

EFNEP SUCCESS STORIES

2015 NC Cooperative Extension Avery and Mitchell Counties



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.

EFNEP and Kindergarten Teachers Change Food Options for Children

"Let's Cook Together," a USDA nutrition newsletter provided for parents of young children, states cooking with children teaches self-confidence, self-esteem and early skills of independence.⁴ It also provides a venue where special parent-child experiences can strengthen family bonds and allow a child to confirm his value as a family member. Children feel proud and important when they help prepare food for the family.

This philosophy recently proved to be true for one Mitchell County family. Their first grade foster daughter became interested in cooking while participating in the North Carolina Cooperative Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). Taught in the local schools, EFNEP delivers a series of six lessons that teach children how to eat healthy and become more physically active. During each series, the children participate in hands-on cooking or food tasting experiences. For this family's foster daughter, EFNEP was the catalyst that instilled the self-confidence and pride needed to prove, in her eyes, a valued place in the family.

Making a special trip to the school after the EFNEP series had ended, the foster mother spoke to her daughter's teacher about the program. Information shared in EFNEP had provided topics of conversation her family could use to bond with the little girl. She said prior to EFNEP the girl hardly spoke and found it difficult to connect with the family. But, while participating in EFNEP she came home every evening excitedly talking about food, nutrition and the recipes she had tasted in class. Since EFNEP, the child had taken an active interest in preparing family meals and became the family's "best kitchen helper."

The mother thanked the teacher for allowing EFNEP in her classroom and encouraged the school to continue participating in the program. She said, "You never know how extracurricular experiences like this can enrich a child's life." She continued by stating that EFNEP had not only brought her family together, it had made them all more health conscious. They were making better food choices, and now looked forward to mealtimes when they could converse and create fun family memories. She reiterated that EFNEP changed their lives. It had done more than teach how to live a healthy lifestyle. It provided a scared little girl with the confidence and self-esteem needed to take her reserved place as a valued member of their family. To conclude, she paraphrased an old adage, "EFNEP is the universal language that brought our family together!"

Resource:

Dietary Dietary sources of energy, solid fats, and added sugars among children and adolescents in the United States. Retrieved from: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20869486> on June 17, 2015.

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