



MEAFCS Mini Workshop and Poster Presentations 2009

**Nutrition Education and Wellness
For
Youth at Risk**

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15 minute Mini-Workshop Application

Program Title

Nutrition Education and Wellness Program for Youth at Risk

FCS Focus Area

Food and Nutrition

Issue and Situation

Pam Swanson, director of the Youth Service Center, called the MSU Extension about the problem of the lack of nutrition education for the youth at the YSC. Her concern was that the youth did not have the ability to make good food choices. Many of the youth have alcohol and drug related issues that affect their nutritional wellness. I developed a program to meet the needs of the center by offering a weekly nutrition class coupled with an exercise program and a nutritious snack.

Stakeholders and Input

The program reaches a distinct population of incarcerated boys and girls from 10- 17 years of age. The juveniles are largely comprised of males labeled as learning disabled or having mental illnesses; some are alcohol and drug dependent. The majority have experienced numerous clashes with various law enforcement agencies. Many lack the skills to maintain any form of steady employment. Some of the youth are teenaged parents or have girlfriends or family members who are expecting children; others are struggling with traditional education, and approximately half of the youth are minorities. Length of incarceration allows most youth to complete an eight-week nutrition and life skill course. I gain information and ideas from the staff and Center personal by using a quarterly survey and phone contacts with the director of the center.

Program Description

Youth incarcerated at the County Regional Youth Center are in the cycle of suspensions from school suffering from poor attendance, failure in school, and specific probations violations. School suspensions and failure to attend school and dropping out of school often result in many youths returning to the center more than one time. However, at some point the youth will transition back to the community. Transiting from a detention facility is a difficult process. By making available to the youth a comprehensive wellness program, during the periods of incarceration, youth will understand the importance of a healthy nutritional regimen. This understanding, can and will assist in reducing recidivism to the center. The mission of the program is to assist the youth in understanding the importance of making healthy food choices and gaining confidence in their ability to follow wellness program when entering society. I present the class each Friday morning for one and half hours. The classes consist of five youth from two levels of incarcerations. The instruction targets low reading and math ability- specifically for the 5th-8th grades. Each week I present a subdivision of the USDA pyramid in detail, the youth sample of food that can be easily prepared and fifteen minutes of exercise completes the class.

Program Impact

It is difficult to evaluate the impact of the nutrition and wellness program, due to the transient population that I teach. There are not methods available to contact the youth after they leave the center. The impacts are antidotal in nature.

- One youth reported that he would choose the fruit parfait off the dollar menu rather than other items because he knows why the parfait is a better choice. In a survey given at the beginning of each eight-week course, many youth report their families run out of food before the end of the month.
- The program originally scheduled for eight weeks; is in the eighteenth month.
- The program is scheduled for 2009-2010 school calendars.
- The staff reports that the youth are willing to attend class and engage with me more than other classes presented at the Center.
- The Program Director for the Center incorporates food suggestions to the regular menu after the youth have sampled new foods. Youth are trying a greater variety of food served at mealtimes such as yogurt, fruit, and whole grain granola parfait.
- A nutritional educational and wellness program will be presented to the staff at YSC, in the fall of 2009.
- The social outcomes will include healthy young people exiting the Detention Center.
- The youths will know the resources in Cascade County outside the criminal system that are willing to assist them succeed in society.
- Healthier youth will mean fewer doctor visits and insurance claims, which will influence the economic stability of the county.
- Research suggests that having breakfast can affect children's intellectual performance. The importance of breakfast and it affects the youth's ability to function at a higher level throughout the day is realized by the youth upon completion of the classes.
- The youth have a better understanding of the risks of diabetes, heart disease, and cancer.
- An optimistic outcome is that youths reentering society will share their knowledge of nutrition and exercise with their parents, siblings, and children of the youth.