

## **Plan for Food Stamp Nutrition Education in Chippewa and Eau Claire Counties during fiscal year 2008**

### **Overview of the Chippewa and Eau Claire Counties Nutrition Education Program**

Eau Claire County's (ECC) Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program (WNEP) began in 1995 to improve the eating and physical activity behaviors of food stamp and food stamp eligible participants within their limited budgets. WNEP initiated the program using the learn-while-you-wait educational approach. Throughout the years, WNEP has developed a multi-faceted and longer term educational program. Currently, 60% of all WNEP educational contacts serve participants in multi-session groups. Most multi-session groups include a minimum of four, one-hour sessions. This multi-session approach increases the probability of clients' knowledge retention and behavioral changes. In 2006, staff made 4,000 educational contacts. Due to an increased demand for nutrition programming in our county, WNEP is currently in the process of hiring an additional nutrition educator. This will provide ECC with a WNEP staff of three, 2.6 FTE's. The ECC Coordinator will coordinate the new Chippewa County WNEP, which will begin in October 2008.

### **Characteristics of the low income residents in Chippewa and Eau Claire Counties**

#### Demographics of the Counties

The 2000 Census reports the ECC population at 93,142. Of those 16 or older, 70.2% (51,987) are in the labor force. ECC's median household income is \$39,219, and the 2004 self-sufficiency wage for an adult with a preschooler and school-aged child is \$16.13/hour or \$33,550/year. However, most low-income workers earn between \$7-\$8/ hour, or about \$15,600/year. In 1999, the ECC median earnings of a male full time, year round worker was 69% higher than that of a female working the same number of hours. Single women head 9% of ECC family households, putting them at increased risk for poverty and food insecurity. Housing is a major expense. Nearly 30% of ECC renters are paying at least 35% of their income on rent. The 2000 Census data revealed 11% of ECC individuals live at or below 100% of poverty, and 25% of the county population is below 185% of poverty (UWEX Food Security Profile Website).

#### Food Insecurity in the Counties

A January 2002 survey of mothers participating in the ECC WIC program revealed an alarming rate of food insecurity (49%) and hunger (23%) (Food Security in the WIC Population, 6/02). A 2004 UW-Extension survey of household food needs conducted at the Eau Claire Area School District's three lowest income elementary schools indicated that 25% of families responding were food insecure and 13% experienced hunger in the past year. Longfellow Elementary, in which 73% of its students are enrolled in free or reduced lunch, is currently involved in a "Weekend Back Pack" food program. Presently, about 160 students are taking home nutritious food on Fridays for weekend consumption. An increased number of ECC residents are currently seeking local assistance to acquire sufficient food. Daily participation in free or reduced school breakfast and lunch has increased 87% and 9%, respectively, from 1999 to 2005. The dramatic increase in school breakfast during this time period is mainly due to the increased number of sites offering the program. In 2005, 9,075 county residents participated in FoodShare, of which 45% were children. From 1999 to 2005, the percentage of ECC food stamp recipients increased 96% (UWEX Food Security Profile). Ethnic data reveals that 98% of Food Share patrons are Non-Hispanic/Latino. Racially, the majority (79%) of ECC FoodShare users are White. The percentage of minorities participating in the program include 9% Asian, 4% Black, 1% American Indian or Alaskan Native, 2% multi-race, and 5% unknown race (WI DHFS 2006 CARES

Report). Area food pantries, the Community Table and elderly meals sites also assist to increase county residents' food security. Few Hmong county residents were frequenting the local food pantry. So in 2006, Feed My People Food Bank, St. Francis Food Pantry, Hmong Association (HMAA) and WNEP partnered to increase Hmong pantry utilization. The initiative has seen an 84% (from 31 to 57 families) increase in Hmong patronage from program initiation to completion.

### **Nutrition and nutrition education needs of FoodShare recipients and other low-income residents of Chippewa and Eau Claire Counties**

The diet quality of young children is a major concern in Eau Claire County. From 2003 to 2005, Head Start nutrition assessments indicated an incremental increase in the percentage of overweight and obese children each year. In the 2005/2006 school year, 39% (50/127) of the children were at 85th percentile or greater weight/height. Of those 50 overweight children, 48% (24/127) ranked greater than 95th percentile weight /height. The 2006/2007 assessment results indicated a decrease in the percentage of overweight and obese Head Start children for the first time since 2003, with 29% (40/138) at 85th percentile or greater weight/height and 45% (18/138) of those overweight children ranked greater than 95th percentile weight/height. ECC adults lead this overweight trend. A recent ECC Behavioral Risk Factor Survey (BRFS) indicated that 55% of adults were overweight, with specifically 23% obese. Research links the lack of physical activity to the increased tendency for overweight issues. The 2000 Western Region BRFS revealed that only 14% of adults exercised 20 minutes or more at 50% aerobic capacity 3 or more times a week. US inactivity rates also tend to be higher for individuals in poverty. On average, food stamp participants (FSP) tend to have poorer quality diets, as measured by the 2005 USDA's Healthy Eating Index. These poor quality diets include consuming fewer than three meals daily; not eating breakfast (which has been linked to increased body weight); and, like most Americans, they are drinking less milk and substantially more soft drinks. WI Department of Health and Family Services data from 2002 also indicated that only 23% of Wisconsin adults ate the recommended 5+ servings of fruits and vegetables a day, while 36% ate 3-4 a day and 41% ate only 0-2 fruits and vegetables a day.

WNEP county partners identified the need for education to focus on increasing the following behavioral outcomes: basic meal planning and food preparation skills; vegetable, fruit and whole grain consumption; physical activity; and healthy food choice selection in sensible portions. The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS) at 22 EC4T, EC Head Start, Preschool and Child Care Centers identified hand washing as an area that needed improvement. Partners also saw the need for the development of positive parent/child relationships at family mealtime. Food resource management and food security were also voiced as concerns by those agencies WNEP directly serves, as well as the Hunger Prevention Coalition. FoodShare participants' voiced many nutrition education needs parallel to those of cited by agency partners. In 2000, 67% of ECC survey respondents (313 respondents) from an EBT training indicated that they would like to learn more about stretching their food dollars. The top three topics respondents said they would like to learn more about included: getting more food for their money, planning low cost meals, and choosing food for good health.

### **Educational Projects planned for FY08**

**Preschoolers:** Programs at School Day Kindergarteners, 4 Year Old Kindergarten, Head Start Centers and Career Development Center (CDC) Alternative High School. Eat Fruits and Vegetables Every Day, Wash Your Hands, or Healthy Habits/Be Active Curricula will be team taught with staff at Head Start Centers, and kindergarten classes at Eau Claire Area School District and Augusta Schools.

Curricula range from 2-5 lessons each. Parents of young children will receive educational materials and suggested activities to encourage family behavioral changes. CDC Alternative High School students are taught nutrition lessons focusing on food and kitchen safety, fat in fast foods and sugared beverage consumption, labeling reading to select nutrient dense foods, and selecting food from the bottom of MyPyramid. Students use the knowledge gained to produce five cooking videos on Community TV.

**After School/Summer Program (including gardens for youth, 5 - 11):** WNEP will partner with 4-H to teach Food, Fun and Fitness after school programs at Longfellow, Lakeshore and Locust Lane Elementary Schools (73%, 50%, and 54% free and reduced lunch participation, respectively). Topics taught will include: balancing physical activity with the food we eat, food safety, label reading, and healthy food choices following MyPyramid. “Kids in the Kitchen” will be taught at Longfellow Elementary School after school and summer programs. Topics covered will include: food and kitchen safety, healthy simple meal and snack preparation, and choosing nutritious foods and beverages. WNEP will teach Kids’ Garden program at Longfellow Elementary School’s Summer Program; North River Fronts Park, EC’s lowest income neighborhood; and Bolton Transitional Housing, for families of abuse. WNEP will partner with the Extension horticulturist, Bolton and EC Parks and Recreation staff to teach the garden program. Hands-on learning will focus on simple food preparation, increasing fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity. Parents will receive produce and recipes to increase household vegetable consumption.

**Parents:** At least two Fun Family Cooking Programs (4 classes/program) will be taught at Head Start and FRC’s rural outreach program to Fairchild’s parents of preschoolers. Parents will set personal, family eating, and household food spending goals. At each class, parents will prepare a portion of the meal with their children. Children will then prepare a healthy snack, while parents have an interactive nutrition lesson and complete the meal preparation. Families will eat the meal together. The partnering agency will promote the event, pay for the food, provide adequate daycare and staffing, and conduct a phone or face-to-face evaluation provided by WNEP with each family attending at least 75% of the classes. WNEP will also teach one time group classes and community event, walk-by education. Topics will include: budgeting within the Thrifty food plan; utilizing community resources to increase food security; planning and preparing low cost, healthy, quick meals and snacks; choosing foods from the bottom of MyPyramid most often; being physically active; and developing positive parent/child feeding responsibilities. Agency partners include: Head Start, Family Resource Center’s Rural Outreach, Beacon House for homeless, Hmong Mutual Assistance Association and ECC Housing participants.

**Job Centers and WIC:** Recipes and nutrition/cooking videos will be available to clients in the lobby. WNEP will coordinate with agency staff concerning group classes provided by WNEP throughout the year. Staff will then connect participants with available nutrition and food resource management offerings. WNEP will offer learn-while-you-wait nutrition education at WIC to increase fruit and vegetable consumption.

**Disabled Adults:** Multi-session group classes will be taught focusing on nutrition and physical activity at Lutheran Social Service’s Session Street Apartments. The clients have mentally health issues. In the summer, the teaching will focus around a garden that residents’ plant and harvest. Topics will include choosing healthy foods, increasing vegetable consumption, and increasing physical activity.

**Food Pantries:** Recipes and a food sample will be shared with pantry patrons focusing on the commodity foods they receive that month. WNEP will also select recipes to increase patrons' fruit and vegetable consumption.

**Food Security Programming Efforts Planned:**

WNEP staff will continue to support the mission and goals of the ECC Hunger Prevention Coalition (HPC). The ECC WNEP coordinator is co-chair of the Coalition. Bi-annually the HPC sponsors the ROWELL Poverty Simulation to increase awareness of ECC poverty and food insecurity.

A recent ECC United Way study indicated that there is a lack of awareness of community resources available to assist those in need. To increase low-income residents' awareness of community resources, the HPC expanded their resource directory in 2005 to include available dental, financial and employment services. In 2006, a Western District Innovative Grant was awarded to WNEP to distribute 50 color copies of the directory to 250 agencies serving those of need. The directory was also put on the ECC UW-Extension website in Acrobat Reader, so agencies could print additional copies. Email addresses were also obtained from the 250 agencies. This email list also functions as an avenue to provide information about seasonal or new assistance programs for the poor. Agencies can also be made aware of local food insecurity and poverty data through these means. In 2008, HPC will update the directory or partner with United Way to implement the "211 System". WNEP staff lead this project.

In 2006, the WNEP coordinator has teamed with ECC Human Services to create a poverty case study program to raise awareness of ECC poverty and food insecurity. Human Services and WNEP team-teach each class. The workshop has been requested and taught annually as requested. In 2008, at least five programs will be taught.

In 2007, WNEP took the lead in an ECC Poverty Task Force. The Task Force has written a project plan and identified the major ECC poverty issues. The group is currently writing issue papers for each of those poverty issues to identify available community resource accessibility, as well as gaps and barriers for those in need. An ECC Poverty Summit is planned for 2008 to garnish community input concerning strategies for each of the poverty issues. The ultimate objective is to create a community of support that enables all county residents to be successful within our economic, political, educational, social and cultural systems.