

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

Overview of Food Stamp Nutrition Education in Marathon County

The Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program (WNEP) in Marathon County evolved from an innovative EFNEP grant in 1990. Its primary goal is to collaborate with others to provide nutrition education for food stamp eligible families and individuals that empowers participants to make healthy food choices consistent with the food guide pyramid and the dietary guidelines. Over the sixteen years of the program's existence, there has been a significant shift in program focus from working nearly exclusively with adults to working predominantly with school-age youth. A second notable change in our programming efforts has occurred in teaching methods. When the program began, the primary teaching approach used to reach our clientele was learn-while-you-wait lessons. Gradually over the years, we have shifted away from these very short teaching interactions toward longer multi-session group lessons. Currently, 94% of our teaching contacts are made in this way. Although we reach fewer people with this shift in teaching method, the group sessions greatly increase the likelihood that our audience will modify their dietary behavior as a result of what we have taught them.

Characteristics of the low-income residents in Marathon County

Demographics of Marathon County

Located in the center of Wisconsin, Marathon County is the largest of the 72 counties geographically. In 2005, the county's estimated population was 130,242, which was a 12.9% increase since 1990. The county's residents are about evenly divided between urban (Wausau and its adjacent communities) and rural areas. The 2000 census indicated that minorities made up 6.2% of Marathon County's population and 14.1% of the city of Wausau's population. This figure represents a 107% increase since 1990. The largest minority group in the county is Southeast Asian (5,715 individuals). In the past three years, Marathon County has seen a renewed influx of Southeast Asian immigrants from Thai refugee camps. More than 500 new refugees arrived in the Wausau area within the last two years. Although other minorities account for only about 2% of the county's total population, there continues to be a slow increase in the Hispanic population in the smaller rural communities, like Athens, on the western side of the county. In 2000, the median age of county residents was 36.3. Residents age 65 and over made up 13% of the population and another 27% of residents were under 18 years old. The age 85 and over population grew 49.7% from 1990-2000, the largest rate change since 1990. A much greater percent of the minority population is under age 25 in comparison to the percent under age 25 in the general population.

In 2000, Marathon County had 16,210 households with children. Of those households, almost 20% (3,190) were single parent or non-married couple family households. The 2004 median household income was \$48,451 in the county and \$36,831 in the city of Wausau. The county's per capita income was \$29,992. For 2002, the US poverty level was set at \$18,244 for a family of four. The number of individuals living below the poverty line was 6.6 % of the county population and 7.2% of the families in Wausau. The poverty rates for the elderly (8.2%) and children were similar (8.5 %). The majority of low-income residents live in either the city of Wausau/ Schofield or in the farthest west municipalities that border on Taylor and Clark counties. In 2000, 18.8% of residents lived below 185% of poverty. The county's unemployment

rate in 2005 was 4.2%. However, the rate for minorities has been significantly higher. In 2001, the minority unemployment rate was 12.9% as compared to 4.1% in the county as a whole.

Food Insecurity in Marathon County

In 2005, there were 10,256 county residents (4,560 children) receiving FoodShare, or 8.15% of the total population. Participation in the Food Share program increased 104% from 1999-2005. In a 2002 survey of Marathon County WIC clients, 41% reported being food insecure and 17% reported being food insecure with hunger. In 2005, the Marathon County WIC program estimated that it was serving 77% of eligible county residents. Additional food security indicators include school lunch, breakfast, and summer meal program participation. In 2005, 26% of Marathon County children were approved for free or reduced price lunch in school. Average daily participation in this program was 4,482 students. This number reflects an 8.10% increase in daily participation from 1999-2005. There are six schools in Marathon County that have greater than 50% of their total enrollment who qualify for either free or reduced price lunch. All schools are in the Wausau School District which does provide breakfast at all of their schools. However, on average, only 25% of all low-income students in Marathon County received both lunch and breakfast at school in 2005. An even greater disparity is noted with the summer meal program. Currently, there are two sites in the county providing summer meals. Consequently, only 7% of those students receiving a free/ reduced lunch during the school year also receive summer meals as compared to the state average of 15%. Food pantry participation is another indicator of food insecurity. For its size, Marathon County has relatively few pantries, only five. Compounding the problem of food accessibility is that of these five, only one is a non-emergency based pantry. In 2002, the Salvation Army assisted 2,256 families with food emergencies. The Eastside Pantry, the county's only non-emergency food pantry, continues to serve approximately 1000 patrons monthly. An additional indicator of food insecurity is the Salvation Army meal program participation. On any given day, between 90 and 150 meals are served at the Salvation Army. In 1997, a total of 27,282 meals were provided. In 2004, they served a total of 35,564 meals. These numbers reflect a 30% increase in participation.

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

In January 2007, the Marathon County Health Department and the Wausau Health Foundation released the latest update of the Marathon County Community Health Assessment that serves as a tool for improving the health of Marathon County residents as well as a reference regarding program priorities. One of six key health priorities that emerged as a result of this assessment is obesity and related disorders. Overweight and obesity are common health conditions and their prevalence is increasing. Excess weight is associated with increased incidence of conditions such as cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and many other diseases. In 2005, 35% of Marathon County residents surveyed reported being overweight (Body Mass Index of 27.3 or greater for females or 27.8 or greater for males). Another 26% were classified as being obese. This figure is nearly double the Healthy People 2010 goal of 15%. While there is a need to be concerned about adult weight in the county, there is an even greater need to be concerned about the state of our children's weight and subsequent health. In 2001, the CDC Pediatric Nutrition Surveillance Data found that 18% of 2-4 year olds participating in the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program in the county were overweight. This finding is well above the state average of 11.3%. Only Wisconsin's Indian reservations showed a higher percentage than

Marathon County. Clearly, there is a need for nutrition education for these low-income families with young children, especially on planning healthy meals and snacks. Another local study found even more disturbing news about the state of our children's health. In 2002, the Wausau Heart Institute initiated a long-term study of students in all seventeen Wausau Area District schools. With the help of the family, 200 students from grades 2, 5, 8 and 11 filled out a diet inventory, reported on physical activity, were measured at waist and hips, and had blood drawn to check for cholesterol and insulin levels. The study results, released in 2004, found that Marathon County kids were almost three times more likely to be obese than kids nationally. Other findings included that by 11th grade, 40% had a higher than normal blood pressure; abnormal cholesterol levels showed up in close to 40% of the kids; and about 25% had a pre-diabetic state known as insulin-resistance which rose to 50% among overweight students. This local study dramatically emphasizes the need for nutrition education for both school-age youth and their parents if these rather alarming statistics are to be reversed.

In 2000, only 10% of Marathon County residents engaged in physical activity for at least 20 minutes three times per week as reported in the Wisconsin Behavioral Risk Factor Survey. The Healthy People 2010 goal is at least 30% of the population will be exercising at this level. Marathon County reports an average of 27.3 deaths per 100,000 residents per year due to diabetes, compared with a statewide rate of 22.7 deaths per 100,000 residents. WIC, the Health Department, and the Wausau School District have all identified overweight/ obesity and sedentary lifestyles as key health problems in Marathon County. WNEP is partnering with all three of these agencies, as well as many others, on an obesity coalition called HEAL (Healthy Eating and Active Lifestyles). As a result of the Wausau Heart Institute study, one of HEAL's main goals is to improve health education programs in the schools with emphasis on nutrition and daily physical activity at all levels. The HEAL Coalition's first major project was initiated in early 2005. Three area school districts cooperated with the coalition to conduct the School Health Index at select schools. Additionally in 2005, Marathon County was selected as the pilot county in the state for a nutrition and physical activity intervention with fourth grade youth called "Footprints to Health". This intervention, coordinated by the HEAL Coalition and the Wisconsin Nutrition and Physical Activity Workgroup (WINPAW) and funded by the CDC, took place during the summer of 2005. The second phase was to select a school neighborhood and carry out an intervention in multiple settings and at multiple levels. The program is designed using the Social Ecological Model, which provides a framework for describing individual change within the context of social change. This model targets several spheres of influence: the individual, family, organizational, community, and policy/systems in order to improve the total health environment around the school. The selected neighborhood, Franklin Elementary, is one of the low-income schools we already work with. This intervention has been extended until May 2008. Hopefully, what we learn from this intervention will provide us with important information to use when assessing needs and planning educational programs in the future.

While there is good local research documenting the nutrition status of Marathon County youth, there is less information for adults. Therefore, we have relied more on agency staff observations. The staffs of both the Eastside Food Pantry staff and the Family Resource Center have commented that the majority of their clients seem to have limited cooking skills, making it difficult to cook from scratch, so there is heavy reliance on processed foods. In 2005, we began offering to pantry patrons small recipe booklets with simple cooking tips and easy recipes

utilizing their monthly commodities along with quick, easy meal suggestions. The booklets have been very well-received by both staff and patrons alike. Presentations at the Family Resource Center also focus on quick, easy ways to make healthy meals and snacks for both themselves and their families in addition to basic diet quality information based on the dietary guidelines. Research on low-income adults consistently shows that as income decreases, diet quality declines and incidence of overweight/ obesity increases. Therefore, there is also a need for practical, easily incorporated tips for prevention of weight gain.

According to the 2002 Wisconsin Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, seniors over 55 have the same dietary quality and overweight issues as younger adults. Although they are more likely to eat 3-5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day, they are also slightly more likely to be overweight and to suffer from lifestyle-related chronic disease. To better understand what kinds of health information Marathon County seniors would be interested in, the county's Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) conducted a "Learning and Wellness Interest Survey in November 2004. Results are based on 254 returned surveys. Findings of interest include 53% of respondents think about health when deciding what to eat, 53% are satisfied with their current state of health, 20% made a personal lifestyle change related to better health but were no longer following the change and another 5% thought about making a change but went no further. Additionally 54% of respondents would use resources related to health and wellness. When asked about programming interests, 40% would attend a physical activity class, 31% would attend an educational series on a general topic and another 16% would attend on a specific topic. Specific topics listed were health and wellness and nutrition. Over 60% of respondents selected healthy cooking, heart health and weight loss as topics of "high" or "medium" interest. Over 50% selected nutritional topics, health wellness assessment, and a walking program as being of "high" interest. Based on this survey, I think we are right on target by continuing to offer our healthy cooking class series for low-income seniors.

Educational Projects planned for FY08

In School: Teach nutrition using hands-on, interactive lessons in 41 classrooms at six low-income schools as part of the "Food, Fun, and Fitness" Program. Related nutrition information and follow-up activities for kids to do with their parents will be sent home with each lesson.

After School: Teach nutrition, simple cooking skills, and physical fitness as part of the "Magic Bean" summer school class, at Lincoln Elementary, the district's lowest income school. Additionally, teach nutrition and simple, healthy snack preparation to members of two low-income, at-risk summer 4-H clubs as well as members of the Wausau Boys and Girls Club.

Preschoolers: Teach the children/families of the Wausau School District at an at-risk, early intervention preschool. Lessons are conducted in nine classrooms and focus on an introduction to a variety of foods. Related nutrition information and follow-up activities for their parents are sent home with each lesson.

Parents: Single session group lessons conducted quarterly for court-ordered, low-income adults with children at the Family Resource Center on dietary quality, fitness, and feeding children topics. Additionally, parents will be taught at school "Family Fun Nights".

WIC: Teach monthly learn-while-you-wait nutrition lessons to WIC participants at two satellite sites in the county in addition to the Wausau office site. Lessons are planned with the WIC staff to meet their secondary education needs as well as the goals of WNEP and the dietary guidelines. Lessons cover the areas of food safety, dietary quality, and fitness.

Senior Dining/ Cooking Classes: Monthly multi-session group nutrition/ healthy cooking classes for low-income seniors that focus on dietary quality and food safety topics.

Food Pantries: Periodic learn-while-you-wait lessons for pantry participants will focus on simple, healthy food preparation tips for current commodity foods as well as other dietary quality and food resource management topics.

Adult Education/ ESL Programs: Provide single session group lessons to enrollees in both Hispanic and Hmong English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Topics will include a basic introduction to American food, American cooking, and what it means to eat healthy using the new Food Guide Pyramid and serving sizes.

Food Security Programming Efforts Planned

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

In 1997, the Hunger Prevention Team of Marathon County (HPTMC) successfully completed a \$14 Food Shopping Challenge. Since then, the Hunger Team has found it much more difficult to conduct a successful awareness-raising activity. We have twice planned a Poverty Simulation only to have to cancel the event due to very low participation. However, in the upcoming year, I am hoping that our Extension office will come together across program areas to try again to host a Poverty Simulation as an Extension program rather than as a project of the Hunger Team. Marathon County had a very active hunger coalition from 1996-2002. During that time, the Hunger Prevention Team of Marathon County (HPTMC) accomplished many projects in its effort to alleviate hunger in Marathon County. Some of these accomplishments included establishing the 17-acre Wausau Community Garden, conducting a large-scale hunger survey of county residents, publishing four editions of a county Food Resource Guide, conducting the \$14/Day Food Challenge as a hunger awareness activity, coordinating the county's TEFAP commodity food distribution program, and hiring a full-time Food Stabilization Coordinator to plan food drives and other hunger-alleviating activities. However, despite these successes, the Hunger Team saw a dramatic fall off in membership over time. Additionally, because we were unable to continue funding the Food Stabilization Coordinator position, the Hunger Team had to give up some of its most successful programs, such as coordinating the Wausau Community Garden and the commodity distribution program to other agencies who took them on as part of their own agency's mission. Consequently, the team lost its focus. I had hoped that in 2007, the Hunger Team could be started again, but many of the agencies who were active on the team before have now become very active on Marathon County's HEAL (Healthy Eating, Active Lifestyle) coalition and are reluctant to take on another meeting right now.

Methods planned to compile data and assess status of food security

The food security status of Marathon County residents has been assessed in a variety of ways. A large-scale county-wide hunger survey was conducted in 1997. That survey showed that the majority of the food insecure in Marathon County was Asian families with children. The results

led the Hunger Team to concentrate its efforts on establishing the Wausau Community Garden. More than 300 Asian families participate in the garden each summer. The food security status of county residents is reported through the media and also through the biannual publication of the "Marathon County Life Report" by the Community Planning Council. The latest report was released in January 2006. This report includes information on various hunger indicators including figures on the numbers of patrons served at the food pantry, meals served at the Salvation Army, and the number of families participating in the free/reduced price lunch program. Additionally, the information we are able to obtain from the Wisconsin Food Security Project website that is specific to Marathon County also helps us to look at trends over time as well as other indicators that are not available in the "Life Report".