The Situation

Nutrition education is critical for limited income families that have a poor dietary intake. Under-nutrition can have serious effects on overall health, most notably in children. Over 22,000 families in Idaho receive food stamps monthly. These families and others with qualifying income need nutrition education in order to make better food choices and make better use of their food dollars.

Our Response

The Idaho Extension Nutrition Program (ENP) is a community-based education program that teaches low-income adults how to stretch their food dollars to provide tasty, low-cost, healthy meals for their families. ENP is a University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System education program. It is designed to reach families that could benefit from practical instruction in nutrition and management of food and resources, leading them to improved health and well-being. Lessons cover a variety of topics in nutrition, food buying, food safety and sanitation, basic living skills, family budgeting, and decision-making. ENP also reaches youth with basic nutrition messages.

Funding and program partners are the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare Food Stamp Program and Food and Nutrition Service, USDA. County extension educators along with the state specialist in nutrition guide the program. The FY2000 budget is $1,161,346 ($580,746 state) and covers 22 of Idaho’s 44 counties. Federal funds support the hiring of part-time Nutrition Advisors and Project Coordinators (approximately one per five-county area). Bilingual assistants are located at program sites with a high proportion of participants whose native language is not English. In addition to hiring personnel, funds are used to purchase educational materials.

Achievements

Individuals are provided nutrition and resource management education on two levels. At the first level food stamp recipients and low-income individuals are contacted about the ENP through recruiting activities. These are called one-time contacts and include nutrition and budgeting messages. At the second level individuals enroll in the ENP series of educational lessons. The increased numbers of participants in both levels are shown below.

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>1st Level</th>
<th>2nd Level</th>
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The 1999 program evaluation is based on the EFNEP Reporting and Evaluation System (ERS). In 1998 ENP began the transition to move all program evaluations to the ERS. This program provides us with a complete profile of adult participants. We can also collect information on participants’ dietary improvement and behavior changes from program entry to exit. These data provide evidence that ENP offers an effective strategy for serving low-income families and assisting them to learn basic living skills that are associated with improved nutrition and increased self-sufficiency. Family outcomes include the following.

Approximately 93 percent of the ENP graduates in 1998-1999 made positive dietary changes by consuming the recommended number of servings in the 5 food groups. For example:

(1) There was an 11 percent increase (from 29% to 41%) in participants who consumed 2 or more servings of fruit per day.

(2) There was a 6 percent increase in participants who consumed 3-5 servings of vegetables per day.

(3) There was a 9 percent increase in participants who consumed 3 or more servings of dairy products per day.

(4) Participants had an increase in their intake of protein, iron, calcium, and vitamins A, C, and B6.

As the graph indicates, at program entry 31 percent of those surveyed demonstrated acceptable practices of food resource management. At exit that score improved to 75 percent. Only 14 percent of surveyed graduates demonstrated acceptable nutrition practices at entry, with 43 percent showing acceptable practices at exit. In the area of Food Safety practices 70 percent achieved acceptable scores at entry, rising to 86 percent at exit.

An ENP Success Story
Michelle found herself in a homeless shelter. An intervention group made up of Child Protective Services (CPS), the homeless shelter, and the Extension Nutrition Program agreed that she needed to make some changes as to the way she was providing for herself and her young child. The child was extremely malnourished. The mother was pregnant. CPS removed the child from her custody with the proviso that he would be returned if Michelle would work with the ENP Nutrition Advisor. Six months later Michelle has learned to cook a large variety of foods, she is effectively using food benefits and is doing a remarkable job of managing her money. She has her son back and has given birth to a daughter. She is beginning to establish a new life.

For More Information
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December 16, 1999

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