

Success Story

Cooking Matters Course: Uniting Against Cancer with Greens and Beans

SUMMARY

COOKING MATTERS



The East Georgia Cancer Coalition (EGCC) is working to reduce cancer rates in its 29-county region by changing eating habits and encouraging lifestyle changes through education. Cooking Matters is a United States Department of

Agriculture-recognized program that teaches participants to shop smarter, use nutrition information to make healthier choices, and cook affordable delicious meals. In 2014, the Coalition started Cooking Matters courses in targeted areas and schools. Since family habits are traced generationally, the organization is hoping to induce lifestyle changes that will permeate current and future generations. The success and feedback from the initial courses have encouraged the Coalition to expand Cooking Matters to other communities in its region.

CHALLENGE

A registered nurse with a long career in health care, including cancer treatment and hospice care, Marilyn Hill, RN, Executive Director of EGCC, has noticed the propensity to overeat by so many residents in her region. “I’ve watched men sit down and eat a full pound of steak at one meal, when in fact they only needed a fraction of that amount,” noted Hill. Research has reinforced the connection of poor nutrition and lifestyles to some cancers. Cancer rates in the EGCC’s 29-county region were among the highest in the state—especially among the region’s rural population. Focus groups conducted in six of the counties with the highest rates of death from cancers reinforced the impression that local citizens were eating too much fat. The citizens had the impression that healthy foods were available but too expensive, that gardening was a lost art, and that they actually enjoyed eating the abundance of fruits and vegetables found in their local community.



Special points of interest:

- Focus groups were held in six of the counties with the highest rates of death from cancers.
- Good nutrition also impacts the ability of a person to respond effectively to cancer treatment.
- The Coalition refocused on changing lifestyles to prevent cancer.

CHALLENGE

In 2013, the EGCC began working with teens and adults to change lifestyles in hopes of reversing many habits passed down through generations. The Coalition also worked with students at the Boys and Girls Club in Jackson County to introduce them to healthy eating. The students learned how to grow their own vegetables. With funding from the Georgia Comprehensive Cancer Control Program, the program was enhanced to include physical activity and nutrition components.

Partners included Broad Street Farmers Market, Urban Farmers from Clarke Central and Cedar Shoals High Schools in Athens, the Clarke/Oconee County Extension Service, the Athens Land Trust, and interns from the University of Georgia School of Public Health- Health Promotion Department. Participants were given cooking demonstrations, informational and interactive posters, monthly health presentations, and incentives to reinforce attendance. Participants learned about kitchen safety, food preparation, unit pricing, food groups, and

RESULTS

The Coalition has also conducted six-week Cooking Matters session at Ebenezer Baptist Church, Broad Street Farmers Market, and the Young Urban Farmers Program at Ruth Street Urban Farm. The teen program served the maximum number of participants (15), and the adult program served 12 participants. The participants' praise of the program has caused Cooking Matters to be in high demand and will expand to other counties in the region.



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Coalition will focus on offering Cooking Matters sessions for both adults and youth in an effort to influence food choices and preparation by families. The Coalition will be supplementing the Cooking Matters classes with posters provided to schools on various topics, including a list of fresh foods available for each season.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY!

Contact us if your organization is interested in hosting a Cooking Matters course.



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