

Cooking with Kids summer program leads to families sharing mealtime

Situation:

Today's hectic lifestyles often lead parents to make less-than-desirable food choices at dinner time. Unfortunately, many parents are not fully aware that **how** they feed their families can be just as important as **what** is served. Research has identified numerous benefits when families choose to eat meals together, including:

Prevention of many risky behaviors: teens will be less likely to become depressed, use illegal drugs, abuse alcohol, smoke cigarettes, develop eating disorders, or get pregnant.

Better school performance: language skills learned during mealtime conversation help children do better in the classroom and on tests.

Improved nutrition: children who have more family meals get more of the nutrient-rich foods that build strong bodies and smart brains – more fruits, veggies, lean meats, and milk.

Prevention of weight problems: smart eating habits help children grow up with a healthy weight, lessening the risk for eating disorders or the multitude of chronic conditions associated with excess weight.

The University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service area nutrition/food safety educator and Cent\$ible Nutrition Program educator partnered with the Sheridan Senior Citizens Center, Northern Wyoming Mental Health Center's Kid's First summer program, Sheridan Junior High School, and Sheridan Recreation District.

This partnership of local nonprofit entities resulted in eight nutrition/cooking programs as part of a summer camp for at-risk youth. Each individual program included an educational component followed by the youth (aged 12-14) preparing a meal to be shared by their families that evening. This was no small task – attendance for the family meals averaged 50-75 guests.

Impacts:

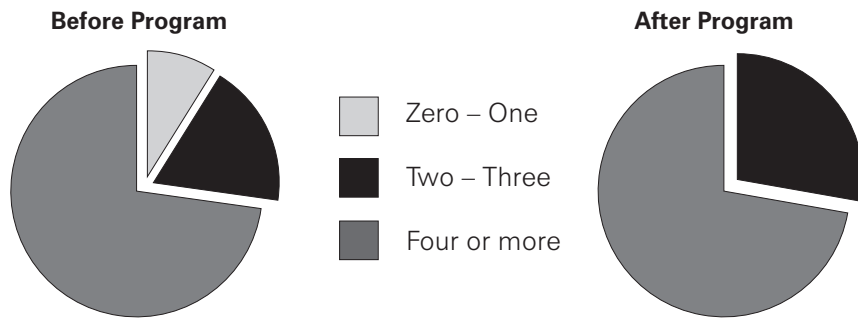
The experience provided great opportunities for youth to improve nutrition knowledge and food preparation skills. The importance of eating together was modeled through the family dinner event, and parent surveys indicated improvements in frequency of family meals as well as involvement of their child in meal preparation.

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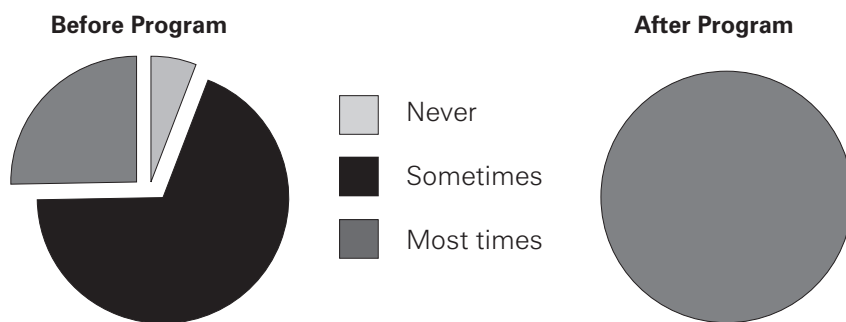


Pre- and post-surveys were filled out by the parents. Graphical representations of the positive results follow:

How many times this past week did your family eat the evening meal together?



How often does your child help prepare the family meal?



Participants learned and practiced invaluable nutrition and food safety skills that culminated in a shared family dinner.



Impacts:

Short term – Participants learned and practiced invaluable nutrition and food safety skills that culminated in a shared family dinner.

Medium term – Parents of participants indicated improvements in frequency of family meals as well as involvement of their children in meal preparation.

Long term – It is hoped participants will maintain these practices, potentially leading to improvements in behavior, school performance, and overall nutrition and health.

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