4-H Food Smart Families: Extension Engages Teens to Provide Youth and Families with Nutrition Education and Cooking Skills

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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

4-H Food Smart Families (FSF) is a National 4-H Council grant funded by UnitedHealthcare that was implemented from June 1, 2017 to May 31, 2019. Extension professionals, who focus on youth development and nutrition education (including EFNEP and/or SNAP-Ed), along with 4-H Teen Ambassadors, delivered programming to urban low income youth and their families in five counties across the state.

Objective: To engage teens as teachers to help plan and lead educational programs that equip youth and their families to make healthy living part of their everyday lives through increasing knowledge to adopt healthy eating and food preparation behaviors.

Use of Theory or Research: Research shows improving eating and physical activity behaviors is effective when implementing multiple changes at various levels of the Social-Ecological Model. This program focused on SEM individual factors through partnerships with in-school and out-of-school community settings. Teen ambassadors were trained using the Experiential Learning Model.

Youth received 10 hours of nutrition and physical activity focused programming using research-based curricula including Choose Health: Food, Fun, and Fitness (CHFFF), Kids in the Kitchen, and CATCH Kids Club (CKC). Educational lessons and activities taught youth food preparation techniques, cooking skills, healthy food choices, and food budgeting strategies. Physical activity was included in the educational lessons to provide youth with opportunities to engage in healthy active play and decrease sedentary lifestyles. Participants received reusable grocery bags that contained nonperishable ingredients for two separate healthy recipes. The ingredient bags promoted food preparation and cooking for youth together with family members.

Evaluation Methods: 4-H Common Measures was utilized to collect quantitative data and evaluate program impact in participants. Survey results and qualitative success stories were entered and analyzed in either Qualtrics or the PEARs reporting system. Quantitative post survey data was captured from teens.

ENGAGING FAMILIES

Families were encouraged to attend Family and Community Engagement (FACE) events to help reinforce program concepts and strengthen community partnerships including schools, youth organizations and local grocery stores. Twenty-seven FACE events provided educational opportunities for youth and families to gain knowledge about making healthful food choices based on a budget, nutrition, meal preparation skills, and the incorporation of physical activity. One popular activity is the blender bike, which combines the concept of healthy snacks and physical activity. Participants are able to create a healthy smoothie using the pedal-powered blender.

TEENS AS TEACHERS

4-H Food Smart Families aims to empower teens through youth-adult partnerships to be leaders in their communities and advocate for healthy lifestyle choices. For this reason, the program utilizes teen leaders, 16-19 years of age, to serve as ambassadors and positive role models in teaching their peers, families, and communities about preparing healthy meals on a budget.

Teen Activation Event

National 4-H Council requests that teen leaders, referred to as Teen Ambassadors, assist in the planning, development, and facilitation of an event offered to youth and family members in their community. Teen Ambassadors in Lancaster County chose to deliver healthy food to communities in need for their activation event.

Teen Ambassadors worked with Nebraska Extension professionals to plan the Community Food & Wellness Festival, which focused on creating healthier lifestyles and healthy food access. The event featured food distribution and educational booths about MyPlate and ideas for utilizing produce. Additionally, blender bikes and a fitness obstacle course were included at the event. Food bags were distributed to all individuals that attended the event, which included recipe ideas, ingredients, and educational handouts. Produce from the Heart helped by distributing 520 pounds of fresh produce during this event.

The Community Food & Wellness Festival event was an expanded FoodNet distribution event that was offered in partnership with Nebraska Extension’s 4-H Food Smart Families program, Nutrition Education Program (including SNAP-Ed & EFNEP), UnitedHealthcare, Produce from the Heart, Good Neighbor Center, Blueszem Health, and the local Farmer’s Market located at College View.

PROGRAM RESULTS

Eighteen Extension professionals and 16 Teen Ambassadors reached over 1,140 underserved youth and 2,540 family members. Two teen activation events were successfully delivered with the support of community partners. 92% of youth (n=816) and 100% of teens (n=10) indicated learning about healthy food choices. 45% of youth and 100% of teens indicated giving their family healthy meal or snack ideas. Youth reported paying attention to how much fruit (64%) and how many vegetables (55%) they eat each day.

CONCLUSION

Nebraska Extension professionals were able to empower teens to help deliver healthy lifestyle programs that improved the knowledge and behaviors of participants.

PARTNERSHIPS

NPH EXTENSION

4-H FOOD SMART FAMILIES

Nebraska Extension, UnitedHealthcare, EFNEP, SNAP-Ed, Produce from the Heart, Good Neighbor Center, Blueszem Health, and the Farmer’s Market located at College View.

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