UI Kootenai Extension and Aging & Adult Services Partner to Help High-Nutritional Risk Seniors

The Situation
Older adults with varying degrees of malnutrition are found throughout North Idaho in their own homes. Needs assessment data collected in 2002 from Aging & Adult Services (AAS) of North Idaho identified 349 (46%) of their in-home service clients as being high nutritional risk. Poor nutrition can lead to lost weight and strength, lessened immunity to disease, depression, confusion and disorientation.

Older adults at nutritional risk tend to make more visits to physicians, hospitals, and emergency rooms. Malnourished patients have longer hospital stays and are admitted to hospitals more frequently. Malnutrition exacerbates frailty and debilitation, causing more time, energy and money spent on care giving.

National statistics indicate four out of five seniors have chronic diseases affecting their diets, one in five skip meals daily, 87% do not eat necessary fruits, vegetables and dairy products on a daily basis, 40% of have annual incomes less than $6,000, 33% live alone and 20% have trouble accessing necessary goods and services.

Aging & Adult Services of North Idaho has made helping their high-risk nutritional seniors a top priority. AAS has established funds for an outside contractor to provide education in specific subject matter to high-nutritional risk seniors living in North Idaho in hopes of keeping clients’ living healthier and happier lives.

Our Response
University of Idaho Kootenai County Extension is the recipient of the Aging & Adult Services funds. These funds are being used in conjunction with District 1’s Extension Nutrition Program (ENP). The Senior Extension Nutrition Program (SENP) provides AAS clients with nutrition, money management and food safety education tailored to suit the unique needs of seniors living in their homes. Nutrition Advisors trained by University of Idaho Extension travel to AAS clients’ homes to provide educational lessons in the following areas:

- The importance of a healthy diet for long-term health
- Planning meals using the Food Guide Pyramid
- How to prepare quick, low-cost and nutritious meals
- The health benefits of eating fruits, vegetables, and whole-grain foods
- Medications/health conditions that affect appetite
- Implications of sudden weight gain or loss
- How to make eating alone a pleasant experience

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• Cooking foods properly
• The importance of washing hands, kitchen surfaces, and kitchen utensils
• Managing money to make money last throughout the month

Through ENP’s many on-going partnerships, Nutrition Advisors connect AAS clients to other assistance programs in their area such as senior center nutrition programs, community food banks, as well as other Community Action resources. ENP Nutrition Advisors have also been trained by the Department of Health and Welfare Food Stamp Program to assist food stamp eligible clients in correctly filling out the Application for Assistance Form.

Program Outcomes
Nutrition Advisors have only been working with their AAS clients for the past 3-months but are already seeing impact. The following are comments from program participants and Nutrition Advisors:

“I love having Cheryl come every week. I now know the importance of calcium in my diet so I have started drinking a cup of milk three times per day. I also try to eat fruit and vegetables but I never understood how many I should be eating. Now, through the help of Cheryl, I try to eat at least 3 vegetable servings per day and 2 fruit servings per day.”

-92-year old woman in Benewah County

“My clients really enjoy my visits and love learning new things. All of them seem so eager to use their “new” knowledge and each week are telling me new things they have started to do differently. Like one woman in Bonner County who is 83-years old has increased her fruit and vegetable consumption and another client in Boundary County who is also 83 years old has started new food safety practices. All my AAS are so open to learning new things and my visits really lift their spirits.”

-Rose Bonner/Boundary Nutrition Advisor

“Many of my AAS clients have spent years cooking for family members, now they are cooking for one. This has been hard for clients to deal with but I’ve been using “cooking-for-one” lessons as a way to show clients how easy it can be to make a meal that is still healthy. This is also a fun activity for clients—they all love to cook!”

-Pam Kootenai Nutrition Advisor

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