

Enriching the lives of Wisconsin families

through education
& community connections

Spotlight

on family & community

HEALTH

UW
Extension
Cooperative Extension

Second in a series profiling
Family Living Programs around the state

CONTENTS

- 1 Letter from the Program Director
- 2 Improving women's health and fitness:
the Strong Women™ program
- 4 Taking aim at obesity
- 6 Fostering financial literacy
- 8 Navigating new parenting roles after a divorce
- 10 Growing stronger relationships
- 12 Designing effective nutrition education for Hmong learners
- 14 Teaming up with partners for a healthier Wisconsin
- 17 Helping incarcerated fathers be better parents
- 20 Working for all Wisconsin families



Dear colleagues, partners and friends,



Welcome to the second edition of the Family Living Programs *Spotlight* series.

In this publication, we want to share with you some of the many ways Family Living colleagues are working with partners around the state to create a healthier Wisconsin.

Cooperative Extension Family Living Programs are developed with the essential elements of healthy Wisconsin families in mind—physical health, healthy family relationships and financial health.

You will read here about just a few of the different ways Family Living colleagues are working to promote health for families—and meet community needs—through effective nutrition education, by increasing financial literacy, giving families the skills to build stronger relationships, providing leadership in the state's battle against obesity, and much more.

With educators in every county and university specialists based on the UW-Madison campus, Family Living colleagues are uniquely positioned to work alongside local and state partners to provide the evidence-informed education and leadership that Wisconsin needs now.

We are pleased to share with you this edition of Family Living Programs *Spotlight on Family and Community Health*.

Laurie J. Boyce

Laurie Boyce, Ph.D.
State Program Director, Family Living Programs
Assistant Dean/Director, Cooperative Extension
University of Wisconsin-Extension
www.uwex.edu/ces

Improving women's health and fitness: the Strong Women™ program

Studies show that, for women middle-aged and older, weight-bearing exercise can help increase strength, muscle mass and bone density while decreasing the risk of osteoporosis, diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, depression and obesity. But only seven percent of middle-aged women report that they exercise regularly.

In Rock County, family living educator Angie Flickinger introduced a curriculum to encourage Wisconsin women to get the essential exercise they need. Flickinger completed extensive training in the Strong Women™

program, an exercise program developed by doctors at Tufts University.

The classes run eight or 16 weeks and aim to improve performance on the Senior Fit Test, which measures the basic abilities necessary to perform everyday tasks safely. And though the classes are targeted for older women, Flickinger says attendance often spans a wide range of ages. "We've had some classes with women as young as 30, all the way up to 90 years old," she says.

In 2008, after Flickinger became the Strong Women™ Ambassador for Wisconsin, she held training sessions and trained 150 new teachers representing 40 Wisconsin counties. Doctors, nurses, UW-Extension educators, Hmong health educators and leaders from the Ho-Chunk Nation became Strong Women™ trainers for their communities. As of 2009, the new instructors reached more than 1,700 Wisconsin women through more than 120 Strong Women™ sessions.



In addition to physical impacts, Flickinger found many women reported mental and emotional benefits, too. "Not only did women say their physical health improved, but they felt socially more

connected. The classes helped them build new relationships and become more active in their communities," she reports.

As momentum for the Strong Women™ program continues to build, more and more Wisconsin women will gain the knowledge and skills they need to achieve better health.

"Not only did women say their physical health improved, but they felt socially more connected. The classes helped them build new relationships and become more active in their communities."

*—Angie Flickinger,
Rock County
family living educator*

Taking aim at obesity

Americans are becoming obese at a troubling rate. In Wisconsin, a recent study from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control showed that nearly three out of ten state residents are classified as obese.

Obesity plays a large role in four of the ten leading causes of death in the U.S.—heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes. And diet-linked diseases account for an estimated \$250 billion each year in increased medical costs and lost productivity.

To combat the rise of obesity in Wisconsin, Family Living colleagues, public health professionals, state agencies

and community leaders have formed local and statewide coalitions to ensure that people have access to safe, nutritious foods and the resources to increase their physical activity, based on guidelines in the Wisconsin state health plan *Healthiest Wisconsin 2020* (www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/hw2020/).

Extension educators are well-positioned to take a leading role as the coalitions look at ways to improve health. Nancy Crevier, Marinette County UW-Extension family living educator, provides leadership for a statewide Coalition Support Workgroup together with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Prevention Program.

“The Coalition Support Workgroup’s mission is to build state and local capacity to support the work of coalitions in creating healthy

communities in Wisconsin,” says Crevier. “We want to equip local coalitions to be effective change agents.”

Gayle Coleman, Extension nutrition education program specialist, explains that Extension addresses the issue of obesity on multiple levels. “We provide direct education to youth and adults through our nutrition education programs,” she says. “We also work with community groups on the environmental aspects—are there farmers’ markets where people can get fresh fruits and vegetables? Are there safe areas for people to exercise, such as parks and bike paths?”

Finally, Coleman explains, Family Living educators and nutrition colleagues provide research-based information to public policy makers and legislators to inform decisions about reducing obesity.



“Extension colleagues have a foot in both worlds,” says Coleman. “They are connected to university resources and they also have strong partners and relationships in their local communities.”

If the coalitions and other efforts are effective at helping to reduce the trend toward obesity, it is estimated that Wisconsin could save over \$3.9 billion in health care costs by 2018 and improve the quality of life for tens of thousands of people. Family Living educators are poised to lead the way.

“Extension colleagues have a foot in both worlds. They are connected to university resources and they also have strong partners and relationships in their local communities.”

—Gayle Coleman,
Family Living nutrition
education specialist



Fostering financial literacy

Financial decisions people make can improve the quality of their lives or make life more challenging. Either way, the impacts of individual financial choices affect the overall economic health of families and communities. Financial literacy—basic knowledge of financial concepts and the ability to make competent decisions—is increasingly recognized as an essential life skill. Yet educational efforts to improve financial literacy are not often part of the equation when it comes to economic public policy.

What role can education play in increasing financial literacy? And what types of education are most effective? To contribute to the research on this topic, financial specialist J. Michael Collins and a team of Family Living county colleagues including Bev Doll, Cyndy Jacoby, Mary Knellwolf, Luane Meyer, Peggy Olive, Jane Schaaf and Ruth Schriefer, launched a financial literacy pilot with 190 Head Start families in the fall of 2009.

With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Center for Financial Security at UW-Madison, the project's aim was to evaluate how setting goals, having a financial coach, and access to financial literacy information might improve financial outcomes.

"Parents in Head Start offer financial educators a special opportunity," says Collins. "Parents of young children start to think about the future and address financial issues for the first time. On a federal level, there is growing interest and support for

Head Start financial literacy project 2010-2011

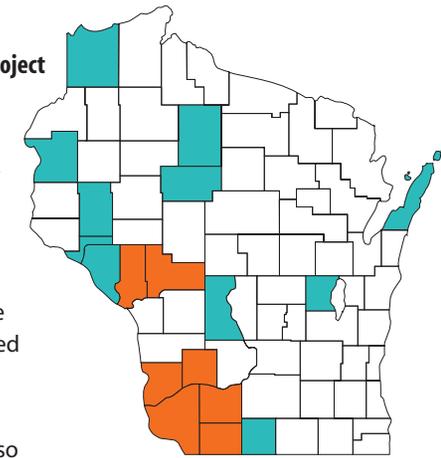
integrating financial literacy into Head Start services."

Head Start families who wished to participate were offered one or more of three educational services provided by Family Living educators:

- Monthly financial education newsletters (also available electronically).
- Two workshops on basic budgeting and credit management.
- Two home-based coaching sessions with monthly follow-up.

The study's results will show whether families who set financial goals and received Extension education adopted more positive financial behaviors, gained confidence in their decision-making ability and made progress with personal monetary goals.

The financial literacy project also highlights Extension partnerships in the state—in particular, the strong relationship between Head Start and Extension. Family Living colleagues collaborated with Head Start staff and families at the Wisconsin Head Start



- literacy pilot project
- new to literacy project

Association annual conference, where in addition to financial education, participants learned more about Extension's work in the areas of nutrition, parenting and reading literacy.

Building on successful Extension-Head Start partnerships throughout the state, Family Living's financial literacy efforts will continue in 2011 with an expansion to 11 more counties and more refined educational strategies—all designed to improve the financial health of Wisconsin families.

"On a federal level, there is growing interest and support for integrating financial literacy into Head Start services."

*—J. Michael Collins,
Extension financial specialist*



Navigating new parenting roles after a divorce

Divorce and separation are common today, but they still have serious impacts—especially on families with children. More than 16,000 children in Wisconsin experience their parents' divorce each year.

To help divorcing parents navigate the legal issues and make decisions in the best interest of their children, Fond du Lac County family living educator Nan Baumgartner partnered with Fond du Lac County's Family Court

Services to offer classes for co-parenting during and after divorce.

The University of Wisconsin-Extension has presented co-parenting classes with Fond du Lac County Family Court Services since 2005.

The classes help divorcing parents steer a course through the legal and emotional

issues surrounding divorce and put less stress on their families.

About 300 people each year take the parenting classes in Fond du Lac County, where the program is now mandatory for divorcing couples with children under 18. The classes focus on developing communication skills to decrease conflict and help parents avoid putting their children in the middle. "This allows parents to divorce each other but doesn't require the child to divorce a parent," Baumgartner says.

The class also helps parents understand the legal terms involved with divorce and child custody. Parents get help starting their co-parenting plan, a legal document required by the state of Wisconsin which lays out how major parenting decisions will be made in the future.



Co-parenting programs for separating couples conducted by family living educators can be found throughout the state. More than 1,500 parents in 22 Wisconsin counties attended Extension

parenting programs for divorcing parents in a recent year.

While the programs look slightly different in each county, the goals are the same—to help parents understand the impact of parental conflict on their children; acknowledge the important role both parents play in their children's lives; and build the skills to successfully co-parent.

"Kids can survive a divorce," Baumgartner says. "It's a matter of how the parents handle it."

Since the court system and UW-Extension started presenting the classes together, the county has noticed more couples successfully completing mediation. "There's a correlation between participating in the class and reduced or more successful mediation," Baumgartner says. "More conflicts have been solved outside the courtroom, without the court needing to appoint guardians."

Participants appreciate that the class keeps the children's best interest in the forefront. "The workshop really makes you face reality—the realities of divorce—and that the children are the most important issue," one parent said.

"There's a correlation between participating in the class and reduced or more successful mediation. More conflicts have been solved outside the courtroom..."

—Nan Baumgartner, Fond du Lac County family living educator

Growing stronger relationships

Knowing how to build and maintain healthy relationships is important to a good quality of life.

No matter what a person's age or stage of life—single, married or divorced—healthy relationships enrich life and bring benefits that flow to children and communities.

In Wisconsin, Family Living Programs is committed to improving life for all families and communities. One way it accomplishes this goal is by working with local partners to conduct relationship education both for couples and for individuals not currently in relationships.

Two curricula, *Within My Reach* and *Within Our Reach*, serve as the framework for Family Living's relationship education efforts. Both are research-

based approaches developed at the University of Denver and funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Science Foundation and the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.

Within Our Reach focuses on the strengths of already-established couples and includes lessons and activities designed to teach critical life skills, such as communication and financial management, so couples can create a more stable relationship and a better environment for their children.

Within My Reach is a relationship skills and decision-making program to help individuals who may or may not be parents achieve personal goals. It shows participants how to consider their own values and expectations when choosing a partner, the effect of relationships on children, how to communicate effectively and to manage problems and conflicts from the perspective of a couple.

Members of Family Living's Healthy Couple Relationships team currently carry out



Within Our Reach and *Within My Reach* programming in a number of counties throughout Wisconsin.

Family living educator Jane Schaaf of Crawford County reports that participants in her *Within Our Reach* sessions represent a wide range of life experiences, such as couples married for many years, those beginning a new relationship, and busy parents of young children.

"The curriculum works well across these different life situations," says Schaaf. "Each little step we make is important."

In Polk County, Family Living educator Gail Peavey has taught *Within My Reach* classes since 2007. Peavey partners with groups like the Salvation Army Serenity House and Head Start to offer the classes to economically disadvantaged residents, and adults at risk for unstable relationships.

Participants in Peavey's program had comments like, "Now I have a better idea about what to do in my next relationship," and "I see some things differently, like picking a partner."

Overall, nearly 700 people have attended Extension's couple education programs in Wisconsin. In addition to single adults and couples, high school students in family and consumer education classes, Head Start parents, incarcerated individuals and divorced couples

sharing parenting responsibilities have taken the opportunity to improve their relationship life skills.

Local organizations concerned with family health and well-being partner with Extension on an ongoing basis to make healthy relationship education available in their communities. Partners include schools, churches, Head Start, child abuse prevention coalitions, law enforcement and court systems.

Over the next several years, the Healthy Relationships team plans to extend healthy couples educational programming throughout Wisconsin, bringing more awareness to relationship issues, and contributing to a firmer foundation for families and communities.

"The curriculum works well across different life situations. Each little step we make is important."

—Jane Schaaf, Crawford County family living educator

Designing effective nutrition education for Hmong learners

The UW-Extension Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program (WNEP) works to provide all Wisconsin's families with information about the benefits of a healthful diet and physical activity with the goal of helping state residents achieve better health.

Wisconsin is home to the third largest Hmong population in the nation. WNEP educators realized that nutrition education for Hmong audiences needed to be developed from the perspective of their culture to be effective. To respond

to this need, Wisconsin educators introduced the *Building Healthy Families* curriculum in 2009.

Developed by California's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, this culturally relevant program was designed to help Hmong make healthier food choices, save money when shopping for food and increase physical activity.

Using the new curriculum brought changes in the behavior of Wisconsin's Hmong learners. "Educators reported improvements in knowledge and behavior regarding food safety practices and making healthier food choices," said Family Living and WNEP specialist Teresa Curtis.

Pilot classes using the new curriculum around Wisconsin graduated 30 Hmong learners out of the 37 who initially enrolled—an 81% retention rate. Overall, WNEP nutrition educators found the *Building Healthy Families* curriculum led them to more success with their learners.

In Outagamie County, WNEP educator Bao Thao-Vang introduced her learners to new foods and encouraged safer kitchen practices using *Building Healthy Families*.

Thao-Vang has graduated 14 learners in Outagamie County. "I got a very positive response with *Building Healthy Families* from all my learners," she says. "They really remember the hand-washing lessons, or the lessons about planning and making lists before you shop. I think many would like to come back and take the class again."

Kazoua Moua reports that in 2008, a young Hmong mother brought egg rolls, which required deep frying, to a holiday party. The following year, instead of egg rolls, she made spring rolls, which are much healthier and not deep fried. "There was a discussion among the group as soon as the other moms saw the arrival of the spring rolls," says Kazoua Moua. "They complimented each other that they had put into practice what they learned about making healthier food."

Since the pilot classes, more than 60 learners have enrolled in the *Building Healthy Families* program. As Wisconsin's Hmong community continues to grow, WNEP nutrition educators will continue to expand their offerings to ensure that Wisconsin's Hmong families have access to nutrition information that is designed to meet their needs.

WNEP educators realized that nutrition education for Hmong audiences needed to be developed from the perspective of their culture to be effective.



Teaming up with partners to promote a healthy Wisconsin

Surveys of the “best places to live” rank communities that support active lifestyles and provide health care high on the list. But creating an environment that promotes health can present challenges for communities, requiring significant resources, leadership and teamwork.

Cooperative Extension Family Living Programs is uniquely positioned to work with partners to promote better health in Wisconsin. No other organization offers a direct link to University of Wisconsin resources in addition to having a presence in every county in the state.

Cooperative Extension’s evidence-driven, community-based education responds to local needs and plays a key role in public initiatives, such as nutrition education programs. And Family Living colleagues across Wisconsin have built strong relationships with state and community partners.

Here are some examples of Family Living’s partnerships that are setting the stage for a healthier Wisconsin.

- Julia Salomón, family living School Breakfast specialist, works with the Department of Public Instruction, the State of Wisconsin and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to educate teachers, school districts and others about breakfast’s proven benefits for children.



- Marinette County UW-Extension family living educator Nancy Crevier provides leadership for a statewide Coalition Support Workgroup together with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Prevention Program to help communities build their capacity to counteract rising obesity rates.
- Roberta Riportella, UW-Extension health policy specialist, belongs to a special legislative committee that is looking at Wisconsin residents’ access to health care.
- Gayle Coleman, Extension nutrition education specialist played a key role in “Linking Research, Community Action and Policy to Prevent Obesity,” a conference attended by representatives from UW-Madison, Wisconsin Partnership for Activity and Nutrition, Department of Health Services, Department of Public Instruction, and

other community and government agencies from across the state.

- In Green Lake County, family living educator Molly Spaulding was instrumental in forming the Green Lake Area Health and Wellness Coalition which coordinates health promotion and prevention activities. Coalition members include local health care providers, the Ripon Medical Center, and area school districts.
- In Milwaukee County, Extension nutrition colleagues Rosamaria Martinez, Betania Silva and their colleagues partnered with Walnut Way and the Fondy Food Center—neighborhood groups that have helped revitalize Milwaukee’s Lindsay Heights neighborhood—to teach residents about nutrition via a federal grant.

Cooperative Extension Family Living Programs is uniquely positioned to work with partners to promote better health in Wisconsin.

- The Family Living Healthy Families and Community team partnered with Extension colleagues from the Community, Natural Resource and Economic Development program to organize the Wisconsin Healthy Communities conference, bringing together nearly 150 fellow educators and state and local groups with the goal of exploring research-based opportunities for joint health education efforts.

These examples represent just a few snapshots of Family Living's partnerships. Across the state, Family Living colleagues are working to promote an environment that supports health for all Wisconsin residents.



Buffalo and Pepin Counties

Helping incarcerated fathers be better parents

When Mary Wood saw the research she knew it was powerful. The data clearly showed that when fathers were positively involved in their lives, children exhibited better mental and physical health and performed better in school. The kids were also less likely to abuse alcohol and drugs or experience early sexual activity.

Fathering was good for dads, too, as studies suggested they were much less likely to engage in risky behaviors and more likely to learn skills that increased their own quality of life.

Wood, the Cooperative Extension family living agent for Buffalo and Pepin Counties, knew that rising numbers of divorcing families in her two-county area echoed a national trend, with a significant number of estranged and under-involved fathers in jail. According to federal reports, more than 1.5 million American children have a parent in prison and ninety percent of the time, that parent is a father.



With growing numbers of jailed dads losing touch with their kids, local human services, child support directors and family court professionals in Buffalo and Pepin Counties were becoming increasingly concerned.

To offer an effective response, Wood and staff from local agencies collaborated on ways to help jailed dads be more responsible parents, partners, employees and community members. After a comprehensive nationwide search, Wood



and her colleagues decided to introduce an innovative, science-based program that covered key topics such as what children need to become competent, resilient adults; how to communicate positively; how to handle stress and anger; working through conflicts; co-parenting with the child's mother; and modeling positive behaviors.

Wood applied for and received a professional development grant in 2008, which she used to earn a Master Trainer Status in the "Fragile Families and Responsible Fatherhood" curriculum, developed by the National Partnership for Community Leadership in Washington, D.C. She adapted the course and designed what has since come to be known as "The DAD Thing Responsible Fatherhood Program."

Assisted by a retired male deputy in summer 2009, Wood conducted the first 16-week DAD Thing for fathers in the Buffalo County jail, fathers referred by DHS staff for child abuse, and those on probation or parole. By the beginning of 2010, 17 fathers had completed the program. As the program progressed, jail staff, probation and parole officers observed changes in the DAD Thing participants, such as fewer behavior violations and angry outbursts.

Fathers who completed the course said they were "highly motivated" to stay out of the corrections system in the future. Their comments revealed deep feelings on what they had learned about themselves and their relationships with their kids. "This class is about a lot more than parenting," commented one dad. "It has made me think about myself and my family like I never have before."

"The DAD Thing gives men the means to see themselves as positive and important in their children's lives, which motivates them to make meaningful and lasting change," says Wood. "Many of the participants have commented that, for the first time, they believe they can be a good dad."

Another important long-term outcome of the program is the high percentage of graduates who remain involved after the program ends and go on to become teaching assistants and facilitators in subsequent programs. "This solidifies their gains and reinforces their new and much more positive role as a father and powerful mentor role for 'new' dads in the program," says Wood.

Wood is currently working with Mary Huser, Family Living state program specialist, to conduct a rigorous evaluation of The DAD Thing. Interest in the program has been growing and a solid evaluation will help determine if it should be expanded beyond Buffalo and Pepin Counties.

Wood and Huser were invited to speak about the The DAD Thing at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Law School, where students and professors expressed an interest in learning more. Requests for more information have also come from others in the corrections field.

Communities, educators and public agencies will continue to watch and learn from The DAD Thing as it helps fathers discover that the best thing they can do for their children and families is to "be there" in a positive, responsible way.

"This class is about a lot more than parenting. It has made me think about myself and my family like I never have before."

—Participant in The DAD Thing



Working for all Wisconsin families

Family Living's unique and effective programs are based on university research. Extension educators based in every county and on the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus have a direct link to university resources, allowing them to draw from and contribute to current research about families.

By responding to the challenges facing today's families with evidence-informed programs and practices, along with local knowledge gained from living in the communities they serve, Extension educators are helping to create an environment where families have the information, skills and assets they need to improve their quality of life and contribute to their communities.





To contact the Family Living educators
whose work is profiled in this series,
go to www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/



Special thanks to Nancy Brooks, Mary Huser, Shelley King-Curry,
Marma McIntee, Bev Phillips

Writers: Meg Gores, Jackie Askins; designer: Susan Anderson

An EEO/Affirmative Action employer, University of Wisconsin-Extension
provides equal opportunities in employment and programming,
including Title IX and ADA requirements.