

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2014 NC Cooperative Extension Yancey County

EFNEP Valued as Partner to Improve Health of County's Youth

The USDA's Dietary Guidelines for Americans encourages us to achieve a healthy lifestyle by eating a nutritious diet and being physically active. Doing so will help us maintain an appropriate weight and prevent disease.

Unfortunately, the Center for Disease Control has recently stated that most young people today are not following the principles set forth in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Resulting consequences range from improper growth and development during childhood and adolescence to an increased risk of experiencing health conditions such as obesity, heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes and osteoporosis during adulthood.¹

In Yancey County, the health community knows there is no better place than in the schools to provide the knowledge and skills needed to live a healthy lifestyle. Children who learn good nutritional and physical fitness behaviors at a young age will carry those behaviors with them into adulthood.

Acknowledging their unique position in the community, the Yancey County public school system has partnered with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service's (NCCES) Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and the local health department to offer nutrition education and physical activity experiences to the county's children. Using age appropriate hands-on learning experiences, EFNEP teaches a six-lesson series of classes that introduce the basic nutrition and physical activity principles found in the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Specifically, EFNEP teaches the children how to plan and prepare healthy meals and snacks based on the five basic food groups, competently read the nutrition facts labels found on food products to determine nutrient content, and use safe food handling practices. The lessons also share information about the health benefits of being physically active each day. The health department follows EFNEP with a program that teaches middle school children more advanced cooking skills that will allow them to prepare quick meals and snacks at home.

Recently, the health department's nutritionist became increasingly amazed at how much the students knew about the nutrition and physical activity principles outlined in the USDA's Dietary Guidelines. When she asked the children where they had learned so much about living a healthy lifestyle, they told her they had participated in EFNEP in elementary school.

At a local meeting of community partners, the nutritionist praised EFNEP stating, "I was surprised to see the students place the main ingredients found in each recipe we prepared into MyPlate food groups. And, they fully understood how the nutrients found in the dishes we created contributed to an overall healthy diet." She continued by emphasizing that because of EFNEP, Yancey County children were learning about the importance of both healthy eating and physical activity at a young age. This has allowed them to practice behaviors early on that contribute to building a strong and healthy body.

The community partners agreed. A comparison of pre and post survey results have consistently shown that EFNEP plays an integral role in helping to ensure Yancey County children know and practice the Dietary Guidelines' healthy lifestyle principles. These lifestyle principles will help Yancey County children avoid, both now and in the future, health problems stemming from poor diets and inactivity. Yancey County has been striving to build a healthy community. EFNEP has been instrumental in helping them achieve their goal.

1. <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/nutrition/facts.htm>

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Summer Cooking Camp Helps Youth Increase Vegetables

The 2010 Dietary Guidelines recommends that Americans aged two and over eat 1 to 3 cups of vegetables daily.² However, according to recently published data from the Center for Disease Control, 93% of our children are not meeting this recommendation.³

To encourage local children to consume more vegetables, the NC Cooperative Extension's 4-H programs hosted a summer day camp for middle-aged youth. The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) taught the health benefits of eating a variety of colorful vegetables and that choosing, preparing, and eating vegetables could make their diets more interesting, tasty, and fun. To reinforce what was learned, the children visited community gardens and local farms where they learned how fresh vegetables were grown. They also created their own versions of veggie pizza and tossed vegetable salad one day for lunch.

They planned, prepared, and served a complete meal containing a large variety of fresh vegetables for their parents. When complimented on the vegetables they chose to serve, many of the children admitted that prior to their camp experience, they had not been willing to try many vegetables. Their parents confirmed that, but added that now their children's paradigm had changed—all of a sudden, vegetables were fun to choose, prepare, and eat!

One mother said EFNEP cooking camps had taught her son to be more conscientious about healthy eating. When first attending 3 years ago, he was overweight and not interested in eating nutritiously. Since then, he has lost weight and become more interested in preparing healthy foods. In fact, he'd even expressed a desire to start a 4-H cooking club with other campers.

Because of their EFNEP summer camp experiences, Yancey County children had acquired the interest, desire, and the skills needed to include a colorful variety of vegetables in their diets. By doing so, they had separated themselves from the 93% of children who were at risk of compromising their health due to eating too few vegetable servings each day.

2. <http://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2010/dietaryguidelines2010.pdf>

3. http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6331a3.htm?s_cid=mm6331a3_w



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