

A Healthier Iowa: One Community at a Time

Family mealtime is “reinvented” in Dubuque County

What do you get when you cross fast-food related obesity rates and a declining economy? A good reason to cook more often at home! Such was one of the observations used by planners of a unique health promotion intervention in Dubuque County.

“With fewer and fewer people cooking at home these days, it’s becoming even easier to get meals at fast food restaurants,” said Pat Fisher, a Hy-Vee dietitian and partner in the Dubuque County Board of Health’s Community Wellness initiative. “It’s also important that we address the health benefits of eating meals as a family— another aspect of American life that seems to have gone by the wayside.”

Organizers cited county-level data in their grant application that show a clear trend toward adult and child obesity in Dubuque County residents. Moreover, with studies showing that kids who do not eat dinner with their families are 61 percent more likely to use alcohol, tobacco, or illegal drugs, their Reinventing the Family Meal educational program makes a lot of sense.

Held since January 2009, each course includes three classes held in three consecutive weeks. Using recipes from the Iowa State University Extension cookbook “Healthy Meals in a Hurry,” participants get together to cook a new meal each week. After each class, participants receive a replication kit—complete with ingredients—so they can go home and fix the meal for their family. At the end of the course, each participant receives a copy of the Extension cookbook.

Funded by the Iowa Legislature and federal dollars secured by Senator Tom Harkin, the spring 2009 courses concluded in June. Twelve courses were held for residents in the communities of Cascade, Dyersville, Dubuque, and Epworth.

“This is the most successful grant that we have ever had,” said Dubuque County Health Department Administrative Assistant Bonnie Brimeyer. “People can’t wait to get into a class.” The county has already



Daniel Ibarra, foreground, clowns for the camera while Barbara Weber, her daughter Jenny, and Dave Blake try out a new recipe in the Reinventing the Family Meal class at the Hillcrest Wellness Center in Dubuque.

started a waiting list for people who would like to take the course in the fall.

Deann Gaul, Dubuque County Extension staff member and Reinventing the Family Meal instructor, recalls a story of a 16-year-old who had been dropped off by her father at the Epworth class with the instructions “learn how to cook.” Having learned some basics in the cooking classes, she is now looking up recipes on her own that she can use to cook for the rest of the family. According to the girl’s mother, “she’s cooking up a storm.”

For more information about Community Wellness Grants, also known as the Iowa Healthy Communities Initiative, visit www.idph.state.ia.us/hcr_committees/physical_fitness.asp and look under “Prevention and Wellness Initiatives.”

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