

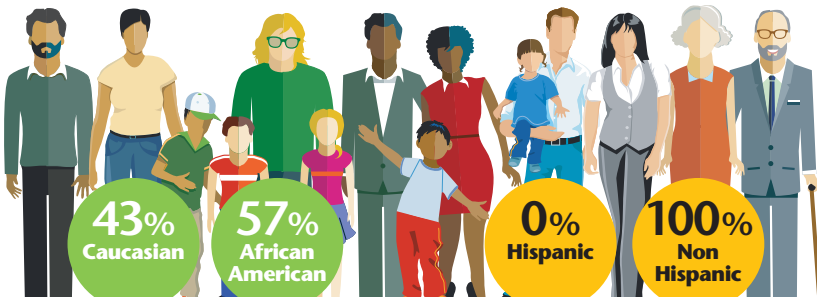
NC Cooperative Extension 2019 REPORT

Gaston County

Supporting North Carolina's Families with Greatest Needs Since 1969

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

- Peer-to-peer, hands on education in the community
- Healthy, low-cost recipes
- Simple strategies to help families move more together



EFNEP Reaches Diverse Audiences in Gaston County

In 2019: **7** families enrolled in EFNEP **460** participated in 4-H EFNEP

29% of EFNEP participants enrolled in one or more food assistance programs.

WHAT IS EFNEP?

EFNEP serves limited-resource families with young children, school-age youth, and pregnant teens through a series of lessons offered by paraprofessionals and volunteers, many of whom are indigenous to the population. In 2019, EFNEP served 45 counties in North Carolina. Participants learned how to:

- Make wise food choices
- Increase daily physical activity
- Manage food resources
- Practice food safety

EFNEP Makes a Real Difference in Gaston County

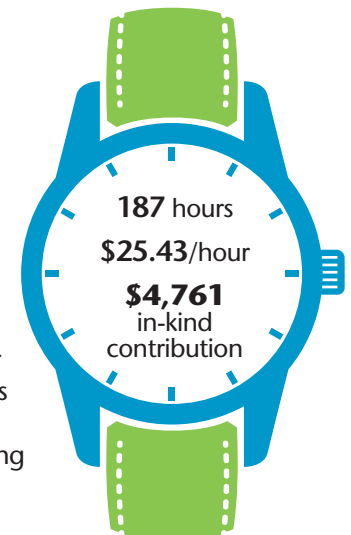
- 84%** of EFNEP participants improved dietary intake.
- 46%** now practice daily physical activity.
- 50%** practice better food resource management.
- 66%** have improved their food safety habits.

North Carolina's Challenges

- In North Carolina, **1 in 5** children live in poverty.
- North Carolina's adult obesity rate is currently **32%**.
- **15.2%** of 2- to 4-year-olds from low-income families are obese. This makes us the **16th** most obese state.
- North Carolina has the **15th** highest rate of diabetes and the **11th** highest rate of hypertension.

Volunteers Strengthen EFNEP

In 2019, **40** adults and youth donated time to EFNEP, making a difference in their own communities and contributing to EFNEP's ongoing success.



2019 NC Cooperative Extension Gaston County Report

Gaston County
EFNEP programs obtained

\$39,520

in funding and support
from local efforts.

EFNEP SUCCESS



EFNEP Impacts the Nutritional and Mental Health of Students in the Dream Center

This past semester, the Gaston County Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) was part of the enrichment clubs at the Dream Center Academy. The Dream Center Academy is an after-school program in Gastonia, NC. The goal of the program is to be a “platform” where low-income students can thrive. According to Roxann Jimison, Academy Executive Director, *“The goal of the Dream Center is not only to spill into the lives of these students, but to spill into their lives so that they can become productive citizens that change their community. Our mission is to empower them to own their education by developing the academic and social skill necessary to achieve that.”* The official mission statement of the Dream Center Academy is *“to support low-income and underserved individuals and families by providing programs that enable them to move toward self-sufficiency.”* 75% of the students who attend the Dream Center come from families whose yearly income is less than \$25,000.

Students attend the Dream Center Academy every day after school for two hours. During those two hours they are fed a healthy snack, have an hour dedicated to homework, and then have an hour of enrichment clubs. EFNEP came into the Dream Center during their enrichment club time to teach the youth cooking skills, kitchen safety, nutrition information, and how to make exercise a priority in their lives.

The youth at the Dream Center were old enough for the EFNEP educator to use a curriculum titled *Teen Cuisine*, which includes more hands-on cooking opportunities than the younger EFNEP curricula. Many of the students who participated in EFNEP at the Dream Center had not cooked before. They learned many cooking terms that will help them read recipes in addition to how to measure different

ingredients, use a skillet, safely use a knife, use a blender, and prepare many different recipes. The class favorite was *French Toast with Fruit*. The students never expected to be able to cook many of their favorite foods. One student said, *“My cooking has really improved, I didn’t know I could cook any of the foods we made in class, and now I can make them at home!”*

Not only did the youth learn to cook, but the class discussed the importance of eating healthy, reading nutrition facts labels, getting all five food groups into their diets, and exercising regularly. The youth kept a goal journal throughout their time with EFNEP and set nutrition and health related goals based on the information they were learning in EFNEP. The journals were used to track their progress and record their success. The youth regularly shared their journals during the EFNEP lessons. One student had great success cutting back on the time he spent playing video games. He mentioned that, *“I used to play video games every chance I got, but now I try to remind myself that it is not good for me and I try to go outside more.”*

The youth seemed to also learn some valuable life skills through their time with EFNEP. One student in particular approached the EFNEP educator after their last lesson together and told her that, *“Your lessons made me a better person.”* This student frequently dropped, spilled, or burned things in class. He even accidentally cracked an egg right into the garbage one time. Reflecting on their time together he said, *“You never got mad at me when I did dumb things. I always get mad at myself, and you taught me that I don’t have to.”* He went on to say that he used to run out of class at school because he was mad, but he has tried to stop doing that and has also tried to stop yelling at his younger siblings. It is amazing what hands-on learning can do and the great lessons youth can learn through a well-organized curriculum. EFNEP is not only teaching the youth of Gaston County the skills they will need to prepare healthy foods for themselves one day, but it is also teaching them many other valuable life lessons.

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