

# EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

## 2015 NC Cooperative Extension North Carolina Report

### DIET QUALITY AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

#### Participant Loses 35 Pounds with EFNEP's Help

For about a year, the EFNEP Program Assistant in Northampton County would encounter a neighbor who asked her about strategies for eating healthier and making healthy foods that her children would eat. Each time, the Program Assistant would encourage this neighbor to come to one of her ongoing EFNEP series so she could learn ways to eat smart and move more. The EFNEP Program Assistant would explain that the nutrition education lessons included food safety, portion control, increasing physical activity, and food resource management and that during each lesson they tried a healthy recipe together. And each time, the neighbor expressed interest but did not take the offer to attend the classes. After some continued prompting and previews of class offerings, the neighbor decided to attend.

The neighbor-turned-participant stated, "One day I looked in the mirror, and I really didn't like myself at all—that's when I decided to do something about it. I had been asking the Northampton EFNEP Program Assistant for all this information but never applied it into my family life and me. But in January 2015, I started the classes and my journey, and she helped me learn a healthy plan that worked for me. That's when we changed our eating habits."

The participant shared that prior to EFNEP "my weight had increased up to 250 pounds over the years. I was tired with no energy and no motivation to do anything. All I wanted to do was sit and watch TV. I did not like to go shopping for clothes because I did not feel good about myself. I felt that nothing looked good on me and I was not attractive, being so huge."

During the series of lessons, the participant began making changes. She "cut out soda, chips, candy", and changed her portion sizes and anything that had lots of sugar, salt, and fat from her and her family's diet. (Prior to EFNEP) "I was a junky for those types of snacks and foods. I have stopped going to fast food places to eat out, and I prepare more of my family's meals at home. Also, I take my lunch to work."

The participant began incorporating more fruits and vegetables into her diet and limiting her portion sizes. She encouraged her husband to do the same. These behavior changes have resulted in big changes for her health.

Recently she shared, "By doing these small changes I was able to lose more than 35 pounds from January – May. I've still got some more weight to lose, but I feel better, I look great, and I have more energy than before."

Though this participant has now graduated from EFNEP, she contacts the EFNEP Program Assistant weekly to keep her up to date on her progress. She shared that she has now started walking for physical activity—something she did not do prior to EFNEP—"to increase my weight loss and (get) better results."

As for her experience with EFNEP and the skills she learned, she stated, "I am happy with my results thus far, and I'm looking forward as I continue my journey."

### FOOD RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

#### EFNEP's Lessons Help Mom Balance Work and Family

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) encourages limited resource families and youth to explore and learn how to Eat Smart and Move More. The nutrition education classes include food safety, portion control, increasing physical activity, and food resource management. EFNEP partners with community stakeholders and agencies to offer classes to help families get the most value from their food dollars as well as provide fun and simple strategies designed to improve participants knowledge and understanding to obtain and maintain good health.

In Warren County, the EFNEP Program Assistant partnered with Work First, a program within the Department of Social Services (DSS) that offers a wide range of educational training, and job opportunities to support participants as they reach their goals of increased self-sufficiency, reduced time spent on public assistance, and improved social functioning.

During the series of EFNEP lessons, the parents often talked with each other about their struggles of balancing work and home schedules, and that frequently, planning for family mealtime had become a low priority. One parent shared that she had a household of picky eaters and that this added to the difficulty and stress of planning meals that everyone could enjoy together.

Utilizing the recipes in EFNEP's *Families Eating Smart and Moving More* curriculum, the program assistant taught the participants how to plan and make quick, inexpensive, and healthy meals through discussion and hands-on food preparation. She encouraged them to plan family meals using the recipes from class and, just as they did together during the class, involve their families in the food preparation. One parent stated that "surprisingly her picky eaters did not mind seeing or smelling food that they were not accustomed to, and in fact, enjoyed tasting these new foods." She went on to explain that, "typically her children would not put unfamiliar foods on their plates and would definitely not eat them." However, now they are helping in the kitchen and eating these once unfamiliar foods. Thanks to EFNEP, this participant has learned skills to balance her work and home life, providing her family healthy meals and helping her toward her goal of self-sufficiency.



*EFNEP helps address the challenges limited resource families face when introducing healthy changes through nutrition education, cooking classes, exercise strategies, and shopping on a limited budget.*

## FOOD SAFETY

### EFNEP Participants Share Food Safety—Community Kitchen Re-opens

According to the FDA, the Federal government estimates that there are about 48 million cases of foodborne illness annually—approximately 1 in 6 Americans are affected each year. Each year these illnesses result in an estimated 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths. Knowing the serious consequences of contracting foodborne illness, a landlord in Avery County became concerned about the safety of food stored and prepared in the community kitchen he provided for his employees and residents. The kitchen, which was shared by several families for meal preparation, was poorly maintained. Animals were allowed to roam freely throughout, even on the counters, and the families were not practicing safe food behaviors when cooking or cleaning up after themselves. For fear they would become ill from a food borne illness, he closed the kitchen and forbid access.

Many of the families who used the kitchen were also Head Start parents. The Head Start Center partnered with the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) to offer a series of nutrition education lessons. Each class included some aspect of food safety information based on the USDA's Fight BAC guidelines—clean, sanitize, cook and chill. During the series, the EFNEP program assistant explained why proper food handling is important and taught the parents how to maintain the safety of their own kitchens. The families learned to properly mix and use cost effective sanitizing solutions to reduce the spread of harmful bacteria, and how to properly read and use thermometers to ensure their food is stored at and cooked to the proper temperatures. They learned how to avoid cross contamination and were provided written materials on food safety to study at home.

When the landlord reopened the kitchen, he told the Head Start staff in passing one day that he'd seen a significant improvement in the food safety behaviors practiced in the community kitchen. The Head Start tenants had passed on the Fight BAC concepts they'd learned in EFNEP to the other families with whom they shared the kitchen. They taught those families the food safety dangers of allowing animals in the kitchen, how to clean and sanitize counter tops, appliances, and cooking equipment, and how to ensure foods are stored at and cooked to safe temperatures. To avoid bacterial growth and the possibility of ultimately contracting a food borne illness, the families were thoroughly cleaning the kitchen and washing soiled linens after each use.

Because foodborne illness can be serious—even fatal—it was important to the landlord that the families using his community kitchen knew and continually practiced safe food handling. Now, with the help of EFNEP, they will stay healthy and reduce their risk of becoming the 1 in every 6 Americans who contract a food borne illness each year.

## FOOD SECURITY

### Planning Helps Family Stretch Resources to be Food Secure

According to the results of a recent study, the Great Recession continues to impact America's children in the area of hunger and food insecurity. Although federal food programs like WIC and SNAP have helped to dull the recession's effects, 20% of American families with children continue to live in food insecure homes.

In Macon County, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) partners with WIC to teach its recipients how to best use their food vouchers. Recently, one young mother admitted that she was extremely worried about how she could continue to feed her family nutritious meals on her family's extremely low food budget. Her husband and four children had been eating on \$60.00 a week for months, and that budget was shrinking. That week she had only \$30.00. She didn't know how she was going to stretch that money to meet the family's needs. She asked the EFNEP program assistant for help.

The program assistant started by asking the young mother to make a list of all the meat cuts in her freezer, canned goods in her pantry, and staple items such as pasta, spaghetti, rice, etc. in her cupboards. Then, she requested the mother add to that list the foods she would receive with her WIC vouchers. When the mother returned, she and the program assistant worked together to create simple meals based on her lists and the recipes found in the EFNEP Cookbook. By including fresh produce from local food pantries, they were able to plan breakfast, lunch and dinner menus for three weeks. Only a few items needed to be purchased at the grocery store to complete the three-week meal plan. The grocery items needed for that first week totaled \$12.00.

The guidance EFNEP had given not only saved this family money that budget-tight week, but for several weeks beyond. In subsequent visits to EFNEP, the young mother learned how to apply MyPlate's basic nutrition concepts to each meal plan and practice the Fight Bac techniques for keeping her family's food safe. Having this information ensured the meals she fed her family were both nutrient-rich and safe to eat. Plus, proper storage and preparation meant less waste, which in turn, allowed her to stretch her food budget even further.

Although the family budget was still tight, this young mother's children were no longer hungry and her household was no long food insecure. Working with EFNEP had made the difference.

#### Resources:

Kids Five Years after the Recession: Smart Policies, Better Lives. Retrieved on-line at: <http://policylab.chop.edu/press-releases/kids-five-years-after-recession-smart-policies-better-lives> on March 2, 2015.

Hunger and Poverty Fact Sheet. Retrieved on-line at:

<http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger/hunger-and-poverty/hunger-and-poverty-fact-sheet.html?gclid=CI-75Y3dxsQCFuk2gQodIlyAgg> on March 3, 2015.

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