



National Extension Association
of Family & Consumer Sciences

Celebrating 90 Years in 2024

**Conference Proceedings of the National
Extension Association of Family & Consumer
Sciences 90th Annual Session**

*Under One Sky: coming together to maximize
our resources, challenge ourselves to improve in
the face of ever-changing needs, and celebrate
our contributions to our communities and the
nation*

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**An Amish Auction Barn and Lifelong Learning Come
Together Under One Sky**

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An Amish Auction Barn and Lifelong Learning Come Together Under One Sky

Background

On an individual instruction basis, I addressed food safety, home food preservation, and/or inspected pressure canners with community members who attended the Health and Safety Event for Amish in September 2023. As presenters we were to fulfill the overall objective of addressing access to health care and provide safety education to the local Amish community. The event was held nearby Amish homes at the Owl Creek Auction Barn from 5:30 P.M. to 8:30 P.M. English Time. The location is an open auction house used by the Amish to sell their produce and other goods weekly on a large scale. Scheduled on a date and time that was beneficial for the Amish Community, generators were brought in for lighting after sunset since the event took place in the fall. Out of respect for Amish values, no pictures were taken of Amish community members.

As a program presenter within this event, I set up a table, working alongside my colleague the county 4-H Youth Development Educator. The table included the U.S. FDA fact sheet *Safe Food Handling: What You Need to Know*, university Extension home food preservation fact sheets and the Presto® Testing Unit for checking pressure canner dial gauges. Other items at the table comprised of buckeye candies, county extension branded bimetallic stemmed thermometers, and bubble remover and headspace canner tools for handing out to those who participated in the individual instruction time including canner inspections.

Objectives

Focusing on home food preservation, my goal was to address at least one of four objectives with individuals/families that stopped by the table.

1. Explain the importance in using USDA tested recipes - in place of recipes handed down through generations.
2. Encourage the use of Mason-type, threaded, home-canning jars with self-sealing lids – in place of using glass jars on hand.
3. Understand the importance of “headspace” in canning.
4. Engage in having their pressure canner dial gauge tested now and in the future.

Methods

For my evaluation method, two hand counter clickers were used. The red clicker for counting those who stopped by the table and the orange clicker for those who answered “yes” to the question, “Did you learn anything new or do you plan to do anything differently after today?”. A blank paper was then used to tally the four objectives.

Findings/Results

Of the approximately 300 Amish community members who attended, I reached 239 at my table. Eighty-seven percent reported either learning anything new/plan to do anything differently. Of those who answered “yes” to the question approximately half shared what they learned or would do differently. Gauging “headspace” received the most “tallies” with 65 for “learning anything new” and having their “dial gauge tested” received the most with 51 “tallies” for “plan to do anything differently”. While the dial gauge testing unit was a draw to the table and a topic of conversation, four canner inspections were completed. Near the end of the event my colleague

commented frequently observing inquiries regarding “botulism” relating to explaining the purpose of the testing unit and using a pressure canner versus a water bath canner.

Conclusion

The implications of the outcomes suggest this population is open to hearing about specific safety information and making some changes related to their need for food preservation which serves their lifestyle. Looking ahead to future Amish community events where food safety and home food preservation is requested, I expect more families will bring their pressure canners for inspections. Anticipating the interest in learning more about “botulism,” I plan to expand on this topic with the possibilities of developing a factsheet to go along with an educational presentation as part of the annual community program. In the meantime, Amish community members have connected with me to obtain food preservation factsheets, bubble remover and headspace tools, and have had multiple dial gauges tested.

The Health and Safety Event for Amish, focusing on food safety and home food preservation, can be replicated throughout local and state programs. By providing safety education for this community, in a space they are familiar and at their convenience, we are engaging an audience who can look to Extension as a trustworthy source for information and education for the whole family. This unique event focusing on a pluralistic society can also be applied to other diverse societies to engage in lifelong learning with Extensions nationwide.

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**Finding FCS Facts in Fiction: Connecting Themes
from Novels to Extension Through a Book Club**

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Finding FCS Facts in Fiction: Connecting Themes from Novels to Extension Through a Book Club

Background

Research has shown that reading can reduce stress, increase imagination and creativity, and even build empathy (Vallie, 2022). Book clubs have been used within Extension in several states to explore non-fiction topics; but the Buckeye Bookworms Book Club is one of the first to connect Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) facts with fiction. In early 2023, Educators from two Ohio counties collaborated to develop the program, which has already expanded to 5 Educators with 140 participants from 23 Ohio counties and eight other states. During book club virtual meetings, Educators present FCS topics from research-based resources like food and nutrition, the history of home economics, family relationships, sun safety, mental health, and fashion. Following the FCS content, meetings follow a typical book club style and explore fiction themes through discussion.

Objectives

1. Create an FCS book club with inspiration from non-fiction books.
2. Explore FCS topics and how they relate to the fictional characters in the books explored.
3. Encourage book club members to read more as a coping strategy for stress or depression, to increase empathy, prevent cognitive decline, and much more.

Methods

The first 4 books selected by the Buckeye Bookworms Book Club represented the following fiction genres Historical, Contemporary, Mystery, and Literary. Book genres were prioritized based on survey results from participants. A priority was placed on selecting books that are no more than 2 years from publication. Additional books were scheduled for 2024 which include a new genre and several books by authors from Ohio, the home of the Buckeye Bookworms.

During the first year, the Book Club piloted several different meeting times and frequencies, and determined that every other week, evening meetings worked best for the current participants. Meetings have been scheduled for one hour and include the FCS content, book discussion, and sharing of optional homework completed by participants. Most books are covered in 4 meetings.

Results

Evaluation strategies used for the Book Club include post-series online surveys and an end-of-year survey with knowledge gained and behavioral change questions. The questions were based on surveys shared from prior Extension book clubs (Huff, N., May, K., & McCulley, M, 2022). 90% of participants reported in a year-end survey (after three books) that the Book Club provided useful information and they shared that new information with others; 100% of survey respondents reported that they were pleased they participated. Numerous participants have reported they are now reading more often, and almost all have read other books by the authors selected.

Conclusion

Reading offers numerous benefits to individuals, groups, and society. Family and Consumer Sciences professionals can utilize book clubs to connect participants to FCS topics in a fun and engaging way. Book clubs give participants opportunities to think about and apply the information reviewed during the meetings. By discussing the book, participants hear perspectives they may not have considered. The virtual book club allows people who would not be able to participate in person to do so. Participants can connect and build community with people from across the home state and beyond around the book and selected FCS topics.

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**From Awareness to Action: The Role of Ouch! in
Breaking Stereotypes**

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From Awareness to Action: The Role of Ouch! in Breaking Stereotypes

Background

Given continued civil unrest and societal distrust in the last decade, Cooperative Extension faces the task of addressing concerns for historically marginalized populations (Diaz et al., 2023; Walcott et al., 2023). In an era of polarization and topic avoidance, the adoption of effective communication strategies has become paramount in dismantling stereotypes and biases (Kubota, 2021). Using the vital conditions framework, Extension agents are tasked with cultivating meaningful engagement in their programs and thereby enhancing the sense of belonging, fostering inclusion, and promoting overall health and well-being within communities (Burton et al., 2021; Corrigan, 2018; Milstein et al., 2023). Field agents recognized that effective communication increased the collective sense of social belonging and empowered course participants to build connections.

Objectives

1. Explore the impact of a stereotyped awareness program on self-efficacy and willingness to explore individual differences.
2. Selection of communication strategies as tools for engagement.
3. Examine the effect of voluntary and involuntary participation.

Methods

During 2022 and 2023, six field specialists administered the two-hour version of “Ouch” 42 times in-person and online, reaching 966 participants through face-to-face and virtual modalities. This class encompasses a PowerPoint presentation with videos, group discussions, and interactive activities. Participants completed a retrospective post-course evaluation containing Likert scale items.

Findings/Results

Analysis of the post-course retrospective survey of participants ($n = 830$, completion rate 86%) using a Wilcoxon signed rank test $V = 53490$, $p < .001$ found course ranks to be significantly higher for participants' capacity to address stereotypes. Participants reported an increase in agreement regarding the utilization of strategies when confronted with discriminatory comments, as well as an 84% increase in their understanding of individual differences. Notably, 90% of participants felt secure within the class, which fostered an environment conducive to the sharing of personal stories. The increase in participants' understanding of individual differences reflects a heightened awareness and a deeper understanding of diverse perspectives among participants.

A subset analysis of the post-course retrospective survey focusing on Youth Recreational Programs ($n = 334$, completion rate 84%) using a Wilcoxon signed rank test $V = 53490$, $p < .001$ found course ranks to be significantly higher for the after condition in participants' ability to confront stereotypes. Participants reported an increase in agreement on employing strategies when encountering discriminatory comments, as well as an 89% increase in understanding individual differences. The increased agreement regarding the use of strategies indicates a positive shift in addressing stereotypes, underscoring participants' readiness to navigate biased situations.

Conclusion

This study provides a roadmap for enhancing positive communication within Extension programs, fostering intercultural awareness, and strengthening interpersonal connections. Participant evaluations highlight improved self-efficacy in responding to stereotypes and enhanced personal communication strategies, while laying the foundation for developing methods to combat discrimination. These changes inform the creation of future allyship, and diversity curricula offered by field faculty across the state, with the next steps involving leveraging program outcomes to craft a comprehensive allyship curriculum. This initiative aims to cultivate a culture of inclusivity and equity within Extension programs, reinforcing Extension agents' roles in achieving positive societal change.

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**Under ONE Sky: Ohio Alliance for People-Centered
Sciences**

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Under ONE Sky: Ohio Alliance for People-Centered Sciences

Background

Ohio continues to struggle to meet the needs of Ohio's citizens in the field of study focused on the science and art of living and working well in our complex world. Fortuitously, the critical need was exposed during 2020 as the world grappled with the outcomes from a global pandemic and economic crisis. Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) professionals have documented how our history has brought us to this condition within our profession's multitude of journal publications. The very nature of FCS's Body of Knowledge (BOK) and the progress of society has exacerbated the problem. It is time to use FCS's BOK as a strength not a liability. The past twenty years shows what happens if a profession divides to conquer instead of remaining united to focus on the science of living and working well in a complex world.

Ohio's innovative idea is to project Family and Consumer Sciences as Ohio's PEOPLE-CENTERED SCIENCES. This strategy is based on the profession's past twenty years" walking through life with an identity crisis" (i.e., Human Ecology, Human Sciences, Health & Human Sciences and Home Economics). The words we use to describe the work of our profession "Do Make a Difference"!

Objectives

1. Identify and unite Ohio's three current FCS BOK professional organizations.
2. Identify emergent entities and supporters to partner with the established organizations.
3. Invite current, emergent and supporters to partner with evolving FCS networking partnership through research, experiential education, and technology to help people develop the essential knowledge and skills to lead better lives, be work and career ready, build strong families and make meaningful contributions to our communities.
4. Create an Ohio Alliance for Family and Consumer Sciences modeled after the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences National Partnership for Recruiting, Preparing, and Supporting FCS Educators by embracing and activating Ohio's statewide people-centered Sciences network of organizations and supporters.

Methods

Development of Ohio Alliance for People-Centered Sciences involves four steps and occurs over several years and two grant cycles. The first step included forming a committee of Family & Consumer Sciences leaders throughout the state of Ohio organized by these Family & Consumer Sciences professional organization (NEAFCS, OAFCS, and OATFACS). As stated above in **Background** these three groups began initial committee work in August 2020. The 2021 NEAFCS Endowment Grant Award allowed established and formalized Ohio's Alliance building concept. The second step consists of consulting with the National Family & Consumer Sciences Alliance. The Ohio group will need a better understanding of the alliance model and learn more from the experiences of the existing FCS Alliance. The 2021 NEAFCS Endowment Grant Award provided the avenue of understanding and customizing the model through consultation with FCS professional organization networks.

The third and fourth steps needed additional financial support and human capital support

from both national and state FCS professional organizations and community as well as community agencies and organizations. The third step consisted of development of a strategic plan including communication, marketing plans and evaluation metrics to promote Family & Consumer Sciences program opportunities. During the third step, the Alliance leaders worked together, and committees for Alliance building, public awareness/marketing. and professional development education opportunities were explored.

The fourth step is underway, implementation of a sustainable strategic plan, evaluation, and publication of outcomes and impacts throughout Alliance member organizations and supporters.

Results

The Ohio Alliance for People-Centered Sciences has become reality. All four steps have occurred or are underway as documented in evidence presented at 2022 and 2023 and forthcoming 2024 FCS national professional organization partners conferences and posted on Alliance member organization websites.

Conclusion

The 2021-2023 NEAFCS Endowment Grant Awards continue to unite like-minded professionals in the People-Centered Sciences to band together elevating FCS Body of Knowledge because “We Are Better Together”. Future opportunities for Ohio’s FCS Alliance include –it takes commitment, collaboration and time to offer quality FCS professional development, alliance members need to meet the needs of all membership classes for sustainability and need to maintain a working relationship with government entities.

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**Getting the Gorge Smoke Ready: Improving
Community Readiness and Response for Wildfire
Smoke**

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Getting the Gorge Smoke Ready: Improving Community Readiness and Response for Wildfire Smoke

Background

Wildfires and resulting smoke and poor air quality have increased dramatically in recent years (US EPA, 2023a). Inhalation of tiny particles, known as PM2.5, during smoke events can result in poor health outcomes ranging from difficulty breathing to asthma and heart attacks to pre-term birth, as well as irritability, confusion, and poor mental health (Cleland et al., 2022; Grant & Runkle, 2022; Holm et al., 2022; Reid et al., 2016).

Objectives

Learn about evidence-based strategies carried out in the Columbia Gorge Region to improve monitoring, communication, and mitigation of smoke. Assess how the implementation of a systems-based approach to improving communication efforts and air quality across a region can improve public health. Adapt community engagement strategies to improve air quality literacy and prepare for and respond to smoke events.

Methods

We have installed over 25 new air quality monitors at schools, orchard sites, and community-based organizations. We developed a Community Response Plan for smoke events which included a regional survey (N=761), focus groups (N= 41), a listening session (N=30), air quality literacy lessons to eight 7th grade classrooms (N=175) and a tabletop disaster drill (N=40). We are piloting outreach strategies, including “Join the Fan Club” Displays in waiting rooms and lobbies of 15 clinics and partner organizations featuring instructions for DIY Box Fan Filter air purifiers. In November 2023, we launched a website, <https://SmokeReadyGorge.org>, that features maps highlighting air quality indices from local monitors, seasonal sources of smoke in our region, and smoke readiness resources and tips.

Findings/Results

We conducted a process evaluation of our “Join the Fan Club” Smoke Readiness Displays. Qualtrics survey links were emailed to all host sites. Respondents (N=9) indicated engagement with the displays and willingness to participate in future campaigns. They rated the displays positively on numerous metrics, indicating agreement with statements about the displays being “educational, useful, well-stocked, easy to understand, actionable, and displayed for an appropriate amount of time. Our work in Columbia River Gorge builds on the successful efforts of other communities across the Pacific Northwest utilizing emerging research on the most efficacious public health tools to address smoke. Holm et al. (2022) document the usefulness of low-cost air quality sensors, N95 mask and respirator use, improved filtration and ventilation, and improved communication strategies to build air quality literacy.

Conclusion

Wildfires and their accompanying smoke will only increase in the coming years as of result of climate change (US EPA, 2023a). The latest research shows connections between

smoke exposure and cognitive health as well as connections to the development of dementia later in life (Cleland et al., 2022; Grant & Runkle, 2022). This is in addition to the already well-documented physical health effects of wildfire smoke which range from increase rates of heart attack, stroke and asthma attacks to pre-term birth and miscarriage (Reid et al., 2016; US EPA, 2023b). Much of our work is replicable and is documented in the research literature to be effective at improving wildfire smoke preparedness, response, and recovery in communities. We want to share this work with our colleagues across Extension so they can bring these strategies to their own communities across the country. We are learning from prior smoke events that no community is safe from or immune to wildfire smoke. All communities need to know about the harms of wildfire smoke inhalation, how to protect themselves, and what measures they can take to prepare for future smoke events.

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**Using Gardens and Produce to Reach All
Communities in Our County**

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Using Gardens and Produce to Reach All Communities in Our County

Background

The Clermont County Master Gardener Volunteers (MGV) rehabilitated a forgotten raised bed garden plot at the Clermont County Fairgrounds placing twenty-two straw bales in the beds surrounding each bale with annual and perennial flowers and herbs. The community learned how to grow vegetables in straw bales and the importance of companion planting to attract pollinators and deter pests. Vegetables were then shared with the community as well as used in cooking and preserving classes.

The garden was open to adults and children who attended the Clermont County Fair and other events at the fairgrounds. How to plant a straw bale garden and weekly progress, observations, and photos were printed and posted in the Ohio State University (OSU) Extension Clermont County eNewsletter. Vegetables harvested from the garden were donated to the OSU Clermont Extension food programs and to the Owensville Commons senior living apartment complex.

Objectives

1. Educate the community on straw bale gardening.
2. Educate the community about companion planting.
3. Make the community more aware of the MGV program.

Methods

Throughout the growing season, eighteen articles with photos appeared in the OSU Extension Clermont County eNewsletter. These included articles on how to start a straw bale garden, vegetables harvested from garden, pollinators and pests observed, weather conditions, and the use of upcycled material. Brochures were distributed at the fair and were available in the garden. Questions concerning the garden were answered at the MGVs' booth during the fair.

Information about the advantages of planting herbs and flowers with vegetables was included in weekly articles in the eNewsletter along with a handout. A handout was also available at the MGV fair booth that included specific vegetables, herbs, and flowers to plant together to attract or deter pests. Signage in the garden also assisted in identification of plants.

Vegetables from the garden were donated to the OSU Extension SNAP-Ed Program, Family & Consumer Sciences nutrition education classes, Dining with Diabetes classes, and food preservation programs plus to the Owensville Commons senior living apartment complex. In addition, fair goers received vegetables when they visited the MGV booth.

Results

Over 40,000 people attended the Clermont County Fair in 2023. At least 150 visited the MGV booth during the fair. This was documented by the number of fair goers participating in a drawing for baskets of garden tools and materials. Over 100 brochures were handed out along with a companion planting resource. A continuous slide show of the garden was available plus a

map that identified the garden location.

Many fair visitors were aware of the garden through the eNewsletter. Some attendees indicated they wanted to try straw bale gardening and were going to encourage their children to try it as their next 4-H project. Fair goers appreciated the vegetables that were available for the taking. Our vegetable basket was another demonstration of the variety of vegetables that can be grown in straw bales.

The project has heightened the community's interest in learning more about straw bale gardening. This spring six presentations are planned on the topic for the Amelia and Oakley Garden Clubs, Brown County MGV, Clermont County YMCA, Southwest Ohio Perennial School, and participants at the Miami Township Civic Center Speaker series.

Over 270 pounds of vegetables were donated to the OSU Extension SNAP-Ed programming and Family Consumer Sciences for nutritional education, Dining with Diabetes classes, and food preservation programs plus the Owensville Commons senior living apartment complex.

The MGVs journaled their observations in the garden during their scheduled week of maintenance. These journal entries became the basis for the eighteen articles, with photos, that appeared in the OSU Extension Clermont County eNewsletter, distributed to more than 2,000 readers each week.

Over 87% of our MGVs participated in the project including clean up, donating supplies, planting, watering, harvesting, and educating others. All agreed to continue the project and offered suggestions to improve and grow the project. The project assisted in doubling the interest in the number of potential MGV candidates for our fall classes.

Conclusion

The straw bale demonstration garden project brought a new light to the MGV program within the community. We revised our MGV informational brochure making it available at the fair. The weekly articles in the eNewsletter highlighted our project activities and donations.

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Digital Financial Inclusion: A Gateway to Financial Resilience

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Digital Financial Inclusion: A Gateway to Financial Resilience

Background

Including digital finance is of utmost importance for communities and families, as it enables them to invest in productive activities, experience growth, maturity, and generate employment opportunities. By embracing digital finance, we can stimulate economic growth, create jobs, and facilitate holistic development. Although digital finance is not a sole solution for reducing poverty among residents of Calvert County, it can contribute to empowering them to build brighter futures. As a result, UME Calvert conducted an assessment and found that almost all residents (98%) who use digital finance programming expressed the need for basic financial education. Their goal is to enhance their knowledge of mobile features and applications. Therefore, this study emphasizes the significant need to introduce training in digital finance to the community, aiming to empower families to make more informed financial decisions. The analysis of data collected from 78 participants living in Calvert County showed they were receptive to digital finance programs and services, suggesting a willingness to transform their mindset. These results complement the offerings of UME Calvert and help promote financial programming that effectively tackles the disparity between digital finance and social inequality. By evaluating the capabilities and resources of families in Calvert County, the research seeks to determine how effectively Extension programs and services can cater to their needs. The aim of the assessment is to establish an inclusive financial technology program that caters to adults in rural communities. By participating in this program, they will gain access to a broad selection of cost-effective and excellent services, giving them the power to make the most of these resources. Thus, the goal of this study is to highlight the current state of technology in the evolution of inclusive finance in Calvert County. The research sheds light on the difficulties of social inequality and the urgent problems encountered by marginalized communities.

Objectives

1. Close the divide between those who have access to banking services and those who do not by offering crucial financial services, like savings accounts, payment options, and credit opportunities.
2. Encourage economic empowerment and social integration by enabling individuals and businesses to have broader involvement in the established financial system.
3. Utilize technology to overcome traditional challenges such as geographic distance, infrastructure limitations, and bureaucratic obstacles in order to promote financial inclusion.

Methods

The study was conducted using a qualitative method. The selection of data collection methods was done intending to assist the researcher in their examination and comprehension of the complex issues related to digital finance. By selecting specific study methods, the researcher could closely analyze the content and investigate the participants' current lives. The qualitative process involved thoroughly studying the perspectives, attitudes, and experiences of participants as they described their use of financial technology. By incorporating a descriptive approach in the research design, this study could enhance the understanding of motivation and behavior among the participants. Throughout the study, the researchers observed and documented the participants' reactions before, during, and after the study by utilizing focus groups, interviews, questionnaires, and record keeping.

Findings/Results

After gathering the data, various techniques were used to analyze it and create the final tabulations. The methods employed included data visualization, frequency distribution, and the use of tables to display percent distribution. The researcher used questionnaires and external systems to gain demographic information as a means of data collection. The gathered information served as a support for the analysis and findings, as the researcher compared and contrasted digital finance programming based on data from pre and post-surveys, observations, and data collected during the study's implementation. During the review and transcription of the data collected from the coding process in the four focus groups, the researcher consistently found categories that included inclusive finance, social inequality, digitalization, personal finance management, and digital banking. When assessing the current state of financial technology, we acknowledge significant progress in making Calvert more financially inclusive through technology since the Covid pandemic. There are still multiple obstacles that remain.

- The utilization of accounts and electronic transaction methods is limited, partly because they are expensive.
- Financial resilience is a struggle for households because of the absence of suitable and easily accessible savings, affordable insurance, and retirement products. Insurance products specifically designed for businesses and farms can offer substantial benefits as well.
- The lack of access to credit and other financing options that cater to their unique needs is a common challenge faced by numerous people, businesses, and farms.
- A significant portion of the population, approximately 50%, lacks confidence in financial technology. Most people do not grasp the fundamentals of financial technology, despite its features being useful for their needs.

Conclusion

The study investigated the demands for programming and services related to digital finance accessible through UME Calvert. According to the research, residents can reap short and medium-term benefits by enrolling in digital finance courses provided by the local Extension office. Families can also develop a financial mindset by participating in workshops and using other programs and services. While there is a growing body of evidence in favor of long-term program offerings over short single sessions, it is crucial to continue striving for advancements in the applicability of digital finance content. The rise of interactive content and technological advancements has further expanded the potential for developing and expanding a UME financial technology curriculum, which would be advantageous for both Calvert and the state of Maryland as a whole. Additional research needs to be conducted to differentiate between various financial characteristics and initiatives, in order to evaluate the potential of technology, such as FinTech, to enhance the financial awareness of individuals in the long term, even after their participation in Extension programs.

The rapid global growth in the adoption of financial technology products and services can be attributed to the ongoing advancements in technology and the expanding access to the internet and mobile devices. People's attitudes towards financial features and applications can be multifaceted and are subject to a diverse array of individual and contextual influences. As we concentrate on future research, this study could gain from incorporating pertinent longitudinal data to substantiate the various advantages of integrating digital finance programming with Extension. These findings also have important implications for Extension Agents of finance and community finance stakeholders. To aid residents in acquiring content, building confidence, and effectively communicating, it is recommended to implement scaffolding techniques. The focus of policymakers is on digital finance programming and services, with initiatives like Marylanders

Online. This information can be used by such entities to advocate for and facilitate the successful implementation and delivery of programs, aiming to narrow the economic divide between finance and technology. However, it is worth mentioning that this study was conducted in rural Southern Maryland, USA, so the results might not apply to an urban setting. Future studies could explore the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) with a mixed method to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the factors that impact the acceptance of digital finance among rural residents. This approach would overcome the limitations of relying solely on questionnaires and enhance the depth of knowledge in this dynamic field.

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**Emerging Solutions to the Affordable Housing Crisis:
Community Land Trust**

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Emerging Solutions to the Affordable Housing Crisis: Community Land Trust

Background

In recent years, states across the United States face a critical affordable housing shortage. In Marion County, Florida, up to 44% of residents face “cost burdened”, meaning the cost of housing and utilities exceeds 50% of household income which may lead to housing instability (United Way Alice Report, 2020). The right combination of remote work opportunities which provided many Americans the opportunity to increase their credit score and record-low mortgage rates, developed a housing shortage which in turn created a housing bidding war, causing prices to surge at a staggering rate.

Marion county implemented a new shared equity ownership program to help households seek affordable housing while building wealth: the Community Land Trust program (CLT). CLT is designed to keep the home affordable for current and future homebuyers. The CLT retains ownership of the land to keep the property affordable. Households who purchase their home through the CLT sign a purchase agreement and a ground lease with a 99-year period for the land. Thus, by removing the land from the purchase of the house, the property is more affordable. The house cannot be sold in the open market, and investors are not allowed to purchase the property (Florida Housing Coalition). Homeowners in the program can build wealth, pass ownership to heirs, and take advantage of homeownership savings.

Objectives

The Community Land Trust provides opportunities for low and moderate low-income households and communities in providing affordable housing. Offering a community-driven approach to housing security.

Methods

FCS agent delivered the required CLT program education to 140 county residents. In collaboration with Habitat for Humanity and the local county Housing Department, the agent delivered 14 in-person CLT Homebuyer Education programs using the inquiry-based and cooperative learning method. The agent developed PowerPoint presentations, resource materials, and a Guide to Down Payment Assistance Beyond Traditional SHIP (State Housing Initiative Partnership). The curriculum teaches income qualifications, property qualifications, land improvements and re-sale restrictions. Surveys indicate that 99% of participants increased their understanding of the CLT program.

Findings/Results

In 2022, the CLT was awarded \$3.2 million dollars from the county to fund affordable housing for qualified residents. In the first year, 140 participants completed the class. Follow-up surveys of clients and partners found that 40 participants applied for and received CLT approval to purchase their first home. Due to the success of the program, the county increased its funding to build affordable homes for the residents.

Conclusion

Sowing and Growing Hope is an example of implementing innovative programs as extension professionals to real-time community needs using research and evidence-based information. The CLT program is reducing the affordable housing crisis by making it possible for families and individuals to purchase their first home.

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**Meet Your HIRO: An Emergency Preparedness and
Financial Organization Tool**

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Meet Your HIRO: An Emergency Preparedness and Financial Organization Tool

Background

In 2022, while the US faced record breaking inflation, residents of Utah experienced even greater challenges with one of the highest inflation rates in the nation. Add to that unemployment challenges, skyrocketing housing costs, and student loan repayments resuming, and one can see cause for stress and uncertainty. In the face of such financial challenges, organizing household financial and important documents can seem daunting for consumers. Disasters across the country, from floods to wildfires and beyond (NOAA, 2024), have added to the need for such education to ease financial stress when emergency strikes.

The goals of the Household Information and Records Organizer (HIRO) are to provide participants with a systematic approach for keeping track of important documents and financial records to stay organized, save time searching for information and make it easier to cope with emergencies. Workshops were developed using research-based resources from Extension educational materials (Roberts, n.d.; Metzen, 2020), FEMA (n.d.), and other renowned experts in finance education (Johnson, 2015; Garman & Fogue, 2018).

Objectives

1. Learn how to keep and store documents securely.
2. Access information quickly.
3. Understand important financial management principles related to the 10 topics within HIRO.

Methods

Faculty from Utah State University Extension taught classes virtually with the HIRO resource as a guide and walked participants through realistic scenarios to introduce each topic in the HIRO. Guided discussion helped participants recognize the value of organizing records and understand financial management best practices. The resource was designed to be easy to use, attractive and fun to approach. An evaluation process following the Targeting Outcomes of Programs (TOP) framework (Rockwell & Bennett, 2004) was implemented to evaluate understanding of personal finance best practices, measuring short-term outcomes and intention to implement change.

Findings/Results

From 2021 to 2023, 546 participants responded to a post-webinar evaluation with the following results:

- 90% (495) had a better understanding of personal finance management after completing a webinar.
- 93% (508) plan to make positive changes to their personal finance management practices because of this workshop.
- Qualitative survey results show participants plan to apply principles taught by reducing and organizing old papers, gathering documents in case of emergencies, and making

weekly goals to work on estate plans.

Conclusion

The HIRO is an example of implementing innovative program resources to address stress and uncertainty regarding financial organization and emergency preparedness. Impacts from keeping financial records organized include improved financial awareness, enhanced budgeting, quick access in emergencies, simplified tax preparation, reduced stress, and long-term financial success.

The *Household Information and Records Organizer* resource is available for free download at: <https://extension.usu.edu/finance/hiro>

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**Utah State University Extension Empowering
Financial Wellness Program**

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Utah State University Extension Empowering Financial Wellness Program

Background

A decline in savings among adults (Gillespie, 2024), a surge in credit card utilization, and a spike in debt levels, fueled largely by mortgage debt, credit card, and student loans (Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2024) each contribute to a state of heightened financial stress for Utahns. The EFW program utilized the U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's Your Money, Your Goals research-based toolkit and developed original educational content and innovative, creative resources to address this need.

Objectives

1. Provide research-based education through an online course, webinars, and in-person classes.
2. Offer professional development training for statewide Extension faculty and community partners.
3. Develop creative educational resources promoting positive personal financial habits.

Methods

The webinars, classes and the online course undergo ongoing evaluation for effectiveness. Rockwell and Bennett's (2004) Targeting Outcomes of Program model is used to guide the planning and evaluation of the EFW program. The evaluation tracks short-term and medium-term outcomes. The EFW program taught 560 classes and webinars to 20,375 participants from July 2020 to June 2024 with an additional 567,000 social media reach.

Findings/Results

Evaluation results demonstrate excellent program outcomes with significant increases in participant's personal finance knowledge and skills immediately after participating. After attending at least one EFW webinar or class (n = 2,395), 94% of participants stated they had a better understanding of personal finance management, and 95% stated they will make positive changes to their personal finance management practices. Participants also reported an increase in savings, increase in ability to handle unexpected financial burdens, and a general, steady increase in financial well-being.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the EFW program has proven to be an effective adult education program in addressing the increased financial stress faced by many households due to compounding economic challenges. The program's significant reach and positive impact, as evidenced by knowledge gain and skills implemented, validate the importance of such adult education interventions. As economic uncertainties persist, the impactful education and resources from the EFW program will aid in fostering long-term financial resilience and well-being across communities.

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**An Exploratory Study to Identify the Need and Interest
in Consumer Home-Canning of Seafood**

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An Exploratory Study to Identify the Need and Interest in Consumer Home-Canning of Seafood

Background

Consumers want to preserve, and our project explored consumers' interest to can seafood. Currently, validated recipes are limited from the National Center for Home Food Preservation and the USDA Guidelines to Home Canning.

Objectives

1. Conduct a literature review of the current unvalidated home canning recipes for seafood.
2. Create and administer a survey to consumers along coastal states, regarding their food preservation-canning practices around seafood, preferred recipes to be developed, and measure their knowledge of validated canning recipes.
3. Test a seafood recipe identified in the survey using a stove-top pressure canner to determine whether safe thermal processing parameters were met for the food product.
4. Analyze and disseminate preliminary findings.

Methods

A literature review was conducted to identify unvalidated home-canning recipes for seafood. A national survey was administered via snowball sampling, where responses were collected via Qualtrics. This 5-minute survey asked knowledge questions, interests around a new seafood recipe, and demographics. Based on the survey results and resources available, a recipe around seafood stock was identified for preliminary validation for home consumers. The project team worked with other Extension Agents to help identify a seafood stock that can provide flexibility for where in the US and its territories home canners can collect the needed seafood. Several pilot studies were conducted to examine flavor of the seafood stock, and preliminary scientific validation of the seafood stock recipe was conducted.

Findings/Results

The literature review resulted in a limited number of seafood recipes for home canning, based on USDA, National Center for Home Food Preservation, and *So Easy to Preserve*. An internet search resulted in numerous recipes that lacked food safety recommendations around processing time and jar sizes. Our national survey collected 502 usable responses where seafood stock was identified. The project team worked with the University of Rhode Island's Cooperative Extension to work with a commercial processor who shared their seafood recipe. This recipe was scaled down for home consumers, piloted in quart-size jars, and processed for 25 minutes, 60 minutes, and 100 minutes at 0'-1,000' for taste. Preliminary thermal process validation studies will be conducted in Athens, GA, in August 2024.

Conclusion

This project best addresses an innovative idea on food preservation that benefits NEAFCS and its members, and promotes the profession of Family and Consumer Sciences in Leadership/Professional Development. Providing evidence towards validating a new seafood recipe could improve coastal states and others improve their dietary intake. Knowing the thermal processing characteristics for a new seafood recipe that is not

currently available from the National Center for Home Food Preservation will reduce the risk of preventable foodborne illness, especially *Clostridium botulinum*, that is associated with under-processed low-acid food products. Our project will allow NEAFCS members to support their communities to improve human health and well-being by increasing the availability and access of safe and nutritious food with the goal of healthy food consumption, and promote and support healthy and livable communities through education of all ages.

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**Evaluating Digital Accessibility of Ohio State
University Extension's Home Food Preservation Fact
Sheets**

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Evaluating Digital Accessibility of Ohio State University Extension's Home Food Preservation Fact Sheets

Background

Extension fact sheets are commonly used to communicate safe food preservation methods to the public and may be housed on online platforms. It is essential for online materials to comply with web accessibility standards because individuals with impaired vision often rely on screen readers and other accessibility devices. Factsheets with errors or insufficient accessibility features could cause translation errors leading to unsafe food preservation practices. Due to the serious nature of errors in home food preservation practices, specifically canning¹, identifying and addressing these insufficient accessibility features should be prioritized. This study explores digital accessibility of online Ohio State University Extension (OSU Extension) home food preservation fact sheets.

Objectives

1. To evaluate OSU Extension home food preservation fact sheets for compliance with the most recent Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1³
2. To demonstrate best practices for assessing web accessibility of digital Extension fact sheets
3. To inspire other Extension groups to evaluate their own online fact sheets for aspects of accessibility

Methods

OSU Extension fact sheets were accessed through the Ohioline online platform² and selected for inclusion in this study based on their home food preservation focus. The fact sheets were categorized by preservation method. Accessibility was evaluated using the WAVE ® (Web Accessibility Evaluation Tools) Browser Extension for Google Chrome, which evaluates websites for accessibility errors and features.

Findings/Results

Thirty-one fact sheets were evaluated and categorized as canning (15), freezing (7), drying (3), and other (6). All fact sheets were hosted in HTML format, which is recommended over PDF format for accessibility purposes. An average of 40 structural elements and 12 features, which improve accessibility, were identified across the factsheets. An average of 2 errors, 1 contrast error, and 17 alerts (indicating potential errors), were identified.

Conclusion

Accessibility errors may lead to an inability of screen readers and other assistive devices to accurately relay important safety information for home preservation processes. This research has revealed that many of the digital accessibility issues flagged were due to the platform (i.e., the Extension website) that the fact sheets were housed on, and was not always due to the content developed by Extension Educators. However, the features and structural elements which support assistive technologies are also found primarily on the website platform, which may limit the ability for factsheet content to be interpreted. Authors plan to communicate these findings to the Ohioline leadership team.

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Healthy Meals for Busy Families

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Healthy Meals for Busy Families

Background

Research shows that home-cooked meals are more likely to contain fruits, vegetables, and whole grains without increasing food expenditures compared to eating out¹. Yet, the practice of cooking at home is declining with key barriers including lack of time, cooking skills, menu planning, and nutrition knowledge². Families may rather choose fast-food meals or purchase convenience foods from grocery stores, resulting in poor diet quality and negative health outcomes². Families report that there is a need for programs that assist in developing knowledge and skills that include nutrition, menu planning, and quick cooking ideas to build healthier meals^{3,4,5}.

Objectives

1. To increase knowledge and confidence in food preparation
2. To expand knowledge and skills on meal planning
3. To improve safe food handling practices
4. To increase knowledge of operating kitchen appliances safely

Methods

Healthy Meals for Busy Families was developed as an in-person class for adult participants and taught at Extension offices and senior centers. The program runs two and a half hours in length with participants divided into groups and rotated to topic stations. Lesson topics included prep ahead freezer meals, quick air fryer meals, one skillet meals, and My Plate sheet pan meals. A discussion of the benefits of meal planning included a focus on incorporating pantry foods and eating a variety of nutritious foods. The program content was presented through recipe demonstrations, hands-on meal preparation, recipe tasting, Extension publications, and program handouts. The evaluation process consisted of a retrospective pre- and post-survey administered after the program.

Findings/Results

Eighty-two participants attended Healthy Meals for Busy Families in 2023, 71% were seniors sixty years or older. Significant improvements in knowledge, confidence and perceived skills among participants were shown through the evaluation process. According to the participants self-assessment: 77% of participants reported the program was “Very to Extremely Useful” for meal planning, 87% reported “moderately to highly improved” pre-meal preparations, and 74% planned to cook three to five times or more per week at home. A six-month follow-up survey conducted of a 2022 program series showed that 54% of respondents improved their cooking skills and 69% cooked more than five times a week at home.

Conclusion

Healthy Meals for Busy Families is an interactive and hands-on program designed to instruct families on time-saving methods and simpler approaches to planning and preparing healthy and affordable meals at home. This program has been well received and easily adapted to the needs of the target audience from families with school age children to adult participants at community senior centers.

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**Indoor container garden promotes youth engagement
and wellness during school year**

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Indoor container garden promotes youth engagement and wellness during school year

Background

Diets high in fruits and vegetables have been associated with improved human health and reduced the risk of many diseases. Yet, most youth do not consume the recommended amount. In Idaho, 37.4% of adolescents reported eating vegetables less than one time per day. Studies have shown that school gardens offer an experiential learning approach to increase fruit and vegetable consumption, encourage the development of healthy eating habits, and improve mental wellbeing among youth. While school gardens offer many benefits to youth, it is challenging to involve students in the gardening process as the growing season occurs during summer break when schools are not in session.

Objectives

1. To engage students in gardening and teach them the science of growing food; 2) to increase knowledge on healthy eating and promote healthy behaviors; 3) to improve fruit and vegetable consumption and encourage a greater willingness to try new foods; 4) to create awareness of and appreciation for the environment; 5) to build self-confidence and reduce mental stress.

Methods

The Indoor Container Garden program—SEED (Science, Education, Environment, Dietary) is designed to bring gardens into the classroom, providing students with a hands-on learning environment about the process of growing food. Collaborators included Extension educators in Family and Consumer Sciences, 4-H, and Horticulture, as well as Eat Smart Idaho, Master Gardeners, school principals, teachers, and the school district child nutrition directors. The target audience was students from kindergartens through fifth grades at schools that had 50% or more free and reduced lunch participants. A toolkit for establishing the SEED program was developed by University of Idaho Extension educators and program coordinators.

Teachers who expressed interest in participating in the SEED program were provided with the materials needed to establish an indoor container garden. The team helped teachers and students set up their garden. Students involved in the seed planting chose to grow either a salad or herb garden. We also taught them what plants need to grow, how to check water moisture, and what plant parts we eat. For the next few months, students worked with their teacher to water and care for their garden. The Eat Smart Idaho's SNAP-Ed instructor offered nutrition education lessons. When the garden was ready to harvest, students tried the food they grew, such as yogurt ranch dip seasoned with fresh herbs, or egg muffins baked with mixed greens. We also taught them how to harvest herbs and dry them in a paper bag.

Findings/Results

From 2022 through 2023, the program has been implemented in 70 classrooms, reaching 1,426 students. In 2023, about 300 students tried the vegetables and herbs they grew. Of them, 81% of students indicated that they liked and would eat them again. They could also identify one factor that plants need to grow. They could also identify at least one factor that plants need to grow. Results from the teacher's program feedback showed that 100% were satisfied with the program. All teachers (100%) would recommend the program to a colleague, and 50% of them learned about the University of Idaho Extension because of the program.

Testimonials showed a strong impact on youth involvement and learning experience through the program. The responses from teachers included:

“We use them as part of our science curriculum, watching them grow, letting students see the seeds, what they need, and how fast they grow. My students both last year and this year have had so much fun... This is a phenomenal program in our school, and it has helped build so much for these kids that they don’t get to do or see at home.”

“Students were able to eat a little bit of the lettuce that we grew in my classroom last spring. This fall we planted herbs and they have really enjoyed putting the lemon balm leaves in their water bottles. They also were able to do the smell test with other herbs as well. I really enjoyed the lessons that were given and so did the students. It was helpful to have a lesson about the herbs used to make their school lunch that day.”

Conclusion

The SEED program has demonstrated an example of innovative school-based programs to promote and improve youth engagement and wellness. It has been replicated beyond the school settings, including childcare centers and after-school programs. The program has been included in the Eat Smart Idaho’s SNAP-Ed plan as a policy, systems, and environmental project, with the plan to expand the reach and enhance learning experience throughout the state to promote healthy schools and communities.

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Funding

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**Traditions and Trends: How can both be safely
preserved?**

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Traditions and Trends: How can both be safely preserved?

Background

Sustainability, homesteading, “back to basics,” and local foods trends continue the interest in home food preservation. Following these trends, more people are purchasing or receiving used home canning equipment instead of purchasing new. The high cost of purchasing new items can make finding a low- or no-cost pressure canner quite appealing. Unfortunately, the safety and accuracy of these items is often quite questionable. This project documents the importance of annual pressure canner inspections.

Objectives

1. Understand the impact of collaboration with local stores selling replacement parts.
2. To increase awareness of the high numbers of unsafe pressure canners being used for home food preservation.

Methods

Extension Educators conducted pressure canner evaluation events at multiple locations and in the office. A total of 1340 units were evaluated between 2013-2024. For each unit, Educators completed an evaluation sheet to document the condition of the unit. The evaluation time also provided opportunity for the Educator to discuss concerns with the client, answer questions, and provide resources.

Findings/Results

Data gathered indicate less than 11% of the units evaluated met all safety requirements. Thus leaving an opportunity for education on some of the changes needed. Simple replacement or adjustment of gaskets, handles, overpressure plugs and gauges can be made by the user to make the unit safe for use. Locating testing events in retail stores carrying replacement parts for pressure canners increased the likelihood of immediate repairs. Throughout the evaluation event, knowledge and understanding of the participants was increased, based on participant and partner feedback.

Conclusion

Food preservation plays a significant role in addressing food insecurity and ensuring consistent access to an adequate food supply in our community. Our collaboration with local partners for annual pressure canner evaluation events has fostered strong relationships. The role equipment maintenance and education play within current trends and past traditions is an important part of the safe preservation of food at home.

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**Using Research to Guide Extension Programming:
Lessons from the Nourish Program**

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Using Research to Guide Extension Programming: Lessons from the Nourish Program

Background

As adults age, decreased functional abilities may lead to increased health care costs, loss of independence, increased morbidities, and early mortality. Adequate dietary intake is important for maintaining musculoskeletal health and therefore abilities; however, dietary intake is impacted by many factors (Daly et al., 2015; Hairi et al., 2010; Witard et al., 2016). Living alone and not being able to drive become more common as people age, and these factors likely impact dietary intake and thus functional abilities.

Objectives

1. Examine how living alone and not being able to drive impacts dietary choices.
2. Investigate the association of dietary intake with disability.
3. Use these results to inform the creation of Extension programming.

Methods

A 71-item online or paper questionnaire assessed lifestyle behaviors among a sample of individuals aged 50 and older and was delivered face-to-face or advertised through social media based out of North Dakota State University Extension. The survey used mixed methods including dichotomous and Likert-type scale questions. Mixed linear models controlling for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, and income investigated the association between dietary intake and functional limitations, whereas mixed linear models also controlling for mental health examined the impact of living alone and not being able to drive on dietary intake.

Findings/Results

A total of 1,645 adults aged 50 and older from across the United States were included in the analyses. Most participants were from North Dakota (n= 591, 36%), male (n= 985, 60%), white (n= 921, 56%), had household incomes of at least \$50,000 (n= 1,218, 74%), and held at least an associate degree or higher (n= 947, 58%). A total of 323 (20%) reported living alone, 251 (15%) reported not being able to drive, and 954 (58%) reported a functional limitation. Increased intake of lean protein ($p < 0.001$) and vegetables ($p = 0.002$) was inversely associated with self-reported functional limitations, whereas increased intake of processed meats was positively associated ($p < 0.001$) with self-reported functional limitations. Analysis revealed an interaction between living alone and not being able to drive with lean protein intake ($p < 0.001$), indicating that both living alone and not being able to drive are related to decreased intake of lean protein. Living alone was related to decreased intake of vegetables ($p = 0.006$), whereas not being able to drive was related to increased intake of processed meats ($p = 0.002$). These results suggest that those living alone have decreased lean protein and vegetable intake, whereas those unable to drive have decreased intake of lean protein and increased intake of processed meats.

Conclusion

These results are being used to develop a 14-lesson peer-reviewed series of online and face-to-face Extension programs packaged as “Nourish”, including 7 lessons in years 1 and 2 of the project. The program includes “Cooking for One or Two,” “Nourish Your Muscle Health,” and overall well-being, among its topics. Nourish programming includes food, nutrition and physical activity education to assist older adults in modifying lifestyle decisions that can impact health. The conference presentation provided information about the assessment survey as well as an overview of the resulting Extension programming and participant evaluation tools that will be used to inform future offerings.

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**An Interdisciplinary Extension Program: Address
Health Needs of Alzheimer's Disease and Related
Dementia Caregivers**

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An Interdisciplinary Extension Program: Address Health Needs of Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementia Caregivers

Background

Approximately 6.7 million Americans aged 65 years or older are living with Alzheimer's and related dementia (ADRD), equating to about 1 in every 9 people of that age (1). As of 2023, Alzheimer's disease is the fifth leading cause of death for people aged 65 or older (1). ADRD poses several health risks, such as forgetting to eat, drink, or take medications, handling kitchen tools/equipment, communicating hunger, consuming expired or unsafe foods, and swallowing and chewing challenges (3,5). In 2021, ADRD caregivers provided an estimated 16 billion worth of hours of care (2). Unpaid dementia caregiving was valued at \$271.6 billion (2). ADRD family caregivers are at increased risk for negative mental and physical health outcomes (2).

Objectives

1. need for ADRD caregiver programs, 2) discuss program frameworks/methodology, 3) share Inclusivity protocols (Spanish, hearing, and visual impairment), 4) present evaluation model and program outcomes, and lastly, suggest best practices and recommendations for peers who wish to adopt this type of program.

Methods

Eight Family and Consumer Sciences educators with diverse expertise (mental health, nutrition, financial health, and health insurance literacy) developed a six-hour caregiver education training divided into two training days. The modules listed below were taught for one hour each. The programs were implemented virtually and in person at strategic geographic regions of the program to provide better access to many Marylanders throughout the state. Participants received the ADRD program toolkit (185 pages) in English and Spanish. Five two-day training courses were offered throughout the state.

1. Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay (MIND) Diet
2. Kitchen I Spy: Stop Food Poisoning in its Track
3. Strategies for Improving Communication with ADRD Individuals
4. Caring for Your Mental Health as a Caregiver
5. Managing Someone Else's Money (Alzheimer's Association Curriculum)
6. Smart Choice Smart Use: Healthcare During Senior Years

Findings/Results

The team implemented retrospective post-program evaluation using paper and online surveys. Program outcomes indicated participants' (n=78):

- intentions to increase the intake of green leafy vegetables (87%), berries (94%), and whole grains (88%)
- confidence as a caregiver to protect others' finances from scams and fraud (87%)
- confidence in creating and sticking to a self-care routine (70%)

- confidence in noticing changes in communication (94%)
- increase in knowledge of reheating foods to 165 degrees F, and of vulnerable populations being at higher risk of food poisoning; and
- felt confident in their understanding of health insurance options (85%).

Conclusion

The multidisciplinary ADRD caregiver program was created as a targeted approach to the complex challenges of ADRD caregivers. This targeted program approach led to promising changes in participants' knowledge, confidence, and intent to change behavior in finance, mental health, nutrition and food safety, and health insurance literacy. Based on these initial outcomes, it can be concluded that larger-scope programming reaching diverse underserved populations is needed to improve wellbeing among ADRD caregivers.

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**Delivering an Effective Suicide Prevention Program-
Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR)**

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Delivering an Effective Suicide Prevention Program- Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR)

Background

Suicide is a rising public health crisis nationwide and is one of the leading causes of death in the United States. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicated that in 2021, 48,183 people died by suicide in the United States and 1,885 in Pennsylvania (1). The 2021 Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) report demonstrates a need for prevention education in that 12.3 million adults seriously thought about suicide, 3.5 million adults created a plan, and 1.7 million adults attempted suicide (2).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has released prevention strategies based on the understanding that suicide is preventable. One key strategy is teaching evidence-based prevention programs to learn to identify and support people at risk in their communities, such as Question, Persuade, and Refer (QPR) (3). This curriculum is offered through the QPR Institute and has now been registered in the National Registry of Evidence-based Practices and Policies (NREPP) at <http://nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=299> (4).

Objectives

The main objectives are to learn to recognize someone at risk for suicide, intervene with those at risk by persuading them to agree to help and learn the resources to refer to an appropriate resource. A key piece of our training is the role play held at the end of the workshop to allow participants to apply the practice of the skills they learned in the training and allow for a final review of the course materials.

Methods

Penn State Extension is collaborating with multiple partner agencies across the state, including County Suicide Prevention task forces, school districts, and senior centers. In 2023, our team provided QPR to 389 individuals. Participants complete an evaluation after the course evaluating pre- and post-knowledge, confidence, attitude, and behavioral application of course content.

Findings/Results

We received 175 evaluations, and they indicate that 77.1% of participants gained increased knowledge of facts about suicide prevention, 82.3% reported increased understanding of how to ask someone about suicide, 79.2% of participants reported increased confidence in the ability to help a person who appears to be at risk of suicide, and 92.4% (65.5% strongly agree and 26.9% somewhat agree) they feel more competent in helping a person who is suicidal. Lastly, 95.1% expressed intent to use the QPR Booklet when seeking help for someone who appears to be at risk of suicide.

Conclusion

Participants attending this session will learn how to implement this curriculum in their state. This effective evidence-based program can be a vital tool in communities to reduce suicides.

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**Empowering Women in the Outdoors: Breaking
Barriers and Building Confidence**

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Empowering Women in the Outdoors: Breaking Barriers and Building Confidence

Background

The Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW) program and Beyond BOW initiatives were implemented to address women's physical and mental health challenges and create health equity for women. An educational program offering hands-on experiences for adult women, BOW welcomes women of all ages and fitness levels, and does not require experience.

Data indicates women participate in outdoor activities significantly less than their male counterparts, creating a health inequity for women. Research also suggests numerous physical and mental health benefits can be derived from participation in outdoor activities including prosocial connections and increased physical activity.

Objectives

The goals of BOW address issues and barriers for women to participate in outdoor activities and include:

- Empowering women with confidence to engage in outdoor activities.
- Expanding knowledge and skills in outdoor activities.
- Creating a supportive network and strong social connection.
- Exploring escalating physical and mental health issues that can be mitigated through outdoor activities.

Methods

Through Utah State University (USU) Extension, women participate in a three-day BOW retreat with workshops offered on numerous outdoor topics such as fishing, hunter safety, archery, outdoor cooking, camping, rock climbing/rappelling, boat and trailer pulling/backing, hiking, and more. Beyond BOW events include shorter, one- or two-day events. Knowledgeable instructors provide educational training before and during events to assist women in proper safety and preparation for activities and to ensure knowledge and skill mastery needed for continued involvement. A strong collaboration with multiple public and private partners enables USU Extension to utilize outdoor experts, provide valuable resources, and establish program credibility. Participants completed a survey after each program containing Likert scale items and open-ended questions.

Findings/Results

Evaluations were completed by 83 participants. According to evaluation results, participants experienced an increase in knowledge and skills in a variety of outdoor activities. In addition to knowledge and skills gain, 83% of participants acknowledged that they made connections with others that will support their continued participation in outdoor activities. Qualitative data from the program evaluation shows that women feel empowered and gain confidence in their abilities to continue recreating outdoors.

Examples of qualitative responses:

- “My husband is very outdoorsy and so we’ve done quite a few adventures together, but after doing a few of these outdoor adventures with BOW, I feel so much more empowered to do these kinds of things on my own!”
- “It has made me want to go out and adventure on my own. As a matter of fact, I have a trip planned for this weekend. This course has given me the confidence to get out there and be more active in nature.”

Conclusion

The BOW program and Beyond BOW initiatives have proven to be transformative and empowering experiences for women, leaving a lasting impact on both individuals and the community. These experiences introduce women to new outdoor activities, not only increasing their physical activity but also strengthening social and emotional connections. The initiatives contribute significantly to building mental health resilience, offering a holistic approach to well-being through a shared journey of exploration and growth.

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EXCITE: Penn State Extension Addressing Vaccine Hesitancy among Rural Senior Adults

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EXCITE: Penn State Extension Addressing Vaccine Hesitancy among Rural Senior Adults

Background

An innovative and collaborative project designed to educate senior populations on the risks and benefits of immunizations. Four vaccines are highlighted: influenza, pneumococcal, COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

Penn State Extension is partnering with the Division of Immunizations, Pennsylvania Department of Health (DOH), to implement an adult immunization education project in 18 rural counties. We selected the primary target audience of 65+ years old in 18 rural counties for our adult immunization activities after reviewing DOH data and identifying the disproportionate impact of these four illnesses on older adults.

Over 179,000 cases of influenza and 119 related deaths were reported last flu season. Among the rural population, the vaccination rate for 65+ state residents are 51.6%, which is lower than the national vaccination rate of 63.6% for the rural population. (1) According to the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID), "Pneumococcal pneumonia hospitalizes about 150,000 people in the US each year." NFID 2022 survey showed, "Among adults 65 years and older, only 29% have been advised to receive a pneumococcal vaccine." (2) In the selected Pennsylvania counties, there were 285,645 confirmed cases of COVID-19. Among those 65+, only 21.5% have received the bivalent/updated COVID-19 booster. (3) The RSV vaccine became available in 2023, and the CDC recommends vaccination for people 60+ years old. According to the CDC, "Each year, it is estimated that between 60,000-160,000 older adults in the United States are hospitalized and 6,000-10,000 die due to RSV infection" (4).

Objectives

This project is designed for seniors in 18 Pennsylvania rural counties to improve their understanding of four vaccines: influenza, pneumococcal, COVID-19, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), increase knowledge of how vaccines work, identify immunization benefits, and increase confidence in recognizing misinformation and finding science-based information among senior populations. These vaccines were selected 1) to support and complement DOH immunization activities, 2) the flu increases the risk of getting pneumococcal disease, 3) COVID-19 remains a serious illness, and 4) the introduction of the RSV vaccine.

Methods

An educational program was developed applying the research-based findings in *Getting to the Heart and Mind of the Matter: A Toolkit to Build Confidence as a Trusted Messenger of Health Information* (5) and reviewed by medical professionals for accuracy. Programming is conducted in senior centers and other extension programming locations reaching the target audience. Preliminary evaluation of the program's effectiveness in increasing knowledge of vaccine benefits, ability to identify misinformation, and intent to immunize will be presented.

Findings/Results

Evaluation results will include survey data from internal Penn State Extension employee educational programs and external community audiences. This is an ongoing grant initiative and data is currently being collected.

Conclusion

Session participants will learn how the partnership with the Pennsylvania DOH was established, how the adult immunization project was developed, and its impact.

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**Implementing a Dibble Institute Program: Mind
Matters- Overcoming Adversity and Building
Resilience**

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Implementing a Dibble Institute Program: Mind Matters-Overcoming Adversity and Building Resilience

Background

Behavioral health challenges are critical issues in New Mexico with suicide rates 59% higher than the United States and suicide being the second leading cause of death for NM residents, age 10-44 years of age (NM DOH, 2015). In 2021 the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) and the Children's Hospital Association (CHA) joined together to declare a national state of emergency in children's mental health.

Objectives

Learn about Mind Matters, an evidence-informed program from the Dibble Institute.
Learn strategies for implementing the program with a variety of audiences including youth, families, adults, indigenous, and underrepresented audiences.

Methods

A multidisciplinary team of Extension professionals was formed to explore the New Mexico Cooperative Extension Service's (CES) role in addressing behavioral health issues such as mental health challenges and suicide. The Family Life and Child Development (FLCD) specialist along with the team identified evidence-based and evidence-informed programs, one of which being Mind Matters: Overcoming Adversity and Building Resilience. The FLCD specialist coordinated professional development opportunities for this program and identified resources to support Extension professionals and community partners to deliver this program to a variety of audiences.

Findings/Results

Extension professionals trained in Mind Matters were able to reach about 400 individuals from a variety of audiences including youth, adults, indigenous, and underrepresented audiences who may have experienced incarceration, homelessness, and/or substance use challenges. Depending on the audience, 83% to 100% of evaluations showed participants strongly agreed that after attending the program, they felt more confident in their ability to manage stress and build resilience.

Qualitative data demonstrated participants learned and utilized skills taught in the program. Some examples of qualitative responses from participants:

"I learned how to control my breathing when I have anxiety attacks. I also learned how to manage my childhood trauma."

"I learned how to be patient with myself and others. And how to open up and talk more with others and know everything is going to be OK."

"I can give away the sad/bad experiences in my life and forgive/be forgiven and move on/forward. That has been a big blessing for me."

Conclusion

The implementation of the Mind Matters program in New Mexico is an example of how Extension professionals were able utilize an evidence-informed program to reach diverse

audiences successfully. Through this program participants learned important information and skills such as how trauma affects stress responses, techniques for self-soothing, strategies for managing emotions, and the importance of healthy social connections. Due to its successful implementation, New Mexico will continue and hopefully expand the use of this program to support mental health and wellbeing with diverse audiences throughout the state.

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Mind Matters Underlying Evidence Base FULL LIST

<https://dibbleinstitute.org/wp-new/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Mind-Matters-Evidence-Base-2021.pdf>

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Inspire Your Community with the Joy of Laughter

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Inspire Your Community with the Joy of Laughter

Background

The goal of laughter therapy is to increase awareness about attitudes and feelings, gain a reprieve from daily stress and worry, encourage healthy choices, build creativity, and promote peak performance. Through the universal language of laughter, researchers have tracked the biological and mental health impacts laughter has on the body. Biologically, laughter boosts the immune system, relaxes muscles, improves circulation and cardiac health, and has a positive impact on pain management (Abram, 2018; American Psychological Society, 2008; Bennett, 2003). Laughter can be a form of mindful wellness and has been shown to reduce stress hormones and strengthen relationships.

Practicing laughter daily has been shown to elevate mood, improve efficiency and performance, create social connections, help overcome challenges, and provide holistic health benefits. It's a complete package for physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being year-round.

Objectives

1. Gain a deeper understanding of laughter therapy and how to utilize laughter in holistic wellness plans to lead a healthier life.
2. Explore ways to add more laughter to life as we discuss the health benefits of laughter.
3. Create a personal or professional FITT laughter prescription (Dexter, Brook, & Frates, 2016).
4. Practice laughter yoga "exercises" together.

Methods

The Health Benefits of Laughter is a four-part curriculum focusing on mental health, physical health, healing trauma, and incorporating more laughter into your life. Participants attended the program virtually or in person for 1 – 2 hours. This class encompasses a PowerPoint presentation and interactive activities. Using the Kirkpatrick Model, the post workshop and 90-day post workshop surveys assess four levels of change: reaction, learning, behavior, and results.

Findings/Results

This is a pilot program; thus, evaluation data is limited. Data from the post-survey developed gauging program effectiveness indicates: 63% strongly agree (SA) better understanding of physical health benefits and mental health benefits; 77% very likely (VL) to add more laughter to their life, and 61% VL to share laughter therapy information with friends/family (N:134). The curriculum is currently in blind peer review.

"I plan to be more mindful of and incorporate laughing/laughter each day in some capacity." "This is a great session. I'm going to make a conscious effort to get my husband laughing after work. He's a joyful person with a very stressful job." Pennsylvania, 2024

"Thank you for the good laugh. I am going to incorporate your ideas in my daily life." North Dakota, 2024

“Thank you so much! It gets to the whole person and the value and legitimacy of - and the need for creating and supporting - more joyful spaces in our Extension work: the legitimacy of laughter.” Florida, 2024

Conclusion

The Health Benefits of Laughter is an innovative program giving extension professionals a readily available tool to address real-time community needs using research and evidence-based information. Participants are more knowledgeable about how simple laughter results in positive holistic health and how they can apply it to their lives. With the positive response to this class, we have seen increased requests and expansion of the program nationally.

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**On the Move Junior Promotes Improved Nutrition and
Fitness Among Children**

Julie Garden-Robinson
North Dakota State University Extension

On the Move Junior Promotes Improved Nutrition and Fitness Among Children

Background

Childhood obesity affects about one in five children and teens in the U.S. according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC 2024). The prevalence of obesity among this age group was 19.7%, or 14.7 million children and teens, from 2017 to 2020. Obesity increases the risk for diabetes, sleep apnea, joint issues, stroke, cancer and is associated with depression, low self-esteem and social problems such as bullying (Kumari, Shukla, & Acharya, 2022; CDC 2022,). Multifaceted approaches, including nutrition education, and policy, systems, and environmental changes, are needed to counteract the medical and societal costs of obesity.

“On the Move Junior” is a five-lesson curriculum taught as weekly lessons in schools by Extension agents, with activities for teachers and parents. Newsletters and social media expand the reach. Knowing methods of making connections with schools and community professionals can be valuable to other Extension professionals.

Objective

The purpose of the curriculum is to increase the variety of fruits, vegetables, protein, dairy, and grains in children’s diets, as measured by pre/post surveys and parent and teacher observations.

Methods

The health-standard-aligned curriculum uses storybooks and activities. Children in grade 2 engaged in food tasting and tracking of their eating behavior based on MyPlate (United States Department of Agriculture, 2024). Children received packets with paper copies of the workbook and surveys, and incentive items (such as “mood” pencils) at the conclusion. The children completed pre- and post-surveys at the start and end of the five-week program. Teachers and parents filled out post-surveys. All surveys were reviewed by the university’s Institutional Review Board.

Findings/Results

More than 11,642 children have participated in this program since 2014. Results with 1,594 children from 30 primarily rural counties in 2022-23 showed significant gains in knowledge. About 81% tried a new food, 74% tried a different fruit, and 72% ate more vegetables. In addition, 107 classroom teachers from 22 counties provided feedback and observations of the program; 100% would have the program in their classrooms again. About 65% of parents read the newsletter and 34% set family goals. According to parent observations, children ate more fruit (57%), vegetables (43%), dairy (55%) and whole grains (26%). Teachers (n=107) observed children making healthier eating choices at lunch (55%) including dairy (46%), fruit (62%), vegetables (57%), protein (23%) and/or whole grains (23%). Parents (n=712) also reported their children asking questions about food (65%), offering help with home food preparation (53%) and talking about the colors of their fruit and vegetable choices (24%). “My child loved it and was so excited to share what she learned!”

Conclusion

Nutrition education that reaches children multiple times with experiential learning and

goal setting not only increased the children's knowledge but also promoted positive behavior change according to self-reports, teachers and parent observations. Providing parent and teacher newsletters with additional resources extends the learning.

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**Opioid Overdose Response Training for Service
Industry Employees**

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Opioid Overdose Response Training for Service Industry Employees

Background

Opioid overdose remains a leading cause of death in Utah and the U.S. (1). Many opioid overdose deaths are preventable if naloxone, the opioid overdose reversal medication, is administered by a bystander quickly and correctly. In 2022, bystanders were estimated to be present at 70% of overdose deaths (2,3). However, most people lack access to naloxone or don't know how to use it (4). To address this issue, Utah State University Extension faculty developed and implemented an overdose response training focused on service industry employees (SIEs) who work at bars, restaurants, hotels, and other businesses, due to their interaction with high-risk groups, potential for being the first to respond to an overdose event, and promising results from pilot studies in other states (5,6).

Objectives

The main objective of this program was to improve attitudes, knowledge, and self-efficacy related to opioid overdose among SIEs in high-risk Utah counties as assessed by pre- and post-surveys.

Methods

We developed a 45-minute opioid overdose response training conducted by Extension faculty to SIEs at the place of business that covered recognizing signs and responding to an overdose event, legal considerations, and self-care. We collected pre- and post-surveys from consenting participants using modified versions of the Opioid Overdose Attitudes Scale (OOAS) and the Opioid Overdose Knowledge Scale (OOKS, 7).

Results

From December 2023 to July 2024, 15 trainings were completed in nine Utah counties to 285 SIEs, of which 180 completed the pre-survey (63.2% response rate) and 154 completed the post-survey (54.0% response rate). As shown in Table 1, results from the OOAS showed a significant increase in six of the seven questions, indicating improved attitudes and ability to respond to an opioid overdose. The knowledge scores from the OOKS increased from 48.9% pre-survey to 87.9% post survey, indicating a strong improvement following completion of the training.

Table 1. Assessment of Opioid Overdose Attitude and Knowledge

Opioid Overdose Attitude Scale Questions Scale: 1-Completely Disagree to 5-Completely Agree	Pre-test	Post-test	p value
	Mean	Mean	
I have enough information about how to manage an overdose.	2.41	4.23	<.001
I know how to give naloxone to someone who has overdosed.	2.53	4.4	<.001
I would be able to check that someone who has overdosed was breathing properly.	3.31	4.34	<.001

I would be able to perform rescue breaths on someone who has overdosed.	3.28	4.01	<.001
I would be able to place someone who has overdosed in the recovery position.	3.08	4.38	<.001
If I witnessed an overdose, I would call an ambulance straight away.	4.38	4.57	0.0312
I would stay with the overdose victim until help arrives.	4.49	4.58	0.2648

Opioid Overdose Knowledge Scale Questions Scale: Yes, No, Unsure	Pre-test	Post-test	% Change
If the first dose of naloxone has no effect, a second dose can be given.	32.5%	87.4%	54.9%
There is no need to call for an ambulance if I know how to manage an overdose.	84.6%	90.8%	6.2%
Someone can overdose again even after having received naloxone.	67.5%	98.0%	30.5%
The effect of naloxone is shorter than the effect of opioids.	32.0%	89.5%	57.5%
After recovering from an opioid overdose, the person must not take any heroin, but it is OK for them to drink alcohol or take sleeping tablets.	48.5%	79.0%	30.5%
Naloxone can provoke withdrawal symptoms.	28.6%	82.7%	54.1%

Conclusion

SIEs are sometimes the first to witness and respond to an overdose at work, making them an important ally in helping to prevent opioid overdose deaths and slow the impact of the opioid epidemic. This training was successful in improving attitudes, knowledge and self-efficacy among SIEs to respond to opioid overdoses and could be implemented among other high-risk occupational groups in the future.

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Taking Action to Improve Farmer Mental Health

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Taking Action to Improve Farmer Mental Health

Background

Research has consistently shown that farmers face unique stressors, including economic pressures, unpredictable weather, and long working hours, which can contribute to mental health issues and higher suicide rates compared to the general population. Previous studies have highlighted the importance of targeted mental health interventions and the need for accessible mental health resources in agricultural communities (Daghagh et al., 2019; Younker & Radunovich, 2021). Penn State Extension's initiative builds on this body of research, aiming to provide practical support and resources to farmers in Pennsylvania.

Penn State Extension established a Farm Stress team in response to rising mental health challenges and high suicide rates within the Pennsylvania farming community (Sussell et al., 2023). This team designed this initiative to address Pennsylvania farmers' unique mental health challenges. It combines efforts from various units, including Animal Systems, Agronomy and Natural Resources, and Food, Families, and Community (FFC). By leveraging the FFC Family Well-Being team's expertise in mental health and suicide prevention and utilizing agricultural educators' established relationships with farm owners, the initiative creates a robust support system for farmers through shared expertise and resources.

Objectives

The primary objective of the Farm Stress Team over the past three years has been to raise awareness, provide education, and offer support to address the effects of stress associated with the ag industry. Specific objectives include:

- **Raise awareness:** Increasing awareness of the importance of mental wellness within the farming community and reducing the stigma associated with mental health challenges.
- **Provide education:** Educating farmers and their families on recognizing stress symptoms and mental health crisis signs.
- **Offer support:** Engaging support systems and improving communication strategies to enhance resilience.
- **Build community connections:** Fostering community connections through educational programs and initiatives to create a resilient and mentally healthy agricultural community.

Methods

A multifaceted approach was used to reach a wide audience:

- **Promotional efforts:** The Team created and distributed promotional materials, publications, and flyers through partnering organizations and at statewide events. They also utilized radio interviews to reach a broader audience.
- **Presentations and conferences:** Team members participated in national conferences and state legislative meetings, delivering 42 guest presentations to address farm stress issues, reaching over 1,580 individuals.
- **Workshops and webinars:** The team organized statewide mental health in-person workshops and quarterly webinars, engaging 258 participants. These sessions covered topics such as agricultural finance, stress impact on health, suicide warning signs, and referral processes.

- **Podcast series:** The "Farm Stress Real Talk" podcast series was launched to provide insights, coping strategies, and authentic anecdotes about managing stress. To date, 17 episodes have been released, with 325 downloads.

Findings/Results

The initiative yielded significant positive outcomes:

- **Increased knowledge:** Post-course evaluations of 72 participants revealed that 99% reported increased knowledge in areas such as agricultural finance, the impact of stress on health, suicide warning signs, and referral processes.
- **Improved confidence:** Additionally, 93% of participants reported gaining confidence in identifying stress symptoms and communicating effectively about mental health issues.
- **Educator impact:** Quarterly webinars on topics such as adolescent mental health and post-suicide coping positively impacted 175 educators, enhancing their understanding and empathy when assisting farmers.
- **Podcast engagement:** The "Farm Stress Real Talk" podcast series has been well-received, with 325 downloads, providing valuable resources for identifying stress symptoms and implementing coping mechanisms.

Conclusion

The Farm Stress Team effectively addresses the mental health challenges within the Pennsylvania farming community by raising awareness, providing education, and offering support. The initiative's efforts have significantly increased knowledge and confidence among participants and educators, contributing to a more resilient and mentally healthy agricultural community. The team plans to expand its reach and resources, including additional podcast episodes and community partnership initiatives, to further support farmers and their families further.

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The Food as Medicine Initiative: The Power of Partnerships in Promoting Community Health

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The Food as Medicine Initiative: The Power of Partnerships in Promoting Community Health

Background

Diabetes can cost in average more than \$16K per person per year (ADA, n.a.). Besides the individual cost, there is a public health cost. For instance, in [Blinded] County, poorly managed diabetes complications are the third cause of avoidable hospitalizations, reoccurring emergency room use (ER) ([Well Florida Council, 2022](#)), and reoccurring 911 calls. Most calls are reoccurring calls, that could be avoided were these patients educated about diabetes management. However, the biggest cost of unmanaged diabetes is the cost of permanent disability, or even premature death. Many of the diabetes avoidable hospitalizations and the highest diabetes mortality rates are near food deserts areas of [Blinded] County ([Well Florida Council, 2022](#)). As of 2017, 37% of the county population had low food access, and half resided in food deserts ([Well Florida Council, 2019](#)). A task force was created to mitigate the situation, and Extension partnered with the Health Department and paramedics to design the *Food as Medicine* initiative to help individuals with diabetes better manage their diabetes and have better access to fresh produce.

Objectives

The major goal is reducing in 5% the number of reoccurring avoidable hospitalizations due to poorly managed diabetes. The second goal is increasing access to fresh produce among individuals with diabetes living in food deserts.

Methods

During phase one, paramedics referred individuals to attend the diabetes management series. During phase two, participants learned about gardening. Phase three started January 2024 and each family will receive either a raised garden bed or a hydroponics system. The local health department invested more than \$40k in this project in 2023.

Findings/Results

Eighty participants graduated from the diabetes management classes, and out of the 35 screened, (58%) lost weight, (47%) reduced total cholesterol; (44%) reduced systolic blood pressure, (42%) reduced glucose levels, and (39%) improved HDL cholesterol. In 2023, 25 families graduated from phase 2 gardening and nutrition training. A retrospective survey found that 16 (94%) increased their interest in growing produce at home. Phase 3 expected outcomes include: one single two-tower hydroponics system produces yearly an equivalent enough to feed a family of four. Each garden bed grows 16 plants at a time. A long-term survey will evaluate long term impacts for Phase 3.

Conclusion

Phase one of the Food as Medicine program produced significant biometric health benefits for the participants. We expect that by improving their health and their ability to manage their diabetes better, we will have fewer hospitalizations, emergency room use, and fewer 911 calls due to unmanaged diabetes. We also expect the gardening bed and hydroponic systems to increase access to fresh produce among the participants with diabetes living in food desert

areas of the county. It is also beneficial for Extension to partner with other local agencies to maximize the impact health programs can create in the community.

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**Walking into County and University Objectives for
Extension Success**

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Walking into County and University Objectives for Extension Success

Background

Cape May County, New Jersey is fortunate to have many walking trails that span beaches, boardwalks, and wooded areas. In 2020, the CDC reported only 28.3% of men and 20.4% of women met the recommendations for weekly physical activity. To encourage more physical activity the Cape May County Family and Consumer Science Educator created the *Walk Cape May County Guidebook* to encourage residents and visitors to move more and enjoy the built environment throughout the county.

The guidebook was a well utilized resource to increase physical activity, however, as a standalone it did not allow for data. Data collection allowed the guidebook to serve as a useful tool for county residents while also serving university research needs.

Objectives

The objective of the development of the walking guidebook was to encourage county residents and visitors to utilize the walking trails for increased physical activity. The county FCS Educator sought to use the guidebook as a deliverable for county stakeholders to demonstrate the breadth of work offered by Rutgers Cooperative Extension. The guidebook did not offer any scholarly application therefore a study was done on trail usage that met university criteria for the FCS Educator. The combination of the guidebook and study lead to scholarly work and county recognition of Extension efforts.

Methods

The walking guidebook included educational information about getting started, staying motivated and the benefits of walking. The book included every trail in the county, trail locations, accessibility and distance information. Because Cape May County has a very large senior population, 29.5% of residents are seniors, the guidebook was printed by the county print shop and available online, electronically.

The trail study was supported by an award (\$1,000) from The John and Anne Gerwig Directors Award. Qualtrics was used as the data collection tool and reported 99% response quality. An IRB (Pro 2023000920) was obtained from Rutgers University Institutional Review Board. The award obtained was used to purchase signs (see figure 1) that were placed at trail heads and to purchase participant incentives.

Results

The study was conducted from June 1, to November 1, 2023, to obtain an appropriate representation of both residents and visitors during the height of tourism in the county. There were 331 responses recorded and there 59 signs posted throughout the county to obtain survey results. There were twenty survey questions and the Director of Planning for the county contributed questions in addition to those designed by the FCHS Educator. The 20 questions included: trail usage, travel distance to trails, demographics, safety perceptions, activity levels, points of interest, and how trails served user needs.

Demographic outcomes of the study were representative of the community with the

majority of participants being 56–65-year-olds (25.90%), non-Latinx (97.20%), with an income of \$125,000+ (36.40%). Study participants consisted of 46% visitors (non-county residents) and 54% county residents. The QR code recorded the location of the participant and asked questions about safety (lighting 34.62% and trash 26.92% were the two greatest safety concerns), and activity level (300+ minutes/weekly (16.94%). Identified points of interest included places of historical significance (71.91%), restrooms (69.36%) and parks, ball fields and disk golf etc. (44.68%).

Conclusion

The Cape May County Walking Guidebook has supported knowledge and behavior change by offering community members a resource to increase physical activity while also supporting data collection for scholarly practice. The collimation of this project provided data that could potentially serve as a marker for Policy, Systems and Environmental change for exercise modalities. This project created synergistic outcomes that met both county and university goals and demonstrated Cooperative Extension’s ability to bring the University to the community.

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Did you enjoy the use of this trail?

Please give us feedback on trail use by scanning the QR code to complete a survey being done by Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Cape May County. Prizes will be sent to the first 100 survey respondents.



The image contains three logos: the Rutgers logo with the text 'RUTGERS New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station COOPERATIVE EXTENSION CAPE MAY COUNTY', the Open Spaces logo with the text 'OPEN SPACES CAPE MAY COUNTY', and a QR code with the text 'SCAN ME' above it.

Figure 1

**A Trauma Informed Approach with Children:
Implementing Trauma Sensitive Strategies in Family
and Consumer Sciences Programming**

Heather Reister
Ohio State University Extension

A Trauma Informed Approach with Children: Implementing Trauma Sensitive Strategies in Family and Consumer Sciences Programming

Background

According to the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration, two thirds of children report at least one traumatic event by age sixteen. These events may have lasting effects, resulting in difficult transitions into adulthood. Trauma comes in different forms, including abuse and neglect, intimate partner violence, poverty, and substance use disorders.

There are long-term negative impacts associated with trauma (increased need for health interventions, higher incarceration rates, and other upward mobility barriers). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, raising awareness of Adverse Childhood Experiences (often the root of trauma) and implementing trauma informed programming may serve as a protective factor that insulates and supports children and their families in learning and development. The work we do as FCS Educators often aligns with public health issues therefore, implementing trauma informed strategies in our programming may result in better outcomes for all families within our communities. Because every child responds to trauma differently, it is especially important FCS Educators recognize predisposed vulnerabilities. Since young children may not easily communicate their feelings, it is critical to utilize best practices through trauma informed programming to limit or avoid causing further harm.

Objectives

1. Generate a shared understanding of the professional language/research used to describe trauma.
2. Explore the prevalence of trauma and how it impacts brain development.
3. Identify opportunities to include trauma informed practices in FCS work with young children and families.

Methods

Since 2022, the state's FCS Early Childhood Education Team has offered trainings designed to educate and promote utilizing trauma informed practices to approximately 250 public school professionals, higher education, Head Start, Extension Educators, and other community members working with young children. The virtual and in-person programs utilized power point presentations with videos, polls, group discussions, and interactive activities. Participants completed a survey after the program containing Likert scale items and open-ended questions.

Results

The team utilized two evaluations (Qualtrics and Evaluation of Effective Extension Teaching) to measure satisfaction and adoption of information. Results (via email, QR code and/or gmlink) indicated 100% of participants agreed/strongly agreed information was helpful and adoption of information.

Conclusion

Because it is not always evident who among us has been negatively impacted by traumatic stress, implementing trauma informed strategies as best practice in all FCS children's programming, can be a useful strategy in strengthening relationships, reducing traumatization, understanding brain development and ACE scores, promoting self-care, and establishing protective factors.

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**Building Bridges Between Early Childhood Education
and Professional Development Pathways**

Marie Economos
Ohio State University Extension

Building Bridges Between Early Childhood Education and Professional Development Pathways

Background

Ohio State University Extension (OSUE), Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) authors and develops professional development (PD) pathways for early childhood educators. The PD is unique as it allows Educators to meet mandatory state requirements for licensing and quality ratings. Additionally, it builds hours toward the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential at the national level and higher education credits.

The curriculum prepares early childhood professionals to implement developmentally appropriate practices as defined by the National Association of Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and align to Ohio's Core Knowledge and Competencies.

- Child Growth & Development
- Family & Community Relations
- Health, Safety & Nutrition
- Child Observation & Assessment
- Professionalism
- Learning Environments & Experiences.

Objectives

1. Identify local, state, and national resources to support the power to the profession framework in developing career pathways in the early childhood profession that articulate to higher education.
2. Create, plan, and deliver science-based, and affordable PD to assist early childhood educators in meeting their mandatory annual PD requirements.

Methods

OSUE, FCS, was recognized by the Council for Professional Recognition (CPR) for CDA instruction. The Gold Standard Select designation awarded was based on a rigorous review of the programming and training provided to CDA students.

The CDA national credentialing program is a PD opportunity for early childhood educators to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities in the ECE field. Early childhood educators earning this credential align their professional development in local communities and nationally to the professional ECE Framework.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) Power to the Profession framework contains recommendations for educator roles, responsibilities, competencies, and knowledge necessary to provide a high-quality learning environment for all children.

Our program focuses on the first of three professional development pathways, (1. early childhood education certificate/credential programs, 2. early childhood associate degree programs, and 3. early childhood bachelor's degree/ initial master's degree programs), including instruction aligned to the eight CDA subject areas.

Findings/Results

The course of instruction meets the requirements for Ohio's ECE profession to meet the career pathway level requirements for programs and teacher licensure. It creates stackable credentials for the professional's career pathway. Ohio's Early Childhood Workforce is struggling with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and, as a result, has a reduced workforce to meet increased demand for services. Many in the profession either retired or left the profession during this time. Supports and systems are needed now to ensure a comprehensive career pathway.

- Ohio Approved Credit + CDA + Associate Degree = Prepared Workforce
- Qualtrics evaluation is administered at the end of each course. Data measures satisfaction and identifies future needs for professional development.
- Impacts from 2021 through 2023 provided 214 hours of instruction, served 580 professionals, and total of 5,308 children impacted.

Conclusion

Our team's strategic goal is to respond in real-time to the demands of the early childhood workforce while ensuring all instruction aligns with best practices for adult learners, Early Learning and Developmental Standards, CDA credentials, and still maintaining fidelity to ensure alignment to higher education programs.

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**Implementing Developmental Life Skills (DLS): A
Framework for Parental Support Through Community
Partnerships**

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Implementing Developmental Life Skills (DLS): A Framework for Parental Support Through Community Partnerships

Background

According to the CDC, in 2021, 1,820 children died of abuse/neglect in the U.S. One in seven children experienced child abuse/neglect in the last year. The consequences of abuse/neglect negatively impact children, families, and communities for generations. This epidemic transcends race, culture, and socioeconomic status. The Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) DLS program delivers in-home education to minimize the negative consequences associated with child abuse/neglect and improve the health of families. Parents who abuse/neglect their children have often experienced complex traumas including addiction, mental health, violence, and poverty leaving them unable to care for their child without intervention. Referring to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, DLS acknowledges development as a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of a person's environment. The DLS program assists clients in establishing protective factors that serve to mitigate the impact of negative experiences by strengthening relationships and systems through educational programming.

Utilizing science-based resources, instructors work with families referred through the county's child protective services agency in developing skills needed to regain/maintain custody of their children. The in-home approach to programming is mutually beneficial, giving instructors insight into the family's strengths, challenges, and clients the opportunity to apply their knowledge into practice. With this educational opportunity, families can break the cycle of displacement and dysfunction and provide a safe, nurturing home for their children to grow, impacting future generations.

Objectives

1. To reduce child abuse and neglect through life skills education and support family preservation/reunification by creating safe and healthy environments for children and their caregivers.
2. To establish protective factors which mitigate the impact of negative experiences by strengthening relationships and systems through educational programming.
3. To collaborate with community partners to create a wrap-around team approach to providing support to families experiencing child abuse and neglect.

Methods

Unlike traditional "*parenting programs*," DLS offers weekly interdisciplinary lessons developed to meet individual needs, SMART goals, interests, and abilities taking place in the client's home and focused on four domains of learning including Home & Safety, Resource Management, Health & Wellness, and Parenting. Lessons may include hands-on activities, workbooks, role play, games, or required reading. Instructors collaborate with caseworkers, juvenile court, therapists, guardian ad litem, court appointed special advocates, and other community partners to create a cohesive wrap-around team in support of the client's goals. The average successful completion of the program is 6 months.

Findings/Results

In 2023, instructors offered 1,675 teaching hours. DLS received fifty-four court ordered referrals and sixty-eight voluntary referrals. Fifty-seven children reunited with their parents and sixty-nine children remained in-home, avoiding the foster care system.

Conclusion

Stakeholders recognize FCS programs like DLS provide education that influences positive behavior changes within families. The financial and societal benefits the DLS program brings to the community are reflected in the county's continued support of this 37-year program.

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Learning through Play: Creative Approaches to Kindergarten Readiness

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Learning through Play: Creative Approaches to Kindergarten Readiness

Background

Early learning experiences from birth to five shape brain development and create the foundation for later learning. “A growing body of behavioral research establishes relationships between children’s play and development in several areas, including language, executive functions, mathematics and spatial skills, scientific thinking, and social and emotional development” (Hassinger-Das, et al., 2017). To address kindergarten readiness, Summer Smart Start Academy, 12 Nights of Virtual Bedtime Stories, and Laugh & Learn Playdates provided children and parents with opportunities to practice enhanced skills development in areas such as language, math, motor, literacy, health, and social emotional competence.

Objectives

1. To understand the importance of play to child development.
2. Learn about a variety of early learning programs that impact kindergarten readiness.

Methods

Summer Smart Start Academy offered weekly online learning sessions held via Zoom. FCS Agents created learning activities and hands-on educational kits to use during the lesson and to reinforce learning at home. Participants also received recorded YouTube video links for each session as well.

12 Nights of Virtual Bedtime Stories offered nightly bedtime stories read by community readers on Extension Facebook pages. Community readers demonstrated reading techniques including talking about pictures, showing children words, reading with fun in your voice, asking questions, and more. Families received copies of each book to add to their home library.

Laugh & Learn Playdates offer monthly sessions for parents and children to engage in playful activities designed to prepare them for kindergarten. Adults and children hear stories, sing songs, make crafts, play games, and enjoy a healthy snack during every playdate.

FCS Agents taught lessons using Extension research based early childhood materials, worked with librarians to ensure appropriate books, and designed developmentally appropriate learning activities to be implemented at home. Each early learning program has a strong research base using principles from The National Association for the Education of Young Children, state early childhood standards, and university Extension peer reviewed facilitator manuals.

Findings/Results

Program evaluation consisted of printed pre-post surveys, Qualtrics surveys, and Facebook discussion. Select parent evaluation revealed: 94% of children followed routines without reminders; 97% had increased social skills; and 89% noted that their child knows how to find the first page of a book and which way to flip the pages. Qualitative data revealed parent statements such as: “Guided weekly lessons were a perfect way to help me keep my little one learning at home over the summer. He especially loved the gator grabbers and all the activities using them.” Program specific evaluation measures are available.

Conclusion

Children who are equipped with kindergarten readiness skills are on target to be more successful in their academic careers. Additional programs are needed to expand at-home readiness domain skills development for families as well as evaluation tools which measure Extension program participants kindergarten screening success and subsequent academic performance.

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Alzheimer's Storybook Program

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Alzheimer's Storybook Program

Background

According to the Alzheimer's Association (2021) Nationally, 48% of family caregivers care for someone with Alzheimer's or another dementia type disease and 25% of these caregivers are also caring for their children at the same time (Alzheimer's Association, 2021). In Montana there are over 17,000 family caregivers caring for people with Alzheimer's.

How children interact with a person with Alzheimer's and the quality of the relationship they have with this person can depend on how they learn to cope with their emotions (Sakai et al., 2012). To help children cope with the emotions that arise from significant life events, like having a parent or grandparent with cognitive decline, many psychologists, teachers, and parents have turned to bibliotherapy approaches (Akgün & Karaman Benli, 2019; Heath et al., 2017). This study explores the creation and outcomes of a program focused on using bibliotherapy approaches to help children and their families.

Objectives

1. Increase knowledge and awareness of AD and the impacts it can have on families.
2. Positively influence the social and emotional wellbeing of the family.
3. Foster multigenerational relationships.

Methods

Utilizing the NEAFCS Endowment funds, the research team developed a "train-the-trainer" approach, demonstrating how Extension Agents and other professionals could educate the adults and children they work with about Alzheimer's by using storybook resources. A three-hour online training was held on May 21, 2022, with 31 in attendance. About 17% were Extension professionals; 14% were librarian professionals; 12% were parents/guardians and 10% were long-term care professionals. The training consisted of an overview of AD, impacts on children, an introduction to Developmental Bibliotherapy and recommended reading practices, and four implementation methods the audience could use in their communities to outreach the storybook resources. Before the training, all participants were sent a consent form and pre survey, a packet of information about the Alzheimer's Storybook program and a complimentary copy of the storybook *Please Explain Alzheimer's to Me*. Upon completing the training, participants were administered the post survey and 6-8 months later follow up interviews were conducted over the phone or Webex. A website was also developed for downloading materials used during the training session.

Findings/Results

A qualitative analysis of the data showed participants perceived the training as effective. The content and resources provided before, during and after the training were viewed as helpful, useful, and relevant. The four implementation methods were found to be versatile. Examples of a qualitative responses from a participant:

"It's really important information and I learned a lot about the disease, and the different forms of it and you know understanding the difference between Alzheimer's and Dementia."

"It's not just opening a book and reading it, you have to ask the right questions and explain things when you're using those books."

Conclusion

The Alzheimer's Storybook Program is an example of implementing family focused dementia programming as extension professionals to real-time community needs using research and evidence-based information. Participants are more knowledgeable about Alzheimer's and storybooks resources that help foster learning, social emotional wellbeing, and multigenerational relationships with persons with Alzheimer's. With the positive response to this training, we have seen this program being implemented in various ways across Montana.

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**Nurturing Children by Engaging Fathers in Early
Childhood Programming: How and Why Family and
Consumer Sciences Should Take Interest**

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Nurturing Children by Engaging Fathers in Early Childhood Programming: How and Why Family and Consumer Sciences Should Take Interest

Background

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 18.4 million children live without a father in their home. That is about 1 in 4 children (Father Absence Statistics) missing out on a biological, step, or adoptive father influence. The U.S. has the highest rate of children living in single-parent households of any nation in the world. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022). Research shows that a father's absence affects children in alarming ways, while a father's presence makes a positive impact in the lives of children, and mothers. There are reciprocal benefits to father involvement as well. According to Fatherhood.gov, fathers who are involved in the lives of their children report better physical and mental health, especially dads of daughters. Research has shown that nurturing dads raise emotionally intelligent children, helping make society more respectful and equitable.

Objectives

Review research from the National Fatherhood Initiative that reveals mutual benefits when a father is present and engaged in a child's life.

1. Identify barriers that prevent father involvement.
2. Discuss strategies for engaging fathers in the classroom and identify resources to support fathers.

Methods

This session will share the research and explore stereotypes or misconceptions that interfere with fathers building healthy relationships with children in the earliest years of development. Building a nurturing environment is critical during the formative years of development for the success of future generations. Family and Consumer Sciences has a positive impact in local professional development. Participants of this session will leave with a 3-hour professional development training for early childhood educators and other community partners.

Findings/Results

From 2022-2023, FCS educators offered the 3-hour professional development training to early childhood educators. Approximately 200 early childhood educators completed a digital Qualtrics evaluation. Ninety percent of participants reported gaining new knowledge with adopting one or more best practices within their program. Early Childhood Educators reported having more father engaging materials, pictures in the classroom and more hours for classroom engagement.

Conclusion

This program builds on best practices for classroom environments that foster growth and development of skills, and strategies for father engagement. Building positive relationships with fathers can bring them closer to their children and increase their participation in early childhood

programs. When supportive relationships with staff are established, fathers report changing their schedules to participate in program activities. Despite barriers to their involvement in the classroom, together fathers and early childhood educators can build healthy relationships which are foundational to engagement.

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**Access to Everyone Under One Sky: Inclusivity Tips
for Audio and Visual Enhancements**

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Access to Everyone Under One Sky: Inclusivity Tips for Audio and Visual Enhancements

Background

As Educators, much of the existing programs utilized at the county level are created without accommodations for hearing and vision impairments in mind. However, over 20 million Americans consider themselves to be living with serious hearing impairment and/or significant vision impairment (American Community Survey, 2022). Individuals living with these losses may experience communication difficulties, reduced participation in social events, and challenges in the learning environment.

According to the Rehabilitation Act (1973), policy requires for any information and communications technology (ITC) produced and presented in a public facing manner by Federal departments and agencies to meet accessibility standards for those with disabilities, including those with disability who are visually or hearing impaired. In addition, all ICT available materials should additionally follow the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 to be compatible for the needs of learners with visual and hearing impairments (2023).

Within the limitations of funding, time, and resources, how can a county educator modify existing programming materials to be more inclusive of this population, abiding by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act?

Objectives

1. Explore the five basic steps to make programming more accessible to the hearing and visually impaired population.
2. Discover existing assistive technology, guidelines for print-based materials, and for testing of content accessibility tools.

Methods

There are limited number of evaluated interventions for people with deaf and/or blindness in the adult learning space. Therefore, the resources used to create the five basic steps were determined by published exploratory studies using the experience questionnaire, revised approaches to studying inventory, and the classroom participation questionnaires to assess the perceptions, participation, and access to information in a learning environment.

Findings/Results

Web accessibility and training are important to the learning of hearing and visually impaired individuals and to the practice of instructional design. Research indicates there is a high level need to address best practices and the integration of technology in online and in-person teaching to successfully connect learners with the proper materials and applicable assistive technologies. Many resources available to provide the assistive technologies and products, however, training is not produced in a one-stop-shop source to educators, and more time is spent looking for resources versus implementing them.

Conclusion

Due to the scattered nature of resources available on the Internet for addressing

compliance issues in web and print accessibility, educators would benefit from a tips guide focused on audio and visual enhancements. This guide allow educators to experience the confidence that their attendees are receiving the best tools and resources available, increasing the participants engagement and understanding of the material.

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**Bridging Theory and Practice: Using Action Research
in Family and Consumer Sciences**

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Bridging Theory and Practice: Using Action Research in Family and Consumer Sciences

Background

In the dynamic field of family and consumer science education, the integration of action research has emerged as a pivotal strategy to connect theoretical insights with practical applications. Action research provides educators with a structured approach to address real-world challenges, innovate curriculum frameworks, and enhance teaching strategies (Coghlan, 2019). This interactive workshop delves into the transformative potential of action research within Family and Consumer Sciences.

Objectives

The primary objectives of the workshop are:

1. To explore the principles and frameworks of action research as applied to family and consumer sciences education.
2. To demonstrate how action research can be leveraged to tackle diverse educational challenges and societal trends.
3. To equip educators with practical skills and strategies to design, implement, and reflect on action research projects.
4. To foster a culture of continuous improvement and innovation in educational practices through evidence-based decision-making.

Methods

The workshop employs a structured approach that includes drawing from diverse educational settings to showcase successful applications of action research in addressing family and consumer science dynamics and societal trends. Participants engage in hands-on activities and group discussions, exploring each phase of the action research cycle—planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Practical strategies are imparted for formulating research questions, implementing data collection methods, and analyzing findings to enhance educational practices.

Findings/Results

Through this interactive workshop and practical exercises, participants gained insight into the application of action research principles within family and consumer sciences education. Additionally, participants have increased their ability to identify pertinent research questions and develop actionable research plans. Their competence in implementing effective data collection methods and analyzing research outcomes has been evident, and there has been a documented increase in their confidence in using research findings to enhance teaching strategies and curriculum development.

Conclusion

This workshop demonstrates the transformative potential of action research in family and consumer sciences education. Participants emerge equipped with the knowledge and skills to integrate action research seamlessly into their educational practices. By fostering a culture of continuous improvement and innovation, educators are empowered to make tangible impacts on learning and community engagement within the realm of family and consumer sciences education.

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**How NEAFCS Annual Session Evaluation Tools Can
Identify Future Sponsors and Professional
Development Needs**

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How NEAFCS Annual Session Evaluation Tools Can Identify Future Sponsors and Professional Development Needs

Background

As funds to attend professional development become challenged, it is important for the NEAFCS Annual Session to appeal to as many of the 1,968 members (2/14/23 William Ferguson email) as an opportunity to learn and network, as well as from a financial standpoint, meet venue minimums. By administering two evaluation tools for both the professional development (PD) opportunities and overall session.

Objectives

1. Outcomes and implications for annual session planners when implementing a retrospective evaluation for PDs covering various topics
2. How to use Qualtrics Stat iQ to conduct paired t-tests
3. Importance of gathering evaluation data annually to support the development, logistics and content of future annual sessions.

Methods

The poster will demonstrate how using an evaluation tool for both PD and the overall Annual Session in an annual, consistent manner could improve membership participation because it would ensure the association, in partnership with affiliate liaisons, is meeting the changing needs of the members. The tools were created and administered by the affiliate liaisons, in partnership with the national board. PD volunteers were trained in how to bring awareness to the tool via QR code, and follow-up emails were sent by the Executive office as reminders. Participants will learn how this process could be replicated for future use.

Findings/Results

At the 2023 Annual Session, a 17-item survey was implemented for PD sessions (n=16), and a 20-item survey for all attendees was implemented, covering learning, motivation, major influences, and major barriers to attending. Both Likert-type and open-ended questions were used. Qualtrics was the online platform used to manage data collection and analysis. Descriptive and paired t-tests were conducted. A total of 378 and 205 engaged in the two surveys, respectively. 50.3% of respondents (n=162) said they intended to continue learning more about the PD topic(s) presented back home. There was a statistical significance ($p < 0.001$) in respondents' confidence to discuss in their community the PD topic(s)/theme(s) presented at this session. In the overall evaluation, respondents "strongly agree" that networking (45.6%, n=88) and then location (36.2%, n=71) influenced their decision to attend. Respondents "strongly agree" that no barriers (25.3%, n=42) and travel funding (25.8%, n=42) would prevent their attendance in 2024. Overall, respondents were "very to extremely satisfied" (74%, n=148) with the annual session.

Conclusion

Results can help to inform future sessions to make them fruitful from a PD and financial standpoint.

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