

19 – Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program

Summer 2019

CSU Extension Internship

Dr. Susan Baker

1. Faculty Mentor

The faculty mentor, Dr. Susan Baker, is a Professor/Extension Specialist in the Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition who also administers the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).

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2. Region

This project will be conducted in Denver County in the Front Range Region in Colorado. However, the research will involve the statewide Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), currently staffed in Larimer, Weld, Denver, Arapahoe, and Pueblo Counties and the San Luis Valley.

3. Proposed Internship Goals, Scope, and Objectives

EFNEP paraprofessionals work in their local communities, providing nutrition education to low-income audiences to improve health and food access. Policy, Systems, and Environmental (PSE) approaches address public health issues to ensure that healthy choices are accessible and practical, amplifying the benefits of programs applying PSE strategies.

The student will collaborate with EFNEP leaders to investigate and design PSE strategies that EFNEP supervisors can implement in support of healthy eating and active living. Accordingly, internship goals and objectives include: (1) examining how EFNEP operates at the community level, (2) studying PSE theory and policy issues, (3) drafting PSE approaches and corresponding evaluation strategies for EFNEP, and (4) synthesis of this information to systematically design and pilot a resource toolkit of PSE strategies that meet national EFNEP guidelines. EFNEP supervisors can use this toolkit to enhance nutrition education efforts to strengthen community and agency EFNEP partnerships and benefit a wider audience.

4. Student Learning Outcomes and Professional Development

By making the healthy choice the easy choice, PSE approaches have significant potential to improve the health of the general public. For instance, PSE approaches have been found to help reach a larger population in tobacco and obesity interventions.¹ However, few evaluation tools are available to determine the effectiveness of PSE approaches in nutrition interventions.² Furthermore, historically EFNEP has focused on behavior change through direct nutrition education, which engages small groups of participants in lessons on nutrition and healthy living.

Although EFNEP has been allowed to introduce PSE strategies over the last two years, PSE approaches are not routinely implemented as a component of EFNEP programming.

Learning Outcomes. The student will observe how EFNEP conducts direct nutrition education classes with adults and youth and learn how the program operates. Simultaneously, the student will examine the literature on PSE approaches, focusing on the history and impacts of strategies implemented at policy, system, and environmental levels in the field of public health. The student will hone research skills by developing, piloting, implementing, and evaluating PSE strategies. After gaining an understanding of the role of EFNEP in communities and agency partnerships, PSE strategies, and program evaluation, the student will design a toolkit of PSE approaches under the direction of the internship faculty mentor to help enhance EFNEP's efforts.

Professional Development. Ample opportunities for professional development are available, including attending meetings with EFNEP professionals and partner agencies. For instance, emphasis will be placed on communities EFNEP serves and agencies with which EFNEP partners, such as Denver Health and Florence Crittenton High School for teen mothers. There is also the potential to attend conferences, such as the annual Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior conference in July. Also, the student will shadow EFNEP educators and collaborate with Denver County Extension agents and EFNEP educators, supervisors, and state staff members.

Furthermore, access will be provided to the University of Minnesota Extension's online course 'Systems Approaches for Healthy Communities'.³ This PSE-focused technical assistance course (>\$4000 value per organization subscription) is comprised of five modules and an online toolkit; the student will complete the modules with CSU EFNEP state office professionals and discuss application of the content for this project. Overall, the intention of this internship is to promote the improved health of individuals and communities and the enhanced collaboration between EFNEP, Extension staff members, and the community on local and ultimately national levels. Ideally, this internship will serve as the foundation for a graduate student dissertation.

5. Ongoing Collaboration with Extension

The Denver suburban environment provides a diverse environment appropriate to pilot PSE strategies and evaluate outcomes. Indeed, EFNEP has operated in Denver for years, serving agencies such as the aforementioned Denver Health and Florence Crittenton High School. Thus, this project will build upon a long-term, ongoing collaboration between EFNEP and the Denver Extension office. Please see the letter of support from Russell (Rusty) Collins, Denver County Extension Director. The student will interact directly with EFNEP educators in Denver County, and the supervisor of the EFNEP paraprofessionals in Denver, Brigid McDonnell. Furthermore, we also hope to partner with CSU Extension's initiative with National Western Center to improve the health of neighboring communities.

6. Support of Stakeholder Needs

CSU EFNEP is deeply integrated into communities, serves diverse audiences, and reaches a myriad of stakeholders, including participants, human services agency staff, and community

leaders. Building upon these established networks can facilitate integration of nutrition education throughout local human service agencies and food systems.

PSE approaches will enhance EFNEP's capacity to implement effective strategies to improve the health of low-income populations and communities. Active communication with community partners will help elucidate specific needs and challenges in the community. Then, appropriate policy, systems, or environmental changes can be enacted accordingly to promote the health of community members by making the healthy choice easier and more accessible. For example, collaborations with partner agencies could facilitate recruitment of a wider range of participants who would benefit from EFNEP classes while also allowing educators to devote more time to direct nutrition education instead of recruitment.

Overall, integrated interventions that combine PSE strategies with EFNEP's traditional direct nutrition education will reinforce and maximize positive effects for communities and individuals served. These upstream changes will expand the reach of EFNEP beyond individuals to include partnering agencies and the communities in which participants live. Ultimately, the strategies and toolkit developed could be implemented by EFNEP leaders across the country and be applied more broadly to the field of nutrition education.

7. Travel Funds

Assuming a Fort Collins-based CSU student is selected, housing assistance would not be necessary because the student would be based out of Fort Collins at the EFNEP office at CSU, sometimes commuting to Denver. Thus he/she could stay in his/her current housing situation. Funds to support the intern's travel to attend EFNEP classes and agency meetings are available.

References

1. Bunnell, R., O'Neil, D., Soler, R., Payne, R., Giles, W. H., Collins, J., & Bauer, U. Communities Putting Prevention to Work Program Group. (2012). Fifty communities putting prevention to work: accelerating chronic disease prevention through policy, systems and environmental change. *Journal of Community Health, 37*(5), 1081-1090. doi:10.1007/s10900-012-9542-3
2. Savoie-Roskos, M. R., DeWitt, K., & Coombs, C. (2018). Changes in Nutrition Education: A Policy, Systems, and Environmental Approach. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior, 50*(5), 431. doi:10.1016/j.jneb.2018.02.007
3. Systems Approaches for Health Communities. University of Minnesota Extension. Retrieved from <https://extension.umn.edu/nutrition-education/systems-approaches-healthy-communities>