

## 2018 LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award Project Evaluation

<b>Project ID</b>	HS-5
<b>Title of Program</b>	New Hanover County Senior Resource Center Raised Garden and Cooking Demonstrations
<b>Program Category</b>	
<b>Submission Date</b>	5/31/2018 11:32:50 AM
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<b>Implementation Date</b>	1-Apr-17
<b>FLSA Designation</b>	Exempt
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### Description of Productivity Improvement

Using vegetables and herbs grown in on site raised beds by seniors at the center, The New Hanover County Senior Resource Center (SRC) hosts free cooking demonstrations each month for older adults, to help turn nutrition education information into action on the part of the senior population. Blending nutrition counseling with practical hands-on cooking demonstrations encourages lower income seniors to make healthier food choices and improve their overall nutrition. Studies show that education is better learned as more senses are utilized. By listening, seeing, and tasting, more people will retain healthy eating information (Science Daily).

Additionally, it is on target with the NHC strategic objective of increasing access to programs to prevent and reduce obesity, a strategic plan developed after 60% of the participants of the NHC 2015 Community Health Assessment reported a BMI in the overweight/obesity range.

The demonstrations are promoted to the general senior public via word of mouth, notices at the SRC, the SRC newsletter, and through postings on the SRC website and Facebook page.

### Description of why this project was initiated

Studies show that healthy eating in later years reduces the risk of many chronic diseases, including obesity, diabetes, osteoporosis, high blood pressure, heart diseases, sarcopenia, and certain cancers (National Council on Aging).

Healthy eating plays a major role in reducing the risk of developing these major chronic illnesses and/or reduces the severity of the chronic condition. The key recommendations from the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans are:

Consume a healthy eating pattern that accounts for all foods and beverages within an appropriate calorie level. A healthy eating pattern includes:

- A variety of vegetables from all of the subgroups - dark green, red and orange, legumes (beans and peas), starchy, and other
- Fruits, especially whole fruits
- Grains, at least half of which are whole grains
- Fat-free or low-fat dairy, including milk, yogurt, cheese, and/or fortified soy beverages
- A variety of protein foods, including seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes (beans and peas), and nuts, seeds, and soy products
- Oils

A healthy eating pattern limits saturated fats and trans fats, added sugars and sodium.

Over time, elevated blood sugar can lead to other diabetic-related health conditions including heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, nerve damage, eye problems, and wound-healing problems. The disease affects longevity, functional status, and risk of institutionalization for older adults.

Additionally, nearly 1 in 6 adults in the United States had uncontrolled high blood pressure.

Given this information, the SRC saw a gap in the community and developed a program to ensure that the seniors in New Hanover County had access to healthy eating education and nutrition information.

The focus on cooking demonstrations is because studies show that education is better learned as more senses are utilized. By listening, seeing, and tasting, more people will retain the healthy eating information.

### **Quantifiable results (sustainability, cost savings, cost avoidance and/or a higher level of service).**

#### **Indication of what resources were used and what was done with any accrued time savings**

The cooking demonstrations have been well-received with a core group of 10-15 participating monthly. Participants were given a survey to understand the usefulness of the program, and results of the survey show that most participants found the cooking demonstrations very helpful, indicating they learned different ways of cooking food, and were more aware of what and what not to eat. Participants reported increasing their intake of fruits and vegetables, protein, calcium, and vitamin D while decreasing their intake of sodium, saturated fat, and sweetened beverages primarily with some exclusion of refined carbohydrate. They reported replacing salt in cooking with herbs and spices, a key focus of the program. Nine of the 15 participants indicated improvements in their health conditions related to hypertension, hypercholesterolemia, and diabetes as a result of the cooking demonstrations. Comments are listed in the survey results section, indicating improved blood sugar and blood pressure readings.

The SRC Cooking Demonstrations Program can be easily replicated by other counties, and has already been in conversations with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension New Hanover County Center to develop a collaboration and expansion of the cooking demonstrations. As with most partnerships, partnering with NC Cooperative Extension will continue to enhance the program and increase the participation.

The initial costs for the program included the cost of equipment, including an induction cook top, pans, mixing bowls, cutting board, and utensils totaling around \$350. The demonstrations are held at the SRC's commercial kitchen, allowing the program to utilize existing equipment. Vegetables and herbs are used from the SRC raised garden beds in many of the demonstrations cutting down on costs. Because the program focuses on economically friendly meals, the monthly food costs of food for the program are minimal. The program is part of the congregate nutrition site activities and attended primarily by congregate seniors along with other SRC participants. The incidental costs incurred with needed food purchases are funded by the congregate supply budget.

### **Other descriptive information**

One participant was willing to share actual lab values of improvements: blood pressure readings improved at 128/80, on the high end of normal, and blood glucose of 119, a good reading for a diabetic.

One participant wrote that the program “made me want to do better, and I like that.” Demonstrating easily-prepared, nutritious meals while allowing the participants to utilize all their senses along with active participation are methods that can lead to motivational change. Motivation is what makes needed changes successful. Once successfully motivated, people can and do change. Change does not happen immediately. The monthly cooking programs allow for this process to develop over time. As gradual changes occur, motivation develops further, enhancing the change in eating patterns. As these eating patterns begin to coincide with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the chances for better health are increased.

Another participant wrote “creative cooking enhances the flavor” of the food, clearly experiencing the goal of the program. Food can be prepared that not only nourishes your body but is pleasing to the senses as well. The process of eating is often a social event and should be enjoyed and savored, and with creativity, herbs and spices, and sometimes a gradual readjustment of taste buds, change does occur.

With a change to healthier eating behaviors, a change that aligns with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, the SRC Cooking Demonstrations are successfully working towards one of the county's strategic desired outcomes: “Community knows risk of obesity and individuals can equitably pursue a life that mitigates risks.”