Practical Nutrition for a Captive Audience

The Situation
The Idaho Department of Corrections established the East Boise Community Work Center (EBCWC) in 1988. Female prisoners who were within six months of completing their sentences were moved from the Women’s Prison in Pocatello to live at the EBCWC. For the next six months the prisoners slept in dormitories, ate family-style meals, held regular jobs during the day in the surrounding community, and attended classes in the evenings to prepare them for their release. Like female prisoners across the country, Idaho’s female prisoners in the 1990’s were much younger than before and many of them left young children at home.

Our Response
The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) in Ada County became an integral program for women prisoners in 1994 because of the efforts of Françoise Teal, a nutrition advisor who also volunteered at the State Prison. Françoise knew that the female population was quickly growing and that many of the ladies were the mothers of young children. She also knew that the ladies were ill prepared to plan meals, shop for low cost foods or prepare nutritious meals for their families because of their years of incarceration.

During the past eight years five nutrition advisors underwent the lengthy screening process required by the Idaho Department of Corrections. Also, the number of classes expanded to include: the South Boise Women’s Correctional Center, the South Boise Community Work Center for men, and the Southern Idaho Corrections Industries for men. The basic food and nutrition lessons challenge the men and women to once again think about meal planning and cooking for their families. Class discussions include practical nutrition, grocery store advertising, new food products, how to read and use the new food label, basic food preparation, food safety issues in the kitchen and around the home, and how to save money by using unit pricing.
**Program Outcomes**

Written comments from the prisoners reveal: “I am anxious to get started on all that I have learned.” “I…will take many recipes and ideas with me.” “I have learned several things that will help me when I leave here.” “The handouts and homework really helped.” “The part on budgeting is really informative.” “I’m excited to use the recipes on my family.” “Wow! I loved cooking today. It makes me want to go home even more and cook for my family. What a great recipe on the Basic Bread Mix. I would love to have more recipes.” “I will use what I’m learning when I get home. My kids will love me & you for teaching me.” “I really like the meal planning. I have five children and I would like to plan well for them, too.” “I love to cook and bake for my three children. I am excited to learn more and get your good ideas.”

During the last fiscal year 88 prisoners (67 female and 21 male) were enrolled in the EFNEP. Of the total number, 62 of them (84 percent) completed the program. What started out as a pilot project for 10 to 12 female prisoners twice a month has grown into weekly classes for men and women at four different locations.

Nutrition advisors from EFNEP gained the respect of the Department of Corrections and the Southern Idaho Corrections Industries. Prison staff allow nutrition advisors to teach food preparation classes in their commercial kitchens, and they print copies of the handouts and assemble them into binders to save the EFNEP time and money.

**The Future**

The four prison sites in the Boise area continue to grow with more and younger prisoners. It is a sad fact that EFNEP will have work to do for years to come.

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**Cooperators**

East Boise Community Work Center
South Boise Women’s Correctional Center
South Boise Community Work Center for men
Southern Idaho Corrections Industries for men
Janet Guerin, Idaho Department of Corrections
Jim Pishl, Idaho Department of Corrections

**For More Information**

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