

Plan for Food Stamp Nutrition Education in Portage and Wood Counties during fiscal year 2008

Overview of the Portage and Wood Counties Nutrition Education Program

Healthy Beginnings Portage County (HBPC), which began in 1997, finds that its original focus continues to meet the needs of first time families. The major focus is on providing once a week home visits to limited-income first time families. Programming related to this focus is funded by County funds in addition to Food Stamp Nutrition Education funds, thus allowing the educational programs to expand their range of topics to include child development and parenting. The goal is to support families to be self-sufficient in raising their children to be healthy, productive adults. Programming offers learning opportunities in the areas of brain and child development, managing food resources, practicing thrifty shopping, nutrition, parenting, and wellness. The second focus is on community-based nutrition education targeted to food stamp eligible households. The goal is to offer learn-while-you-wait, group learning opportunities and a bimonthly newsletter addressing the following areas: choosing/preparing safe, nutritious, and affordable meals and snacks; increasing consumption of lower fat/higher fiber foods; balancing physical activity with healthy eating; managing food dollars and accessing community resources for food security. HBPC is also exploring opportunities to provide nutrition education to the elderly and adults with physical and/or developmental disabilities, and in some cases their caregivers. This would take place in groups and/or individually in a home setting.

Wood County Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program was a new program in 2006. It began as a joint program with Adams County and in 2008 will become part of Portage County. In 2008 WNEP will focus on providing education and resources for dietary quality, balancing food and physical activity, food safety and budgeting for food dollars to low-income families as a strategy to provide clients with educational information that helps them transform their lives. At this time, about 30% (3612 of 12,352) of the potential population is being served. As the program identifies more sites for services and expands into the northern part of the county, this percentage of contacts will increase. Wood County has identified three key audiences for services in 2008. These audiences are: low-income seniors and adults with disabilities living independently, elementary school children as identified by free and reduced lunch statistics and other qualified school groups where families meet food stamp eligibility, along with those who have children at WIC and Head Start.

Since Wood County WNEP is a new program, 2008 will focus on teaching and maintaining programming at low-income sites in the southern part of Wood County while beginning limited outreach through WIC and Senior Nutrition to the northern part of the County. Although there are pockets of poverty throughout the county, the long term plan is to gradually increase the range of the WNEP program to encompass the entire county.

Characteristics of the low income residents in Portage and Wood Counties

Demographics of the Counties

Portage County demographics are comprised primarily of the following populations: 95.7% White; 2.2% Asian; 1.4% Hispanic or Latino. Between 1990 and 2000 there has been a marked increase in Asian residents (99% increase) and Hispanic or Latino residents (69% increase). The poverty rate for Portage County is higher than the state average (9.5% compared to 8.7%), and

only 66% of eligible county residents are enrolled in the food stamp program (statewide 102% of eligible residents are enrolled). Additionally, Portage County has relatively high food costs – 3rd highest out of 25 reporting counties. The Portage County 2005 Hunger Profile reports the following trends for residents with earnings less than \$25,000: 15% of households have skipped meals because there wasn't enough money for food; 10% of households with children were not eating enough because there wasn't enough money for food; 20% of households were needing to choose between food and other necessities, with nearly 1/3 of this group needing to choose almost every month. The Portage County 2005 Hunger Profile also reports that the food insecurity rate among county residents was 36% and that the number of requests for emergency food has increased 55% since the year 2000.

Wood County has a population of 75,234 (2005 updated census data). The population is primarily white (96.5%) with a significant Hmong minority (1.7%). 1.1% of the population is Hispanic. 68% of all households are described as family households with the household size averaging at 2.47. Of all County households, 14.2% are adults with an identified disability. 67.1% of the population is in the labor force with a median income of \$36,344. 7.8% of the population is below the poverty line. Unemployment has decreased from 6.1% in 2003 to 5.7% due to changes in area industries. At present, 2.79% of seniors are currently receiving food stamps. Elderly poverty rate in 1999 was 8.66% and mean Social Security income is \$12,167. Grandparents raising grandchildren is 3.4% (338) of the total senior population.

Nutrition and education needs of Food Stamp Program recipients and other low-income residents of Portage and Wood Counties

Food insecurity is a major area of concern in Portage County, with 36 % of county residents experiencing food insecurity. Our most vulnerable citizens are at risk for hunger and under-nutrition. The effects of food insecurity on infant and young children are startling. Consider that 80-90% of human brain mass develops by the age of three. Without proper nutrition during this period, cognitive delays result. According to Dr. Larry Brown of Brandeis University, children from homes experiencing hunger and food insecurity “get sick more often, have much higher rates of both iron deficiency anemia and serious ear infections and are hospitalized more frequently.” According to the Oregon Hunger Relief Task Force, other immediate affects of food insecurity on children are higher levels of aggression, hyperactivity, and anxiety. The younger a child is when exposed to hunger the more serious the long-term health consequences are likely to be. In fact, fetal under-nutrition results in low birth weight and affects the development of the kidneys, liver, pancreas and the skeletal mass of the baby. According to Susan Bagby, OHSU, low-birth weight is a more powerful predictor of adult cardiovascular disease than any other risk factor. This speaks directly to the need to provide nutrition education right from the start. Nutrition educators in Portage County have the ability to provide nutrition education to first time families shortly after the birth of their child when they sign up for our home visitation program. Families can remain in the program until their first child reaches the age of five. This long term relationship allows educators to provide consistent, family-specific information. It also enables the educator to address prenatal nutrition when subsequent pregnancies occur.

People with disabilities and seniors can be profoundly impacted by food insecurity as well. The administrative team and service coordinators of Community Cares Portage County – CCPC (the agency that individualized long term care services to seniors and to adults with physical and

developmental disabilities in Portage County) identified nutrition education as a major gap in services during their quarterly meeting in October 2005, particularly as it applies to improving food security and choosing a healthful diet. Portage County WNEP educators will work with CCPC clients individually and in groups when referred.

Portage County residents are among the estimated 76 million people in the United States sickened each year due to a food borne illness. A large percentage of these illnesses result from improper food handling practices in the home. Research has implicated the kitchen environment and food handling practices as follows: kitchens can be more heavily contaminated with fecal bacteria than the bathroom; 82% of sink faucet handles are contaminated during food preparation; 60% of people do not wash the cutting board after cutting raw meat or poultry and before cutting fresh vegetables for salads; 9% do not wash the work surface at all after cutting raw chicken; 44% consistently forgot to wash their hands properly before preparing meals; 49% thought that cooked food should be cooled at room temperature before being placed in the refrigerator or freezer; and only 12% always used a meat thermometer to check doneness. Since improperly handled or prepared food can lead to food borne illness and low-income families may be more at risk for serious consequences of food borne illness, Portage County WNEP will continue to underscore training and practice in this area.

At present, 10.67% of the population (8096) is a food stamp recipient in Wood County although the potential audience is 12,352. Adult recipients (4349) are slightly higher than child recipients (3747) although there appears to be more need among child recipients. According to U.S. Census data in 2000, 26.7% of all children in Wood County live at 200% of poverty. African-American (14.3%) and Asian (12.4%) children comprise the highest percentages of poverty. But, some services for food stamp eligible children are being under-utilized. Of the total enrollment of 14,660 students in the Wood County schools, 25.6% (3753) of enrolled children are eligible for free or reduced lunch while only 2985 or 20% actually participate. Summer meal sites are currently unavailable. Families with young children are also under-utilizing services for food stamp eligible families. Last year 2470 individuals received Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) services. On average about 73% received WIC services. Of those who receive WIC services, 38% of the households still report themselves as food insecure. 19% of these identify themselves as "food insecure with hunger" indicating the severity of food insecurity in the county. Many families are concerned about having enough food to last through the month and many of these families reduce their food intake to stretch the food dollar.

Based on Wood County UW-Extension collaborations with other agencies that serve food stamp eligible clients, educational needs for WNEP include budgeting for food dollars, dietary quality, concern about youth obesity prevention and reducing the risk for becoming overweight and food safety. In addition, with My Pyramid, it will be important to educate food stamp eligible families about new dietary and physical activity recommendations

Educational Projects planned for FY08

School Days: Wood County WNEP will reach groups of students at schools with a population of students having 50% or more free and reduced lunch qualifiers with information about basic food safety including hand washing, dietary quality, and balancing food with physical activity.

Currently, three schools: Mead Elementary, Howe Elementary and Pitsch Elementary qualify for services.

After School Programs: Wood County WNEP will provide small-group education at after school programs where 50% or more of students are free and reduced lunch recipients. Education at these programs will focus on dietary quality and balancing food with physical activity. In addition, families will be reached during evening family programs with information about dietary quality and balancing food with physical activity.

Head Start: Families with children at Head Start will be provided nutrition education opportunities during parent meetings on feeding toddlers and preschoolers. Nutrition education materials along with recipes and activities will be distributed to parents on the following categories: eating variety of fruits/vegetables; eating sufficient grain foods, especially those made from whole grain; making healthy choices from the milk group and the meat and beans group; planning meals and snacks; preparing food; and balancing calories from foods and beverages with calories used through physical activity. Nutrition lessons and activities with the children at Head Start will be offered three times during the year in each of the classrooms. Content will include eating a variety of fruits/vegetables in conjunction with the Community Garden, choosing foods and beverages to meet nutrient needs without eating too many calories, food safety, preparing food, and balancing calories from foods and beverages with calories used through physical activity.

In Wood County WNEP will provide a series of three puppet shows to young children on hand washing, eating a variety of food, and balancing food with physical activity. In addition to these programs, materials with more in-depth information about food safety, dietary quality and physical activity along with topics of concern will be offered to parents of young children.

WIC: Pregnant women and families with children at Almond, Amherst and Stevens Point/Plover WIC clinics will be able to participate in learn-while-you-wait activities covering the following topics: eating a variety of fruits/vegetables, balancing calories from foods and beverages with calories used through physical activity, utilizing community resources to improve food security, and choosing and preparing age-appropriate meals and snacks while modeling healthy eating.

Wood County WNEP will provide individual "Learn While You Wait" displays on topics appropriate for pregnant women and mothers with young children at Wisconsin Rapids and Marshfield sites. These displays will emphasize the use of WIC food package to stretch food dollars. A secondary focus will be encouraging parents and adults to model and encourage physical activity about as a balance for dietary intake. Individuals will learn in one-on-one or parent-child interactions.

Adult Groups:

American Cooking Club Asian American families with children or adults can participate in cooking classes (once a month during the school year) addressing: food safety, using food labels; planning meals and snacks; eating sufficient grain foods, especially those made from whole grain; making healthy choices from the milk group and the meat and beans group; and balancing calories from foods and beverages with calories used through physical activity.

Salvation Army Adults and parents with children residing at the Salvation Army's homeless shelter can participate in twice a month group sessions covering the following content areas: managing food resources and using thrifty shopping practices for nutritious foods, acquiring sufficient food to feed themselves and their families, and improving dietary quality.

Disabled: Adults with disabilities participating in Community Cares Portage County will be offered individual nutrition education and group sessions, when appropriate. Portage County nutrition educators will work with the client and the CCPC case manager to assess the individual's needs and develop an individualized service plan. Possible areas to be covered: improving food security; making food choices consistent with the Dietary Guidelines and MyPyramid; choosing foods and beverages to meet nutrient needs without eating too many calories; planning and preparing meals; managing food resources and using thrifty shopping practices for nutritious foods; and safe food handling, preparation and storage practices.

Wood County WNEP will provide education for a small group of food stamp eligible clients who live independently. The new program will be designed to assist them with independent cooking, food budgeting, dietary quality and balancing physical activity with food skills. Small group format will be used.

Family Resource Center: In Wood County WNEP will provide puppet shows for young children on hand washing and eating a variety of food. In addition, parent programs on feeding young children, infants, and toddlers will be provided for Early Head Start parents and Family Resource Center services will also be offered to Nekoosa Ho-Chunk Head Start families.

Senior Dining: Senior citizens at all (8) county senior dining sites will receive teaching sessions three times during the year addressing the following topics: meal planning and shopping for food in light of the new dietary guidelines, using community programs/resources to improve food security, and incorporating physical activity into lifestyle. Five sessions will also be offered on eating more fruits and vegetables by utilizing the Farmers' Market Vouchers.

Wood County WNEP will provide education at eligible senior nutrition sites with over 50% of the participant eligible for food stamps. Emphasis of programming will be dietary quality, physical activity and food safety. Presentations will be done in small group format.

Food Pantries, etc: Adults and families with children participating at TEFAP site (St. Vincent DePaul) and the Salvation Army and Operation Bootstrap Food Pantries will receive a bimonthly newsletter covering the following topics: community resources to improve food security, recipes highlighting common pantry foods, thrifty shopping practices, meal planning, seasonal food buying, and tips for living within a spending plan.

Home Visits: 50-75 First time families of infants and children will receive a series of interactive, in-home visit lessons tailored to their families' needs covering such areas as: making food choices that are consistent with the Dietary Guidelines and MyPyramid, food for pregnant or breastfeeding women, feeding infants/ toddlers/ preschoolers, food safety, planning meals and snacks, preparing foods, shopping for food, balancing calories from

foods and beverages with calories used through physical activity, and using community programs resources to improve food security.

Food Security Programming Efforts Planned

Portage County WNEP plans on raising awareness of hunger and food insecurity in the community in the following ways: participation in Portage County Hunger Prevention Partnership, having WNEP staff represented on the Financial Wellness Board, participation in Wisconsin's Hunger Consortium and distribution of "Hunger Close to Home" to partner agencies and community members. Portage County WNEP educators will provide State approved evaluation tools to be used to evaluate community presentations when appropriate.