

Plan for Food Stamp Nutrition Education in Racine and Kenosha Counties during fiscal year 2008

Overview of Food Stamp Nutrition Education in Racine and Kenosha Counties

The mission of the Racine and Kenosha Nutrition Education Program (R/KNEP) is to work together as a team to educate limited resource audiences about the importance of making better food choices within the limited resources that are accessible to them. R/KNEP uses various venues to provide Food Stamp Nutrition Education in both counties. The program uses a combination of educational institutions, after school programs, parenting programs, agencies that provide services to the same audiences, transitional living programs, homeless shelters, AODA programs and housing establishments, etc.

Largely, R/KNEP provides nutrition education to children ages 6 to 15 in the classroom environment as part of the students regular school day. R/KNEP plans to continue providing nutrition education to children in this fashion while expecting to continue to provide nutrition educational experiences to youth at other times including the summer, after-school and during other education experiences that are sponsored by other community agencies and the two school districts. The program is also providing nutrition education to adults in a variety of locations, including transitional living facilities, the Spanish Center's prenatal program, those living in AODA facilities, and those in homeless shelters. The R/KNEP program is providing nutrition education training to childcare providers in both counties and nutrition education to families with young children at WIC sites, using them as recruitment tools, and Head Start programs. Lastly, the R/KNEP Administrator is serving on various community task forces, boards, etc. to ensure that all possible connections and linkages are being made in both communities on all levels.

Characteristics of the low income residents in Racine and Kenosha Counties

Demographics of the Counties

Demographically, the area served by the R/KNEP is divided into four quadrants divided by the Racine and Kenosha county line running east and west and I-94 running north and south. East of the "I" each county has a very ethnically diverse urban population with poverty levels double those for the state and exceeding those for the United States as a whole. West of the "I" each county has a predominantly Caucasian, affluent rural population with pockets of poverty. The unemployment rates for both counties are among the highest in the state, Racine ranks ninth with a rate of 4.7% compared to a statewide rate of 3.9%, and Kenosha ranks 14th with a rate of 4.4%. However, the cities of Racine and Kenosha fare far worse than the counties as a whole with the City of Racine ranking number one in unemployment with 7.3% of the population being unemployed and the City of Kenosha ranking number seven in the same category. Although the fast growing minority population has been Hispanics from Mexico, those numbers are starting to level off. It is assumed that the leveling off of the numbers is the result of the controversy regarding the documented and undocumented Hispanic residents. It is speculated that the undocumented populations are afraid to access services that are considered to be governmental in nature. Therefore, it seems as if the numbers are just being maintained.

On the other hand, what seems to be increasing are the numbers of students considered to be overweight and obese. The Racine Head Start program documented that 26% of its student population is considered to be obese. However, when the parents were surveyed and asked,

“Whether or not you feel your son/daughter is overweight or obese,” only 12% thought that they child was either overweight or obese. On that same survey, the parents were asked, “Whether or not you feel that physical activity is important to their child’s all around good health.” Over 98% thought that physical activity was very important to the health of their child. However, when asked, “How much time does your son/daughter spend participating in a physical activity in a day,” 76% answered less than 30 minutes a day. Based on the above information, it is extremely important that nutrition education continue to provide services to the families in both counties for the purpose of educating in making better food choices and educating them regarding the importance of physical activity.

Food Insecurity in the Counties

In 2006-2007, Kenosha County, through the efforts of its Hunger Prevention Council, which is a subcommittee of the Emergency Services Network, completed the Food Security Survey that was developed by the University of Wisconsin in an effort to better understand the food insecurity issues of the Kenosha Unified Schools community. Over 7,000 surveys were distributed and more than 42% were returned. The R/KNEP Administrator is a member of the Hunger Prevention Council and is part of the three person team to represent the University of Wisconsin on the Emergency Services Network. Once the results of the Food Insecurity Survey are completed, the Hunger Prevention Council will develop a plan of action to address the issues. Additionally, the Hunger Prevention Council, in conjunction with Kenosha County, is developing a food systems map. This map will be used by the various agencies that aid in food insecurity issues to discover the holes in the system and think strategically on how to fill the holes. Also, the map will support agencies on developing partnerships that may lessen the food security issues in Kenosha County. Lastly, in Kenosha County, the Council is attempting to develop some food gleaning relationships with area grocers that will then support the efforts of the food pantries and soup kitchens in the county. Some grants have been written to support the above efforts. It is the goal of R/KNEP to be in the position to provide nutrition education to the participants of the various soup kitchens, pantries and WIC in the county.

In Racine County, the Food Security Survey that was completed about four years ago has resulted in school breakfast being provided in one school in the Burlington School District. The R/KNEP program has supported the efforts in that school district by giving ideas of ways to kick off the school breakfast program, which the school district is calling the “Grab and GO” snack break program. Also, requests have been made to give ideas of encouraging the school children to participate in the program. Additionally, the recently hired 4-H Youth Development Educator contacted the R/KNEP Administrator regarding a program of which children who participate in an after-school program called “Lighted School House” and who may have food security issues on the weekend would receive a backpack of food on Fridays and return the backpack on Mondays to be used on the following weekend. The nutrition educators presently provide nutrition education to those students and will provide support materials to be included in the backpacks. It is the hope of the 4-H Youth Development Educator to have the program started by late 2007.

R/KNEP will continue to provide Nutrition Education in the schools that meet the qualification of having at least 50% of its student body receiving free and reduced lunches. For the 2007-2008 fiscal year, 24 schools between both counties meet the requirement. Of those 24 schools nine are

at or above 70% of its student body receiving free or reduced lunches. As a direct result of the number of students in both counties experiencing food security issues, the number of residents that are receiving aid to help feed their families, the number of residents that are either chronically or episodically homeless and the number of children that are considered to be overweight or obese, R/KNEP has decided to provide at least 5 nutrition education sessions per classroom. It is the hope of the program that even though resources are few, that families will make better nutritional choices for their families based on the foods made available to them through the various programs and support systems. Also, R/KNEP will work with the food pantries and homeless shelters in an effort to improve the nutritional value of the food choices that they offer their program participants.

Nutrition and nutrition education needs of Food Stamp Program recipients and other low-income residents of Racine and Kenosha Counties

Both Racine and Kenosha Counties have higher percentages of persons participating in the FoodShare program than the state as a whole [22,576 Kenosha & 23,253 Racine compared to 554,020]. There is a large potential audience of over 40,000 persons, including adults and children, in both counties for R/KNEP's services to those persons participating in the state FoodShare program. The food banks in both counties have reported an increase in the number of pounds of food distributed this year in comparison to the same time in 2006. In Racine County over 600,000 pounds of food was delivered to various food pantries through out the county. In fact, the Food Bank is concerned that at this pace, due to lack of funds and low levels of donations, it will not be able to continue to provide food to the local food pantries. In Kenosha County, the Shalom Center, a homeless center that is also a soup kitchen and a food pantry, has provided 37,779 meals thru its soup kitchen representing a 27% increase over last year at this time. The center has also provided over 400,000 pounds of food, which is a 13% increase. Twelve schools in the Kenosha Unified School District have 50% or more of their children enrolled in the free or reduced-price lunch and breakfast program while twelve schools in the Racine Unified School District meet the criteria. This represents a fourteen percent increase over last year.

Recently, studies have shown that this generation is the first generation in decades to have a life expectancy shorter than the proceeding generation. The studies conclude that the reason for this shortened life expectancy is the result of poor eating habits and the sedentary lifestyles of the children. Therefore, the school districts, as required by law, have developed Wellness Policies that have included such things as not having vending machines that provide carbonated drinks but rather juice and water, baked snacks instead of fried snacks and provisions for lunch rooms to provide healthier snack options in the a la carte section of the cafeteria. Although the plans are in place, both school districts are having difficulties putting those plans into action because of various long-term contracts that were entered into before the Wellness Policies became a mandate. As a result, our emphasis on education of elementary and middle school aged youths is justified because of the large proportion of children living in poverty and those that are not familiar with proper eating, portion control, the MyPyramid and the need for daily physical activity. Additionally, it is most important that R/KNEP continue to provide nutrition education to younger children so that even though the less nutritional options are present, the children can make healthier choices based on their knowledge. Also, our education of adults or parents is crucial if the program hopes to make lasting changes in the way that people prepare and serve

food to their children. Additionally, parents must be educated regarding the need for daily physical activity in the lives of their children.

Educational Projects planned for FY08

School Day: Several classroom visits about dietary quality topics will be provided at local elementary and middle schools at multiple grade levels. Professor Popcorn is the curriculum that has been chosen for this population. A newsletter will be provided for the families of those students that participate in the program.

After-school Day: R/KNEP will partner with the local Boys and Girls Club, the Lighted School House and the 21st Century Learning Center and the Professional Services Group's after school program to provide programming whose topics will include dietary quality, food preparation, and the importance of physical activity. Kinder Chef will continue to be used with this population and possible the Families in the Kitchen program at some sites. However, at the Kenosha Group Home site, the program will have to be developed based on the requests of that facility.

Job Center and Human Services: R/KNEP will partner with the local YWCA's Family Resource Center to provide nutrition education and life skills training. The program will include four two-hour sessions. At the conclusion the participants will receive a certificate of completion that can be included on their resume to enhance the possibility of acquiring adequate employment. This program will be offered quarterly. The participants will also receive a newsletter. Sisters in Health will be used at these locations.

WIC: R/KNEP will provide interactive nutrition displays, food preparation demonstrations and learn while you wait lessons for clients.

Preschoolers: R/KNEP will provide multiple classroom visits for nutrition education to the Head Start participants. Lastly, the students will receive a newsletter that will inform the parents about the lessons that their children will be learning in the classroom. A curriculum has not been selected for this population.

Parents: R/KNEP will provide two nutrition education opportunities for the parents of the Head Start students in Kenosha County and one nutrition education opportunity for the parents of the Head Start students in Racine County. Also, R/KNEP will provide a newsletter to those parents that will include nutritional information and more information regarding the home visiting program.

Adult Groups: R/KNEP will provide monthly nutrition education to the mothers that participate in the pre-natal program at the Spanish Speaking Center and weekly at two other transitional living facilities. Additionally, the participants will assist in the preparation of a meal using items that are in the cupboards and they will be asked to demonstrate newly learned skills. The nutrition educators will attempt to encourage the program participants to continue nutrition education upon leaving the transitional living program. Most of the program participants will have their children living in their home upon discharge from the facility. Also, R/KNEP is planning to continue programming at the HALO homeless assistance program in Racine and Vets Place, which is a assisted living facility for veterans, in Racine County.

Food Pantries: R/KNEP will provide information about how to use the commodities and foods provided by the pantry. Also, at each demonstration the participants will receive various nutritional and outs and simple recipes.

Home Visitation: R/KNEP will provide individual nutrition education sessions to home bound clients as needed.

Food Security Programming Efforts Planned

Methods or activities planned to raise awareness of hunger/food insecurity

R/KNEP plans to explore ways to improve enrollment and participation in the school breakfast program in both Kenosha and Racine Unified School Districts by working with the school districts in strategizing ways in which they can participate in the school breakfast program and working with task forces in the area of which school breakfast program participation is part of their mission. R/KNEP will continue to partner with the Racine County Food Bank, the WIC offices in both counties and at least one food pantry in Kenosha to provide education regarding the use of more fresh vegetables in their daily meals and encouraging WIC participants to take advantage of their Farmer's Market vouchers.

Methods planned to compile data and assess status of food security

R/KNEP will partner with the Kenosha County Hunger Coalition to aid in the gathering of data by using the school food insecurity survey. Also, with participation on the taskforce, R/KNEP hopes to aid in the development of an effectual strategic plan to address the various issues that may become apparent as a result of the school survey. Additionally, in Racine County, R/KNEP will assist the project manager in developing a system or network of services to support the needs of the City of Burlington as identified in the school survey that was completed in 2003.

Plans to increase involvement of community groups in efforts to address food insecurity

As stated above, the administrator will serve on various community groups, boards and taskforces to increase understanding of food insecurity in both counties and the need for nutrition education to low income audiences. Also, the staff will assist organizations in developing plans or strategies to improve the food insecurity and proper nutrition issues in both counties. They will encourage individual homemakers to take advantage of the various food pantries, the FoodShare Program, WIC, the Share, Inc. program and other community resources that assist families with securing food.