

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

Overview of Food Stamp Nutrition Education in Walworth County

As diabetes and obesity are on the rise in youth, it has become increasingly important for low-income families to make healthy and economical food choices. Since 1995, the Walworth County Wisconsin Nutrition Program (WNEP) has worked with low-income families in schools and has partnered with community agencies to teach safe food handling, managing food resources, and making healthy food choices. The purpose of WNEP is to develop and implement community based nutrition education programs for low-income individual families in culturally responsive lessons that take into consideration the strengths of each participant. The process is transformative. Educator and participants identify goals and areas of interest in order to plan lively and thoughtful learning experiences.

Characteristics of the low-income residents in Walworth County

Demographics of Walworth County

The demographics in Walworth County are rapidly changing. According to the 2000 census, the overall population of Walworth County was 93,759, representing a growth rate of 25% since the 1990 Census. It is expected to increase by 28% by the year 2030. The number of low-income families is expected to grow as job growth in higher paying industries decreases (Job Center Walworth). In 1999, 8.4% or 7,479 of Walworth residents lived in poverty. Many of these families are female-headed households.

The Latino population has grown dramatically in Walworth County, by 204% from 1990 to 2000. Sixty six percent of the Latino population lives in Delavan, Lake Geneva, Whitewater, or Elkhorn. This will mean increased efforts by WNEP to reach segments of this Latino population which otherwise may not have access to our nutrition programs. Working with Latino youth in schools is a start, but WNEP must also make connections with parents and try to involve them in our nutrition education programs in the schools. Efforts must also be made to reach dairy and other agricultural producers and their seasonal workers.

Food Insecurity in Walworth County

In 2003, 5.21% of Walworth County residents were receiving food stamps. This is a 131% increase in participation between 1999 and 2003. An average of 1,435 residents use Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Supplemental Nutrition Program on a monthly basis. This represents about 82.8% of the low -income audience. Forty three percent of WIC participants were considered food insecure as of 2002. Walworth County WNEP will work in local WIC offices as well as participate in the Farmer's Market to encourage WIC families to buy locally grown vegetables and fruit as well as to promote the FoodShare program.

The need to continue nutrition education in the schools cannot be overstated. In 2003, 2,581 food stamp recipients were children. This represents 11% of the total food stamp population. Over the past eight years, there was a 72.4% increase in the participation rate of school age children who use the free or reduced lunch program. Therefore, our audience has grown. Through developmentally appropriate education and effective parent-school connections, we can reach out to more families than ever.

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

Low-income families in Walworth struggle to feed their families. Access to good, low-cost nutrition is limited not just by low-incomes but also by limited transportation and nearby grocery stores close to home. Community education that focuses on meal planning and resource management can be an important step in improving nutrition in low-income families. In a 2005 survey of 5,404 food stamp recipients in the state of Wisconsin, 35% responded that they were most interested in lessons related to getting more money for food and making their food money last.

In addition to resource management, WNEP can play an important role in addressing nutrition and related health issues. Obesity has reached epidemic proportions. Obese adults have higher rates of diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure. Women with low incomes (130% of the federal poverty threshold) are 50% more likely to be obese than women with higher incomes. WNEP can begin to address these issues by offering conveniently located nutrition classes which focus on topics chosen by program participants.

But it is not only adults who suffer from these health issues. There is an alarming increase in children. More low-income Latino 2-4 year olds are overweight than are low-income African American or white 2-4 year olds. According to the 2003 data from the Centers for Disease Control, 12.5% of low-income 2-4 year olds enrolled in the Walworth County WIC program are overweight. It is important now more than ever to work with parents and with schools to provide information and lessons on healthy eating and physical activity.

As a result of a comprehensive needs assessment done in 5 counties (including Walworth), many local partner agencies are requesting culturally responsive nutrition education and materials translated into Spanish in order to meet the growing demands of the Latino population. Additionally, survey results reflect a desire for increased Latino youth programming and recreational activities in Walworth that are well advertised and affordable. Walworth WNEP will partner with local agencies in order to provide appropriate educational opportunities in schools, in the Job Center, and in other sites.

In conclusion, the Walworth WNEP program will increase its outreach efforts and seek to partner with diverse community agencies. However, there are challenges. Communities in Walworth County are far from one another. It is a challenge to provide nutrition education over which individuals or families, regardless of where they live, can feel ownership. For example, if a program is offered in Elkhorn, people from other communities do not attend. They may believe that it does not pertain to them or simply have no access to transportation or the time to travel to the site. Equal time and attention should be placed on the different communities to ensure that eligible participants have access to WNEP programming.

Educational Projects planned for FY08

In school: Multi-session groups. Nutrition education classes of at least six one-hour sessions will be given to youth aged 5 to 11 years old at seven elementary schools in Walworth County. Some of these classes will take place in English as a Second Language classrooms. These series of

classes will focus on ways to enjoy eating fruits and vegetables as well as physical activity. More intensive nutrition education will take place in one area high school. Topics that will be explored include resource management and setting diet and physical activity goals.

Parents: Multi-session groups in two area high schools. Pregnant teens and teen parents will participate in a series of classes that will focus on breastfeeding, feeding infants and young children, food safety and resource management. Classes will be conducted in both Spanish and English where it is appropriate and needed.

Parents: Multi-session classes in one area high school with parents of high school teens. These single session workshops will focus on breastfeeding, physical activity, food safety, resource management and nutrition. Efforts will also be made to attend school family nights in cooperating elementary schools to offer workshops and information on topics relevant to low-income families.

Parents: Newsletters. The parents of elementary school children will be reached through newsletters throughout the school year. These newsletters will inform parents about the nutrition education at school as well as give families tips on how to incorporate healthy recipes and physical activity for their families. A similar newsletter will be mailed to WIC families, containing information geared to young children and toddlers. A similar newsletter will also be mailed to low-income story-hour participants in area libraries that will contain nutrition information and healthy recipes.

WIC: Learn while you wait. WNEP will provide a bilingual display to be changed every two months in Walworth County WIC clinic. A WNEP educator will staff this display two times a month in order to talk to WIC clients and teach short lessons on predetermined topics. Farmers Market- WNEP will collaborate with WIC and staff bilingual displays at local Farmers Markets.

Food Security Programming Efforts Planned

WNEP staff will publicize the Food Security Summit to all partner agencies in Walworth.

WNEP staff will raise awareness of food security issues by conducting nutrition education workshops in local hunger pantries.