

## **Nutrition Connections Program**

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Nutrition Connections helps people living in or near poverty acquire the knowledge and skills needed to make changes in behavior, improve diets and to get more for their food dollars. Education is offered in the areas of nutrition, money management, food preparation, food safety, menu planning and smart shopping. Nutrition Connections also works with schools that meet income criteria.

Research has documented the effectiveness of this program for increasing the nutritional well-being of the families it serves. A national survey in 2007 showed that 92% of those “graduating” from these programs improved their dietary intake. This included an increase of about 1.4 servings per day of fruits and vegetables.

Nutrition Connections, through the national Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), saves states and families money. Multiple cost benefit analyses in several states highlight the value of the program and document that for every dollar invested in EFNEP, benefits can reach as high as \$10.64 from reduced health care costs. Another study showed that for every \$1 to implement the program, \$2.48 is saved on food expenditures, reducing the need for emergency food assistance.

In Belknap County, 518 youth and 354 adults with 707 family members participated in Nutrition Connections programming during the program year 2008-2009. This includes one-time classes as well as people enrolled in a series of classes. Data from pre/post surveys for adults taking a series of lessons indicate the following percentage of adults changed their behavior after they completed Nutrition Connections classes in 2008-2009:

- Overall, 85% of the adults who took a series of classes (usually 5-6 lessons), showed improvement in one or more nutrition practices. These include planning meals, comparing prices, not running out of food before the end of the month and shopping with a grocery list.
- Overall, 96% showed improvement in at least one of the following: making healthy food choices, preparing foods without adding salt, reading nutrition labels and making sure their children ate breakfast.
- Overall, 58% showed improvement in food safety such as thawing and/or storing foods properly. Food safety is critical to avoiding food borne illness. Food borne illness can result in days lost from work or from school and increased health care costs.

Teacher feedback from Belknap County schools is extremely exciting and positive. A few of the student changes observed by teachers include:

- Students are eating more fruits and vegetables.
- Students are eating breakfast more often.
- Students are going home and “teaching” their families about what they have learned.
- Students are making better choices at the grocery stores.
- Students are reading labels.
- Students are bringing healthier snacks from home.
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Overall, people who participate in Nutrition Connections programming in Belknap County are making improved health/nutrition choices for themselves and their families. The implications to making smart nutrition choices are financial, emotional and physical. Nutrition Connections helps people learn how to become more self reliant and more independent. We provide the education to people so they have the tools, awareness and knowledge to make healthier choices.