

# Food Stamp Nutrition Education Study

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## Case Study Reports

Prepared for:

U.S. Department of Agriculture  
Food and Nutrition Service  
Alexandria, VA

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28 April 2000

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## Section I

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### Overview and Summary of Case Studies

In 1997, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) commissioned a study of State-level efforts to provide food stamp recipients and eligibles with nutrition education. The purpose of the study was to provide FNS with descriptive information about how Food Stamp Nutrition Education has been implemented in States utilizing the optional nutrition education provisions of the Food Stamp Program. As a part of that study, six local case studies were conducted to examine how local programs implement State policy. This report presents information obtained from the six case studies.

This report is organized into an introductory section, followed by the six individual case study reports. This introductory section presents an overview of the selection process for the case study sites, a review of common program elements found among the sites, and a summary of findings. The data collection instruments used for the case studies are located in Appendix A.

#### A. Overview of Case Study Site Selection

The goal of the case study reports is to provide descriptive information about how local programs implement nutrition education activities for food stamp recipients and eligibles. In order to select appropriate case study sites, information obtained from a review of State food stamp nutrition education plans (NEPs) was used to identify those States with local programs that had been operating for at least two years. The process for selecting the specific State and local programs is described below:

- # Selection of specific States was based upon two factors. First, State administrative structures were reviewed to identify States that both direct their

nutrition education activities from the State-level as well as those States who allow local flexibility in planning nutrition education programs. Four of the States selected were “State-directed” and two allowed local flexibility in developing their nutrition education plans.

Second, no two States were to be located within the same FNS geographic region. This allowed for examination of any regional differences in how the programs are implemented.

- # A diverse group of local programs were selected based upon their geographic location (rural and urban areas); the diversity of target populations, such as whether they target the general food stamp population or whether they target sub-groups of eligibles, such as teens, mothers of young children, or the elderly; and the education requirements set for nutrition educators, particularly the use of paraprofessional as compared to programs requiring staff with at least a Bachelors degree. Individual States were asked to recommend local programs meeting these criteria, such as a rural program serving primarily teens with paraprofessional educators.

One of the issues addressed in deciding on the selection process was whether to include FNS-sponsored nutrition education networks in the case study sites. After much deliberation, the nutrition networks were excluded from consideration from the case studies. The main reasons for excluding the nutrition education networks were that a separate evaluation of nutrition education networks was already being conducted, and because the nutrition education networks primarily use social marketing as their method of delivering nutrition education, there was little in the way of local implementation activities being undertaken. As a result, all of the case study sites selected were operated by the Cooperative Extension Service.

Table I.1 below displays the selected States and the criteria with which they were matched.

<b>Table I.1. Case Study Site Selection, by Criteria Used</b>				
State	Type of Program Administration	Geographic Location	Primary Target Audience	Nutrition Educators
Colorado	Local Flexibility	Urban	Low-Income Audiences in General	Require Bachelors's Degree
Oklahoma	State-Directed	Rural	Food Stamp Recipients and Eligibles	Paraprofessional
North Carolina	State-Directed	Rural	Mothers of Young Children	Paraprofessional
Iowa	State-Directed	Rural	Mothers of Young Children/ Some Elderly	Paraprofessional
Virginia	Local Flexibility	Suburban	Food Stamp Recipients	Paraprofessional
New Hampshire	State Directed	Rural	Pregnant Teens and Young Mothers	Require Bachelors Degree

**B. Overview of the Case Study Methodology**

Individual site visits were conducted at each of the six selected local programs over a three month period. The primary method of data collection was interviews with key program staff and with representatives from collaborative agencies. In addition, data collectors observed nutrition educators conducting at least one nutrition education class. During this observations, the data collectors also conducted group interviews, when appropriate, with clients participating in the nutrition education sessions.

Case study guides for each of these data collection efforts were developed and can be found in Appendix A. Data from the entire data collection effort was aggregated and summarized into a

single case study report. Each report is organized in the same manner, and is divided into six sections. These sections include:

- # An introductory section describing the local agency;
- # A description of the program components of the local nutrition education efforts;
- # A discussion of efforts made by the local program to evaluate their nutrition education activities;
- # A description of barriers faced by the local program in implementing and maintaining their nutrition education activities;
- # A review of factors that have facilitated the provision of nutrition education to low-income clients; and
- # A discussion of lessons learned from implementing their programs.

### **C. Common Program characteristics of the Case Study Sites**

The sites selected for the case studies provide nutrition education on a broad variety of topics to diverse populations. Each of the local programs visited is responsible for recruiting clients, scheduling nutrition education classes, and completing enrollment and evaluation paperwork on each of their clients. While the case study sites were selected for their diversity, there were a number of program characteristics common among the sites. These include:

- # All of the programs included in the case studies have strong relationships with their State’s TANF and Food Stamp Programs. In most cases, the nutrition education activities delivered by the agencies counted towards meeting TANF program requirements for clients to participate in education and training activities. Many of the classes and activities conducted are geared towards helping clients improve their shopping skills and their ability to manage resources.
- # All of the nutrition education sites rely heavily on collaborative relationships to recruit clients. The agencies visited market their programs to community agencies that serve low-income clients within each nutrition education agency’s geographic service area. These collaborative arrangements are the primary method used for the recruitment and referral of clients in to the nutrition education program. All of the agencies visited cited strong collaborative

relationships as a key to their success.

- # All of the programs use a basic curriculum developed by the Cooperative Extension Service in their State. While some of programs are allowed to modify the curriculum to meet the individual needs of a client or group of clients, the curriculum is always used as the basis for presenting nutrition education messages.
- # All of the agencies visited use the Cooperative Extension Evaluation Reporting System (ERS) as the basis for conducting reviews of their program outcomes.

## **D. Summary of Case Study Findings**

This section provides a summary of the key findings from the case study visits. It is important to remember that the sites selected for these case studies are not necessarily representative of the diverse and numerous local programs around the country. The information provided in these case studies is descriptive in nature, and should be used to help in understanding how local programs might be implemented.

This findings section presents a summary of some of the more common issues identified across the six case study sites. These summaries are divided into three categories: findings related to program diversity, findings related to challenges faced by local program in implementing their nutrition education plans, and findings related to positive lessons learned. Each of these three areas is discussed below:

### **1. Summary of Findings Related to Program Diversity**

When examining the major difference between the approaches used by the local programs, three specific topics stood out. First, the required education level of nutrition educators was a major issue for most local program staff, with strong feelings expressed about their agency's own approach.. Second, the mode of providing nutrition education was examined, comparing agencies using a group teaching approach with those focusing on individual, one-on-one nutrition education sessions. Finally, issues related to local flexibility in diverting from the State's prescribed approach when presenting nutrition education topics and issues were

examined. Each of these three areas is discussed below.

**a. Education Level of Nutrition Educators**

There is a strong difference of opinion as to the importance of using professional versus paraprofessional nutrition educators. Each of the sites was asked about the strengths and weaknesses of their approach. The sites that use paraprofessional staff generally recruit staff from the communities in which nutrition education is being provided. Officials from these sites argued that using persons who come from the community being served can relate better to the needs of the clients and are more effective in recruiting. In addition, the paraprofessional staff often are viewed by the clients as “peer educators” and feel that these nutrition educators will have a better understanding of the issues and problems they face.

Agencies that use paraprofessionals cited one weakness in their approach; the high level of turnover among paraprofessional staff. Agency officials in all of the case study sites using paraprofessional noted that salary levels for paraprofessional staff are very low, and once the nutrition educator gains some work experience, they often leave for a better paying job. This means that agencies are constantly experiencing staff turnover, which affects both the continuity of the program and increases new employee training costs for the State agency.

Agencies that require their staff to have a minimum of a bachelors degree argued that delivering nutrition education is a complex process, requiring the educator to customize the messages to meet client needs and be in a position to answer technical questions. In this regard, professional nutrition educators are better prepared to adapt their lessons to meet individual needs and provide accurate answers to technical questions.

An additional advantage of using staff with higher education levels is that programs tend to experience less turnover, and thus are able to maintain program continuity. Both sites that used professional staff indicated that they have been able to establish long-term

relationships with agencies and resources within their community, and thus have been able to effectively recruit new clients.

The only disadvantage noted for the use of professional educators was related to client scepticism about the nature of the program. One program representative explained that professional nutrition educators are often viewed with some scepticism by potential clients, as they tend to feel the material that will be presented may not relate to their individual circumstances or it may be “too academic.” Overcoming this scepticism has been a challenge for agencies using professional nutrition educators, and has been offset somewhat by the long-term relationships established by the nutrition educators within their communities.

#### **b. Different Modes of Providing Nutrition Education**

The two main modes of providing nutrition education used by the case study sites were individual one-on-one and small group sessions. All of the programs visited use both methods to a certain extent, but have chosen one as their primary method of delivering nutrition education and the other as a less preferred method.

Programs located in rural areas tended to conduct more one-on-one sessions than those located in more populated areas. The use of one-on-one was described by one program representative as the most effective means of creating behavioral change. These sessions, often conducted in the individual’s home, use a strong hands-on approach and can be adapted to the individual needs of the client. Often the nutrition education can be tied in to the preparation of a family meal, and thus creating a sense of accomplishment at the end of the session.

In contrast, programs that primarily use small group sessions noted that peer support plays an important role in changing client behaviors. The fact that the group members can use each other as sounding boards for ideas and issues seems to play an important role in the success of the group education approach. In addition, the use of small groups

allows the nutrition educator to reach significantly more clients than a one-on-one approach.

**c. Local Flexibility in Implementing Nutrition Education Activities**

Most of the local programs were allowed some degree of flexibility in presenting nutrition education topics and designing activities. In those programs which allowed the most flexibility, nutrition educators noted that while they always use the curriculum provided by the State as the basis for their presentations, they tend to skip or shorten lessons that do not seem appropriate for their clients.

Once example of the need for flexibility cited by a nutrition educator related to providing nutrition education to pregnant teens. This educator noted that the basic curriculum was directed at persons who were more self-sufficient than most pregnant teens, who often live with their parents and do not do the shopping for the family. The nutrition educator modified her approach to emphasize healthy eating rather than the curriculum- directed activities supporting the development of shopping skills.

In two programs where less flexibility is allowed, nutrition educators noted that clients can become bored with the lessons if they don't directly relate to their particular situation. In these cases, the nutrition educators rely on clever and innovative methods to keep the sessions interesting and maintain the client's attention. An additional issue noted was the fact that clients tend to complain that there are too many lessons, requiring several trips to come to the classes, or that the individual lessons are too long. The two programs that noted this problem are working with State officials in an attempt to modify the curriculum to either reduce the number of lessons or reduce the amount of material covered during each lessons in order to shorten the time it takes to present the information.

## **2. Summary of Findings Related to Challenges Faced by Local Programs in Implementing Nutrition Education Plans**

Local staff were asked to describe the challenges they have faced in implementing their programs. While each individual agency noted challenges that were somewhat unique to their particular circumstances, there was some commonality in three areas. These areas include recruitment of clients, limits on the use of Federal and State funds, and unique issues facing rural programs. Each of these three findings is discussed below.

### **a. Problems and Issues Related to Recruiting Clients**

All of the local programs noted some problems with recruiting clients for their programs. The most common problem was the perception on the part of a potential client that the nutrition education sessions would be uninteresting. In order to overcome this problem, several of the local programs would develop sample lesson plans, and then conduct a sample class at a community agency providing some other type of social and/or health service. This method allowed potential clients to see for themselves the type of information provided and the methods used. Hands-on activities were usually used in these demonstration classes to capture potential client interest. Potential clients were then allowed to sign up for classes after the session.

Another problem cited by four of the programs visited was the difficulty in reaching clients who speak languages other than English. Only two of the programs visited had staff that could conduct nutrition education lessons in Spanish, and none of the programs could provide lessons in other languages used by their target audience. In order to receive nutrition education services, clients must have some understanding of English to be able to participate. As a first step in addressing the problem, two of the programs were working on translating more materials to languages other than English and working on developing meal planning and food preparation classes using foods that would be more familiar to persons from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

**b. Issues Associated With Funding Restrictions**

Four of the local programs noted that restrictions on the use of funds for support services limit their effectiveness in recruiting and presenting nutrition education lessons. In particular, restrictions on using program money for child care and transportation were cited as problems. Nutrition educators in these four programs noted that it would be much easier to both recruit and provide services to clients if they could use a portion of their budget to provide support services.

In addition, two local programs noted that limits on the amount of funding they receive have required them to solicit in-kind contributions from community agencies or local merchants in order for them to conduct specific classes. For example, food preparation demonstrations are effective means of teaching healthy eating, but often the local program budget does not have sufficient funds for purchasing the foods needed for the class. The two programs citing this issue have worked with local food banks and with local grocery stores to obtain donated foods for their cooking demonstrations, but noted that it was unreasonable to expect that the donations would always continue.

**c. Unique Challenges Facing Rural Programs**

A number of challenges were noted by the programs serving rural geographic areas, including difficulty recruiting clients, the lack of support resources for referrals, and difficulties with scheduling classes for a limited number of individuals. However, most common among the challenges noted was the amount of time that it takes the nutrition educator to travel to sites where they conduct their nutrition education classes. Two of the nutrition educators working in rural programs noted that it was common for them to travel for long distances, only to find that the clients that had been scheduled failed to show up for the classes. One other educator noted that as much as 20 percent of her time was taken up by traveling, which severely limits the amount of time she has for teaching, recruiting, and completing administrative tasks.

### 3. Summary of Findings Related to Positive Lessons Learned

Local programs were asked to identify the positive lessons learned from their implementation of their nutrition education programs. While local programs cited a number of positive experiences that were somewhat unique to their particular situation, there were four positive lessons that seemed to be common to most or all of the local programs, including:

- # ***Strong partnerships with other agencies serving low-income clients are critical to the success of the local nutrition education programs.*** All of the local programs cited strong community partnerships as a key to their program's success. These partnerships assist the local nutrition education program with client recruitment, provide a source for client referrals, and often provide resources that are normally unavailable to the nutrition education program. Maintaining these relationships can require a significant effort on the part of the local nutrition education program. One local program noted that when a collaborative agency changes its executive director, or loses key staff, relationships often have to be rebuilt with the new personnel in order to continue to be effective.
- # ***The most successful methods of presenting nutrition education are the use of hands-on and interactive activities.*** Nutrition educators from all of the local programs were in agreement that the best methods for providing nutrition education information to low-income audiences involve using methods that allow the client to interact with the educator or other members of the group. In addition, the use of food demonstrations, group meal planning and preparation, and group shopping trips to teach nutrition principles make the program both interesting and fun.
- # ***Adapting the nutrition education program to the needs of different groups of clients is key to maintaining client participation.*** Nutrition educators at four of the six local sites emphasized the need to adapt the curriculum to the needs of the clients in order to hold their attention and provide them with an incentive to continue attending classes. Understanding the diverse needs of low-income clients, and making the nutrition education relevant to the life circumstances of the clients was cited as key to conducting a successful program.
- # ***Strong support from the State sponsoring agency is critical to the success of local programs.*** All of the nutrition educators cited the support they receive from the State Cooperative Extension Service as extremely important in maintaining their program. In addition to providing the funding for the local nutrition education program, the State sponsoring agency provides the curriculum, nutrition education materials, and appropriate training for local program staff. In addition, the State sponsoring agency assists the local programs with conducting needs assessments and providing data for conducting local program evaluations.

Without this type of support, the local programs would not be able to continue to provide high-quality services to their clients.

In this section, the selection process utilized for the case study sites was discussed, the common elements of the local programs were described, and the summary of common findings was presented. However, each case study report provides unique information about the local program selected for examination. The next section presents individual reports from the six case study sites, identifying the processes used to provide nutrition education, and the individual issues faced by each local agency.

# Virginia Case Study Report

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## I. Introduction

The Virginia Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program operates a Statewide program called Smart Choices for Nutrition Education Program (SCNEP). The first site visit for this study of the program was conducted over a two-day period in September 1999 (plus a short visit two days later to observe a nutrition education group session) in the Northern District, which is spread across 29 rural and suburban counties. The Northern District area program coordinator is located in Warrenton, VA. The State sponsoring agency is Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, based in Blacksburg, VA.

In-person interviews were conducted with four people: the Area Program Coordinator, two nutrition educators, and a food bank representative. Two nutrition education sessions were also observed, one with an individual teen mother at her home and another with a group of Spanish-speaking senior citizens at a community center.

This local program is a component of the largest Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Area program coordinators get directives from the State coordinator on issues such as what populations to reach, what core materials to use, and how much money to spend. Outside of the basic State guidelines set out by their nutrition education plan, the local SCNEP has quite a bit of flexibility to tailor the program to fit the demographics of the population, regional issues, or other logistical variations. Some of these, such as the use of bilingual materials, are discussed later in this report. The State-level administrators do not overstep any local-level boundaries in their involvement and monitoring of local activities.

The program in the Northern Virginia region employs 23 nutrition educators, one area program coordinator, and one full-time and one half-time secretary. They currently have 21.5 FTEs with three positions vacant, but they will wait to hire for these positions until there are five openings, because they conduct the three-week initial training in a small group to provide quality education.

## **II. Components of Food Stamp Nutrition Education**

### **A. Target Audience and Eligibility**

The SCNEP offers its services primarily to those who receive or are eligible to receive food stamps. Their clients are 185 percent above poverty level or less, preferably at 125 percent of the poverty level. In all counties, the target population is anyone who is in need, and clients range from teen girls at high risk of pregnancy to the elderly. The State-level SCNEP administrators initially were the ones who designated the target population. It became an approved part of the annual Nutrition Education Plan (NEP), and each area program coordinator follows guidance from the NEP. The State received a waiver to deliver service to non-food stamp recipients who are food stamp eligible, in part because of the large number of elderly who are eligible and in need of nutrition education. There are a large number of eligible elderly clients in VA who do not receive food stamps because they fear lengthy and complicated paperwork or they feel the amount of assistance they will receive is not worth the trouble of applying. The Virginia SCNEP includes both an adult and a youth component that are run separately. This case study focuses on the adult component.

Basically there is no single population that is targeted more than others in the State. Visits to two locations of the local SCNEP found one exception, where there is a nutrition educator whose first language is Spanish and who teaches classes in Spanish (although she teaches in English when necessary). This same site also focuses their outreach to groups of retired adults (with some additional focus on Spanish-speaking retirees). The other site visited serves the broad population that is set out in the NEP, and focuses on a broader range of food stamp recipients and eligibles such as single parents, teen parents, and families with small children.

The nutrition educators have been using the nutrition education materials with the target population for years. Educators do pre- and post-tests to measure the amount of change in client eating behavior, thereby indicating the clients' ability to comprehend the curriculum. Most of the materials are written at an 8th grade reading level, and there are materials in Spanish for Hispanic clients. Some of the items that are in Spanish are brochures received from agencies on topics of health, food safety, etc. and often the aforementioned Spanish-speaking educator translates recipes and materials into Spanish for her clients. These materials are used as supplements to the main curriculum, which is only written in English. One nutrition educator spoke about the appropriateness of the materials for the cultural and social needs of her audience of Spanish-speaking elderly and said,

*"The information is simple and easy. We don't use big words and it's easy to understand. Plus, they have me to explain things that are tough."*

Other non-English speaking populations that have been reached in the Northern Virginia area of the program include Vietnamese, Cambodian, Somalian, African, Russian, Czech, Chinese, Greek, and Italian populations. All of these clients were able to understand enough English to benefit from the nutrition education, though there are others who need service who do not understand English. These potential participants are unable to be reached by this program since there are no educators who speak all of those different languages.

## **B. Qualifications of Nutrition Educators**

The nutrition educators in SCNEP are paraprofessionals and are called program assistants. Their primary responsibility is to provide nutrition education to food stamp recipients and people who are eligible for food stamps. Another important responsibility is to recruit participants, develop relationships with local agencies and programs who provide contacts for recruitment, and find agencies that will provide food for food demonstrations and food baskets for needy families who are enrolled in the program. The nutrition educators also keep records on each participant, including pre-test data, post-test data, information on each lesson taught, and participants' progress and behavior change. An important part of their job is resource management whereby they make sure there are community resources available to participants

and make participants aware of those resources.

The program prefers that nutrition educators have a high school diploma or GED, but that is not a strict requirement. Some of their educators have some college course work, some have a bachelor's degree, and some have graduate course work. The program does not require a specific background in nutrition education, but provides each new employee with extensive training on the approach used by Virginia Cooperative Extension. This training is provided because new employees may be misinformed about nutrition concepts, as their knowledge may not be derived from research-based nutrition information. It is often easier to teach employees the research-based information from scratch than try to change their previously held assumptions. In addition, it is important that educators have a good work ethic and a heart for working with people. It is important that they be "hands-on," non-judgmental, able to work with ethnically diverse populations, and have some experience with volunteer work or have taught a class before.

One additional responsibility of the nutrition educators is to recruit a few community volunteers to help them with their work. These volunteers usually help with recruiting clients, teaching lessons, giving food demonstrations, maintaining equipment and supplies, and collecting data for family records. The number of volunteers each educator has depends on the size of the county and how much need the educator has for help. The volunteers are required to attend a 10-hour training session on food and nutrition taught by Cooperative Extension.

### **C. Training of Nutrition Educators**

All nutrition educators are trained initially during a three-week intensive small-group session. The main presenter is the area program coordinator who is assisted by veteran nutrition educators, Extension agents, and other experts and professionals. They feel having the initial training conducted in a group is more efficient and that group participation makes for a richer, more collaborative training. The initial training of nutrition educators is mandatory. Only those who are able to attend the full training are eligible for hire.

The initial training covers all of the basic nutrition information that is the core curriculum for the program. The training is conducted using a standard presentation format complete with demonstrations, overheads, and handouts. The training is very hands-on and interactive. Educators learn to use the materials from the curricula and have all of the resources available to them in their offices. Besides learning about the curricula, other topics they discuss include how to complete paperwork, how to recruit clients, how to solicit community resources, job benefits, food safety, health risk reduction, recognizing personality traits in people, and how to work with limited income audiences.

In addition to the formal curricula, other materials that are used during training and for nutrition education dissemination are received from other agencies, organizations, and associations such as the American Heart Association, Head Start, WIC, and the Dairy Council. One educator said the training helped her become comfortable with using the materials and conducting a lesson in front of a group of her peers. She said,

*"I was very afraid to stand in front of people, so they had me do it (in front of the other trainees). The other program assistants gave me self-confidence. I didn't know the materials before . . . I could not have done it without the training."*

After the initial training, the area program coordinator brings all of the new educators together again twice during their first month in the field to be sure they are applying the concepts properly, to answer any questions, and to refresh them on any issues they did not absorb during the initial training. The three-week training includes a lot of material that can easily be forgotten if it is not used quickly or often, so the coordinator makes sure to touch base with all of the new educators to ensure all questions are resolved.

Nutrition educators receive in-service trainings every other month in the district office. Either the area program coordinator, an Extension agent, or an expert in the field does the presentation. All of the nutrition educators meet at a central location for the training. A different topic is presented each time, either presenting new material or giving more in-depth information on topics covered in the curricula. Some of the topics include breast-feeding, food

and money management, stress management, vitamins, aging, chronic disease, alternative medicine, exercise, and food safety. Other training opportunities afforded the nutrition educators include computer classes through Extension and other continuing education courses through local agencies.

SCNEP works with and has provided training to staff from their local Food Bank. The Food Bank is highly collaborative and provides in-kind donations such as incentives for recruitment and prizes for SCNEP graduates. They also provide some monetary donations, grant money, food donations, and volunteer time. The training provided to the food bank employees includes 16 hours of nutrition education instruction. The Food Bank often has staff members who prepare meals but who have little knowledge of nutrition. The training covers topics such as food labels, food preparation, and the Food Guide Pyramid. The local SCNEP conducts this training once a year, or more often if there is a large number of new staff hired by the Food Bank during the year.

#### **D. Modes of Delivery**

Nutrition education is delivered predominantly on a one-to-one basis or as a structured group. Some group classes are taught in settings such as private homes, elderly communities or Federally funded housing projects. Other locations where nutrition education is provided include Extension offices, the Department of Social Services, senior citizen feeding sites, WIC sites, homeless and domestic abuse shelters, county bilingual sites, military installations, and churches. The area program coordinator said,

*"We've even gotten to the prisons. We've developed so many relationships that we've not had barriers [to reaching the target population]."*

Whether the nutrition educator does formal one-on-one education or a structured group lesson depends on the clients and the location. In rural communities, for instance, where there are few clients spread across wide areas of the county, one-on-one sessions are more practical since people cannot travel hundreds of miles to meet in a "central" location. In urban and suburban settings, group sessions are easier to organize because of the availability of public

transportation. The State coordinator would prefer for all of the nutrition education to be provided one-on-one because of the individualized attention the clients get in that set up. However, in some areas it is easy to have small groups, and teaching groups increases the number of people who receive education. One nutrition educator said that she thinks clients prefer one-on-one sessions because they are more focused and individualized, and allow for more confidentiality.

No nutrition education is delivered through mass media broadcast. In the past, they have used advertisements on the radio and on public television to promote the program, but not to deliver education. Another form of mass media advertisement was a news story that a local television station did of the program two years ago.

## **E. Content of Nutrition Education**

The curricula used by the SCNEP are “Healthy Futures,” “Smart Choices,” and a curriculum developed by Michigan State University. Each curriculum includes all of the dietary guidelines including: eat a variety of food; maintain a healthy weight; choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol; choose a diet with plenty of vegetables, fruits and grain products; use sugars only in moderation; use salt and sodium only in moderation; and, if you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation. The curricula also involve the Food Guide Pyramid throughout the course of the education. Each nutrition educator tailors the sequence of lessons based on the individual needs of the client or group of clients. The two nutrition educators with whom we spoke ranked their five most emphasized topics of nutrition education differently. For the Spanish-speaking educator, she emphasized cholesterol and high blood pressure first, then diabetes, then fiber, then fruit and vegetable consumption, then increased calcium. The other educator emphasized the Food Guide Pyramid first, then food safety, reduced salt, reduced fat, and finally increased calcium. Other topics included in the curriculum include:

- # A healthful diet (in general);
- # Eating five fruits/vegetables a day (5-A-Day program);

- # Food buying;
- # Food storage;
- # Food preparation/cooking skills;
- # Food budgeting;
- # Food safety and sanitation;
- # Health risk reduction and chronic disease;
- # Increased calcium intake for women;
- # Menu planning, pantry inventory, and meal management;
- # Obesity and weight management;
- # Physical activity and fitness;
- # Increased fiber intake; and
- # Reading food labels.

## **F. Process of Delivering Nutrition Education**

Nutrition education is provided by the nutrition educators in a series of no less than six lessons. Most of the lessons last between one and one and a half hours. It often takes up to one year for a participant to complete the required courses for graduation, though the nutrition educators work hard to ensure that participants are not enrolled longer than a year. They believe one year is the maximum and optimal amount of time a participant should be in the program, and that is plenty of time to complete the full course. As the participants begin to finish the prescribed course of lessons, the nutrition educator completes a family record to monitor the change in knowledge and behavior to determine if they have learned enough to successfully graduate. At the time of graduation, each participant gets a certificate of completion. The educators noted that many people feel very good about getting a certificate at the end because it gives them a sense of accomplishment.

The nutrition educators are expected to increase the numbers of recruited and graduated clients each year for the first three years. After the third year their requirements do not increase. The first year, educators in urban areas are expected to recruit 90 participants and graduate as many as they can (though there are no standards set). The second year they are expected to recruit 120 clients and graduate half of them, or 60 people. The third and subsequent years they are to recruit 150 clients and graduate half of them, or 75 people. In order to reach these goals, it is most effective to teach lessons in small group sessions instead of one-on-one, though occasionally it is necessary to teach individuals who cannot make it to groups.

One nutrition educator in Northern Virginia discussed how she reduces attrition throughout the year. She said that she develops relationships with her clients to encourage them to become invested in the education. The more they feel they have a relationship with the educator, the more likely they will keep their appointments for each lesson, take seriously the task of changing behavior and knowledge, and continue through to completion. Another way to help ensure optimal participation is to keep in touch on a constant basis, weekly if possible. This lets each participant know that they are important enough to remember and that the educator is counting on them to stay connected and involved. A final way to keep participants involved is by tailoring the lessons and the way the entire course is taught to the needs of the individual. If the clients feel their individual needs are of primary concern, they are more likely to invest more fully, stay in the program to graduation, and get more out of their learning. Some of the clients end up taking the course again in a group setting (without being enrolled a second time) because they enjoy the class and working with the nutrition educator.

The curriculum for “Eating Right is Basic” includes a small, tabletop flip-chart with all of the lessons included. The nutrition educators are trained on how to use the flip-chart and often use it in conjunction with other displays, hands-on activities, and materials. They also use games, videos, and other materials including the “Healthy Futures” curriculum, the “Smart Choices in the Grocery Store” curriculum, and a series of books from the University of Wisconsin (keeping food safe, making the most of your food dollar, etc.). Though each nutrition educator uses the same curriculum, teaching methods and styles vary from person to person. Educators are given flexibility to teach in the way that feels most comfortable to them and in a way that is

received most positively by the clients. They do not use their curricula in a formalized, rigid way, therefore. The education they provide is flexible and based on the needs of the participant(s). They determine how to teach and in what format (one-on-one or group) based on these needs. They know from experience what works best, and when they need to slightly alter how to provide the education, they use their flexibility to cater to the changing needs of the participants. One of the benefits of having bright, energetic nutrition educators is that they are fully capable of modifying the education they provide based on their clients' needs.

## **G. Needs Assessment/Formative Research**

The needs assessment for SCNEP was conducted years ago before this local program was established. Therefore, the current area program coordinator was not involved in the needs assessment activities. No formal, on-going needs assessment is conducted because they feel they are reaching the people who are in need and because time is of the essence. Since education is needed for those who are receiving or eligible for food stamps, that is the population they focus on.

The area program coordinator said she is pleased with the number of clients enrolled in the local SCNEP. More clients could be reached in Northern Virginia if there was more money to hire additional nutrition educators, but for now they are at full capacity in terms of the numbers they are able to reach.

## **H. Coordination and Collaboration**

One of the most important aspects of this local program's success is the collaborative relationships that have been established and maintained. Every nutrition educator works with a number of different programs to help with recruitment, service delivery, and other aspects of programming. Some of the agencies that the nutrition educators in the Northern Virginia area collaborate with include:

- # SHARE (Self Help And Resource Exchange, a non-profit food and community network);
- # Legal Aid;
- # Department of Social Services;
- # Food stores;
- # Schools;
- # Churches;
- # Parks and Recreation Department;
- # County fairs;
- # Department of Mental Health;
- # Area Agency on Aging;
- # Geriatric clinics;
- # Emergency food services; and
- # Community centers.

Some of these collaborations help the educators with recruitment of participants. Other agencies allow the educators access for advertisement purposes to find people who are eligible for food stamps. Some agencies provide services or products to help the educators with their program, such as food from the Food Bank for cooking demonstrations. The nutrition educators report that these collaborations are effective in part because there is good communication, good follow-through, and a focus on a common cause to help people who are on food stamps. The only collaboration that was not as effective in one county was with the local WIC Program. Extension staff believe the problems result from a mis-understanding regarding potential duplication between WIC and the agency in providing nutrition education to food stamp recipients.

In talking with a member of the local Food Bank, it was learned that there are both significant

benefits and a few challenges in working with the local SCNEP. The initial challenge was simply learning about each other's programs and functions. Soon, however, the food banks were collaborating with Cooperative Extension to deliver nutrition education to food stamp recipients and eligibles. The Food Bank partners with SCNEP to bring hands-on cooking skills and other life-skills classes to people in the low-income communities they serve. Each session includes eight classes where participants are taught nutrition, cooking skills, and life skills that are taught by other professionals. All recipes and brochures are based on researched nutritional information. A nutritionist oversees all classes. All foods used are easy to prepare, low cost, easily accessible, nutritious, and prepared in a healthy manner. Fresh produce is used at each class and most of the ingredients are from the Food Bank. At the end of every class, each participant receives a bag containing all the ingredients used in the recipe so he/she can prepare the same recipe at home. This allows the participants to practice their skills and to share their new knowledge and skills with their families.

This is just one example of a successful community collaboration. It has been effective because of the good working relationship that has developed over time, getting stronger as time goes on. With experience and time working together, there are fewer surprises, better relations, and improved understanding between coordinators. Over time the Food Bank even came to better understand the match rules, helping the collaboration run even more smoothly. Both sides are interested in educating the low-income populations, but the program always needs good management. The management breeds coordination, creates support and understanding, and a need to remember that the bottom line is education. Caring local SCNEP coordinators make the collaboration work. Also, coordinating with SCNEP gives the Food Bank educators a larger population of people that they can directly reach. Cooperative Extension also has a larger set of resources (money and materials) and better training materials than many other agencies with whom the Food Bank coordinates.

However, the food bank representative also noted that not every part of the collaboration with SCNEP has worked as well for the Food Bank. The representative noted that working with SCNEP creates the appearance of too many bosses for the Food Bank educators. The Food Bank educators have to respond to their supervisors at Cooperative Extension, the Food Bank

supervisors, and to area program coordinators. This creates a number of demands on the educators and takes away time from teaching. Also, the Food Bank representative believes that Cooperative Extension asks for too much paperwork, which takes away from time educating the target audience. In addition, because food per se is not the specific focus of the SCNEP in the way it is for the Food Bank, it can be more challenging to work with SCNEP as opposed to other groups who focus mainly on food distribution. Finally, because of the large number of people that the educators are required by Cooperative Extension to reach, the Food Bank representative worries about a reduction in the quality of education in the interest of gaining more participants.

## **I. Nutrition Education Plan**

SCNEP is run based on a Statewide Nutrition Education Plan (NEP) and each local program follows guidance from the Statewide NEP. No districts have their own plans independent of the State plan. The area program coordinators have input to the State's NEP each year but they do not participate in the actual writing, which is done by the State coordinators at Virginia Tech. In general, the NEP in Virginia has remained relatively constant over the years. One change in the NEP was in the specified target audience. In the past, the State coordinator was more hopeful about being able to get all of the numbers of participants by only recruiting food stamp recipients. When educators began experiencing difficulties getting enough participants, they identified a large portion of people who need nutrition education who were eligible but not receiving food stamps. Once this was determined a few years ago, the NEP was rewritten to include a waiver to provide education to both food stamp recipients and eligibles.

The grant money from the NEP is divided out by district based on the number of nutrition educators in that region. They are also given a flat sum of \$2,500 per year in this district for incidentals and training.

The program in the Northern Virginia district implemented their program activities as they were prescribed in the NEP. The State coordinator purposely wrote their NEP to be broad and flexible so that they have leeway to change subtle aspects as needed. The area program

coordinator said,

*"We learn as we go. Flexibility is built in. I let the program assistants do it to the level they want to do it. I give them suggestions but then let them go tap into resources. We recognize it's a process and we give it time. Though we haven't made many changes to the program."*

### **III. Evaluation of Nutrition Education Activities**

The State coordinator of the SCNEP evaluates the numbers reached using the ERS system, with individual participants as a unit of measure. Clients are tracked at the State level and program assistants are kept informed of behavior changes through a computer-generated program (ERS). Their annual reports are generated for the period May through April.

The State coordinator conducts evaluations of the entire program, though it is the nutrition educators who evaluate the progress of their clients over the course of all sessions. The area program coordinator works with the educators in the beginning and as needed to ensure they understand how to use the ERS diagnostic report for client evaluative purposes. They use the ERS system lesson logs, and family records to evaluate the progress of the clients. The coordinator also does small performance reviews of each nutrition educator each year.

In terms of how well the program operated this year based on their planned versus actual activities, the educators with whom we spoke reported having exceeded the numbers of participants they were required to graduate this past year. They attribute that, in part, to being "seasoned" educators who have established rapport with agencies and who have good reputations in the community. Knowing a lot about a community helps, as well as developing strong ties with the local Extension agent. They often get referrals from past and current participants. One educator also added some outreach techniques this year, which helped her gain greater numbers of participants. One new strategy was using flyers. Another was making more recruitment phone calls to agencies and potential participants. Finally, having a volunteer who works with each educator is an excellent way to increase recruitment since two people working toward gaining higher numbers is always better than one. The educators both

said they need to continually think up new and better ways to recruit participants and promote the program to keep the numbers up. They added that they have enough money to run their classes, travel as needed, and buy new supplies, which helps them effectively run their education sessions.

#### **IV. Factors Facilitating the Provision of Nutrition Education**

Overall, having exceptional nutrition educators, the ERS charts collection system, and a variety of resources and teaching materials are what facilitate the successful execution of the local program. Other facilitators are discussed below in more detail.

One facilitating aspect of the SCNEP is having the State program structured such that there are five area program coordinators who administer the local programs. This allows the coordinators to provide continuity of administration across a wider area than if there were double or triple that number of coordinators. The area coordinators all report to the State coordinator but are responsible for monitoring the ongoing operation and management of SCNEP in their region.

The one area program coordinator with whom we spoke reported that one facilitator for her program was having a supportive and effective State coordinator. She said it helps to have her leadership, and her care for low-income populations comes through in her commitment to the success of the program across the state. The State coordinator always makes time for the area program coordinator and is well-informed about how the program is running and what issues are in need of attention.

One aspect of the program that facilitates implementation has to do with the cooperative Extension home economists in the communities. The home economists take new nutrition educators to local agencies to introduce them to agency representatives. Networking with agency representatives is an important way home economists help educators develop relationships in the community. These relationships are often important in helping with recruitment, securing in-kind donations, and networking.

Another part of the program that facilitates its success is the continuity that the nutrition educators provide to the education process. The program reports a very low attrition rate for educators, even though they make comparatively small salaries. Their commitment to the work and their enjoyment of their job encourages them to stay, which helps the program's overall success. As mentioned before, each nutrition educator also has the help of a volunteer in their community who helps with outreach, fixing food bags, helping with food demonstrations, cleaning up after lessons, etc. This is another one of the facilitators to effective implementation of the program.

One nutrition educator said she felt that the opportunities afforded all staff for continuing education was a major facilitator. She noted that the classes that the area program coordinator developed or facilitated were very helpful to her in her job. In addition to the classes, other resources, such as the area program coordinator, other Extension agents, and other experts who teach the courses were helpful as well. They teach important skills, give new and improved knowledge, and suggest better ways to teach the nutrition education in a hands-on, interactive way.

## **V. Barriers to Providing Nutrition Education**

There were a number of barriers that had to be overcome this year in order for the SCNEP to run effectively. For instance, the amount of funds that the area program coordinator was able to collect this past year was less than she needed to reach all of those participants she wanted. Many of the funds she is able to collect were not eligible for federal reimbursement, which is frustrating in times when they are struggling to raise enough money for the year.

Another major barrier is the salary for the nutrition educators. The economy is so good in the Northern VA area that most people could easily find better paying jobs. Virginia's nutrition educators get paid better than those in other states, though it is not enough to keep people satisfied with the salary. Besides the fear of losing trained and effective educators, the coordinator finds that applications for the open positions are few and far between because of low pay in the Northern Virginia economy. This sometimes makes it difficult to find enough

applicants.

As mentioned earlier, one barrier to getting the required number of participants each year is when food stamp recipients and eligibles are widely spread out across a long distance. In these counties, participants must have transportation so that they can travel to meet in a centralized location for the nutrition education each month. Since this is often not a viable option, nutrition educators often end up doing one-on-one education, making it very difficult for them to get the number of participants they are required to have. Along the same lines, it is sometimes difficult for the nutrition educators in the spread out counties to travel as much as they need to on the travel allowance they are given. Especially when clients who are being given one-on-one education are not home at the scheduled time, the mileage cost can be an issue.

Another barrier involves key agencies that are too busy to effectively collaborate with the program. The type of help SCNEP usually counts on is having agencies help provide potential clients to the educators. Because the agencies are too busy or because SCNEP is a low priority for them, some of them provide only minimal assistance. One agency helped by generating a list of people an educator could contact, but did no work to help contact or encourage client participation.

Another barrier that was faced were problems trying to collaborate with local WIC programs. Because WIC does not generally provide information regarding shopping skills and resource management, the nutrition educator providing food stamp nutrition education wanted to recruit WIC clients to provide this additional information. However, when the nutrition educator went to the WIC representative to discuss working collaboratively to try to get more clients recruited into the program, she was turned away. The person told her that because the educator was a paraprofessional without a degree or certificate, they would not promote the program nor help with recruiting clients. The sense of the food stamp nutrition educator is that WIC wants nutrition education to be taught to their clients only by degreed educators.

Food demonstrations are an important part of successful nutrition education. The educators

often find it difficult to secure locations where there are cooking facilities where demonstrations and hands-on cooking can be conducted. A similar barrier involves not having TVs and VCRs to show videos associated with some nutrition lessons. Though there are a few VCRs available to educators, they have to be checked out and are sometimes not available as easily as if each educator had her own equipment.

One environmental factor that is a burden to full and effective implementation of the program is public transportation. Even in the cities where there are buses, clients (especially elderly clients) do not know how or do not want to learn to use buses or the subway to get to education sessions. In addition, a lot of clients are single parents caring for young children at home, making it difficult to get them to attend classes unless childcare is offered. Finally, some educators go to very poor areas with sub-standard housing in order to teach nutrition, making their jobs more difficult, though they note that this does not stop them from teaching these clients.

## **VI. Lessons Learned**

The following are some lessons that the area program coordinator and the nutrition educators have learned through their tenure in this local program.

- # Presenting a positive image is key. The more people that hear about the program, the more it will grow. Presenting the program to administrators of other agencies helps to promote it, as well as lets the public know the program exists. Other ways of advertising include setting up displays at agencies, having the nutrition educators go to health and wellness fairs, and making connections at churches and grassroots organizations that can help recruit clients.
  
- # Teaching nutrition education using pure lecture format without the use of demonstrations and visuals is highly ineffective. The best lessons are those that are interactive, hands-on, and full of visuals. Participants love food demonstrations as well as cooking with the educator. Demonstrating how to cook a meal, having fun with it, then giving participants a food basket with all the needed ingredients and the recipe is a great way to get them to try to cook a dish at home for their family. Participants also respond well to "shock" visuals such as the examples of what clogged arteries look like.

- # For truly successful implementation, the program needs as many agencies to be involved as possible in order to help network and advertise the program.
- # You need nutrition educators who have a heart for people. You also need to train educators on a regular basis to ensure they are up to date on all of the information they need to address.
- # One thing the area program coordinator hopes to do differently in the future is spend more time fostering a strong and trusting relationship between herself and the new educators. She said she would like to spend more time with each new educator because they often begin relatively shy and somewhat intimidated. She wants to help them feel more comfortable immediately.
- # Running the SCNEP is more about management and supervision than about having experience or a background in nutrition. The area program coordinator spends a lot of time building a relationship with local Extension agents since they conduct a good portion of the training provided on an on-going basis. She takes a great deal of time to foster those relationships with Extension agents, both in the office and in the community.
- # The educators believe that it is very important to develop a personal yet professional relationship with the participants. Some participants simply need to feel they are accepted, befriended, and loved. They need to feel respected. It is also good to try to give the participants something during the course of the education, whether it be friendship, a listening ear, food samples, a certificate of graduation, or some other gift or incentive.
- # It is important to remember that all participants' needs are different. Each person has a different level of knowledge, a different set of life circumstances surrounding food and nutrition, and a different way of learning. The educators said they have to be flexible and aware of their participants' needs at all times.
- # One educator recommended that all area program coordinators shadow their educators at least once a year to see how difficult their jobs are. She noted that the coordinators could benefit from seeing how difficult recruitment is, how frustrating it is to deal with cancellations, and see how some of the performance expectations and goals set for all educators are too high for those in more rural communities. She noted that some of the guidelines are unreasonable for those operating in a spread-out, rural county. She also suggested that policymakers increase salaries for educators. She said low salary affects morale and retention of educators.
- # As a parting comment, the area program coordinator said, "We're making a difference in lives and creating empowerment!"

# North Carolina Case Study Report

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## I. Introduction

North Carolina has 17 programs as a part of its program to provide nutrition education to low-income individuals and families. One of the many programs is called Out For Lunch (OFL). The OFL program was selected from North Carolina's 17 programs for this case study because it existed in FY 1997 when the study began. OFL's main mission is to provide food and nutrition education and food resource management for limited resource families in 41 North Carolina counties. The primary audience is young women who are food stamp eligible and their preschool children, though the program is open to all food stamp recipients and eligibles. The OFL program for school-age children is currently present in 13 counties. The State sponsoring agency is North Carolina State University Cooperative Extension and the specific OFL program visited was a joint county program between Craven and Pamlico Counties in the eastern part of North Carolina.

Each participating OFL county has a contract with Cooperative Extension that is developed between the State OFL director and the county. The team of agencies that work together in the OFL effort are North Carolina State University, the North Carolina Department of Social Services, and the participating county. For the county to participate, the county contract has the following terms:

- # The county must provide access to a food laboratory (or similar setting conducive to hands-on experience for 12 adults) for the parents, a separate room for children under 3 and a separate room for those 3-5 years old (conducive to minimal food preparation, finger painting, etc.). These rooms should be in the same building.

- # The project budget will provide resources for food demonstration items, food preparation equipment and the program assistants. Resources for participant transportation are not included. The county is expected to provide a means of transportation for participants. Availability of transportation is a requirement for receiving OFL funding.
- # The project contains an optional school-age curriculum for 6-11 year-olds for the summer months. The OFL program does not provide funding for the school-age component. If implemented, the county would need to provide adult staff and/or volunteers and resources to conduct activities.
- # OFL funding cannot be used for copies of handouts for participants, office equipment, office furniture, food laboratory appliances, preschool furniture, or supplemental supplies (toys, cribs, mats, etc.)
- # The county is expected to provide paraprofessionals hired to conduct the program with access to office space and equipment.

The OFL program has a standard curriculum, but the local program assistants have the flexibility to tailor their programs to fit the demographics of their participants, regional issues, or other logistical variations. The State-level administrators play an integral role in supporting the local level programs by providing time and aid to the local level coordinators and program assistants. Also, Cooperative Extension provides regional supervising agents to provide direct support to the local programs and to serve as trainers for the program assistants. The OFL program in North Carolina employs approximately 80 program assistants (two per county; although some program assistants cover more than one county), eleven supervising agents, and two coordinators at the State level. This report concentrates on the Craven/Pamlico County program where two program assistants serve both counties.

## **II. Components of Food Stamp Nutrition Education**

### **A. Target Audience and Eligibility**

The initial planning for the program began in 1995 with a preschool program for children of parents who were a part of the North Carolina Work First Program. Through cooperation between the Food Stamp Program, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program

(EFNEP), and the development of county relationships with organizations like food banks and Family Resource Centers, the program was able to expand to adults.

The OFL program offers its services to those who receive or are eligible to receive food stamps. Participants are 185 percent above poverty level or less. In order to tailor the classes to meet the specific needs of Hispanics, the elderly and other groups, OFL participant handouts have been modified. Modifications include translation of materials for Spanish-speaking participants by volunteers and by two program assistants who are Hispanic. A resource review is also underway to contribute to the modification of OFL to meet the needs of senior adults. Also, on occasion, program participants are blind, hearing impaired, disabled, or developmentally delayed, and it is up to the individual program assistants to decide how best to work with these individuals and tailor their programs to fit the needs of these individuals.

The primary audience in Craven/Pamlico County is women who are food stamp eligible and their preschool children. In recent years, some men have chosen to participate in the program and their numbers are steadily increasing. The program serves a total caseload of 550 adults and preschoolers.

When speaking with program participants in the Craven/Pamlico program, it was obvious that they are very interested in the program. Most feel that they are learning a great deal and they are thankful that their children are able to participate. Also, elderly participants enjoy being able to attend because they still want to learn and it makes them feel that people are concerned about their well-being and they feel more of a part of the community.

## **B. Qualifications of Nutrition Educators**

The nutrition educators in the OFL program are paraprofessionals and are called program assistants. Their primary responsibility is to provide nutrition education to food stamp recipients and people who are eligible for food stamps. Another important responsibility is to recruit participants and develop relationships with local agencies and programs who provide contacts for recruitment. The program assistants also keep records on each participant,

including registration information, feedback and success stories, and evaluation forms filled out at the end of each session.

The OFL program hires paraprofessionals who have high school diplomas or GEDs. Some of the educators have some college coursework, some have a bachelor's degree, and some have graduate coursework, but they prefer that the educators have little to no prior experience in nutrition because they prefer to teach all of the nutrition information from the start. They also find that some people with college backgrounds create too rigid a classroom environment, to which participants do not respond well. Also, individuals with college backgrounds do not tend to understand the population as well as those who are indigenous. It is important that the program assistants build a non-threatening environment and help create dignity and pride in the participants.

### **C. Training of Nutrition Educators**

All program assistants undergo a total of four weeks of training. For three weeks, the program assistants go to “boot camp” for training on basic food and nutrition, development of teaching skills, and recruiting skills/methods. The fourth week is devoted to the OFL program itself and how it operates. The training program for the program assistants is conducted by the regional supervising agent along with guest presenters. The goal of the supervising agents is not only to increase knowledge, but to create a fun atmosphere so that the new program assistants feel excited about the job they are starting as well as make them feel that there are people who will support them in their effort to teach nutrition.

To enhance communication and training after the initial “boot camp” among all involved in the OFL program, quarterly regional meetings are conducted. The meeting sites are strategically positioned in five areas of the State, requiring county staff to travel no further than one hour to attend the meetings. The primary purpose of the meetings is to provide ongoing training for the program assistants and other county staff who deliver the OFL program. The quarterly meetings allow all Extension personnel involved in managing and implementing the program to receive program updates, share ideas for continuous program improvement, and brainstorm

solutions to common roadblocks in the program. Feedback from participants in the meetings has been favorable. Meeting participants indicate their pleasure in being involved in the “continued evolution” of the program. Ideas generated from staff at regional meetings are integrated into the program (where appropriate) as a means of implementing continuous quality improvement. The ability to have input to help create and to improve OFL is very important to the program assistants because it also allows them to feel like the State directors are accessible. In addition to the quarterly district group meetings, the supervising agents conduct periodic in-service trainings, and 2000 will mark the second Statewide program assistant conference.

#### **D. Modes of Delivery**

Nutrition education is delivered in a structured group setting. The adults are in one group, and the children are in another group in a separate room. The parents are more than welcome to go and look in on their children as they feel it is necessary. In situations where a participant is of an extremely low-literacy level, the low-literacy participant will be partnered within the group or one-on-one help may occur. The classes in Craven/Pamlico are taught in various community locations including churches, community centers, County Extension offices, schools, homes, and volunteer fire department buildings. Programs are not held in government offices because of the audience’s negative associations with government buildings.

Typically, the classes are Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday because those are the days when participant attendance tends to be better, but there are occasional classes on the weekends. Due to the hands-on nature of the classes (emphasis on food preparation), there is a maximum of 12 participants for the adult class. There may be more in the preschool class. The program assistants try to create an interactive environment to create interest in the lesson.

#### **E. Content of Nutrition Education**

For the adult class, the first three classes center on fruits and vegetables and the last session focuses on dairy foods with other topics mixed into the discussions. Each week the program

assistants discuss various topics ranging from food safety to shopping. The classes for the preschool children mirror the adult program.

The curricula use dietary guidelines including: eat a variety of foods; choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol; choose a diet with plenty of vegetables, fruits and grain products; use sugars only in moderation; and use salt and sodium only in moderation. The curriculum also involves the food guide pyramid as a major concept throughout the course. Each nutrition educator tailors the sequence of lessons based on the individual needs of the client or group of clients. The two nutrition educators with whom we spoke ranked their most emphasized topics of nutrition education differently. For the adult educator, she emphasized healthy eating, food budgeting, food safety, germs, and cooking skills. The preschool educator emphasized germs, fruits, vegetables, and healthy snacking.

## **F. Process of Delivering Nutrition Education**

OFL follows an established curriculum of four sessions (one session per week) for four to five hours at a time. At the completion of the four classes there is a graduation ceremony which includes a certificate of completion. The program assistants in Craven/Pamlico and their supervising agent emphasized how important earning the certificate is to the participants. Often, this program is only the opportunity they have had to earn something in their life and the certificate generates a significant amount of pride.

The nutrition educators in the Craven/Pamlico program also noted how important it is to relate to the participants. Program assistants have to be willing to share information and be open to share of themselves to get participants to buy in to the program. One key to getting program assistants to relate to the participants is having North Carolina make an effort to hire program assistants who are indigenous to the food stamp population. In this way, the program assistants have a better knowledge of the population they are teaching; likewise, they may already have built relationships with current and potential participants. Currently, 70 percent of the program assistants in North Carolina are indigenous to the population, and many have been on food stamps at one time or another.

The first hour of the class contains the topic of the day. The program assistants, through discussion, teach the participants about healthy eating, new foods, and how the foods will be used in meal preparation and planning. The remainder of the session includes hands-on learning activities involving the topic of the day as well as the preparation of a full meal for lunch. While the food is cooking, the program assistants go back to a discussion format on nutrition topics. After the meal is over, the participants receive a bag of food and cooking supplies to fix the same meal at home for their families. The preschool class is conducted in much the same manner except adapted to preschooler skills. The primary difference is that physical activity is also included in the preschool class.

The most important aspect of the OFL program is its hands-on nature. During participant interviews, it was stated that the active learning as well as the positive energy and open nature of the program assistants made the participants want to learn more. Many wish that classes were every day and the mothers who have children participating in the program noted how the children became more interested in their food and wanted to help more with food preparation at home. A telling remark by one participant was, “Once you see it (food) and use it (food preparation), you want to do it (food preparation).”

## **G. Needs Assessment and Formative Research**

The local programs in North Carolina are not directly involved in the needs assessment process. All needs assessment activities and formative research are conducted at the State level.

## **H. Coordination and Collaboration**

An important aspect to any program’s success is collaboration with other organizations. Collaboration with North Carolina’s Work First Program has been very helpful for recruiting participants for OFL. Work First in Craven/Pamlico County became involved with OFL after the Work First Assistant Director observed an OFL presentation and was “thoroughly impressed.” OFL was integrated into the Work First Job Readiness Class. Work First felt

OFL would be a perfect match to improve learning skills as well as work skills for those interested in entering the food service industry, and the Job Readiness Class participants needed nutrition and parenting skills. The Craven/Pamlico County Work First representatives say, “Keep the program!” They have observed so much improvement in job and life skills in their Job Readiness Class participants. The number one complaint about the OFL program is that it should have more money to provide more transportation. There are also other collaborations with community organizations and businesses to get items for the OFL participants and space for classes.

One relationship that continually needs to be worked on is the relationship with the Department of Social Services (DSS). Over time the relationship with OFL and the State DSS has improved through constant meetings and relationship building. The relationship with DSS is important because the program money flows through DSS as well as contract approval, and buy-in to the program’s benefits is necessary from DSS officials. The greatest difficulty comes with DSS officials at the local level, where it is harder to get buy-in to the program. There is a great amount of turnover at the local level so educating the officials is a continual process, and many DSS local directors do not feel that education should be a part of DSS’s job.

## **I. Nutrition Education Plan**

The OFL program is a part of a Statewide nutrition education plan (NEP) and each local program follows the guidance from the Statewide NEP. The counties do not have their own plans independent of the State plan. The local program coordinators and staff have input to the State's NEP each year but they do not participate in the actual writing, which is done by the State administrators at North Carolina State University. To write the new proposal, there is an OFL Project Team who collect information from the various county programs. A Planning Retreat is conducted to evaluate the progress of the program and develop ideas for program growth and enhancement for the upcoming proposal period.

Following is the summary of activities from October 1, 1998, to September 31, 1999:

- # 5,607 families were enrolled in the OFL program;
- # 9,896 preschoolers participated in the program;
- # 518 school-age children participated in the program, which was delivered in after school programs;
- # 514 volunteers supported the program;
- # 21,576 contacts were made to recruit, inform, and enroll eligible participants; and
- # Six additional county programs were successfully linked to the State's Work First Program as optional components.

### **III. Evaluation of Nutrition Education Activities**

State administrators of the OFL program evaluate the numbers reached using registration information, feedback and success stories from the participants; comments from the evaluation forms filled out at the end of each OFL session; and feedback from all of the program assistants and supervising agents gathered at meetings and through the email network. Evaluation of the entire program is done on a continual basis at the State level as well as the local level.

The monthly narratives supplied by the program assistants report program outcomes that may not be captured in quantitative data. Narratives from program assistants indicate that several participants continue to develop improved self-image and self-confidence as a result of learning and implementing new food behaviors. Program assistants also indicate that the participants request that additional sessions be taught to enhance their new knowledge and to provide them with additional skills in food selection, preparation, and safety.

Program assistants working with preschoolers continue to report an improved awareness of different foods, especially fruits and vegetables, among participants. Where many children are reluctant to try new foods at the beginning of the program, program assistants report an increased curiosity and willingness to taste as the children become an active part of the

program. Program assistants also write that children often ask their parents for foods similar to those they tasted as part of the OFL program, thus reinforcing the parents' active role in shaping children's food habits.

#### **IV. Factors Facilitating the Provision of Nutrition Education**

The number one facilitator for a successful program is having enthusiastic and caring program assistants. Without good program assistants, the participants will not come to the programs, there will be no word of mouth to generate new participants, and the participants will not learn anything from the classes. As one participant said,

*“The program assistants make you want to come back.”*

Other facilitators are:

- # Developing relationships with program collaborators through communication and coordination.
- # Creating relationships between State program administrators, supervising agents, and program assistants to develop ownership of the OFL program through communication.
- # Having a set curriculum to breed continuity to the program, although the built in flexibility of the curriculum now allows program assistants to reach their target audience.
- # Hiring program assistants who are indigenous to the population that is being served.
- # Having strong State coordinator leadership.
- # Establishing good working relationships with other organizations working with low-income populations (e.g., WIC, EFNEP).

#### **V. Barriers to Providing Nutrition Education**

The greatest barrier to the program reported by the local staff involves finding funds that are eligible for Federal reimbursement. From an administration standpoint, it is difficult to

document funding sources because the State uses two different documenting systems (the University system and FNS' system). Also, staff believe that regulations regarding which funds are eligible for Federal reimbursement are too prohibitive, especially when using space as in-kind match. Staff believe that if the regulations were changed so that fair market value of the space could be credited towards Federal reimbursement, then the program would have funds to expand.

Other program and participant barriers are:

- # FNS guidelines for the program continually change, so rules cannot be counted on to remain consistent and the rule changes tend to be more restrictive than helpful to program development (e.g., rules for allowable expenses have become more rigid).
- # Writing a proposal each year makes it difficult for long term planning. A minimum of a two-year proposal plan would be better.
- # There is usually a delay with the contract approval and funds having to go through DSS. It would be better to have the funds go straight from FNS to the State sponsoring agency.
- # Because the program is dependent on finding local funds that are eligible for USDA reimbursement, it is sometimes difficult for counties to supply the appropriate funds to sustain/improve the program.
- # The population is hard to reach. Many times the population is “too proud” to come to Cooperative Extension for help.
- # Getting listings of potential participants from DSS is difficult.
- # Transportation, though provided, is too limited to reach all those eligible for participation. The program could expand to more counties, and if counties did not have to arrange for transportation then funds could be used to provide transportation.
- # Many wish funds could be used for child care for those participants with children too young to attend OFL.
- # There continue to be problems with program acceptance in the community.

## VI. Lessons Learned

The following are some lessons that the State and local coordinators have learned through their tenure as administrators of the OFL:

- # The most successful strategies to reach the audience are word of mouth, speaking with community leaders, speaking with former participants, speaking with agencies who work with similar populations (e.g., WIC, Work First, Head Start), and speaking with DSS.
- # Direct mail is the most unsuccessful way to reach this population.
- # In developing the program, make sure to listen to and be responsive to the needs of the program assistants. Create a standard/Statewide program that has flexibility built into it. The standard program also makes it easier to show outcomes.
- # If the program were to be started over, the State coordinator said that she would have more help at the State level (full-time evaluator and more administrative staff). Currently, almost all of the money goes to the county programs.
- # The most important advice for other local directors was to be accessible to the program assistants and do not micro-manage them. Also, the program assistants need good initial training, so try to develop a good evaluation program. From the State director point of view, it was important to not micro-manage and also to start small (e.g., pilot program) and then expand slowly.
- # The administrators would like to see parenting and financial planning courses to be allowed as a part of FSNEP programs.

# Oklahoma Case Study Report

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## I. Introduction

The Oklahoma FSP nutrition education program is known as the ONE (Oklahoma Nutrition Education) program, and is run through the Cooperative Extension program at Oklahoma State University. Two sites were selected for visits, both in rural areas. One was in Altus County and the other in Beckham County. Interviews were conducted with four people including the ONE Program Coordinator, two Nutrition Educators, a representative from the county Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Program. Two nutrition education classes were also observed, one with a group of three woman at a client's home and the other at a TANF teaching site. The following sections highlight the major elements of the sessions observed.

## II. Components of Food Stamp Nutrition Education

### A. Target Audience and Eligibility

The overall target audience for the ONE program is low-income audiences, with food stamp recipients and eligibles as a priority. Most of the participants are over the age of 18, but they do serve a small population of teen parents. A number of persons being served consist of persons who work for social and health service providers, but still qualify as low-income. These individuals are composed of home health care workers, nurses, and day care providers.

The program has tracked the number of people served this past year by counting both families and individuals. The total number of families served was 526 and the total number of

individuals 1,306. Of all participating families, 58% or 305 families had members who were food stamp recipients while the remaining families had member who were eligible for food stamp benefits, but not currently receiving them.

The program ensures that the nutrition education is appropriate for the population by tailoring classes to the needs of the individual or small group. The nutrition educators monitor progress of each client using the ERS data collection system and, through consistent client feedback, modify the education accordingly. The cultural appropriateness of materials is monitored in a similar fashion, by assessing how well the materials work with the population and by hiring educators who represent the demographic characteristics of the target population (e.g, placing African-American educators in communities that are predominantly African-American). The nutrition education materials are general enough to be used statewide, so the cultural appropriateness of the materials has to be monitored site-by-site or person-by-person. By using nutrition educators from the community to teach the classes, the cultural appropriateness of the materials can be consistently monitored.

The nutrition educator is responsible for tailoring the education to the specific needs of the client. For example, while there are some Spanish-speaking clients in the OK communities visited, the availability of nutrition education materials in Spanish is limited. Where materials are not available in Spanish (e.g., recipes) they are translated or interpreted by Spanish-speaking educators. The ONE program administrators make a conscious effort to hire Spanish-speaking educators in communities where it is likely a large portion of clients are Spanish-speaking. In another case, an educator works with a client who is blind, though none of the materials are developed for the blind. It is her interactions with him and her ability to tailor the materials and the lessons to him that make the program a success for this client.

Some of the other special populations nutrition educators work with include teenagers in high school classes, TANF recipients, people with mental and physical disabilities, people in drug treatment programs, and clients from a local hospital's psychiatry ward who are preparing to be reintegrated into the community.

## **B. Qualifications of Nutrition Educators**

The skills and education requirements for employing the nutrition educators consist of having a high school diploma or GED, having a good attitude, having a lot of initiative, and being a self-starter. It is important for the educators to not only teach, but to motivate the participants to achieve healthier lives through healthier eating. The educators are required to recruit their own clients through contacting other community agencies for help and using their own resourcefulness to find new clients in their county. Educators are also required to maintain working relationships with other community agencies, not only for recruitment purposes, but to more effectively network within the community at large. In addition, the nutrition educators must fill out their own paperwork associated with each client. There is initial paperwork, ongoing monthly paperwork, and graduation paperwork to be done for each client.

Directing the activities of the nutrition educators is the program Coordinator. The Coordinator's position is a three-quarter-time position, and has the support of a half-time secretary. There are eight full time (40 hours per week) nutrition educators in this region. The Coordinator, secretary, and two of the local nutrition educators share office space at the Extension office in Altus. All other nutrition educators in the state have an office in the county Extension office along with other Extension staff. Currently there is one nutrition educator position vacant due to a recent resignation.

The first job of the new educator is to learn the basic information of the curriculum, to meet key representatives in the community, and begin networking to recruit clients. After their initial training, the Coordinator visits the educator periodically for a few months to help the educator become acclimated to the program and to answer any questions they might have. The Coordinator believes it helps to revisit some of the training material early on so that the information is reinforced.

## C. Training Nutrition Educators

When a new nutrition educator is hired, they are required to attend a training course for three weeks duration following a specific training agenda. The Coordinator organizes the initial training as necessary depending on when a new educator comes on board. In addition, the initial training includes having the new employee shadow existing educators, meet agency representatives, and prepare a lesson to present to a group.

Besides the three-week initial training, ongoing training is planned by the Coordinator, and provided monthly. The educators and the Coordinator agreed that the ongoing training is crucial to the successful implementation of the ONE program. Sometimes it is the Coordinator who runs the training, other times it is an Extension Specialist or other expert who is brought in to conduct the sessions. One of the educators mentioned that there was a lot of training, which she liked and found very helpful.

The ONE program provides training to other staff besides their own educators. For example, training is provided to day care providers who work primarily in low-income communities. These day care providers are themselves food stamp recipients or eligibles. A similar situation occurs with some home health aids who are eligible to receive nutrition education but who achieve a dual benefit in that they also prepare food and shop for the clients they serve.

## D. Modes of Delivery

The setting of nutrition education is left up to the discretion of the individual educator and is designed to accommodate the needs of the population. Most nutrition education is delivered in people's homes on a one-on-one or small group basis (this works well if there are multiple people in a neighborhood who are enrolled). Both the Coordinator and an Educator said,

*“We conduct the education primarily in homes. We encourage participants to sit at their kitchen tables for lessons because we can use the food they have in their kitchen to do demonstrations. It’s not as good in the family room because the kitchen is where all of the food items are.”*

In some cases, education is taught in group rooms located in other service agencies. For example the learning resource center (LRC) for TANF recipients is a site used where many food stamp recipients and eligibles attend classes to promote self-sufficiency. In addition, some nutrition education is conducted at schools in classrooms. Libraries and extension offices have also been used.

While most of the nutrition education in the ONE program is delivered as formal one-to-one education, small group education is also used. One of the benefits to small group lessons is that they are able to present information to more people at the same time. In addition, the interaction among participants is often helpful, with participants sharing experiences and benefitting from hearing answers to other people's questions. One Educator said,

*"I like to find people in groups. Some individuals are not as open, some are really defensive. Some have been treated badly in the past, so they are more comfortable in a group. That way there's not so much of a focus on them. They feel better having people like them in the group. Sometimes they are embarrassed for you to come into their homes."*

Regardless of the mode of education, each lesson begins with a set of prescribed objectives, then the actual teaching session, followed by a review of what was learned during that session. Sometimes the education is conducted in a more informal mode, especially if there are special circumstances that require more flexibility such as a personal crisis that the client needs to discuss. While none of the modes of nutrition education have been formally tested by the local programs, the experience of the local educators has prepared them to evaluate in a non-systematic way whether the education, materials, and modes are working effectively.

## **E. Content of Nutrition Education**

The ONE program is designed to provide practical information to its clients and uses a core curriculum provided throughout the State called Eating Right is Basic. The curriculum consists of sixteen basic lessons called "The Basics", which cover topics from how to shop for food, how to identify healthy food, food safety and preparation, and issues related to the

nutrition of children.

The general focus of the ONE program is to teach better nutrition and management of food dollars. All components of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* are used in the nutrition education curriculum for the ONE program. In addition, the Food Guide Pyramid is used as a central component of the education. Both of the nutrition educators who were interviewed confirmed that the dietary guidelines and Food Guide Pyramid are central to their teaching. Although the core curriculum is the basis for education, any topics the educator thinks would benefit a client can be presented to the Coordinator for approval. The Coordinator must first approve the new topic and its associated materials. This will sometimes occur if there is a special dietary or health need of one of the participants. For example, an additional topic might be a discussion of specific food allergies. The materials for special topics can often be accessed through a list of externally developed materials that is maintained at the Coordinator's office for the benefit of the educators. In other cases there are specialists who work for Extension who can give advice on other topics or where to get materials that are not available to the ONE program.

Each nutrition educator focuses on or emphasizes some topics over others. The two educators who were interviewed had slightly different ideas about their top five topics. One said meal planning, then budgeting (stretching food dollar), then food labels, eating light is right, and then the food guide pyramid were her list of priorities. The other educator indicated that food budgeting, grocery shopping, food safety, reading labels, and meal planning were the most important topics for the population she taught. One educator also reported that she has experienced many illnesses in her life and she said she likes to teach from her own experience. She says that while she tries not to get too personal with her clients, she does try to add a personal component to her teaching so that they perceive her as warm, approachable, and not intimidating.

## **F. Process of Delivering Nutrition Education**

Recruiting participants and assessing a client's eligibility are the first steps in the process of

reaching the target audiences. Once eligibility is established, the educator schedules the first meeting. In most cases, the same weekly meeting time and day is agreed upon so that both the educator and client get into a routine. Participants are enrolled in the program for approximately nine months, but no more than 12 months. The goal is to provide the client with a minimum of three sessions a month.

The selection and order of topics presented is determined by the educator. One educator noted that for some clients, they have to be “lured” in with a very interesting topic in the first session or two in order to keep them coming back, so she will choose a topic that she knows is of particular interest to that person. After successful completion of the entire course of lessons, the individual “graduates” and is given a certificate of completion for finishing the course.

To aid in planning for each class, the educators have a list of resource materials, maintained by the secretary of the local ONE program. The list of materials is divided into curriculum materials, games, and visuals. Some of the materials include the basic curriculum, recipe books, a food dictionary, an exchange list for food planning, fact sheets, keys to successful money management, practical food safety display, food safety bingo, a germ war game, a “Take Aim Nutrition” game, food models and cutouts, thermometers, calcium teaching kit, Food Guide Pyramid display, and “Play It Safe” posters. The secretary also maintains a printed list of all of the ONE program videos and audiotapes that are available for use by the educators. At any time, the educators can check out materials from the Extension office.

Educators are trained to use most of the resource materials, but they are encouraged to use creativity and their best judgment in exactly how they conduct their lessons. For example, though the Eating Right Is Basic curriculum includes a small table-top flip-chart which is attractive, informative, and a very good resource, one Educator said she uses her flip-chart as a reference during her presentation instead of reading it verbatim as the sole visual of the lesson. She prefers to incorporate more activities and more interactive displays and visuals instead of depending on the flip chart to be the only visual and piece of information. She often uses games, simulates a shopping trip, conducts food demonstrations using food she knows her clients use regularly, and shows videos as other forms of visuals to stimulate learning during

her lessons.

Upon completion of the program, the goal is to have the clients consuming healthier foods promoted by the Dietary Guidelines and the Food Guide Pyramid. They should be eating an adequate amount of nutrient-dense food every day, improving food budgeting, improving meal planning, being better purchasers of food, using available resources better, and using the USDA food safety guidelines.

## **G. Needs Assessment/Formative Research**

The needs assessment process for this local ONE program is not a formal one, as all of the formal needs assessment was done at the state level before the program began. Informally, the local program stays connected and in-touch with the needs of the community and target audience through its links with community agencies and by its ongoing work with the target population. Every county in the state has different needs, so it is important for the Program Coordinator to get feedback from the nutrition educators to ensure the materials are appropriate for the population and that their needs are being met. The Coordinator told us that,

*“We jumped in and began working with the target population right away without doing our own, separate needs assessment. From experience we know what’s working and what’s not working with the clients.”*

One important component of the ONE program is an annual retreat that is organized by the Coordinator for all of the nutrition educators and the secretary. They spend an entire day away from the office in an informal, unstructured environment, discussing the year’s progress, upcoming goals, and what changes need to be made for the upcoming year. They have brainstorming sessions, sharing sessions, planning sessions, and team building opportunities. The Coordinator believes this retreat is a great way to learn about the needs of the target population all over her region, come up with strategies for strengthening the program, and building teamwork and morale among her staff. The retreat is viewed as a unique and creative way for the local program to address accomplishments and difficulties, develop future strategies to overcome obstacles, and develop a sense of camaraderie and respect among staff.

## H. Coordination and Collaboration

As noted above, collaboration between the ONE program and community agencies is critical to the success of the program. Some of the major collaborators of the ONE program include the Department of Human Services, The Health Department, Elder Care, mental health agencies, substance abuse treatment programs, day cares, schools, and grocery stores. An example of a collaboration that has worked well is that with a local grocery store. One of the nutrition educators told us that the original idea came about because some of the educators felt it was not appropriate for them to tell their clients what to eat without providing them with some of the food they would be asked to try. The educator began by going to the manager of two local grocery stores to ask if they could have the not-so-fresh fruits and vegetables that were no longer able to be sold but still edible. One of the managers agreed to pack up the produce that was no longer sellable and have it available for the educators to pick up each week. The educators and their volunteers have found this to be a wonderful addition to the program and a way to put their teaching into action, as well as providing a needed service to their neediest clients. This way, the educator and the grocery store are collaboratively helping those who are hungry in the community.

In speaking to one of the ONE program's collaborators, a job developer for the Department of Human Services' (DHS) Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) program, it was learned how effectively two agencies can work together. Initially, the relationship began when the ONE program Coordinator went to the TANF office to ask to meet with the county director in order to make them aware of the ONE program and to request that a TANF recipient apply for the job of nutrition educator in that county. The Coordinator saw the Department of Human Services as a very important partner in this county (as in all others), so she made a special effort to foster the initial relationship and to collaborate with the TANF program. The Coordinator discussed the ONE program with the TANF Director, highlighted how the two programs do not overlap nor threaten each other, and emphasized the benefits the ONE program could offer to TANF recipients. It was agreed that the two agencies would collaborate, and their relationship has been steadily improving and strengthening ever since.

Some of the tasks the two agencies collaborate on include the hiring of educators in that county, providing referrals to clients, maintaining ongoing communication and information sharing, distributing program brochures, discussing the educational needs of the target population, and attending each other's meetings. The TANF representative helps the nutrition educator in acquiring new and needed resources when necessary, helps foster the existing relationships between Extension and DHS, and provides invaluable networking opportunities. The clients she helps the educator recruit are TANF recipients who are required by law to attend classes while they are receiving aid. The ONE program is incorporated into the curriculum for all TANF recipients in that county, so the nutrition educator has somewhat of a captive audience and does not have to go door-to-door recruiting this particular population.

The TANF representative noted that she feels her collaboration with the ONE program is very effective. She mentioned that many TANF recipients remark about how much they got from the lessons learned through the ONE program. Both agencies have one common goal and that is to help TANF recipients or those who are receiving Food Stamps to reach self-sufficiency and live healthier, better lives.

Some other reasons this collaboration works so well is that the TANF representative has always felt nutrition was important to all people, she says that both agencies are very cooperative by nature and the staff have wonderful attitudes, and having a common goal is invaluable. In addition, the TANF representative and the ONE nutrition educator share an office in the county DHS office, thereby fostering their working relationship and making it easier to communicate as often as possible.

Only a few barriers to effective collaboration exist between these two agencies. One problem noted is that they are all very busy and often on the road, and sometimes it is a struggle to find time to meet in order to discuss issues. In order to overcome this barrier, they have made a number of efforts to manage their times and schedules to find time to meet. They both have to be flexible and accommodating each other at times. They also depend on technology to help them stay connected, through the use of e-mail, phone, and fax.

Local staff noted that one potential collaboration has not worked out well, namely working with the Women, Infant, and Children Program (WIC). The problems associated with the WIC program tend to be those related to a perception that the two programs are competing with one-another to reach the same clients. While in some counties the collaboration works fine, in others WIC sees the ONE program as a threat. The Coordinator believes it would behoove the WIC program to allow the FSP nutrition education program to provide WIC clients with nutrition education beyond that which is provided by WIC, because, in her opinion, the ONE program offers more intensive, thorough, well-rounded, long-term education to participants.

The only other barrier that was reported was that they often lack funds to acquire all of the equipment or food they need to conduct food demonstrations for TANF clients, but there is little they can do for this besides look for other funding or donation sources. In spite of these few barriers, however, the TANF representative says the collaboration works very well and is growing stronger over time. She believes the growing strength of the collaboration has occurred because they are learning a lot about each other's organizations. Sharing of ideas is easier the more they know and trust each other, and it has evolved to become a very comfortable, easy, informative, non-intimidating, and effective networking partnership.

## **I. Nutrition Education Plan**

The local sites in Oklahoma do not write their own nutrition education plan but follow the guidelines provided in the overall State NEP. Each nutrition educator gets their own copy of the state's NEP so that they know the requirements as they are listed in the state plan. The local program accomplished most of what was proposed in the NEP for this past year. One goal that was not reached was to enroll the target number of clients in some of the more rural counties. In some counties, it was impossible for the nutrition educators to get 40-50 people enrolled and graduated in a year. There were simply not enough people eligible or able to be recruited. The lack of community agencies serving the target population also hurt efforts to recruit new clients. Agency contacts and networking is crucial to the successful recruitment of participants in all counties, but even more so in counties that are very sparsely populated, widely dispersed, and economically disadvantaged.

### III. Evaluation of Nutrition Education Activities

Evaluation is an important part of the local program. They utilize the Cooperative Extension ERS data collection system as their evaluation tool. Initially, the participants fill out a 24-hour food recall form that is then entered into ERS and the results given to the nutrition educator. The nutrition educator is trained to analyze the results of the 24-hour recall and develop a family plan for nutrition education. They spend time discussing the results of the initial 24-hour food recall with the family and counseling the family on their family eating habits. In addition, the ERS system is used to help the nutrition educators monitor the progress of their clients on a monthly basis. Every three to four months the secretary inputs data from the 24-hour food recalls, the intakes, and the exit surveys. Behavior change of the participants is measured by the 24-hour food recall. Behavior changes in terms of food safety and food management are measured from the results of the exit survey that the participants are required to fill out. One Educator said,

*“The 24-hour recall tells me what I need to teach. It tells me where [my clients] are. It really helps me a lot.”*

Another Educator felt that the 24-hour food recall is not the optimal way to determine whether a student is ready to graduate from the program or not. She felt that having the student plan a meal is a better estimate of how much they have learned and how well they can apply what they know. She believes that this method is a better way to observe behavior change. She admitted that the pre- and post-test is one good way to measure behavior change, but many of her clients are persons with a developmental disability or have too little education to comprehend those tests.

### IV. Factors Facilitating the Provision of Nutrition Education

The Coordinator and the Educators identified a number of different aspects of the program that were highlighted as facilitators. One facilitator to the effective administration of the local ONE program is for the program to keep a full staff at all times, including secretary and

educators. For the most part retention has not been a problem, but the Coordinator admits that having a full staff is a major facilitator for the success of the program.

In order for the ONE program to run well, the Coordinator has to have a good, supportive relationship with the Educators. The Coordinator said,

*“I have to spend time ensuring that I have a positive but professional relationship with my Educators. I listen to suggestions, complaints, and ideas. I really try to hear them, to be flexible, collaborative, and ask them for their input. It is also very important for me to understand their personal crises...It’s important to keep staff motivated through all of their personal and life crises.”*

Another facilitator is the experience that comes with having done the job for a few years. The Coordinator said that she feels she does her job better each year because of her expanding experience in doing her job. The educators echoed this belief in their own jobs, saying that as they gain more experience, they become better recruiters, teachers, and employees.

When agencies have cooking facilities for food demonstrations, that helps make the lessons go more smoothly. Food demonstrations are a key part of the curriculum. Not only does it demonstrate how to prepare healthy food, but it also allows the educator to demonstrate food safety and sanitation skills. Finally, such demonstrations are very interesting way to teach that most students really enjoy. When agencies can provide the actual food for the demonstrations, that makes it easier for the educator as well.

## **V. Barriers to Providing Nutrition Education**

The people with whom we spoke discussed a number of barriers they faced that have prevented them from optimally running the ONE program in their region. As was noted above, a major barrier involves counties that have low numbers of eligible participants or low recruitment rates. From examining the county profile, it is not immediately apparent why the numbers of recruited and graduated participants is so low, but it is a constant challenge to get more people enrolled. The Coordinator is unsure if the educator in that county is not utilizing

all of the resources available to her to recruit more effectively, but the coordinator has spent time with the educator, trying to come up with new and improved methods for recruitment. In counties where there are limited resources and agency representation, it is difficult to get all of the people they are supposed to have each year.

Another barrier identified was that of the nutrition educators' salaries. Because of the low salaries, they do not always attract the best applicants. The process of interviewing can be frustrating and a particular challenge because of this. Retention also is a problem because of the low salaries, though most educators stay because they find the work rewarding, enjoy teaching, and feel committed to the ONE program and the Coordinator.

Another barrier identified is that because this program is still relatively new, it can be a challenge convincing potential clients to agree to sign up. Because enrollment in the program is not required for food stamp recipients, many people who could benefit from it do not want to be bothered with nutrition education. Some people do not initially see how they would benefit from this education, some say they do not have time to attend, and some feel that they have been preparing meals most of their lives and they do not need anyone to tell them they are doing it wrong.

Most of the staff felt their jobs would be easier if the ONE program were made mandatory for people on Food Stamps. They said it would eliminate the need for recruitment, the one aspect they all agree is the most challenging to the effective implementation of the program.

## **VI. Lessons Learned**

The following are some of the lessons the interviewees said they have learned during their years in this program.

- # The most successful recruiting comes from referrals from agencies and current or past Extension Homemakers. The least successful recruiting effort is cold calling door knocking.

- # The most successful teaching strategies are the actual hands on lessons. The clients enjoy cooking, games, and visuals. The least successful teaching strategy is just using the curriculum flip chart with no visuals or hands on activities.
- # The success of a program depends on the person you have educating the clients. It is important to hire the "right" person and spend time and effort training them correctly from the beginning. Some of the qualities of a good nutrition educator include initiative, care about helping people, good organizational skills, and positive self-esteem. This job takes a special type of person. Continuous training of paraprofessional is important, too.
- # When starting a new program, it is important to have an open mind and not have many preconceived ideas and decisions made. As you learn and grow, so will your program. It helps to observe successful programs in action to get ideas from people who are currently running an FSP nutrition education program. Through observation and communication with those already conducting this program, you can learn from others' mistakes and get ideas about how to run this program. It is helpful to go to more than one site to gather information from as many people as you can in order to create what works best for your location. The Coordinator talked about the benefits other agencies could gain from her experience and knowledge in running the ONE program. She thought it would be a valuable experience to be able to mentor other agencies to share ideas on paperwork, materials, interview questions, job description or anything else that would help another agency get started.
- # It is important to care about the nutrition educators' outside lives. Many of them are struggling financially and issues come up that take away some of their focus on their job. Coordinators must be flexible with their staff and understand that the quality of their private lives sometimes affects the quality of their professional lives. Encourage and support them through their personal crises and they will more likely be long-term, happy employees.
- # It helps if the nutrition educator is a "people person." A good attitude helps a lot. Over time, Educators become more relaxed as they gain more experience and learn the material. Educators need to be themselves and remember that the clients are often struggling financially and have low self-esteem. It is important to give them a glimpse of your own life and struggles without imposing your own difficulties on them or burdening them with stories of how hard your life has been. It is good to be down to earth and treat the clients as you would want to be treated. Remember that you are going into people's private homes and that can be intimidating for some people, especially if they think you are representing a government agency which is linked to some of their social benefits.

- # Word of mouth is one of the most important recruitment tools. People in the community get to know you and can help advertise the program, possibly increasing the numbers of recruited clients. In addition, word of mouth often helps other agencies become interested in the FSP nutrition education program. Once they have heard about the program they are more willing to meet and help with whatever resource are needed.
- # Educators must be self-starters with a lot of initiative. It can be very isolating to be in this job since you rarely work closely with colleagues, instead working alone and interacting with various clients each week. It is important for the same reason to hire responsible, mature educators who are able to monitor their own performance and get the work done without heavy supervision.
- # It is important to solicit help from potential collaborators, not to wait for them to come to you. To do this, educators must have good self-esteem, be self-starters, and not be afraid to go get what they need from other places. If you have the attitude that what you are doing is important, others will see that and will respond accordingly.
- # Let the potential clients know that the program can be customized to their individual needs. This helps them understand how helpful it could be in their own lives. As you gain their trust and they become more invested in the lessons, you can add information that they may not initially know they want or need, but that will benefit them in their everyday lives. It is also important to let them know that you are not going to tell them that they cannot have certain foods, but that you are going to give them suggestions and skills on how to balance the not-so-healthy food they love with healthy food they are not currently using. You are not there to police but to enhance their dietary intake.
- # In order to successfully recruit, it is important to examine every avenue and contact every possible agency. Leads may appear where you least expect them. Also, never burn bridges with agencies because they may become important to you again in the future or they may work with other agencies with which you want to collaborate.
- # It is a challenge for the educators to recruit and teach all of the clients they are supposed to each year. Therefore, this local ONE program has contemplated having one person be the agency liaison in the region, funneling all of the agency contact and recruitment up to that one person. That way, the same person can keep track of all of the contacts, leaving the job of lesson planning and teaching to the Educators. They are not yet sure if this will be approved at the state level, but they have a person in mind who would like to take on this agency representative responsibility should it be approved.
- # The Coordinator and Educators agreed that it is important to go to their collaborator's meetings when the meetings are open to other agencies. It is

additional networking and keeps you connected to the issues they are facing on an on-going basis. You also get a chance to meet the people who work in the agency on a daily basis. In addition, if you are available to them, they remember you, which is helpful for referrals and other networking opportunities.

# Iowa Case Study Report

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## I. Introduction

The Iowa nutrition education program for food stamp families (called the “Family Nutrition Program,” or FNP) began with funding from FNS-USDA in the fall of 1995. It started in 14 counties and has grown steadily to its present coverage of 34 counties. To be included, counties must have: 1) large numbers of food stamp families with children, 2) no Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) units to reach them, and 3) expressed interest from potential collaborating agencies.

Growth of the FNP has been rapid, and one reason for this has been welfare reform. In Iowa, State funds to serve food stamp clients have been given to counties, where local groups are able to determine how the funds will be used. Because counties have found the FNP to be a successful approach to improving the diets of food stamp clients, they have begun finding local matching funds to expand the program in their communities. In addition, families under welfare reform have found the resources of the FNP to be helpful in meeting their needs as parents and providers, and therefore have increased the demand for services.

The FNP consists of two main programs: *Building a Healthy Diet*, based on a new curriculum developed by the EFNEP Coordinator, and *Have a Healthy Baby*, a maternal/infant nutrition education curriculum developed by Purdue University. Target audiences are parents of children aged 0 to 10 and young pregnant women (in their teens and early 20's). The overall philosophy of the FNP is that the program assistant is a *partner* with the parent or mother-to-be. The *family* chooses and drives the lessons and decides how long to participate. Moreover, the lessons are very “hands-on.” Each has only one or two handouts, and the materials are very

simple.

## **II. Components of Food Stamp Nutrition Education**

### **A. Target Audience and Eligibility**

While the Iowa FNP has a federal waiver allowing them to serve low-income audiences in general, services are primarily provided to those who receive food stamps. While, as noted above, clients are primarily mothers of infants and children to age ten, and pregnant women in their teens or early 20's, Osceola County also has a small program serving elderly individuals in congregate meals programs. In FY98-99, a total of 1426 individuals were reached, of whom 1197 were parents of young children, 223 were young pregnant women, and 6 were elderly. More than 900 actually graduated from the program.

The target audience was chosen through a review of local statistics and the input of local Cooperative Extension Service (CES) and community partners. The commitment of community partners to his effort is paramount to this effort. Although most participants are Caucasian, two counties, Marshall and Tama, target Spanish-speaking families who are primarily from Mexico. In addition, there is a Misquaquee tribal settlement in Tama. The FNP has hired Spanish-speaking staff, and plan to hire a Native American to serve tribal members in Tama. To better serve minority populations, all curricula have been tested with Hispanic as well as Caucasian audiences.

### **B. Qualifications of Nutrition Educators**

The nutrition educators are paraprofessionals called Program Assistants (PAs). There are currently a total of 21 PAs working in the program, with an additional two positions open. PAs are recruited to represent the cultural profile of the families with whom they work. Two PAs are fluent in Spanish, as is one supervisor. Their educational backgrounds vary. Some have a GED or high school education, some have a bachelor's degree, and a few are community health nurses or teachers. Most staff work an average of 30 hours per week.

Experience requirements for employment vary depending on the level of the PA. A PA1 need only a GED, transportation, and some work experience, while a PA2 needs at least one year's experience working with families one-to-one or in groups, plus an ability to adapt materials. Unlike EFNEP, which has 5-6 PAs per county, the FNP has only one per county, and some even cover two counties.

Half of the PAs' time is assigned to direct teaching, and the other half of their time is assigned to administrative tasks including record-keeping, recruiting, and developing relationships with local agencies and programs who provide contacts for recruitment or other resources for their programs. Record-keeping includes maintaining family records, completing pre- and post 24-hour recalls and pre- and post behavior checklists, and preparing reports describing lessons taught. PAs also serve as a conduit to other community resources for which their clients may be eligible. For example, the PA for Story County prepared a booklet describing where clients might obtain emergency foods. This information was presented by location, times available for picking up food, and types of foods provided. In spite of numerous emergency providers in the community, such a resource had never been compiled before. Clients noted that it was especially valuable where some emergency food providers were open only a few hours per week.

Two local PAs were interviewed for this case study. Each was responsible for recruiting and teaching participants, and being an important part of both their office teams and their community networks. Each stressed that they work in partnership with their participants. She said that her participants really “own the program,” and her objective is to provide information in a manner that allows the client to learn at his/her own pace. She noted that “It’s important not to approach providing nutrition education like it is a class.” Even when she collects the dietary information, she asks, “Do you want to write or do you want me to write?” so no one feels they have to fill out forms. Both PAs said they adapt and tailor lesson plans for their audiences.

Both have backgrounds in health or health education. One has been an early childhood educator with Head Start and has nutrition education experience; the other was a registered

nurse. To become nutrition educators, each received training from family life, nutrition and health, and financial management field specialists. They also received an introduction to the Cooperative Extension Service, so they can make its other resources available to their families

### **C. Training of Nutrition Educators**

Most training is conducted at the local level. Field specialists teach the subject matter and "walk" the Program Assistants through the nutrition education curricula, while family management specialists teach that component. Training also includes role plays to give the PAs experience presenting the lessons. In addition, all PAs attend an annual 2-day nutrition conference to keep up to date on new information.

### **D. Modes of Delivery**

Nutrition education is delivered either one-to-one or in small groups of 2-6 people. Both of the curricula used, *Building a Healthy Diet* and *Have a Healthy Baby*, include many hands-on activities. For example, in *Building a Healthy Diet*, each staff person has a blue display board where the participants can post things, such as a puzzle of a child to reflect how children grow with healthy foods. In the stretching food dollars lesson, a popular topic for families, dry beans are used to represent money in a variety of scenarios. To encourage families eating their meals together, a deck of cards with simple table topics for mealtime discussion is given to clients. Food models and one-page activity sheets are also commonly used.

The most common settings for nutrition education include homes or community settings such as farmers' markets, churches, WIC clinics, and other agencies. When the FNP began, about 70% of the participants were reached in small groups. However, as was noted above, the proportion reached in one-to-one sessions has been increasing, particularly in rural counties. In FY99, 467 participants were reached one-to-one, 916 were reached in groups, and 43 were reached through a combination of the two.

Mass media/broadcast has only been used as a means of promoting the programs, and not as a

means of nutrition education. Radio public service announcements, news releases, and newsletters are some of the media employed for program promotion. However, Iowa also has a Nutrition Network, and there will be increased use of social marketing as a method to provide nutrition education throughout the State.

## **E. Content of Nutrition Education**

There are two main curricula used by the Iowa FNP: *Building a Healthy Diet* and *Have a Healthy Baby*. *Building a Healthy Diet* (BHD) is available in Spanish as well as English. *Have a Healthy Baby* (HHB), a maternal/infant nutrition curriculum from Purdue University, is in the process of being translated into Spanish, and Iowa has been helping to pilot test the translations.

The BHD was developed by the State EFNEP Coordinator with contributions from two EFNEP Supervisors and one other educator. Together they drew up "best practices" from their experiences with the previous Iowa/Kansas EFNEP curriculum and other resources. Their goals were to keep concepts simple, few in number, food-based, with behavioral objectives and hands-on activities. They also wanted to foster group cohesiveness.

BHD was pilot tested in four Iowa counties before the Family Nutrition Program began. Using the insights gained through this testing, the curriculum was further developed with input from the FNP Coordinator and reviewed by nutrition specialists of the North Central Region of the Cooperative Extension Service. Eventually it was adopted by both EFNEP and the FNP. BHD will be available this winter for purchase by other States. The curriculum emphasizes the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and the *Food Guide Pyramid*.

Two very different local nutrition education sessions were observed in November, 1999. The first was a graduation ceremony for an FNP group in Story County. To prepare for this event, the PA demonstrated many of the shopping skills she often teaches her families. The PA bought supplies at three different locations starting with a foods warehouse, using sales circulars and choosing foods based on price and availability. Although the participants were

not part of this preparation, the food shopping alone was a fun activity. For the actual ceremony, held in a local church in Ames, the participants prepared a complete graduation dinner for their families. Healthy recipes included Italian chicken over angel hair pasta, sweet ginger carrots with raisins, whole grain muffins, fresh-made applesauce, and oatmeal chocolate chip cake. About ten women participated, all cooking in the kitchen and learning as they did. The PA also taught principles of nutrition, food safety, and money-saving meals while everyone cooked. The grand finale was the enjoyment of a wonderful meal by family members and the presentation of graduation certificates to the women. Through individual conversations with the participants, it was evident that the women thoroughly enjoyed the PA and had gained a great deal from the curriculum. One woman said,

*"I've learned so much! I wish the program didn't have to end!"*,

a sentiment that seemed to reflect the feelings of the entire group.

The other nutrition education session observed was a one-to-one session in the home of a Madison County participant and mother of one. She said she learned a great deal from the PA, whom she said really seemed to care about her, and she especially enjoyed the hands-on activities.

## **F. Process for Delivering Nutrition Education**

Both PAs target families with young children, many of which have limited literacy or language skills, mental or physical disabilities, and/or very few resources. They also reach pregnant and parenting teens. One indicated that the target population she services was more diverse from those in other counties, as she has taught people from China, Taiwan, Korea, India, and Turkey. Her personal diversity also has helped her in this effort, since she cooks foods from many foreign lands, including China and India. When asked if they thought that the nutrition education program was appropriate for the cultural and social needs of the audiences, each PA indicated that they tailor the program to the client. One PA said she follows the "spirit" or main ideas of the curriculum, but lets the family guide the educational experience in terms of

how deep to go. Also, each lesson has additional optional activities for those with more interest.

Each PA said that she recruits participants through a number of means. Both have excellent working relationships with other agencies reaching low-income families, and often receive referrals from these agencies. In addition, each has developed some creative approaches to finding clients. For example, one PA indicated that she puts signs in Laundromats with her telephone number on tear-off stubs. She also calls ministries, food pantries, adult education, and any other place where low-income people may go for help.

The PAs said that they base the content of their nutrition education on both the information they collect when enrolling the family and the interests of their participants. All lessons are interactive with many props and hands-on activities. One observed nutrition education session, *Family Basics*, was a group-prepared celebration dinner, complete with nutrition and food safety tips, with the entire group working together. Another session observed was a home visit, where the PA used several props to demonstrate the functions of key nutrients. In each case, the participants were very involved in the learning experience, and showed pride in what they could contribute. Interviews of the participants showed a clear personal bond between the PAs and their clients.

Nutrition education topics are diverse, since sessions are largely family-directed. However, regardless of which topics a family might choose, the PAs make a point of including needed information, as indicated by the baseline assessment. All Dietary Guidelines were mentioned as topics, as well as food purchasing, budgeting, storage, and preparation; food safety and sanitation; menu planning and meal management; label reading; weight management and physical fitness; the importance of calcium and fiber; and nutrition for pregnancy, lactation, and young children.

The vast majority of nutrition education sessions are delivered one-to-one or one-to-two, and usually in the families' homes. In addition, one PA noted that she sometimes delivered *Family Basics* workshops in churches or half-way houses, and occasionally one-shot presentations for

high-schools or day care family nights. The other PA said she gave classes at an alternative high school, where students could get credit for participating. Other sites mentioned were WIC clinics, a child abuse prevention council, the Cooperative Extension Service offices, and a counseling center.

Both Program Assistants said that there were few differences between the way the program had been planned and how it was actually delivered. One said there were more families in need than she could reach; the other said she had difficulties reaching pregnant teens because her community seemed to fail to recognize that teen pregnancy was as problem. One PA said she did more of her education in a one-to-one format than she had planned because financial management topics did not work well in groups due to the personal nature of the information.

The main facilitator to program delivery, according to both PAs, was good internal and external agency support and collaboration. The biggest challenge was different for each of the two PAs. One stated that her biggest challenge was the turnover of staff in other agencies, which made it difficult for her to keep them fully informed about the program and of her role. The other said that in spite of a heavily booked calendar, the time she had to spend traveling in her rural community and the number of no-shows among her participants made it difficult for her to reach her goal of spending 50% time in actual teaching. She added that she wished there were more referral resources and funds for providing incentives for participants to attend.

Asked about lessons learned through their experience with the FNP, the PAs said that it was important to meet participants where they are, both literally and figuratively. Door-knocking does not work, and most participants don't read the newspapers. Getting referrals from other agencies serving this population is important. One PA said she tries to let the agencies think that it's their idea, then she will meet her participants anywhere they choose. But overall, she sees 99% of her participants in their homes.

By the same token, the nutrition education sessions need to be based on what the participants want and need to learn in order to be successful. One PA said she *shows* them she understands by doing a fair amount of self-disclosure, and she takes every opportunity for reinforcing what

they are doing right. She builds trust by allowing them to ask anything of her, and explaining that she'll ask questions of them, but they don't have to answer if they don't want. She makes a point of remembering what they tell her and following up with it. She even gives out her home and cell phone numbers, explaining that she worries about people who feel they have no hope or no options.

Involving and listening to the participants were also stressed. One PA said, "Let the parents steer the lessons. They love picking topics." Another stated, "Use hands-on activities that have relevance for them. Appeal to all the senses."

Regarding educational strategies that have not worked, the PAs said overall, there are very few. Occasionally there are noncompliant participants, and every strategy doesn't work for somebody. One PA said, "This program is valuable, and there's something in it for everybody. The challenge is in adapting the information to your population."

When asked what recommendations they would give to new nutrition educators, to be successful, their responses were similar. One said, "Be patient, hang in. People own their own outcomes." The other said,

*"Relax. You don't have to go in claiming to know everything. Every participant teaches you something. Practice on someone before you start."*

Although both PAs said they have supportive Directors, their advice to Directors was to remember to promote the program when talking to the community. The FNP is one of the biggest face-to-face programs; and just as it helps participants, it helps other organizations by saving time and complimenting their work. One PA, however, acknowledged that the program and the families it serves are different from county to county.

Both PAs collected data for program evaluation. The data included 24-hour diet recalls, behavior checklists, and some open-ended questions about what additional information the participants would like to receive. One PA said, however, that she could use some lower-

literacy teaching and assessment tools.

## **G. Needs Assessment/Formative Research**

For the needs assessment conducted in preparation for this FNP, the State EFNEP Coordinator drew upon the literature concerning needs of low-income populations. In addition, she had an assistant program leader who was compiling health statistics with the Iowa State Department of Health. These data were used to identify one county in each area of the State which would have an initial FNP program. Needs assessments are conducted annually.

Formative research has been ongoing. It has included pilot testing the BHD diet curriculum and collecting ongoing feedback from the PAs. In addition, the FNP Coordinator conducted a series of seven focus groups from January through May, 1999, and has been conducting follow-up interviews/case studies with some families for one year, ending in March, 2000. This should shed valuable light on the FNP's impact on the families it serves.

## **H. Coordination and Collaboration**

Collaborating agencies in the two case study communities included WIC, a community life/mentally retarded population, Crisis Child Care, the Department of Human Services, schools, a Tri-County Mental Health Program, People Helping People, the Area Education Association, the Bridge Counseling Center and others. For one of the PAs, collaboration primarily has meant referrals or access to participants; however, for the other, collaborators have provided space for clients, child care, and school equipment. For the most part, collaborations have been successful, although each PA cited at least one challenge. One PA said she would like to see more activities actually planned together, while the other said high rates of staff turnover in the collaborating agencies has posed challenges for keeping them updated. Both PAs said that continuous contact is important for maintaining good relationships.

To examine the relationship between the FNP and community agencies, two representatives from collaborating agencies were interviewed. These included a Family Resource Coordinator

in the Community Resources and Service to People (CRISP) Program in Winterset, Iowa and an Income Maintenance Worker from the Department of Human Services in Madison County. Both said that the collaboration was very effective. One said she spoke to the PA on a daily basis, while the other said she always asks new recruits if they want a referral to the FNP, then faxed it to the PA immediately. Both women said the referrals were mutual, as they received a number of referrals from the PAs.

Both interviewees spoke highly of the PA, especially regarding her follow-up with families. They said the PA makes sure the families keep their appointments and doesn't let anyone fall through the cracks. Some of the factors that have enhanced these relationships are community assistance team meetings, where representatives of several agencies look at ways of working together, and the small size of the community. The only barrier cited was getting families to follow through with their care and transportation difficulties (although the PA's ability to conduct home visits helps to reduce that problem).

Both agency representatives said that the collaboration has grown stronger as they have worked together and they have increased the frequency of their communication. Although both agencies have worked with other organizations (e.g., WIC, food stamp offices, Parents as Teachers, and Elderly Supplemental Foods), they said that their work with the FNP was either just as good or better. One stated that the FNP program assistant does an exceptional job of following through with her referrals. This has been especially important in a county where infant mortality and teenage pregnancy rates are high, there is no hospital for mothers to go to for delivering their babies, many young mothers don't read or write, substance abuse is common, and a major employer in the county recently closed its doors.

The PAs also provide ongoing training to the staff of the Community Action Agencies and Department of Human Services. One of the program assistants has also trained nurse-midwives and some graduated participants who are willing to serve as program volunteers. The training most often entails demonstrations of small program segments to provide staff at these other agencies with a sense of the program's content.

## **I. Nutrition Education Plan**

The FNP is run based on the Iowa State-wide nutrition education plan (NEP), and each local program follows the guidance from the State-wide NEP. No regions have their own plans independent of the State plan. The original plan was written and funded in 1995 and staffed in 1996. The program has grown from 14 to 34 counties, partly through the availability of funds allocated to counties as a result of Welfare reform.

## **III. Evaluation of Nutrition Education Activities**

The FNP is evaluated through pre- and post 24-hour recalls currently analyzed using the EFNEP Evaluation and Reporting System (ERS). Evaluation also includes a checklist somewhat different from the Behavior Checklist used by EFNEP in that it includes more nutrition, food safety, and food resource management questions. Lastly, there are questions about participant satisfaction with the program.

Results have shown significant improvements in dietary and other behavior indicators for participants completing the program. Satisfaction with the program is high. The Program Coordinator is also conducting follow-up focus groups and interviews to examine longer-range impacts for a number of program families. One of the main ways evaluation findings have been used is to increase funding.

## **IV. Factors Facilitating the Provision of Nutrition Education**

Facilitators for program success included the following:

- # Because many of the FNP administrators have had previous experiences with EFNEP, they were able to implement the program quickly.
- # The program has a committed core of family specialists and PAs in the FNP counties, who are willing to spend the time required to get the program going and make it successful.

- # The use of advanced technologies, such as the Iowa communications network, has allowed the program to provide additional training for FNP staff.
- # Having additional funds become available to the counties through State Welfare Reform has helped to expand the program to more counties.
- # A philosophy of partnership between the PAs and clients, which allows for a flexible approach to providing nutrition education..
- # Utilizing a behavior-focused hands-on curriculum.

## V. Barriers to Providing Nutrition Education

The State Coordinator stated that most barriers to full and effective implementation have been at the local level. Barriers that were mentioned included the following:

- # It was difficult to find effective ways of reaching the target audience. Door-knocking has limited success, especially since the rural population is so dispersed. Many families also do not receive a paper, so newspaper advertising only tends to raise public awareness. Recruiting through existing agencies seems to be more effective; however, this requires the commitment of those agencies. PAs with good communication skills also help.
- # Federal regulations and limits on how money could be used posed some barriers relating to costs. Many items, such as tote bags for the PAs, or incentives for participants, could not be included in the program's budget.
- # The dispersion of people in rural areas posed challenges. Families were more difficult to find and required more time and travel to reach.
- # Federal policies regarding educational content limited the curriculum. Experiences in Iowa have shown that families need, and respond better to, a more holistic curriculum that addresses needs such as parenting as well as nutrition. Nutrition does not stand alone, but is an integral part of broader family issues. A good example is the parent-child feeding relationship which touches on both nutrition and parenting. Some counties have contributed local dollars to separately support parenting or financial management topics.
- # Collaboration varies significantly at the local level. Often the counties think this can be "fixed" at the State level, but that does not work. Local support is extremely important.

- # Barriers affecting access to families include child care, transportation, and the time families have. Targeted families have multiple needs, with agencies competing for their time. These barriers are somewhat reduced by PAs offering to go to the participants' homes.

## VI. Lessons Learned

The following are some lessons that the State FNP coordinator has learned through her work as the administrator of this local program.

- # The commitment of State and local community partners is critical. In Iowa, the Department of Human Services said that they would have a contract, but wanted the Cooperative Extension Service to recruit all local support. Now new counties can only join in if they can show local support (financial and otherwise).
- # Continually listen to the local staff. They have valuable insights for seeing how the program can fit into families' lives.
- # Families and clients need to play an active role in nutrition education. Allowing clients to choose what they want to learn, giving them hands-on learning experiences and opportunities for interaction, keeping it simple and practical, and providing educational approaches that are appealing to a variety of the senses can make learning fun. Cooking and tasting foods together is an especially effective strategy. However, storing and carrying educational props can sometimes be a challenge.
- # FNPs need nutrition educators who care about people and have good communication skills.
- # To reach the target audience, it is important to work through existing agencies, convincing them how the FNP has been effective in the past.

# Colorado Case Study Report

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## I. Introduction

The Colorado food stamp nutrition education activities are administered by the Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, and has been in existence for four years. The purpose of the program is to provide food resource management and nutrition education to food stamp recipients and eligibles. Within the overall activities related to providing nutrition education to food stamp recipients, the State has developed two separate components; one that focuses on school-aged children, and another for adults and teens who are living independently. This case study focuses solely on the program for adults and teens. Sites for this case study were located in Adams County (the metro Denver area) and Jefferson County, which provided information on how the program is delivered in both an urban and suburban setting.

Over the course of a two-day site visit in November 1999, interviews were conducted with four staff members and one collaborator. The participants included the State Coordinator, the Assistant State Coordinator, two nutrition educators, and a Food Assistance Program representative. The following sections describe how food stamp nutrition education has been implemented in the two counties noted above.

## II. Components of Food Stamp Nutrition Education

### A. Target Audience and Eligibility

The broad target audience for the adult program is individuals who are income eligible at 180 percent of poverty level and who are fifteen years of age and older. These individuals must be

living independently, cooking their own meals, managing their own money, and shopping for their own food. All participants are either food stamp recipients or eligibles, with the majority being single mothers between the ages of 20 and 40.

The participants in the program can generally be grouped into two categories, those who are mandated by other programs to attend nutrition education classes and those that attend voluntarily. In the category of those required to attend classes are individuals receiving assistance from Colorado's Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) Program. Colorado allows TANF clients to receive nutrition education as part of their mandatory education and work requirements. As a result, clients who elect this option must attend the classes to continue their benefits. A second group of individuals required to attend the nutrition education classes are parents of children enrolled in Head Start. These parents are required to gain a certain amount of nutrition training while their children are enrolled in the Head Start Program, and the Colorado Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program fulfills that requirement.

Staff report that these two audiences are very easy to identify and recruit, since the nutrition education program meets the mandatory requirements of the other two programs and services are provided at convenient locations. At the same time, staff noted that it is often more difficult to provide services to clients who are required to be there, as the clients are often unhappy about having to attend and are less interested in the information provided by the educators.

Although a high number of the program's clients are Hispanic and are Spanish-speaking, neither of the educators interviewed for this case study speak Spanish. This has made it difficult to recruit this population into the program. Small gains have been made by one of the educators who is working with a class of students taking an English as a Second Language (ESL) course. In this instance, the educator has modified her materials and approach by simplifying much of the vocabulary so students can obtain nutrition education information at the same time they are learning English. Program staff indicated that they are working hard to identify Spanish-speaking educators in order to expand the program's presence in the Spanish-speaking communities.

## **B. Qualifications of Nutrition Educators**

The requirements of the nutrition educator positions include a bachelor's degree with an emphasis in food and nutrition, home economics, health, education, or a related field. Past experience working with health and human service organizations as well as experience in client recruitment and conducting needs assessments is helpful but not required for these positions. There is also heavy recruitment of bilingual staff, and although not available at the site visited for this case study, half of the educators in the State speak both English and Spanish.

The educators also need demonstrated work experience in community education and the ability to work effectively with people from diverse backgrounds. They should be able to manage, organize, train, and teach groups of limited income clients using a variety of methods. They also must be adept at oral and written communication, have good listening skills, and the ability to work with people as individuals, groups, and teams. There needs to be some evidence of personal drive or initiative, they must be self-starters, and good leadership qualities are important. Finally, it is important that the educators have some computer literacy.

When interviews are conducted to hire new nutrition educators, the interviewers spend a lot of time discerning how well the persons handle themselves professionally and how well they would teach this type of information to a low-income audience. Each interviewee demonstrates their presentation and teaching ability for ten minutes during the interview. They role-play a situation where the interviewers play the target audience and the interviewee is the nutrition educator. This gives the interviewers an idea of how the candidate will teach the target population and the level of sensitivity they have for the population. The State coordinator believes she can teach people about nutrition but not how to be sensitive to people who are likely to be program clients. She emphasized that it is important to hire people who already have a high level of sensitivity to the target population in order to be an effective teacher.

The responsibilities of the nutrition educators include providing leadership for the

organization, developing implementation strategies for delivering nutrition education, and evaluating their local programs. Educators work closely with county agencies and local advisory committees to develop collaborative relationships and identify program needs. In addition, they often write articles or are interviewed for stories in local papers or other publications promoting their local activities.

Educators are completely responsible for recruiting clients and setting up classes. Once clients are recruited, the educators must first assess their current level of nutritional and money management knowledge so that they can provide an appropriate level of education. One educator reported,

*“We have to assess what people already know about life skills (like nutrition, math, and shopping) then fill in the blanks. I like to ask them questions, then let them give me feedback to get a sense of what they know.”*

The local nutrition educators have two supervisors, one administrative and one program-oriented. While the county Cooperative Extension Director is their direct supervisor, the State coordinator provides overall direction for implementing the program. This works well in the Denver metro area, according to those we interviewed, because the educators have someone they can go to at the local level to resolve local problems, and a separate person they call for assistance with programmatic issues. Both supervisors provide input into the educators’ annual performance review, providing some breadth to the annual evaluation of each educator.

### **C. Training Nutrition Educators**

As noted above, Colorado only uses nutrition educators with a minimum of a bachelor’s degree in a nutrition-related field. As a result, the coordinator feels less of a need for ongoing training. Newly hired educators receive an orientation to the program that includes becoming familiar with the curriculum and meeting with program staff. During the first month of employment, the State coordinator goes with the newly hired educators to their county and spends a day with them helping to orient them to the program. Included in the orientation are discussions around managing their budget, implementing the curriculum, preparing required

paperwork, and providing details about the program's administrative structure. In addition, prior to beginning work in their assigned county, the new educators attend sessions in a nearby county to observe and shadow an experienced educator for a few weeks. The university Cooperative Extension office also provides a one-week training on Extension policies, procedures, and other administrative issues. Finally, the county Cooperative Extension Director shows the new educators around the local office, orients them to local policies and procedures, and introduces them to other agency staff with whom they will work closely.

In addition to the initial training, the program conducts one large training a year for all program staff. A committee made up of the coordinator, volunteer nutrition educators, and volunteer Cooperative Extension staff plans all aspects of the annual training, including topics, speakers, and schedule. This year, the program conducted a four-day nutrition education training for all nutrition educators, supervisors, and other Cooperative Extension agents. This training was designed to help educators dialogue with colleagues; share teaching, networking, and recruiting ideas; join working committees to strengthen programming; and learn about past and future program outcomes. Topics covered during this training included:

- # New & emerging issues in nutrition;
- # Obesity trends/why diets don't work/body image;
- # Popular high protein diets;
- # Lipid panel blood draws;
- # Profiling families in poverty;
- # Anger and stress management;
- # *Eat Well For Less* curriculum training; and
- # Client recruitment strategies.

The speakers included a mix of university staff and experts from the community. Attendees felt that the training was highly informative, and they particularly enjoyed speakers who used

an interactive and hands-on approach to providing information. Each year the topics and speakers change, so there is a different set of training materials used every year. The annual training is technically not mandatory for program staff, however everyone makes a concerted effort to be there since it is also an opportunity to network and touch base with other program staff from across the State. Sessions at the annual training are also videotaped so that future educators can benefit from them, or so that others can review the information at a later time.

In addition to the annual training and the orientation activities, nutrition educators are also encouraged to take advantage of other forms of professional development throughout their tenure. Cooperative Extension often offers courses or in-services for professional development that the educators are eligible to attend. In addition, educators can take approved courses at local colleges and universities, attend approved conferences or symposia, and participate in community meetings that are informative and educational.

#### **D. Modes of Delivery**

The basic mode of delivery for the local programs is formal small group education. The curriculum that is currently being used includes eight two-hour lessons, although a shorter six-lesson (twelve-hour) version is being developed and tested for use in the upcoming year.

While most classes are small to moderate in size, educators are allowed flexibility in determining the overall size of their classes. One educator reported that said she likes to have only three to five participants in a class, but at times will teach classes of up to 26 students. Another educator tries to keep all of her classes between 10 and 15 participants. On occasion an educator will conduct a make-up class of one or two students in order to keep them in line with the other students in their class. One of the benefits staff attribute to small group education is that it develops a sense of community among clients, letting them know they are not alone in their struggles to provide low cost, nutritious meals to themselves and their families.

## E. Content of Nutrition Education

The core curriculum developed by Colorado for the program is called *Eat Well For Less* (EWFL). The curriculum is based on social/cognitive learning theory and uses the Expanded Health Belief (EHB) Model. The curriculum fully incorporates information from the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and the *Food Guide Pyramid* as well as social marketing components gleaned from the Nutrition Education Networks across the country. Each lesson of the curriculum begins with a core concept, illustrating topics that will be presented during the lesson. After the core concepts are presented, there is a discussion of the topic through the use of activities and demonstrations. All of the lessons incorporate concepts around food resource management. The lesson ends with a recap of the issue and a summary of what was taught.

The curriculum is designed to be very general, so educators can use the same curriculum with many different target populations with varied needs. One educator said,

*“It’s a pretty general curriculum and I adapt the information to meet the needs of my specific target population.”*

The entire curriculum was developed in English, though many of the handouts have been or are being translated into Spanish. Eventually, the curriculum and the evaluation forms will also be translated into Spanish. This will make the curriculum more useful for a wider variety of clients and will make it more marketable for other States who wish to purchase the curriculum for their own use.

When asked about the topics the educators generally emphasize in their lessons, the answers did not vary widely. Both educators interviewed indicated that they emphasize the Food Guide Pyramid first, then fat intake, followed by calcium, fruits and vegetables, and then meal planning and shopping. The educators also noted that they modify their teaching style, some of the content, and some of the topics they emphasize to fit the clients’ needs. Different approaches are needed when teaching older adults than when presenting to a group of young

parents. The educators try to use examples that work well with a given population instead of using the same ones for everyone. This approach helps to tailor the education so that the material is easier for the clients to absorb, making it highly applicable to their lives, so that they feel they can relate to the educator.

One of the important aspects identified by staff is that the program is not designed to restrict a person's dietary choices but to increase the clients' knowledge so they can make healthier food choices. One educator said it was very important for her to emphasize that she is not going to tell any client what they can and cannot eat. This way, the clients feel less intimidated, less likely to feel defensive about talking openly about what their families eat, and more open to hearing about good nutrition.

## **F. Process for Delivering Nutrition Education**

Each educator varies in the way she teaches nutrition depending on her own personal style and clients' needs. The structure of the curriculum is designed to begin with basic topics and move on to slightly more advanced issues in later sessions. Both educators interviewed follow the curriculum quite closely because they believe in how well it works and they like the content. However, flexibility is encouraged and the curriculum is malleable enough to be used as needed by trained professionals.

One educator feels it is important to give the clients something to take home with them after each lesson as often as possible. To do so, she obtains food donations from the local Food Bank and uses some of her program budget to make up food samples (with recipes attached) that represent a food item being presented in the lesson for that day. Clients take the samples home, try the recipe, and can see for themselves how easy it is to prepare the foods. For example, if an educator is discussing beans during one session, she might find a bean soup recipe, obtain packages of dried beans from the Food Bank, and prepare a package to give to each participant during the session. Clients report enjoying these samples and it is one of the aspects of this program that keeps clients interested in coming back for future lessons.

During the site visit, one lesson was observed at a school for pregnant teens and new teen mothers. The group was composed of about 18 young women, some of whom knew each other. The lesson began with an introduction of the topic, and then some questions and answers to warm up the group. Once the participants felt comfortable, the educator presented some group activities. Most of the class members were involved and attentive throughout, though a few were disengaged and remote. The educator focused her lesson on the Food Guide Pyramid first, then portion sizes, meal planning, how to reduce fat in a meal, and ended with a menu-planning activity that brought many of the previously covered topics together in one activity. The lesson lasted just over an hour, was interesting, fast-paced, and for the most part kept the participants' attention.

## **G. Needs Assessment/Formative Research**

Needs assessment has been an important aspect of the Colorado program since it was first established. In 1994, the current State coordinator conducted a pilot study for the food stamp nutrition education project of what is now the curriculum to test the idea of making group nutrition education available to those receiving food stamps. The content of the curriculum was based on focus group data gathered from the intended target population. In the focus groups, moderators asked food stamp recipients what they were most interested in learning about with regards to nutrition. Using these focus group data as a base, the State coordinator began collecting other information in order to construct the curriculum. It has taken a number of revisions to get the curriculum to its current content, and future revisions are already planned. As the curriculum is used with the target population all over the State, ways of improving it and modifying it become apparent, and educators are given ample opportunities to voice their ideas about how best to alter the content for optimal use.

## **H. Coordination and Collaboration**

As mentioned earlier, each nutrition educator has responsibility for developing and maintaining relationships with community agencies. Occasionally, an agency representative who is working closely with an educator will team-teach a lesson if it is a topic they know

well. This team approach helps to develop strong collaborative relationships. In addition, simply inviting outside agency representatives to observe a lesson has become another effective way to build collaborative relationships.

Marketing activities are important for keeping the local nutrition education program visible in the community. Much of the marketing activities revolve around presentations to community agencies made by the nutrition educator to groups of potential clients. These presentations can either be designed to simply present information about the program or they can also include demonstrations of what an actual lesson would be like. Staff report that demonstrations are an effective way to illustrate how fun, stimulating, and educational the lessons can be.

Another method used to promote the nutrition education program is the posting of advertisements and flyers in the community. However, this approach has proven to be less effective. One educator reported:

*“The first year I tried placing flyers at food stamp offices, at the Commodity Programs, and other governmental offices around the city. A handful of individuals responded to those flyers. I called the individuals who responded and asked if it would be alright for me to contact their building manager to set up a class in their apartment building. Overall, the use of flyers was ineffective because the flyers got very little response and I was having to do all the leg-work to set up a group.”*

One unique and interesting marketing activity that the educators in the local programs are doing is creating and distributing a periodic newsletter for the community agencies with which they work. The newsletter has articles written by the nutrition educators and volunteers who represent the local program. Some topics include basic nutrition, spending wisely, food safety, and healthy recipes. The first newsletter was sent out in December 1999, and featured stories about the Cooperative Extension Service and food stamp nutrition education. Because it is such a new activity, staff have not yet been able to assess the benefits of this form of marketing and information dissemination but believe this approach will be successful.

In some cases, the program will develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with an agency with which they are partnering. This is the case with the relationship developed with the Head Start and Early Head Start programs. The MOU is simply to state the objectives of the partnership so that no misunderstandings occur. The MOU lasts for one year then is renewed if the partners agree to continue working together.

Though it may seem that WIC would be an obvious partner with the nutrition education program, this has not been the case in the Denver metro area. Food stamp nutrition education project educators rarely report working with the local WIC program because of fear on the part of the WIC program that clients will find it inconvenient to attend one more program providing nutrition education services.

As part of this case study, representatives of the Denver Food Assistance Program (FAP), a local food bank network, were interviewed to discuss the collaboration between them and the local food stamp nutrition education project. The local nutrition educator met the FAP representative through their mutual affiliation with the Denver Coalition on Hunger, of which they are both active members. Through this coalition they were able to form an effective partnership to better serve clients seen by both programs. For example, the FAP representative was able to help the nutrition educator develop a strategy to find clients by linking her up with the Homeless Coalition in Denver. Through this relationship, the program was able to provide nutrition education to young mothers who are homeless.

The classes at the Homeless Coalition work well because the educator teaches the theory and the nutrition material and the FAP representative provides the food, the recipes, and the cooking demonstrations. The educator teaches for 45 minutes while the FAP representative is preparing for the food demonstration. They get very positive feedback from the participants who say that they have changed their shopping habits and they like the opportunity to network with other clients about where to shop, what to buy, and what meals to prepare. The biggest benefit for the FAP representative is that this method introduces homeless mothers to her program so that when they leave the homeless shelter, find housing, and are in need of food, they know where they can go for help.

One of the reasons this collaboration works so well is because the two individuals have a great deal of respect for one another and use each other as resources for the things the other person does not know as much about. The representative noted,

*“We respect each other and complement each other by relying on each other to answer questions if one of us doesn’t know the answer. We don’t outshine each other. We’re very relaxed together. We like each other.”*

## **I. Nutrition Education Plan**

While the responsibility for preparing the State Food Stamp NEP has usually fallen to Cooperative Extension, this past year the nutrition education plan (NEP) was written by a committee composed of representatives from a number of State agencies. This change was a result of Colorado’s decision to develop an FNS-funded nutrition education network. Although one plan is submitted to the State Food Stamp Agency for approval, the Cooperative Extension program remains a separate component under the NEP.

In the Year 2000, the coordinator plans to begin allowing the nutrition educators to set their own program objectives, develop their own strategies, and determine how best to evaluate the success of their program. This action was taken at the request of the nutrition educators who felt their county would benefit from a more tailored program to fit the unique needs of the community. The coordinator believes that the educators know their target populations best and can make the best decisions regarding how to teach and present the program.

To implement the changes, the coordinator sent out a form with some general guidelines and suggestions on how to write an individual county plan. Each nutrition educator’s plan will be submitted to a committee of State-level program administrators who will review the plans and send back comments, changes, or give approval. The coordinator expects this new approach to the program to work very well and to improve the educators’ morale and sense of satisfaction with their jobs. It will also provide diversity and flexibility to the Statewide NEP, which is important considering how diverse the target population is in the State.

### III. Evaluation of Nutrition Education Activities

Evaluating client progress towards meeting behavioral objectives is a very important part of the Colorado program. Nutrition educators track client progress and behavior change using the ERS software program (new version 4.0) and specially designed Excel spreadsheets. The educators gather data using an entry/completion record form to test client knowledge before the course begins and then again at the end of the course. In addition, clients complete individual lesson pre- and post-tests, 24-hour food recalls, and a confidential graduation questionnaire. These graduation questionnaires include space for clients to record testimonials of their experience in the program. This provides some qualitative information on how the program is working for clients. Once the educators collect data, they are sent to the State office where they are entered into the Statewide data system. These data are analyzed at the State level and results for each county are sent back to the county director who disseminates the information to the nutrition educators. The results can then be used to make determinations about recruitment and delivery of the education.

In addition to the formal analysis of the ERS data, monthly reports prepared by the educators document class participation and outcome/impact results. In addition, the local educators contribute to a report that the State coordinator prepares for the FNS regional office twice each year. The report details progress toward the program's goals and objectives, and includes demographic data, data related to increased participant knowledge, information on documented behavioral changes, evidence of increased nutritional intake, and data regarding client satisfaction with the program.

In addition to evaluating behavioral objectives, the program has developed methods by which it can determine if the nutrition education offered is appropriate for the cultural needs of the population. For example, the educators have each client fill out a program feedback form once they have graduated from the program. The information provided by the clients helps program staff to examine how well they are meeting the needs of the clients. In addition, the agencies with which the program has developed collaborative relationships are often a good source of information about cultural needs of the target population and the appropriateness of the

settings where nutrition education is provided. Cooperative Extension also works with the State diversity coordinator who helps with training of educators and information dissemination.

#### **IV. Factors Facilitating the Provision of Nutrition Education**

There are a number of factors that have facilitated the success of this local food stamp nutrition education project. One of the factors noted earlier is the extensive use of degree professionals to conduct nutrition education activities. While many other States use para-professionals, Colorado staff feel as though using degree professionals is more cost-effective. These degree professionals tend to take on higher caseloads, require less ongoing training, and they tend to take more responsibility for their work. The coordinator noted that the program has to pay the educators a higher salary, but she believes they save that amount of money in training, extra supervision, and in solving attrition problems.

It has also been important that the educators have backgrounds in areas related to nutrition. The educators' previous training in areas of nutrition and food science prepare them better for conducting this type of work than someone who lacks such a background. The educators know more than just the basics of nutrition, so they have a firmer foundation from which to teach and the ability to answer a wider range of questions from clients than para-professionals might..

In addition to the use of highly trained educators, the fact that food stamp nutrition education is so closely tied to the Welfare to Work program also has helped with recruitment of clients. One educator noted that it helped that the program fulfills the work and continuing education requirements for TANF recipients, as it allows the nutrition education program to work with other programs in the community serving the same client base. This way, the nutrition education program feels more like it is part of a larger overall program serving food stamp clients.

The coordination of nutrition education with other community-based programs has helped a great deal in recruiting audiences for the nutrition education lessons. This coordination has

helped the educators save time and energy on recruitment and usually provides a consistent stream of new clients. If the educators had to spend their time forming all of their classes by recruiting individuals in the community, they would not be able to reach the number of clients they currently see each year. Having groups already in place where they can incorporate the nutrition education program relatively easily is an enormous facilitator to the effectiveness of this program.

One final item noted by the educators was the fact that there is enough money in the local nutrition education budgets to buy the materials they need to run the program well. For example, the local program budgets have money to buy food for demonstrations when needed and to make copies of handouts when needed. In addition, educators have become adept at securing donations from outside of their agencies and using their budget to purchase items they are unable to have donated.

## V. Barriers to Providing Nutrition Education

Staff were asked to identify any barriers that they have experienced to the effective implementation of food stamp nutrition education. Most of the barriers identified related either to the locations at which nutrition education is provided, or the use of the prescribed curriculum. Each of the barriers identified are discussed below:

- # ***Working with new collaborative agency directors.*** Because most clients are referred to food stamp nutrition education from other agencies, it is critical for the nutrition educator to develop cooperative relationships with health and social service agencies located within the community being served. Staff reported that turnover of local program directors has been a problem in the past. When turnover occurs, the nutrition educator must develop an entirely new relationship with the new agency director, which always seems to take a significant amount of time and effort.
  
- # ***Providing nutrition education at sites with difficult clients.*** In some cases, educators reported having difficulties providing nutrition education at sites serving difficult clients. One example noted related to a home for pregnant teens, where some of the teens became angry with others attending the class, and violence erupted.

- # ***Adapting the curriculum to special needs of pregnant teens.*** There are a number of teen parents who attend sessions where the current curriculum is used by the nutrition educator. The educators pointed out that the curriculum is less geared to teens than to adults who are living independently. This is because teens are often living at home or with others, and as a result, they are usually not the ones doing the shopping, cooking, and meal planning for the family. While it is important to teach them the importance of good nutrition, much of the independent living skills being taught are not of interest to the teens.
  
- # ***Adapting the curriculum to shorter time periods.*** Educators identified the amount of time it takes to complete the curriculum as a barrier. The curriculum is organized to be conducted in 12 sessions, which is a burden in cases when the educator must work with clients over a shorter period of time. To resolve this, modifications to the curriculum are being discussed so that it can be taught in fewer sessions without sacrificing effectiveness.

## VI. Lessons Learned

The following are some lessons that the interviewees learned over the course of their tenure with the food stamp nutrition education project:

- # ***Having a strong relationship with the director of a collaborating agency is important to a successful collaboration.*** Having a good relationship with the directors of other community agencies is the most effective method to promote the program to clients, identify when and how to make program changes, and influence others to work with the nutrition education program. These agency directors are also usually well connected to other agencies in the community, so a good relationship with them will encourage the directors to help promote the nutrition education program to others.
  
- # ***Working with collaborative agency staff helps to understand the needs of the clients.*** Spending time with agency representatives is very helpful in getting to know the population with whom the collaborative agency works. The better aware of the clients' circumstances and reasons for receiving services at the collaborative agency the educator is, the better they can serve the client's needs quickly and effectively.
  
- # ***Program flexibility has allowed educators to fine-tune their lessons to fit the needs of each population.*** Educators have been able to learn how to modify the basic curriculum to adapt lessons for teenagers, working families, and the elderly. Program administrators encourage

educators to do this sort of lesson tailoring in order to make the program work optimally for all clients.

- # ***Using visual presentations and hands-on activities are often the key to keeping clients interested in the program.*** Staff have found that a lecture format is boring and ineffective for long-term retention of nutrition concepts. Clients have expressed that they really enjoy visuals and demonstrations. For example, the use of a large, Plexiglas Food Guide Pyramid was very interesting to teens, because it is colorful and can be manipulated by putting different foods in each slot. Visuals are also particularly useful if teaching clients with learning disabilities or those who are have low levels of formal education.
  
- # ***It is important for the educator to build trust between themselves and each client.*** Educators cited a number of trust-building activities they use to help with getting to know where each client is in his/her life. Educators have learned to be involved with the needs of the client, but also to be careful not to cross the line between educator and friend. It is also important not to talk down to clients; instead, respect them as individuals who are as valuable as anyone else. Other ways to show respect for clients is by being on time for lessons, being well prepared for lessons, and being empathic about their struggles and life circumstances.
  
- # ***It is important to have clients buy into the concept of long-term behavior change if you expect them to continue in the program.*** The one-shot marketing efforts are a good way to promote the program, but you have to explain the value of education over time as it relates to long-term behavior change so that they understand why the program includes a series of sessions.
  
- # ***It is important for educators to be organized in order to be the best prepared and effective in delivering nutrition education.*** One educator noted she uses a separate drawer for each lesson she teaches. The drawers are portable, so before each class she can simply take the drawer she needs with her and she has all of the materials needed to conduct her class. The key is maintaining the drawers to ensure that all that you need is available when you need it. There are so many materials and so much to remember for each class that this method simplifies the educator's work enormously.
  
- # ***It is crucial that the educators gain enough knowledge of the curriculum topics to be able to answer client questions in an educated manner.*** Clients will ask questions constantly, especially questions to verify what they have been taught growing up, what others have recently told them, or what they hear in the media. While it is

important to know the basics, it is also important to stay abreast of emerging nutrition issues so that you can provide answers that are accurate.

# ***While word of mouth and sending flyers out are two ways to recruit, they are not the most effective.*** The educators have found that it is more useful to find groups of food stamp recipients or eligibles that are already in place. Then, the biggest challenge is to convince the sponsoring agency to allow them to deliver education to that group or to help convince the group that they should volunteer to participate. Finding groups already in place is the best way they have found to recruit participants.

# **New Hampshire Case Study Report**

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## **I. Introduction**

The New Hampshire Cooperative Extension Service administers local food stamp nutrition education projects in all counties in New Hampshire. The majority of the nutrition education activities are conducted through cooperative extension field offices. However, in Grafton County, a very rural county in northern New Hampshire, services are provided through a multi-purpose social service agency named The Whole Village Family Resource Center. This agency is unique in New Hampshire, as it provides physical space and support services to over ten other social and health service programs located in the county. Some of the services available at the Whole Village Family Resource Center aside from food stamp nutrition education include WIC, mental health counseling, senior meals, health care services, a food bank office, domestic abuse counseling services, child care, and a Head Start program.

Because the program is located in a very rural county, nutrition education services to food stamp clients are provided by a single nutrition educator. The nutrition educator conducts classes at the Whole Village Family Resource Center and provides some individual and small group sessions at other sites throughout the county. Over the course of a single day site visit in January of 2000, interviews were conducted with the nutrition educator, the director of the agency in which the program is located, and with one program volunteer. The following sections describe how food stamp nutrition education is being provided in Grafton County.

## **II. Components of Food Stamp Nutrition Education**

### **A. Target Audience and Eligibility**

The primary target audience for the Grafton County program is families living at or near the poverty level. In particular, families with young children and pregnant teens are groups the program tries to reach. Through connections with the school system, and the close proximity of WIC services, the program has been particularly successful in recruiting pregnant teens, and utilizes a Statewide program curriculum entitled *Great Beginnings*, which is directed at this target population. Many of the participants in the *Great Beginnings* program continue to receive services through other components of the nutrition education program once they deliver their baby.

### **B. Qualifications of Nutrition Educators**

Nutrition educators in New Hampshire are generally county extension staff. The Grafton County nutrition educator noted that while she believed it was important for the person providing nutrition education to be a professional nutrition educator, it was also important to use program volunteers who reflect the community being served. The Grafton County program uses a number of volunteers, some of whom are graduates of the programs, to assist the nutrition educator with presentations and help lead discussions, where appropriate. In particular, the educator noted that volunteers were very helpful in providing her with assistance in conducting cooking demonstrations, helping clients with their food preparation activities and providing overall encouragement to the clients to complete the course.

### **C. Training Nutrition Educators**

Training is available to the Grafton County nutrition educator through a number of sources, but is primarily focused on continuing education. She reported attending two conferences held each year where nutrition educators from across the State attend sessions designed to update their knowledge of nutrition education issues and provide them with enhanced skills training.

In addition, the conferences provide an opportunity for nutrition educators to meet among themselves to discuss program issues and share effective means of delivering nutrition education.

In addition to the formal training provided through Cooperative Extension, nutrition educators are also encouraged to find opportunities on their own to receive training. In particular, the nutrition educators are encouraged to attend conferences and seminars sponsored by other programs within the University of New Hampshire, or sponsored by other public agencies such as the State Department of Public Health.

#### **D. Modes of Delivery**

The Grafton County program relies primarily on small group classes for its mode of delivery. The basic curriculum is divided into three basic programs. These include:

- # *Eating Right Is Basic*, a program designed to provide basic nutrition education services to low-income families. This program focuses on teaching healthy food selection, food budgeting, and food preparation skills. Services are delivered at the Whole Village Family Resource Center and at individual's homes.
- # *Great Beginnings*, the program for pregnant teens, provides classes at the Whole Village Family Resource Center. Classes are generally held after school lets out for the day, and teens who have transportation problems are picked up by a transportation service operated by the Family Resource Center.
- # *Planning Ahead, Staying Ahead* is a program designed to help low-income families plan budgets and manage resources. This program is provided both in small groups and in individual's homes. A number of participants in this program are TANF recipients who can count their participation in the program towards their education and work requirements.
- # Special programs provided at community sites, including a program conducted in local schools and programs taught at senior citizen centers.

Because of the numerous support services located in the Whole Village Family Resource Center, clients are encouraged to attend sessions at this site. Child care services are provided

to clients attending nutrition education sessions, and referrals to other programs can be made quickly and easily. However, because of the rural nature of the county, and because some individuals have transportation problems, the nutrition educator is often asked to conduct nutrition education activities in individual's homes. While this is not the preferred method of delivering nutrition education, the educator noted that home visits may be the only way to reach some of the most needy clients.

Most of the nutrition education provided uses interactive methods to convey the message. Videos and role playing games are often used to make the classes more interesting. In addition, games such as "Calorie Bingo" are used as a teaching method, with prizes such as food discounts and recipe books being provided by local merchants. The nutrition educator emphasized the importance of making the lessons fun and interesting to the clients. She noted that young clients particularly enjoy the role playing games, as it allows them to interact with their peers and learn from one another.

## **E. Content of Nutrition Education**

The main focus of the nutrition education content is selecting and preparing healthy foods. *The Food Guide Pyramid* is used as the basis for all of the lessons. The different program components taught by the nutrition educator all focus on making healthy choices when shopping for foods for the family. Because the Whole Village Family Resource Center has a kitchen that can be used for food preparation activities, a number of classes focus on preparing healthy meals. In addition, clients are taught how to plan and budget for meals. For example, clients are given specific shopping assignments between classes, and are asked to report on the foods they were able to find that fit into their budget.

In addition to providing information about nutrition education, clients also are provided with recipes they can easily prepare. Clients each receive a recipe book when they attend the first class, and then are asked to report on recipes they have tried. Clients are also encouraged to share their favorite recipes with other participants.

## **F. Process for Delivering Nutrition Education**

The nutrition educator reported that the classes generally follow the curriculum provided by the State Cooperative Extension program. One of the issues she has been required to address is the motivation of the participants in the classes. Because some of the participants are attending the classes to meet education and work requirements for TANF, they are not as motivated as those who are attending because they are truly interested in the topic. During the site visit, two nutrition education sessions were observed, one for parents with young children and the other for pregnant teens. The session for parents was composed primarily of persons who were attending the session to meet TANF requirements. These individuals seemed less interested in the class material, often checking their watches and asking how much longer the session would continue, and rarely contributing to the discussion. In contrast, the pregnant teens seemed very interested in the topics, and actively participated in discussions lead by the nutrition educator.

A second issue raised by the nutrition educator involves the extent to which home visits are productive. While not the preferred method of delivering nutrition education, the use of home visits has some advantages in that the nutrition educator has the opportunity to observe the living conditions of the clients. This is helpful in understanding the circumstances under which the client must operate, and allows the educator to provide customized information to the client that is specific to her particular needs.

## **G. Needs Assessment/Formative Research**

Needs assessment activities are conducted by the State-level program, with little involvement by the local programs. Most of the needs assessment activities conducted locally relate to the recruitment of clients. The nutrition educator noted that she works with the collaborative agencies located within the building in which she works to identify potential clients in need of services, and has established an elaborate referral system within the Whole Village Family Resource Center to identify potential clients. In addition, the educator uses an advisory group composed of community representatives to assess the community's needs and target new outreach programs.

## **H. Coordination and Collaboration**

The location of the nutrition education program in a multi-service agency has allowed for significant collaboration with other programs. The director of the Whole Village Family Resource Center noted that all of the programs make a commitment to cooperating and collaborating with one another when they sign a contract to use the facility. In particular, the presence of on-site child care and transportation services helps encourage collaborative efforts among the various agencies located in the building. For example, referrals between the WIC program and the food stamp nutrition education program are very easy, as the WIC clinic is located just down the hall from the nutrition educator's office.

The primary source of referrals to the program come from the local County social service agency, and through the programs located at the Whole Village Family Resource Center. In her report to the State program, the nutrition educator noted that she made contact with 63 collaborative agencies during 1999, including doctor's offices, health clinics, hospitals, community centers, home health agencies, and other human service agencies. Through these contacts, the nutrition educator has also developed an extensive network of community resources and referral programs throughout the county. The nutrition educator maintains a listing of over 40 referral agencies within the county that are available to provide a variety of services to her clients.

## **I. Nutrition Education Plan**

Once the Statewide nutrition education plan is approved by FNS, local programs are asked to prepare a workplan with goals and objectives, which is submitted to the State Cooperative Extension Program each year. The local workplans must be developed using the approved guidelines provided by the State program. There is no direct involvement on the part of the Grafton County nutrition educator in the development of the State's nutrition education plan for food stamp recipients.

## **III. Evaluation of Nutrition Education Activities**

The Grafton County nutrition educator uses the ERS data collection system as her primary evaluation tool. In the course of making client contacts, she completes a number of data collection forms, including an enrollment form, and pre-and post-test surveys. Data is sent from the local program to the State office, where it is processed. Reports are then sent back down to the local program for review and use. The Grafton County program also asks clients to complete a “graduation survey” when they complete the program component in which they are enrolled. These surveys provide direct feedback from the clients to the nutrition educator regarding those components of the program they enjoyed, and provides suggestions for improving future classes.

#### IV. Factors Facilitating the Provision of Nutrition Education

There are a number of factors that have facilitated the success of the Grafton County program. Some of the more important factors include:

- # ***The strong collaborative arrangements that are possible by being located in a multi-service agency.*** The fact that a number of social and health services targeted to low-income advances are provided at the same setting is an enormous facilitator to coordinating services and recruiting clients. The fact that program directors need only walk down the hall to resolve problems or plan joint activities has led to strong collaborations among the agencies. This benefits the client in that they can essentially use a “one stop shopping” approach to receiving services.
- # ***The presence of support services, such as child care and transportation have greatly facilitated client participation.*** The nutrition educator, as well as clients interviewed all emphasize the presence of transportation and child care services as main factors in allowing clients to attend the nutrition education sessions.
- # ***Strong collaborative ties to community agencies have facilitated client referrals into the program.*** The large number of contacts the nutrition educator has made with community agencies has helped significantly with the recruitment of clients. By making presentations to agencies about the benefits of the nutrition education program, and providing the community agencies with posters and materials describing the program, the educator has developed an extensive network of referral agencies

- # ***Strong support from the State Cooperative Extension Service has helped to build a successful program.*** The nutrition educator cited the strong support provided by the State program coordinator as a major facilitator to her being able to run a quality program. The State program has provided both high-quality materials and training support to the local programs, allowing them to improve the overall quality of nutrition education provided.

## V. Barriers to Providing Nutrition Education

The nutrition educator was asked to identify any barriers that she experienced to the effective implementation of the nutrition education program. The Grafton County nutrition educator felt that the overall program was well accepted, and there were not many barriers to providing high-quality nutrition education. Three areas she did express concern about include:

- # ***The rural nature of the county means that many clients may not be able to access the services they need.*** While the Whole Village Family Resource Center provides some transportation services, their geographic range is limited to about six miles. There are also very limited public transportation services available within the county. This means that potential clients who live in the more rural areas of the county may not have transportation to the services they need. While home visits are an option, the client can only receive one service at a time through this method, and can not take advantage of the numerous services available at the Center.
- # ***Clients who are participating to meet TANF requirements are not as interested in the program, and sometimes can be a disruptive influence on others.*** Because clients who are attending the nutrition education sessions to meet TANF requirements are generally not as interested in receiving services, they tend not to participate as much in interactive activities. As a result, both the nutrition educator and clients who are attending because they are interested become frustrated with the lack of participation on the part of the TANF clients. As a result, some of the more interactive methods used by the nutrition educator are not as effective in delivering the nutrition education message.
- # ***The community as a whole has failed to acknowledge the problem of teen pregnancy, and as a result has little in the way of services for pregnant teens.*** The educator noted that referral sources designed to assist pregnant teens in the county are very limited. In her opinion, the community refuses to acknowledge that teen pregnancy is a problem, and therefore has not developed the support services necessary to assist pregnant teens. The educator noted that the Department of Health has actively been working with agencies in the

community to improve services for pregnant teens.

## VI. Lessons Learned

The following are some lessons learned reported by the nutrition educator.

- # ***Spending the time necessary to develop collaborative relationships is critical to the success of the program.*** While developing collaborative relationships takes an extraordinary amount of time, in the long run they benefit both the local program and the clients. Strong collaborative relationships have been the key to successful client recruitment, and an excellent resource for providing additional support services to nutrition education clients.
- # ***While not the preferred method of conducting nutrition education activities, home visits can provide important information about the needs of clients.*** Visits to clients homes often help put the issues of poverty into perspective. By trying to understand the client's living conditions and income limitations, the nutrition educator is in a better position to provide appropriate information and referral.
- # ***Using hands-on and interactive methods of delivering nutrition education are the most effective in reaching the target population.*** The most effective methods for delivering nutrition education to the New Hampshire food stamp population is to use interactive and hands-on activities. Cooking demonstrations, role playing games, and use of videos all have been effective methods for delivering the nutrition education messages.
- # ***Working with pregnant teens requires special consideration for their situation.*** The lack of support services for pregnant teens often requires the nutrition educator to make adjustments in her approach to teaching nutrition education. For example, because the pregnant teen often is living with a parent, the educator tries to provide information to the parents to help them choose healthy foods for their daughter. In addition, the nutrition educator tries very hard to encourage the fathers to attend the nutrition education session, so they can provide support to their partners.