



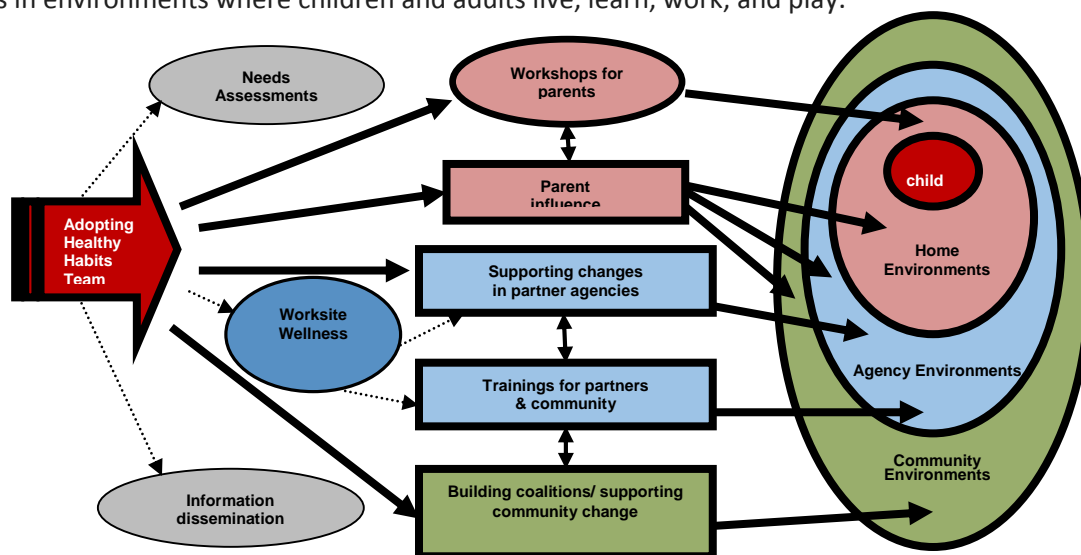
APHA Food and Nutrition Section Roundtable
Innovative SNAP-Ed Activities to Promote Healthy Eating, Physical Activity,
and Prevent Obesity
Monday, November 1, 2015: 2:30-4:00pm

Title: Adopting Healthy Habits: Nutrition educators expand roles to include policy, systems, & environmental change

Presenter(s)/Author(s): Tisa Fontaine Hill, MPH (tfh3@cornell.edu) and Jamie Dollahite, PhD, (jsd13@cornell.edu)
Division of Nutritional Sciences, Cornell University

Abstract Overview

Introduction: Supporting policy, systems, and environmental change (PSE) efforts is increasingly recognized as an essential component of nutrition education in communities. Through community-based participatory research, Adopting Healthy Habits (AHH), leveraged existing Cooperative Extension staff to address the challenge of translating the PSE approach into practice. Study objectives included 1) identifying programmatic supports for professional and paraprofessional nutrition educators to expand beyond direct education and 2) documenting the changes that support healthy choices in environments where children and adults live, learn, work, and play.



Approach: Staff (n=16) in seven diverse counties across New York state focused strategies (staff development, worksite wellness programs, and engagement in local coalitions) to increase healthful food and activity behaviors underpinned by local policy and systems changes. Output and outcome data were collected through yearly work plans, periodic focus groups and interviews with staff and partners, community readiness and other needs assessments, and monthly documentation of activities.

Results: With dedicated time, ongoing technical assistance, and skill development, nutrition educators can become agents of PSE changes. Results included best practices for adoption of healthy activities and the importance of supporting guidelines and policies in primary sectors (schools, worksites, and community organizations). Data analysis elucidated needs regarding evaluation tools, resources to support dedicated time for PSEs, and training relevant to multiple community roles undertaken by professional and paraprofessional staff.

Discussion: AHH outcomes illuminate opportunities within current partnerships to engage in and implement PSEs. Site-specific case studies detail contextual variation and serve as roadmaps for PSE initiation. Sharing successes and ongoing challenges can further assist staff in developing their roles as PSE change agents and will should inform both current and future PSE public health approaches. **Essential supports** to develop skills & move to collaborative relationships conducive to environmental change: dedicated time, mentoring, and technical assistance. **Delivering nutrition and parenting education** (“Healthy Children, Healthy Families: Parents Making a Difference!”) provided educators with a deeper understanding of the role of the environment in shaping behaviors as well as a tool to use with partners. **Worksite Wellness** efforts translated into skills/effective work with community partners, trying new activities and directions → new understanding of role of the environment, facilitating discussions and change efforts with different stakeholders, dealing with resistance, developing credibility and passion. **Nutrition educator roles in community change:** Its good to have multiple staff at coalition meetings - helps facilitate planning and taking action. Managers and frontline staff have different roles in the community: Quote: “Sometimes the manager is better at getting things set up. I’m better at going in and getting things done.” AHH support is essential to managers being able to engage in environmental change activities with community coalitions: helps give direction. **Resources needed** to support work: dedicated staff time for work with partners & coalitions, time to reflect and identify next steps, document what has been done (for ourselves and for our partners) and the impact (for ourselves and for our partners), build relationships, time with partners. Ongoing challenges include:

- Educators expected to meet education “numbers,” difficult to prioritize policy, systems & environmental efforts.
- Requires long-term commitment – few short-term outcomes.
- Community buy-in takes time; multiple, iterative steps; dedicated staff.
- “Spark-plug” identification in each environment difficult.
- Staff turnover in partner agencies frequent.
- Effective skill-building activities not fully identified.
- Need feasible, productive evaluation methods.

Implications specific to SNAP-Ed & public health practice

...on the **national level**:

- Redefine strategies for obesity prevention
- Strengthen grant opportunities for practitioners to use environmental strategies
- Modify existing federal nutrition education policies to include environmental change work & **monitoring systems**

...on the **state level**:

- Urge federal leaders to adopt the socio-ecological perspective
- Support each other in adopting the socio-ecological perspective
- Provide training, technical hands-on support, & opportunities for practitioners to share their stories

...on the **community level**:

- Expand position descriptions to include environmental change
- Promote organization worksite wellness
- Encourage & facilitate sharing of networks and relationships
- Collaborate to apply for environmental grants

...on the **practitioner level**:

- Educate staff and leaders of community agencies on environmental change
- Develop and expand existing networks to find environmental change opportunities
- Share stories to support each other’s use of environmental strategies