

# **Plan for Food Stamp Nutrition Education in Iron County during fiscal year 2008**

## **Overview of Food Stamp Nutrition Education in Iron County**

The Iron County Nutrition Education Program began in December 1995 and continues to address the need for nutrition education among limited resource families in Iron County. Since the inception of the program we have taught to a wide variety of residents who receive food stamps or are food stamp eligible. Over the years, however, our education has become more focused on youth. We have an excellent opportunity to provide them with education about making wise food choices during their formative years. Teachers in the Hurley school system eagerly embrace our project goals, prepare the students for our teaching, review the lessons with their students, and provide additional education between WNEP visits. Nutrition education in Iron County is imparted mainly through group lessons, as well as staffed walk-bys. We have found this to be the most efficient use of our time. We do limited one-on-one visits, mostly for the purpose of educating on resource management. A monthly menu back newsheet reaches each family in the Hurley School District. Iron County Integrated Family Services serves as an advisory group, reviewing the work of the project and suggesting content, methods for future work and potential collaborations. Our work in the Iron County office of UW-Extension is done under the leadership and supervision of the Iron County Board of Supervisors Extension Education Committee. We report to IFS members each month and to the Extension Committee quarterly. WNEP updates are also included in each quarterly addition of the "Extension Connection", a newsheet that is sent to each member of the Iron County Board of Supervisors.

## **Characteristics of the low income residents in Iron County**

### Demographics of Iron County

The median age of citizens in Iron County is 45 years, almost ten years older than both the national and state median. Only 19.4% of the population is under age 21, with 23.2% being age 65 and over. More than 98% of Iron County's population is white; there are representatives of other ethnic groups, most predominantly Native American (0.6%). More than 21% of non-elderly adults are disabled.

### Food Insecurity in Iron County

The median household income in Iron County is \$29,580 (Wisconsin: \$43,791). Iron County is the second lowest county in the state in average earnings per job (Iron: \$19,257; state: \$30,006). 11.2% of Iron County individuals are below the poverty level (state: 8.7%). The child poverty rate is 15.1% (state: 10.8%) and the elderly rate is 10.61% (state: 7.43%). Almost one-third of Iron's population falls within 185% of poverty.

The food insecurity rate among WIC clients is 43%, with the hunger rate being 17%. 6.9% of the general population and 14.7% of the child population in Iron County receive food stamps. This is a 33.7% increase in the general population and a 57.9% increase in the child population (to 6<sup>th</sup> highest in the state), from 1999 statistics. It is estimated that only about 60% of the general population and about 50% of the senior population who are eligible actually receive food stamps. WIC participation is down 4%, though virtually all Iron County residents eligible for WIC receive benefits. 50% of schools in Iron County offering a school lunch program are considered high poverty; all of the high poverty sites serve breakfast.

The unemployment rate of Iron County residents was 10.3% for February 2007, compared to a Wisconsin unemployment rate of 5.9 % and a U.S. unemployment rate of 4.9% during the same period of time. Iron County had the highest unemployment rate of the 72 counties in Wisconsin in both January and February, 2007

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

Iron Co. residents have a higher incidence of breast cancer, cerebrovascular disease (stroke), diabetes, heart disease, infant mortality, & pneumococcal infections than do residents statewide. The Iron County diabetes rate is 14%, 8% statewide. Age-adjusted rate for heart disease in Iron Co. is among the highest in the state, 193.3 (statewide: 162.4). Stroke mortality rate is 104/100,000 people, 69 statewide. Total hospitalizations of Iron County residents are more than five times the state rate, at 78 hospitalizations per 1,000 population, compared to 14.5 hospitalizations per 1,000 people statewide.

In the northern district of Wisconsin 24% of adults are characterized as obese (21% statewide). 12% of adults in this district get regular, vigorous exercise (14% statewide). All of these life-threatening conditions are modifiable, to a greater or lesser extent, by improved nutrition.

### **Educational Projects planned for FY08**

**School Day:** Iron County WNEP staff will teach six nutrition/dietary quality lessons to students in grades pre-kindergarten through four, and grade six, of the Hurley School District, using the Heart Healthy or an alternative curriculum.

Iron County WNEP staff will teach four food safety lessons to two classes of students in grade five of the Hurley School District, using the Operation Risk curriculum.

A nutrition/dietary quality/food safety message will be contained on the back of each month's school hot-lunch/breakfast menu sent to 450 homes in the Hurley School District. Though not a substitute for in-person teaching, previous experience has found this to be a catalyst for parents to enroll for free/reduced hot lunch and to call our office, approach us at Parent/Teacher Conferences and other venues with nutrition questions and concerns.

**Preschoolers (Head Start):** Iron County WNEP staff will teach six nutrition/dietary quality lessons to two classes of Head Start students and will provide parents and Head Start teachers and staff with materials necessary to continue the lessons between sessions and to enhance their own knowledge of nutrition and dietary quality.

**Parents (Head Start):** Iron County WNEP staff will teach three in-person lessons to parents of Head Start students, and one lesson to parents of home-based students, during the school year.

**WIC:** WNEP staff will provide monthly interactive walk-by lessons to participants of the local WIC clinic. We will continue to work with the Iron County Health Department to address the incidence of childhood and adult obesity, and mortality from cerebrovascular disease, diabetes, and heart disease through two community wide activity/wellness events and through collaboration on a Living Well with Chronic Disease series of classes in our community.

**Senior Dining:** Older adults at four senior dining sites in Iron County will receive four interactive walk-by lessons during the program year. Each lesson will educate about the value of good nutrition and physical activity, including where to find local resources to aid in these efforts. One lesson will focus on food safety.

**Food Pantries:** WNEP staff will provide nutrition and resource management resources to people using the two local food pantries, as well as research-based information on hunger and food security/insecurity, nutrition, and food safety to staff and volunteers from the pantries and other local agencies.

### **Food Security Programming Efforts Planned**

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

We will raise awareness of hunger/food insecurity in the general community through the use of press releases and Hunger Close to Home materials, which will be used with focus groups, in reporting to stakeholders, and in displays.

WNEP staff will work with two local food pantries to create a pamphlet and display designed to raise awareness in the community, as well as to increase donations to the pantries. We will include food stamp and school lunch enrollment information on these and other WNEP materials, as well as on newsheets we design for Hurley School menu-backs.

#### Methods planned to compile data and assess status of food security

We will solicit data from the local food stamp program on food stamp recipient rates and from two local food pantries on the use of their programs. This is in addition to the use of census-based data.

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

Coordinator will work with both food pantries on recruiting, evaluating and rewarding volunteers, and with the pantries and other organizations serving low-income residents on exploring issues and conducting activities which strengthen their groups, including, but not limited to, needs assessment, program planning, and evaluation.

Coordinator will continue to chair the local Emergency Food and Shelter Board; however, the amount of money allotted to Iron County from the Emergency Food and Shelter National Board Program has been reduced from \$9,819 in 2004-2005, to approximately \$3,145 in 2007-2008. This funding underwrites the costs of providing emergency food, emergency shelter, eviction forestalls, and utility disconnect forestalls to residents of our community who have the most need.

Coordinator will continue to provide nutrition and resource management expertise to residents utilizing these services, as well as research-based information on hunger and food security/insecurity, nutrition, and food safety to staff and volunteers from the five agencies.

We will continue to include information on enrolling in the local food stamp program and in free or reduced school lunch in materials we distribute throughout the community, including newsheets used as menu-backs in the Hurley School District.

Both the Coordinator and the Nutrition Educator will serve on the Hurley School Wellness Committee.