

Plan for Food Stamp nutrition Education in Buffalo, Jackson, Pepin and Trempealeau Counties during fiscal year 2008

Overview of the Buffalo, Jackson, Pepin and Trempealeau Counties Nutrition Education Program

In 1993 WIC, Head Start, Public Health, and Senior Services in Buffalo, Jackson, Pepin and Trempealeau Counties requested assistance in providing nutrition education to low income families with children and senior citizens. The major purposes of the program are to choose a healthy diet, to implement cost saving shopping strategies, to prepare low-cost snacks and meals, and to implement safe food handling practices. Throughout the thirteen-year history, learn-while-you-wait strategies have largely been used with both the senior citizens and young families. Within the last seven years, small group sessions have been conducted with disabled and or developmentally challenged and Head Start parent groups. In 2006, a school-age audience was added in Jackson County. During that year, the nutrition educator provided cafeteria nutrition lesson focusing on the consumption of fruits and vegetables while students ate their lunch. In 2007, a classroom component was added that focused on making half your grains whole. Also, in 2007 the senior dining program was considerably reduced and replaced with the Stepping Up to a Healthy Lifestyle series offered at low-income housing sites.

Characteristics of the low-income residents of the Buffalo, Jackson, Pepin and Trempealeau Counties:

67,760 predominantly white citizens populate the four-county area. 2000 US Census data indicates that over 98% of the populations of each Buffalo, Trempealeau, and Pepin Counties are white. American Indians comprise over 6.2% of the population in Jackson County. Within the last five years, there has been an influx of Hispanics to fill agriculture and manufacturing jobs. The Arcadia School District reports that about 70% of the new enrollees are Hispanic. Similar observations regarding the increasing Hispanic population have been made by WIC and Head Start. In 2005, 5681 (8.3%) of all persons in the four-county area received FoodShare benefits. From 2004 to 2005 there has been an increase of 568 participants in the FoodShare program. Although elderly poverty rates are approximately 10%, less than one-third of the elderly in poverty receive Food Share assistance. Families with children also experience poverty issues. In 2006, 30.6% (3,851 of 12,588) children in the four-county area receive free and reduced price school meals. Fairchild Elementary and Merrilan Elementary schools both have more than 50% of the students receive free and reduced price meals. Another nine schools have 40% or more of the students eligible for free and reduced meals. The child poverty rate is approximately 10% with a range from 7.87% in Buffalo to 13.39% in Pepin County. While 20.9% of all Wisconsin residents have income below 185% of poverty, all four counties have more than 22.4% of their populations with income below the 185% poverty. Jackson has the largest percentage, 27.9%, of its population at this income level. Eighteen percent of families responding to the Blair-Taylor School Survey of Household Food Needs (Winter, 2005) indicated by their responses that they were food insecure. This includes 8% of families that experienced hunger.

Nutrition and nutrition education needs of the local low-income residents of Buffalo, Jackson, Pepin and Trempealeau Counties

Local assessments show that overweight and obesity issues are major nutrition concerns. The five major health problems (heart disease, obesity, cancer, diabetes, and poor nutrition) identified

in the 2002 Trempealeau County health assessments have relationships to overweight and obesity conditions. The 2003 UWEX strategic planning process also identified obesity and related nutrition concerns among the top five issues. Likewise, a study of 1053 students in four Jackson County elementary schools indicated 473 (25%) of the students were at risk of becoming overweight and 206 (20%) of the students were overweight. According to the Wisconsin Behavioral Risk Factors Survey, 58% of adults are overweight or obese in the Western Region of Wisconsin. County partners shared that they observe knowledge, skills and behaviors lacking within the audiences they served. All partners identified the following: 1) eating whole grains, 2) eating a variety of fruits and vegetables, 3) eating foods that meet nutrient needs without eating too many calories, 4) choosing/preparing foods with less sugar, 5) preparing food/versus pre-packaged items, and 6) balancing calorie intake with calories used through physical activity. Additional education needs identified focused on managing resources and using thrifty shopping practices, storing food safely, and community awareness of existing food insecurity.

Educational Projects planned for FY08

School Day: Youth 6-11. Learn-while-you-wait education in the focusing on handling food safely, eating whole grains, eating a variety of fruits and vegetables, and choosing foods with less sugar and small group sessions Plans are to use the Professor Popcorn curriculum.

After School: Youth ages 6-12 at Gebhardt School, Black River Falls. Multi-session groups focusing on preparing and eating nutritious snacks, handling food safely (hand-washing), and being active. Plans are to use the Professor Popcorn curriculum.

WIC: Parents of infants/children and pregnant women. Learn-while-you-wait education focusing on choosing and preparing nutritious meals and snacks with a focus on preparing and consuming foods to meet the 2005 Dietary Guidelines.

Disabled: Adults without children. Multi-session groups focusing on planning, buying, and preparing nutritious and affordable meals and snacks with considerations for balancing calorie intake with calories used through physical activity. Participants will gain food preparation skills in order to live healthy, independent lives.

Food Pantries: Adults, parents with children, and senior adults. Learn-while-you-wait interactive demonstrations on planning and preparing pantry foods that may be unfamiliar or have less appeal. Participants will use food resources available to increase food security.

Parents: Parents of children at Fairchild and Merrilan Elementary Schools, as well as parents of Head Start Children. One-time groups focusing on preparing food/versus pre-packaged items and planning low-cost meals and snacks that meet Dietary Guidelines. Newsletters and brochures will be sent home with children participating in WNEP "school day" sites.

Senior Dining/Nutrition Programs: Learn-while-you-wait interactive demonstrations focusing on preparing and eating fruits and vegetables. The "Sisters in Health" curriculum will be adapted to meet the location restrictions.

Other (low-income housing units): Multi-session groups at low-income housing units in Buffalo, Pepin, and Trempealeau County will use the “Sisters in Health” curriculum to focus on preparing and eating fruits and vegetables.

Food security programming efforts planned

WNEP will work with food pantries, churches, schools, and organizations to raise awareness of food insecurity among the elderly, disabled, and young families who are reluctant to participate in not aware of their eligibility to participate in social programs.

WNEP will work with program partners to conduct “Diversity Circles” to involve citizens in assessing and taking action to address local poverty issues in Trempealeau County and possibly Jackson County. The Methodist Church in Black River Falls began studying hunger and poverty issues as a 2007 Lenten Project. The Jackson County UWEX Family Living Educator was involved in this project and has encouraged WNEP to join the effort to move this group toward a Poverty or Hunger Task Force.

In addition to using demographic data gathered through government program participation, WNEP staff will conduct key informant interviews with food pantry coordinators and Social Services’ economic support workers to better understand participation trends and the needs of their clients.