

Cooking Matters

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SUMMARY

Indy Hunger Network is a partner with Cooking Matters (CM), a national campaign of Share Our Strength, an organization working to end childhood hunger and poverty by teaching families to make healthy, affordable food choices. The CM courses provide culinary and nutrition education focused on how to shop for and cook healthy, affordable meals. A CM course is typically a six week program with one class per week for two hours. The primary audience targeted for the program is parents and caregivers of children ages 0-5 years old.

IHN has been partnering with the Indiana Department of Health, Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity since 2019 to implement the CM program in the Indianapolis community. The DNPA has supported the CM programming offered in childcare settings and early learning centers i.e. Head Start locations, WIC, and after-school programming. Through this support IHN has been able to teach 56 courses, and has reached a total of 443 adults and children.



CHALLENGE

Throughout IHN's implementation of the CM program, there have been several challenges. The target population for the program is parents and caregivers of children ages 0-5 years old. After a few years of program implementation, IHN evaluated the program to determine if IHN was reaching the target population. The assessment revealed that parents within the target population of the program typically show for one class, but then fail to attend the remaining five classes in the course. Due to the decline in attendance by parents with children ages 0-5 years old, IHN was not significantly reaching the targeted demographic of the program.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

IHN's program reach is typically only in Marion County, Indiana. However, offering virtual programming due to the COVID-19 pandemic has allowed the program to begin reaching sites in outer lying counties. IHN plans to use virtual programming to expand programming to additional outer-lying counties of Indianapolis. Below includes the number of sites IHN has reached in each county.

Marion County - 25 sites

Johnson County - 1 site

Hamilton County - 1 site

More information about DNPA can be found at in.gov/health/dnpa

Participant Quotes

"It made me more conscientious about my eating habits. I drink a little more water, eat more canned veggies, and more fruits; I am more confident about cooking quick meals."

"It was great learning more healthy budget friendly meals and we worked together as a family making planning and preparing meals."

Contact

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SOLUTION

In order to increase participation, IHN surveyed previous participants and site location coordinators to understand what time of day and course length (six week program for two hours weekly) would best serve the target demographic of the program. IHN's CM staff also attended family engagement nights and parent meetings at new and existing CM site locations to offer recipe samples and cooking demonstrations. This time was used to survey potential participants to continue to assess the appropriate time and length of courses for these families. Additionally, IHN reached out to CM at the national level to determine if shortening the six week two hour weekly classes would be approved.

RESULTS

IHN was approved by CM at the national level to offer shortened programming. However, the shortened courses still had to cover all items in each week's curriculum of the six week programming. The condensed courses were shortened to four week courses for one hour each week. IHN now offers the condensed version of the CM program to the early learning centers, WIC clinics and after school programs. In addition to shortening the courses, IHN also found that offering classes an hour prior to child pick up or an hour after child drop off would work best for the surveyed parents' schedules. Moving the class time and shortening the course length allowed IHN to see an increased participation rate from the targeted population of the CM program.

FUNDING

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SUSTAINING SUCCESS

After several successful implementations of the shortened format of the program, IHN has seen a significant increase in attendance from the targeted population of parents and caregivers of children ages 0-5. This new format has also allowed IHN to expand the offering of shortened programming to partners that the six week programming did not work for. IHN still surveys the site location coordinators and participants to determine if the course length and time duration work for them. With this new format, the CM program has been able to reach eight Head Start locations, one early learning center, six after school programs, one adult and child health center, four WIC clinics and one low-income healthcare center.



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