

Plan for Food Stamp Nutrition Education in Menominee and Shawano Counties during fiscal year 2008

Overview of Food Stamp Nutrition Education in Menominee and Shawano Counties

Menominee and Shawano Counties initiated the WNEP in 1994 to fill an educational gap for limited income families participating in or eligible for the Food Stamp Program. WNEP's primary goal is to develop and implement community based nutrition and resource management education programs with limited-income families. The majority of teaching is on a prevention level, working with school age children. This is based on community needs, of increasing trends of overweight youth and high rates of diabetes in the Native American population. Emphasis is also placed on increasing physical activity as evidence shows this prevents and/or decreases the age of the onset of diabetes. The WNEP program is working with the TANF and JOBS programs in both counties with focus on resource management issues.

Characteristics of the low income residents in Menominee and Shawano Counties

Demographics of the Counties

Menominee County/Nation is the home of the Native American indigenous tribe of the Menominee's. The population is approximately 4,770 (2000). The majority of the population is Native American (84.8%) and Caucasian (11.9%). Menominee County/Nation population consists of 39.5% under 18 years old. The poverty rate is 28.8%, which is the highest in the State of Wisconsin. The College of the Menominee Nation conducted a study in 2003 to assess the incidence of diabetes in the adult population. It was determined that the incidence of diabetes in adults is 46% (ADA) with a third of cases currently undiagnosed. Non-insulin dependent Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes appears to be related to Native American ancestry (i.e. percentage "Indian Blood"). Risk factors include: obesity, poor nutrition, lack of exercise, and family history. Shawano County has a population of 40,664 (2000), with 91.6 % ethnicity being Caucasian and 6.3% being Native American. Shawano County has a poverty rate of 7.9% with 25.7% of the population under the age of eighteen.

Food Insecurity in the Counties

In Shawano County, according to the Wisconsin Food Security Project, 42% of WIC households are food insecure and 20% are food insecure with hunger. These percentages are comparable to the States rate. Food insecurity and hunger percentages according to the Wisconsin Food Security Project are lower for Menominee 40% and 10% respectively compared to Shawano. This does not correspond with other indicators that contribute to food insecurity in the county/nation. Menominee County/Nation has the lowest median household income in the state (\$29,440), the highest rate of poverty in the State (28.8%), the highest rate of unemployment in the state (10.7%), highest number of single mothers in the state (21.4%). There are no grocery stores, farmers markets, low-income family gardening and only one small food pantry. This county is also 6th in the state for the number of families who do not have a vehicle. Somewhere the data contradicts each other. These overwhelming factors certainly point to the fact that percentages for food insecurity are not representative of this population. There may be some facts that are processed through the tribe and do get to the state.

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

The nutrition needs and educational needs in Menominee County/Nation are overwhelming. It is established that almost 40% of Native American youth 5-13 years of age lack a healthy diet and

physical activity, and with the high rate of poverty this increases the likelihood that these children will have a 5-fold higher risk of diabetes, along with heart disease, high blood pressure and adult obesity (WINGS Study, 2004). As these health issues can be prevented by early education it is important to provide concrete concepts about healthy life styles. It is also vitally important that parent education be part of the total education equation. Dr. Alex Adams, WINGS surveyed parental concern in regards to their children's overweight status on the Menominee, LOC, and Red Cliff reservations. The finding concluded that 44% of parents had little concern and 24% were not concerned at all. One conclusion was that parents are not making the connection between childhood obesity and the high health risk factors in later life. This definitely points to the need to educate parents about the risk factors, children's health and the connection between later health issues. Education content also needs to work with parents on healthy life styles to help decrease their risk of diabetes and heart related diseases.

Due to these major health issues there are many agencies that focus on nutrition and physical activity, especially the health care field. It is the consensus from all agencies that there are still not enough services/education, especially prevention, to address all the health issues.

Due to the high unemployment and poverty rates, teaching basic financial management is a need. To help families explore what they have and how to use it as efficiently as possible. Sharing ideas with each other, learning new resources and supporting each other.

Shawano County poverty rate (7.9%) has over 2,467 food stamp recipients and has over 1500 WIC participants. Low-income schools and agencies support the need for nutrition for adults. The percent of poverty with incomes below the 185% below poverty is 23.1%, ranked 37th in the state of Wisconsin. This is higher than the state average of 20.9%. There are approximately four low-income schools in Shawano County, most of which are rural outlying areas. Lack of resources for community involvement is prevalent, including preventative nutrition education for students.

Educational Projects planned for FY08

Schools: Due to the high rates of overweight/obesity in children and the need for prevention of diabetes, especially with native children, schools aged children kindergarten through second grade will be the focus. Three schools in outlying areas of Shawano County and one public school in Menominee County will receive nutrition education. The ethnicity is primarily Caucasian and Native American. A series of four sessions is provided for each classroom. Focus is on the Food Guide Pyramid, food recognition, sometimes/anytime foods, health snacks and physical activity. Parent newsletters are sent with each student after each session to help make connections with parents. Schools activities and events will be attended to further reach parents directly with focus on the relationship between healthy lifestyles as a child to prevent adult health issues, especially diabetes.

Parents: Families and Schools Together (FAST). Due to the high rates of generational poverty and subsequently the high risk issues that this presents; health problems, lack of nutrition knowledge and unstable family environments the Menominee Indian School District has secured funds to work directly with these families. This is an eight week program to work directly with the parents and children as a family unit. It includes empowering parents, sharing a meal and cooking one of the meals, working on family issues, and allowing parents to have their own support group and children having kids time. The WNEP will provide cooking skills, recipes, and information on feeding large groups

and food safety to parents. Children will receive nutrition education in regards to dietary quality and food safety as part of “kids time”.

WIC: To reach pregnant mothers and parents of young children, Learn-While-You-Wait will be a part of WIC clinics on a monthly basis. This is a major avenue for our program to reach food stamp recipients. Nutrition education topics will be chosen based upon participant’s request, collaboration with Dietitians and WIC Directors. In general, especially in Menominee the focus is on preventing diabetes, healthy foods for young children and some basic nutrition concepts.

Job Centers: Participants of W-2 and TANF will receive two to three sessions focused around financial management. Basics such as knowing what your income currently is, budget planning, making food dollars stretch, and saving by being efficient with what you have. Sharing and discussion of strategies that work to save money will part of the sessions, so people can learn from each other.

Food Security Programming Efforts Planned

Bridges Out of Poverty workshops have been held for local agencies, organizations and governments, with over 400 people attending the two day trainings. This is a community-wide effort to address the issues that face generational poverty families’ everyday and to create positive organizational change and mindsets/attitudes towards poverty families to better serve them. As part of this community effort a large committee is being formed including the schools, agencies, and clinic, governments, youth, and poverty families. The major issues facing Menominee will be addressed and work groups will be established to work on these issues. Due to the high rate of diabetes, heart disease, etc. a work group will be part of this effort. A program, Getting Ahead is also being offered to generational poverty families. It facilitates a process in which adults are viewed as problem solvers and they go through a process that allows them to look at their own life and by the end of the 20 sessions they have a written plan of changes and goals that they wish to achieve. One 20series of sessions has been completed and another is to begin in April. At this time Getting Ahead is being viewed as a long-term program in Menominee.

In Shawano County the Nutrition Educator will serve on a community nutrition group addressing issues with local school lunch programs, obesity, etc. There will also be collaboration with WIC on continuing work with the community gardening program, to help make fresh produce available to low-income families through the food pantry.