

## **Description of the Work and Duties of a Nutrition Educator** **Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program (WNEP)**

WNEP nutrition educators serve a unique and important role providing educational programming to limited income learners. Nutrition educators are supervised by WNEP county coordinators while functioning with a great deal of independence and individual responsibility in educational environments.

### **Preparation**

Using existing WNEP approved teaching materials and curricula, nutrition educators are responsible for planning and preparing for lessons and teaching events for which they are the scheduled teacher. For each teaching event, nutrition educators prepare a written lesson plan that conforms to program guidelines, are age appropriate, and is based on the needs of the participants. Lesson preparation by many nutrition educators includes shopping for food/demonstration supplies, preparing the food samples or foods for use in the demonstration, picking recipes and getting copies or other supplies needed for the lesson. While nutrition educators do not develop entirely new teaching materials, they use their skills and creativity to come up with new fresh ways to use existing resources in their teaching events and lessons. Evaluations of lessons are an important part of any lesson planning. WNEP state evaluations and local county evaluation projects are used when they fit with the program being taught.

### **Teaching Environment**

Nutrition educators may teach a variety of types of learners in a variety of settings. Education is offered in group settings, for individual learners, in busy waiting rooms, for senior adults, for groups of preschoolers or for classrooms of school children. Nutrition educators develop competencies as needed to effectively teach the groups and learners who are the focus of WNEP work in their county. Nutrition educators are adept at basic food preparation.

### **Outreach and Relationship Building**

Nutrition educators are very aware of their responsibility as an outreach of the University. Nutrition educators present themselves as UW-Extension professionals; they believe in and promote a positive public image of UW-Extension and WNEP in all public interactions. They strive to reach diverse and underserved residents of their counties. They appreciate and celebrate diversity in their learners and their co-workers. They present research-based information while taking care that personal ideas and advocacy agendas are avoided. Nutrition educators respect the privacy of their learners; they incorporate appropriate confidentiality and human subjects' protection practices in all aspects of their work. Nutrition educators interact with and appreciate the work of other professionals in their communities. Learning about and understanding the procedures and protocols for working with other agencies is an essential part of the work of nutrition educators.

### **Scheduling**

Nutrition educators work with county coordinators to schedule home visits and/or teaching events at various agencies and locations. Each nutrition educator is continually adjusting schedules, as necessary, and communicating with colleagues and coordinator about those changes. Nutrition educators take personal responsibility to follow through on commitments to learners, to partners and to co-workers.

### **Traveling and Safety**

Nutrition educators travel throughout their county (or several counties) to teaching locations. Travel may be accomplished by county-owned vehicle or by personal vehicle. Some nutrition educators may travel to multiple sites per day teaching a variety of lessons, and are efficient and thrifty as they consider travel time when scheduling events. Lessons frequently include the use of interactive displays, food samples, games, activities, and handouts necessitating the transporting of these items to the sites by the nutrition

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educators. Nutrition educators are alert and careful about their personal safety; they use their knowledge of their learners and the community to make wise decisions.

### **Professional Development**

Nutrition educators value on-going professional development. They keep up-to-date on content and process skills related to their education role by attending trainings and professional development at local and state levels.

### **Understanding Community Needs**

A nutrition educator possesses or pursues personal knowledge of the communities in which his or her teaching will be done—knowledge of neighborhood characteristics, common challenges experienced by residents, and resources and programs available to residents. Nutrition educators are able to cope with the unexpected and the uncertain. Lessons in non-formal settings are subject to many unanticipated changes. Relationships and arrangements with community partners frequently ebb and flow causing changes to plans.

### **Characteristics of an Effective Nutrition Educator:**

- Ability to follow a lesson plan while still being flexible and able to quickly adjust their teaching plan if necessary
- Ability to relate to lots of different people—those from other cultures and races, those who are differently-abled, those who speak a language other than English, those who are non-literate or low-literate
- Ability to adapt to many teaching environments—classrooms, homes, community centers, etc.
- Ability to sense non-verbal cues from learners
- Ability to be a good listener, non-judgmental and accepting without enabling
- Creative and willing to try new, innovative ways to teach and reach learners
- Ability to educate without rescuing
- Ability to build trusting relationships in order to foster learning and change
- Ability to help learners work to find some of their own answers or solutions
- Aware of appropriate boundaries for self-disclosure
- Ability to approach individuals who may seem reluctant to interact or participate in lessons
- Ability to accept feedback and coaching from supervisors and others
- Ability to learn and adapt so mistakes or missteps are not repeated
- Possess excellent time management skills-prioritize work and maintain schedules that are flexible with changes in programs
- Ability to correctly demonstrate and lead simple physical movement activities, as part of “Eating Smart--Being Active” (or similar) lessons.

### **Accuracy/Writing Skills**

Nutrition educators are responsible for handling lots of paperwork and records. They have an appreciation of the need for accuracy in the details of records and the need for timeliness in paperwork submission. Nutrition educators use personal computers in their offices for email communication, word processing and sometimes for data entry. Nutrition educators have, or work on developing, good writing skills so they can communicate about their job effectiveness to local partners and to the state and federal partners, through documents such as success stories or quarterly reports of their work.

### **Performance Review and Program Evaluation**

Nutrition educators contribute to telling the stories of WNEP by writing or contributing to success stories and impact statements each year. The use of state WNEP evaluations is encouraged as they are helpful in writing impact statements and providing statewide impact. Nutrition educators participate fully in their

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own Performance Reviews each year by reflecting on their successes and challenges, setting goals and requesting performance feedback from local community partners and others.

### **Teamwork**

Nutrition educators know that working as part of the county Extension team is important. Nutrition educators are expected to contribute appropriately to team projects and committee work, balancing the requirements of WNEP specific activities with other county Extension office activities. Nutrition educators are encouraged to work on WNEP work groups that develop new ideas or work on issues of importance to WNEP colleagues. Nutrition educators within a county or multi-county WNEP project form an essential work team. Activities of this local WNEP work team may include sharing teaching ideas and resources, team teaching, offering formal and informal feedback to each other, work team or staff meetings, regular communication amongst the nutrition educators and with the county coordinator, and just generally working as a team to complete the local programming obligations.

### **Mentoring**

Mentoring relationships are encouraged to help new nutrition educators have a clearer understanding of WNEP expectations as they begin their work as a nutrition educator. Mentoring can help ensure that the educator is receiving orientation, support, and training needed to succeed as a nutrition educator,