



## **Nutrition Connections 2004 Results**

### **Christine Parshall**

From 2003 to 2004 the statewide Food Stamp caseload rose 10%, one indication of an increase in food insecurity in New Hampshire. Food pantries also report an increase in the number of people requesting food assistance. These numbers include families with children, adults with disabilities, senior citizens, and the homeless. Nutrition Connections strives to reach people from a variety of low income households to help them stretch their food dollars, utilize available community services, improve the nutritional quality of their food choices, increase food preparation skills and increase food sanitation skills and knowledge.

Nutrition Connections reached over 167 adults from across Cheshire County. Programs were offered in home for some clients as well as at a variety of locations including the Winchester Learning Center, Senior Apartments in Keene, Keene Housing Authority, Cheshire Academy, Stonewall Farm, Monadnock Family Services, Granite State Monarchs, and Elm Street Transitional Housing. Participants attended group sessions, individual home visits, and completed learn-by-mail activities. Approximately three quarters of these participants were enrolled in a lesson series of two or more sessions. The graduation rate was about seventy five per cent. At the completion of a Nutrition Connections program 38% of graduates ate two or more vegetable servings and two or more dairy servings, compared to 19% upon starting. 42% improved food resource management practices. "With the suggestions and recipes I have received from this program I have found meals to be less time consuming and more nutritious," stated a woman who received home visits.

**Standing Ovation:** Once a year this day of workshops for seniors is sponsored by several area agencies and organizations which serve senior citizens. With the assistance of a Keene State College dietetic intern, twenty one senior citizens attended a workshop about cooking for one or two. Eleven participants gained new knowledge and eight updated current knowledge. "We always need new motivation and ideas to spur us on. The program was fun and informative," reported one person.

**Smart Choices:** Three newsletters were mailed to 1459 Food Stamp households from the Keene District Office catchment area. This number includes households in Contoocook Valley towns such as Peterborough, Antrim and others. The newsletter includes nutrition information, recipes, shopping tips, and contact information for other Nutrition Connections programs.

In 2004, Nutrition Connections reached 314 youth in Cheshire County. Most were between the ages of five and twelve and they came from all over the county. Almost all tasted at least one new food while participating in Nutrition Connections and activities and all practiced good hand washing techniques. Sites included the Alstead Elementary School, Youth Safe Haven, Produce for People, Head Start, ELM/Winchester Learning Center Summer Program, and North Walpole School.

Over thirty five volunteers helped make Nutrition Connections programs successful this year. Their collective time added up to 20% of one full time staff equivalent. Volunteers served adults and youth in a variety of ways including classroom teachers supplementing their curriculum with Nutrition Connections lessons, After school program directors providing supplies for activities, Keene State College providing one practicum student who completes 100 hours of service to Nutrition Connections, Keene State College Dietetic interns assisting with a variety of program efforts, support workers at Monadnock Family services providing transportation and personal support to children and adults involved in programs, Keene Housing Authority staff who were trained to teach Planning Ahead, Staying Ahead, a financial management curriculum for low income audiences.