Extension Nutrition Education (ENP)

The Situation

Nutrition education is critical for the health and well-being of children and their families. Undernutrition along with environmental factors associated with poverty can permanently retard physical growth, brain development, and cognitive functioning. The longer a child's nutritional, emotional, and educational needs go unmet, the greater the likelihood of cognitive impairments.

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 family. ENP is a University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System education program. It is designed to reach families that need stability in the home so they can deal with the expectations of employers, vocational trainers, and human service providers. The EN Program helps families move toward increased self-sufficiency. Lessons cover a variety of topics in nutrition, food buying, food safety and sanitation, basic living skills, family budgeting, and decision-making.

Funding and program partners are the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, Food Stamp Program, and USDA Food and Consumer Service. County extension educators along with state specialists in nutrition and family economics guide the program. The FY98 budget is $1,063,152 ($538,233 federal and $534,919 state) and covers 19 of Idaho's 44 counties. Federal funds support the hiring of part-time "nutrition advisors" (one or two per county) and part-time project coordinators (one per five-county area). Bilingual staff are located at program sites with a high proportion of participants whose native language is not English. In addition to staffing, funds have been used to purchase computers for data management.

The University of Idaho also supports the national Food Stamp Nutrition Education Program listserv. The listserv has nearly 200 registered members from all over the country. The listserv is used to discuss issues and regularly share teaching resources, evaluation, and funding concerns.

Achievements

Individuals are provided nutrition and resource management education on two levels. First, food stamp recipients and low-income individuals are contacted about the ENP through recruiting activities. These contacts include nutrition and budgeting messages but are short-term compared to those who "enroll" in the ENP series of educational lessons.

The program evaluation is based on a written pre- and post-test called "Food and Funds Checklist." The checklist is a self-assessment of behaviors related to food buying, healthy eating, food preparation, and budgeting. Participants indicated
frequency of 19 behaviors on a five-point scale, 
Always, Often, Sometimes, Seldom, and Never. 
N=445.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contacts</td>
<td>965</td>
<td>1,788</td>
<td>8,493</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enrolled (individuals)</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>527</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enrolled (total family members)</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>1,627</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>1,424</td>
<td>2,862</td>
<td>12,644</td>
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Family outcomes include the following:

"Shopping and eating" improved. After participating in ENP, more individuals said they shopped with a list, planned meals, used the Food Guide Pyramid when feeding their families, and read labels to reduce fat.

"Managing food resources" improved. After participating in ENP, fewer individuals said they had to reduce or cut the size of meals because they ran out of money, and fewer individuals responded they had fewer food choices at the end of the month.

"Safe food handling practices" improved. After ENP, more individuals said they washed their hands before handling food.

"Managing food dollars and budgeting" improved. After participating in ENP, more individuals said their grocery dollars go further since they have learned how to compare prices.

More individuals reported their family talked about major purchases before the money was spent. Both before and after participating in ENP, individuals said they know how much money is spent on housing and utilities and how much is spent on food.

"Healthy eating practices" increased. After participating in ENP, more individuals said they offered the recommended 5 servings of fruits and vegetables in one day to their family and had 2 or more servings of a milk product daily. More individuals reported eating within the first 2 hours after waking up in the morning.

**Funding**
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