

Plan for Food Stamp Nutrition Education in La Crosse County during fiscal year 2008

Overview of the La Crosse County Nutrition Education Program

The La Crosse County Nutrition Education Program was established in 1994 as a result of needs identified by local politicians and community agencies. Initially, the program utilized learn-while-you-wait displays as the primary method of presenting nutrition education. As the program developed, teaching strategies have grown to include multi-session nutrition classes for parents, skits and puppet shows for young children, and interactive cooking demonstrations and classes for older children and adolescents. The La Crosse County Nutrition Education Program works with FoodShare recipients of all ages throughout the county to teach knowledge and skills related to diet quality, food safety, food resource management, and food security.

Characteristics of the low income residents in La Crosse County

Demographics of La Crosse County

La Crosse County has 107,120 residents, 5.9% (6361) of whom are under the age of five and 12.5% (13,440) of whom are over the age of 65. The poverty rate for La Crosse County is 10.7% (10,841) which is above the state average of 8.7%. Specific concentrations of low-income residents include the Powell-Hood Park-Hamilton neighborhood, where 67% of neighborhood students qualify for free or reduced price meals, and the Lower Northside neighborhood, where 63% of students qualify. In La Crosse County 94.2% of residents are Caucasian, 3.2% are Asian, 0.9% are Black, 0.4% are American Indian, and 1.3% are two or more races. Annually, 7850 residents participate in the FoodShare Program. Hmong refugees from Thailand continue to regularly arrive in La Crosse County

Food Insecurity in La Crosse County

Food insecurity among La Crosse County WIC clients was reported at 48%, compared to 44% statewide. The La Crosse School district has eight schools that operate food pantries for their students. There are two community gardens that contribute over 25,000 pounds of produce to community members annually. A survey completed in July 2004 by 736 families at the WAFER food pantry in La Crosse indicated that 90% (662 families) reduced the amount of food eaten at meals in order for food to last through the month, while 82% (603 families) reported skipping meals to make food last longer. 37% (227 families) had run out of food the previous month. Overall, 99% (729 families) stated that they relied on the pantry to have adequate food for the month.

Nutrition and nutrition education needs of Food Stamp Program recipients and other low-income residents of La Crosse County

La Crosse County Nutrition Education Advisory Committee recommendations as well as input from community partners helps WNEP staff develop programming to meet the needs of low-income audiences in La Crosse. A local principal, teachers, family resource center educators, and Hmong educators have also provided input about needs of the community. Nearly every contact advised that food resource management was a vital area for nutrition education. Food safety instruction was another important recommendation, in addition to teaching participants basic food preparation skills and quick and easy meals and snacks. NHANES data indicates that children participating in the Food Stamp Program are almost twice as likely to be overweight

compared to higher income children. In addition, low-income women participating in the Food Stamp Program are more likely to be obese than other low-income, non Food Stamp recipients and higher income women. Because much of WNEP programming focuses on diet quality, servings, and adequate physical activity, WNEP may contribute to lower incidence of overweight and obesity among Food Stamp Program recipients.

Educational Projects planned for FY08

In School: WNEP staff will teach multi session and one time group lessons to youth 6-11 years and youth 12-17 years on a variety of topics, including dietary quality and food safety. WNEP will also teach multi session classes at the Juvenile Day Treatment Center and one time session classes at Youth Secure Detention due to the high turn over. The “new comer” Hmong elementary groups K-2 and grades 3-6 will be added to our school educational classes.

After School: WNEP will teach multi session lessons to youth 6-11 years and youth 12-17 years on a variety of topics, including diet quality, food safety, and food preparation.

Preschoolers: One time group lessons and puppet skits will be offered at local park and recreation events, head start classrooms to youth ages 4-5 and multi teaching session with Hamilton’s preschool children.

Parents: WNEP will teach one time groups and multi session lessons to parents of infants and children at family night events. This is partnership with the after school 21st century grant program and the Family Resource Center. Quarterly educational sessions are also provided at the La Crosse Family Resource Center for parents. Monthly multi session classes for pregnant women, English Language Learner parents, and new parents are taught at the Holmen Family Literacy Center. Topics include feeding young children, diet quality, food resource management, and food safety. WNEP also includes articles in the quarterly Family Resource Center newsletter.

WIC: Learn while you wait education using flip charts and food demonstrations will be offered to parents of infants/children on a variety of topics in the Sparta, Onalaska, and La Crosse nutrition services waiting area.

Gardens: One time group sessions will be held at the Southside Neighborhood Center during produce pick up times and will include information about diet quality and food preparation. Demonstrations will be included. The lessons will reach adults with children and adults without children. WNEP staff will also teach lessons about fruits and vegetables in conjunction with the Hamilton Elementary student garden. These lessons will be for youth, age 6-11.

Adult Groups: Two different multi session classes for adults, age 18-64 without children, will be taught at the Salvation Army on a monthly basis. One will focus on food resource management; the other will emphasize food safety and food preparation. The local technical college provides classes for recent Hmong refugees. Semi-annual classes on food safety and basic shopping skills will be taught to these newly arrived residents. WNEP plans to continue offering one time group lessons about food resource management, quick and easy meals/snacks to women’s shelter residents. These lessons will be provided to adults with or without children.

Disabled: Multi session classes will be offered weekly to independent disabled adults. The topics will cover diet quality, food safety, food preparation, and food resource management.

Senior Dining: Multi session classes for older adults will be offered monthly at the income eligible senior dining sites of La Crosse County. Also, food demos with educational sessions for seniors are offered when the nutrition coordinator distributes vouchers for the Farmer's Markets. Monthly articles are included in the Senior Review newsletter.

Food Pantries: Education through learn while you wait displays will be continued at the La Crosse WAFER food pantry. Topics include diet quality and food resource management. Adults with and without children will be reached.

Food Security Programming Efforts Planned

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

Working in collaboration with local partners, WNEP will assist with local poverty simulations as requested. WNEP will also keep the Coulee Region Childhood Obesity Coalition aware of local hunger and food insecurity issues. WNEP will continue to inform community partner agencies and county officials about food insecurity and hunger in La Crosse County.

Methods planned to compile data and assess status of food security

WNEP will work with the WAFER food pantry to collect local food security data. WNEP will also compile food insecurity data from the local school districts.

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

La Crosse County had a strong coalition to address food insecurity and hunger known as the Hunger Task Force. It evolved into a private agency that focuses more on coordination of food recovery and distribution to local pantries. The county is now lacking a group that focuses on community wide hunger and food insecurity prevention efforts. The WNEP staff will work with the La Crosse County Health Department and other local community partners to reconvene a hunger coalition to address these issues.