

# Nutrition Education & Tools Project



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 3**

**ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND ..... 3-6**

**NEEDS STATEMENT ..... 6-8**

**PROGRAM DESCRIPTION ..... 8-13**

**PROGRAM VISIONS..... 13**

**GOALS AND OBJECTIVES ..... 14**

**IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION..... 14**

**COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS ..... 15**

**CURRENT COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS..... 15-16**

**FUTURE FUNDING ..... 16-17**

**CONCLUSION ..... 17**

## **Executive Summary**

WAFER has been providing food to the hungry for 30 years, changing to meet emerging needs and addressing underserved populations through the ongoing creative effort of many. Research demonstrates the ever decreasing health of our nation's poorest while food insecurity is increasing.

In a country where food is plentiful and every advantage is at our fingertips, people are still falling between the cracks. As an organization that collaborates with many other organizations to ensure food access through recovery and distribution, it is apparent that two key components are missing. First, many clients lack the skills and tools necessary for food preparation and preservation. Second, related to the first key component is good nutrition and wellness which can contribute to a healthy lifestyle. Addressing these shortfalls with an education program designed to strategically address these shortfalls will ultimately lead to greater food security and self-independence for the low-income populations throughout La Crosse County.

## **Organization Background**

Responding to God's love, WAFER provides food and works to eliminate hunger.

WAFER has a 30 year history in the greater La Crosse area, continually evolving and growing to keep up with the food needs of local communities. Originally known as The Emergency Food Basket, the food pantry was located near the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. The Emergency Food Basket was serviced by the Lutheran Campus Ministry and Roncalli Newman Center. Food, resources, and volunteers were provided by local churches. In 1985, a task force formed the Board of Directors and just one year later W.A.F.E.R. (West Avenue Food Emergency Resource) hired an Executive Director and moved to the basement of St. Paul's Lutheran Church on West Avenue. During the first year of operation, client households were allowed one emergency food package and just over 3300 food packages were provided.

In 2002, a different location was sought in order to improve safety and accessibility to client families, those with physical limitations, and volunteers in addition to safe food storage. After moving to the current location, the WAFER acronym remained, but the lengthy name was dropped. During this year, WAFER became a TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) outlet, participating in the government commodities program. With the addition of TEFAP, visits were increased to a minimum of one time per month and nearly 9500 food packages were distributed to families.

Today, WAFER is La Crosse County's largest food pantry, serving approximately 1600 families each month. In total, more than 20,000 food packages feed 56,000+ people each year for approximately four days each month. Communities which utilize WAFER services include:

La Crosse, Holmen, Onalaska, West Salem, Mindoro, Bangor, and Rockland. Services are extended to residents in Houston County, MN, as well because of limited resources in that area.

Each individual or family served by WAFER is at a different place in life: homeless, looking for work, having a job that doesn't adequately provide support, chronically ill, newly diagnosed, living in a rural area, lack of transportation, physical disability, mental disability, or elderly. The WAFER staff and board regularly assess needs and address them with expanded or altered programming to ensure that basic needs are being met, as much as possible.

Poverty and hunger are not discriminatory - they know no age, race, gender, or any class. Thousands of individuals and families rely on the food package provided by WAFER, containing a variety of non-perishable foods such as canned fruits and vegetables, cereal, pasta, side dishes, canned meat, soup, and peanut butter. Frozen meat, , extra items (like salad dressing, muffin mixes, seasonings, and condiments), a large assortment of produce, dairy, and plenty of bakery items increases the amount of food in each package to feed each person in the family for 4-5 days.

Despite honorable intentions to eliminate hunger completely in our community, state, or nation, there will always be chronically impoverished people. While that statement is somewhat pessimistic, it is realistic to assume that there will always be people who will rely on "charity" just to survive, based on the cards life has dealt (severe mental or physical disability, physical deformities, life-altering accidents, etc). As a result of the varying needs presented in our local communities, WAFER has established, implemented, and collaborated with multiple partners to address those needs.

For example, located in a relatively high poverty area, WAFER collaborates with Channel One Foodbank (a Feeding America agency) to offer an additional food package each month to every family. Channel One brings roughly 15-25,000 pounds of food to our location early on a Saturday morning. The pallets of food are set up in the street (or the warehouse behind our building during the winter months) and as households walk through the line volunteers hand them the items available. The food varies based on what is available in the Channel One warehouse, but generally includes canned vegetables and beans, cereal, crackers, fresh produce, bakery, and side dishes. Between our La Crosse and West Salem location, 500-600 families come to receive their additional food package during the two hour time frame.

While addressing the food needs of seniors we must take into account possible physical limitations and transportation barriers. As a result, Senior Share, a food package delivery program, was created several years ago through collaboration with the La County Aging Unit and the Housing Authority of La Crosse. Each participant's food package is individually packaged, taking into account preference and dietary restrictions when possible. The food packages are delivered to a variety of low-income or senior housing complexes, meal sites, community halls, and individual residences throughout La Crosse County. Staff and volunteers

from WAFER in coordination with volunteers from the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) help with deliveries. In September 2013 the communities of Rockland and Bangor were the final communities to be added, making this program available throughout all of La Crosse County. The Rockland/Bangor Fire Department Auxiliary is partnering with WAFER to deliver food in this new area.

As a staff and board we assessed our reach into the various communities that make up La Crosse County. Meeting with various community leaders, Auxiliary members, school district staff, and residents caused staff and board members of WAFER to really look at the rural communities and come up with a plan to address the expressed needs. As a result, in September 2013 Senior Share was expanded to the Bangor and Rockland areas, making this program available throughout La Crosse County. Equally as important are two new programs were implemented in those areas.

First, Feeding Today's Youth, already serving students at La Crosse area Boys and Girls Clubs, was expanded to serve students in the Bangor School District. With a 33% free and reduced lunch rate, their location in a food desert (an area that lacks healthy, affordable food), and no after-school intervention programs, this seemed like the obvious and most critical place to start. Feeding Today's Youth in the Bangor Schools will provide children with meals to eat on weekends or school breaks. The children who participate in the program will be chosen by their teacher if they display signs of not having enough to eat on weekends (such as returning to school on Monday with stomach pains, fatigue, and headaches) or if they know that the family situation necessitates program participation. Children will receive a variety of ready-made meals, cereal bowls, canned fruit, pudding, shelf-stable milk, and snacks like granola bars or crackers. This program started "unofficially" during the spring of 2013, but has officially started this school year.

Secondly, a Mobile Drop program was implemented for families in the Bangor/Rockland area. Despite a mere twenty minute drive for most Bangor residents, the trip into La Crosse taps into precious gas money. Much like the Senior Share program, the Mobile Drop consists of volunteers (presently Bangor High School FFA students) packing food packages for individual families, taking into account food preferences when possible. The quantity of food items vary based on the number of people in each family. The food package is delivered by the Bangor Fire Department Auxiliary along with a Food Fair box, essentially providing them two food packages at once.

In addition to our more "age specific" programs, it is important to recognize the diverse ethnic populations in our community. Approximately 10% of all the families WAFER serves each month are Hmong. More than 10 years ago WAFER began ordering basic staples found in the Hmong diet. Typically, Hmong families decline about 50% of the "traditional" food package that is offered to all families because they are not foods consumed by the Hmong population. By offering two varieties of rice noodles, rice, fish sauce, and bamboo shoots, Hmong families

receive a more complete food package while maintaining cultural preferences. Working with the Hmong Mutual Assistance Association (HMAA) has allowed us to assess this program for relevance, quantity, and importance for the Hmong population. In addition, HMAA's involvement with WAFER has allowed our staff to gain important Hmong history and cultural values education as well as needed assistance when deciding how best to provide services.

### Needs Statement

The COMPASS NOW 2012 report, compiled by The Great Rivers United Way, identifies current and emerging needs and/or issues in our region. The report sites obesity, food insecurity, increased child poverty rate, increased FoodShare usage, and transportation among the relevant issues. These findings indicate the wide range of needs present among those living in poverty and those struggling to secure even basic necessities. As WAFER works towards addressing food insecurity issues through general food pantry programming, WAFER and collaborating partners seek to address issues of obesity, nutrition, and food insecurity through education.

Nutrition knowledge, food preparation skills, and basic cooking tools are a few of the essential foundations for adequate intake and the opportunity for healthful living. Low-income, food insecure individuals and families are at a disproportionate risk for obesity and chronic health conditions because of limitations in all three of these areas. The American Diabetes Association presents a strong case linking "obesity, inactivity, and poverty (which) may be too costly to ignore because obesity-associated chronic disease already accounts for 70% of U.S. health costs." An obesity rate of 33% with an additional 33% who are overweight and a forewarning of the situation getting worse as childhood obesity rates rise, indicates a need to take preventative steps to strengthen the people and the health of our community.

While working one-on-one with the clients our staff notes many lack basic food preparation skills or food knowledge. Compounded by poverty and the cyclical nature of it, there are few options for change. We believe that by developing strategic education we can help people make better food choices and decrease the negative health consequences that result from inadequate nutrition. Based on the population served by WAFER, there is demonstrated need for such programming.

WAFER staff and board members have noted that in addition to a lack of skills and/or knowledge, a shift in the attitude towards food has occurred. The focus has shifted from the nutrient and health-filled properties of food to one that solely focuses on just satisfying the pangs of hunger. Possibly this shift is the cause of increased obesity rates and increased health conditions plaguing our society today. Sources such as The Journal of Nutrition, FRAC (Food Research and Action Center), and many more, cite a correlation between poverty and obesity. Factors such as limited resources and limited access to healthy, affordable foods contribute to the growing issues among this at-risk population. Those who struggle with food insecurity may at

times function at a crisis level. Cheap, energy-dense foods are chosen solely to prevent the feeling of hunger despite low nutrition properties. Additionally, chronic overeating when food is available causes a shift in the metabolism contributing to weight gain.

However, through combined effort between WAFER and collaborating partners, a multi-faceted approach to food and nutrition education will educate, train, and equip those who have never had access to such crucial skills. This educational programming will attempt to break the cyclical nature of poverty, give families the opportunity for success and growth, and reverse the increased weight issues and their consequences more prevalent in recent years.

Tara Pascual, author of *Cooking Up Community: Nutrition Education in Emergency Food Programs*, in coordination with WhyHunger, discusses at length the benefits of such education programs by highlighting organizations that have had or continue to offer various education programs. Found in the introduction, Pascual states “systematic and sustained action is needed to achieve food and nutrition security for all in the United States. To eliminate food insecurity, interventions are needed, including adequate funding for increased utilization of food and nutrition assistance programs, inclusion of food and nutrition education in such programs, and innovative programs to promote and support individuals and household economic self-sufficiency.”

Food and nutrition education interventions can create innovative change within communities and food pantries can provide a “non-traditional setting” for such education. According to the April 2010 UW Extension report, *The Public Value of Nutrition Education*, “in a tight economic time, it is important to point out that nutrition education pays off economically – not only for the learners, but also for taxpayers.” Relying on data reported from the USDA, this report concluded that consumers did “modify their food choices after participating in well-designed nutrition education programs that teach how a good diet can benefit long-term health.” With a strong focus on the health and economic benefits to the participants it is equally important to recognize that encouraging “Americans to improve their diets may prevent tens of thousands of cases of heart disease and save between \$4 billion and \$12 billion in health care expenditures and lost earnings over 10 years.” In the end, obesity and its health consequences put an enormous “financial burden on the health care system.”

In 2010 survey by the Department of Health Services, 13% of Wisconsin residences had income below the federal poverty line; La Crosse County was no different. Locally and nationally, one in five children is at risk for food insecurity according to hunger statistics reported by Feeding America (the nation’s foodbank). However, assessing the population served by WAFER and breaking down all participants by age results in one startling finding; one in three of WAFER’s clients are under the age of 18.

“One of the most powerful things a food bank can do is to work to assist the ability of the millions of people we work with to improve their own ability to look after their nutritional

health, by improving their food literacy (understanding their nutritional needs and empowering them to meet them by teaching them how to stretch dollars by shopping smart, how to cook real nutrient dense meals for their families, eating and growing more produce, and making the connection with exercise and lifestyle). This is not a window dressing, it truly helps people take control of their own situation and health.” Erik Talkin, C.E.O., Foodbank of Santa Barbara County.

### Program Description

WAFER and collaborating partners have developed a multi-faceted ***Nutrition Education Program*** with varying approaches to specifically target low-income, food insecure populations. Together we strive to achieve a collective impact. Each collaborating partner has a shared vision regarding the issues we address, the approach needed for success, and the flexibility to make adjustments as needed in response to successes or demonstrated needs.

Sheila Franz, from UW Extension Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program (WNEP), currently offers brief food tasting and informational sessions covering a wide range of topics and foods. For some sessions the goal is to simply educate the client on a new food available in the food pantry. This includes the varying ways to prepare the item, how to incorporate it into a meal, recipes, nutrient content, and a sample of it prepared. Other sessions are basic nutrition sessions designed to increase intake in a particular nutrient area such as whole grains. This session also includes a sample of a finished recipe as well as additional recipes and verbal instructions on how to accomplish the goal of the session. To date, these sessions are very much appreciated by the clients who participate. However, Sheila is required to make WAFER one of her many education sites throughout the county. It is agreed that increased frequency and duration would impact more people than what is currently occurring.

Due to years of trials and successes from the UW Extension educators and collaborative partners, a variety of programming has been developed to meet the needs of the low-income, food insecure population throughout La Crosse County, specifically those served by WAFER. In addition to programming designed to “meet the needs”, collaborative partners agree that nutrition intervention must occur to provide low-income persons with skill sets that will not only increase personal nutrition and health, but allow them to begin on a road to self-sufficiency and less reliance on emergency food services. Each partner is proposing to provide varying degrees of participation and locations; education, information materials creation, evaluation, advisory role, and more.

The UW Extension office will continue to offer established education sessions, but will also contribute to this initiative by:

- Offering “Cooking with Sheila”, a series of 45 minute hands-on cooking class. Upon series completion, participants will receive a pre-determined “incentive” such as cooking



tools, utensils, or equipment for successful home implementation. An example of the topics to be covered are:

- How to make a quick, healthy meal in minutes
- How to incorporate more produce into your daily diet
- One pan meals
- Food preparation skill development (peeling, chopping, slicing, etc)
- Seasonal produce, what to buy and eat during which season
- How to shop and eat healthy on a limited budget
- Serving in an advisory role to review accuracy and usability of education materials.

Viterbo University and the Dietetics Department have expressed an overwhelming interest in this education program because of the benefit to those who are food insecure as well as the invaluable experience their student educators will receive. Viterbo instructors are offering enrolled undergraduate and graduate dietetic students to provide:

- “Ask a Dietitian” booth for a minimum of 16 hours located at WAFER food pantry during hours of operation.
- “MyPlate” education session(s) using foods available in the food pantry for adult participants. This session would be conducted over four weeks at one hour per session for a total of four sessions.
- “Meal Planning” education session(s), creating menus utilizing foods available in the food pantry. Focusing on adults and their children this class will incorporate cooking and eating as a family.
- “Reducing Salt Intake” hands-on cooking session. The foods used will be similar to those found on the pantry shelves, teaching participants how to reduce sodium in their diet. Student educators will offer blood pressure screenings for interested participants.
- “Managing Your Weight”, a hands-on cooking session, teaching healthy cooking.
- “Weight Management and Physical Activity” education session teaching participants the value and benefits of managing body weight, BMI (Body Mass Index), and physical activity.
- “Healthy Cooking for Diabetics”, a hands-on skill development cooking session.
- Two research students providing a total of 240 hours to education projects. These will be developed after initial implementation and evaluation based on grant needs and prior successes.
- Development of individual foods “placards” to put on file for WAFER’s use in the food pantry. Cards will be laminated and used as the product comes in, specifically fresh produce. The placards will provide clients with basic knowledge of the food item, how to prepare it, and ideas for use accompanied by recipes.
- Coordinate with local higher education facilities to organize childcare for participants with children too young to actively engage in the educational session.

The La Crosse County Aging Unit currently collaborates with WAFER for the implementation of the Senior Share program, providing food packages to seniors who need food assistance. Sponsoring Senior Meal Sites throughout La Crosse County, The La Crosse Aging Unit has the capacity and knowledge to reach this at-risk population. In addition to collaboration with WAFER, The La Crosse County Aging Unit collaborates with Sheila at the UW Extension office to offer education sessions to seniors. In order to reach established goals, the frequency and duration need to be increased. Working collaboratively with all program partners The La Crosse County Aging Unit will provide:

- Valuable experience in order to implement programming at local farmers markets for the senior and non-senior population.
- Current knowledge of the federal farmer’s market “voucher” program which will be utilized for the creation of local farmers market “bucks” to be used as program incentives.
- Specific focus for education development targeting seniors.
  - Increasing and varying nutrients
  - The health consequences of limited intake
  - Utilizing seasonal produce
  - Preservation of fresh produce, specifically for those that live alone
- Extensive reach to the senior population through monthly newsletters, for education and program announcement purposes.

The Hunger Task Force of La Crosse, a food rescue and distribution agency, serves more than 60 partner agencies throughout four counties. Hunger Task Force operates a unique program in the City of La Crosse: the Kane Street Garden, implemented to increase vegetable consumption for low-income individuals. Utilizing two lots within the City of La Crosse, the Kane Street Garden is a local source of fresh produce for the community, netting nearly 30,000 pounds yearly. The Hunger Task Force, Kane Street Garden Coordinator, and collaborative educational partners, will provide:

- A hands-on “How To Garden” educational session(s) to encourage
  - Increased daily produce intake
  - Self-sufficiency through personal gardens and food preservation
  - Increased physical activity through gardening
- On-going consultation for program participants for successful home garden implementation upon program completion
- Educational and demonstration sessions based on seasonal produce
  - Preparation
  - Preservation
  - Recipe suggestions

- The capacity to extend educational outreach and collaboration to partner agencies throughout the four county service areas as available.
- The conduit by which a variety of national and regional resources are available through Hunger Task Force of Milwaukee, “Wisconsin’s premiere anti-hunger agency”.

The Hmong Mutual Assistance Association (also known as the Hmong Cultural and Community Association [HCCA], an upcoming name change) “is an educational and charitable organization that provides cultural, educational, economic and social services to refugees, former refugees and other ethnic groups in the greater La Crosse area.” With a significant Hmong population in the La Crosse Area and increasing health conditions since migration, there is need for program specific nutrition education. Dr. Bee Lo, Practitioner of Alternative Medicine and HCCA Board Member, will serve as a resource to collaborating partners as well as offering bi-monthly educational sessions for one year. Each session will last three hours; two hours will be designated for education and one hour is designated for hands on cooking skill development. Dr. Bee will provide culturally and linguistically appropriate educational programs such as:

- Cooking skill development to improve the daily diet of Hmong families, specifically those who work outside of the home.
- Family food preparation to increase quality time and increase quality nutritional intake.
- Presenting historical data on the traditional Hmong diet, recent changes to the Hmong diet, and as a result, the negative impacts on health.
- Increased nutritional effectiveness for better overall health and wellness, the use of eastern medicine, and allergens.
- Decreasing health consequences related to the “American” diet.
- Gardening at home with involvement of HCCA Elders acting as “at-home trainers” to assist participants.
- How to stretch food dollars while maintaining healthy choices.
- Hmong and English informational and educational sessions made available on the WAFER website. Such ideas include seasonal produce usage, how to use produce WAFER has available, recipe suggestions, produce preparation, increasing nutrient intake, the nutrition properties of specific foods, and more.

Organic Valley is an 1834 member “farmer-owned” cooperative making joint decisions based the health and welfare of people, animals, and the earth. With a mission “to create and operate a marketing cooperative that promotes regional farm diversity and economic stability by the means of organic agricultural methods and the sale of certified organic products”, Organic Valley is also committed to “growing healthy communities”. Organic Valley is “committed to making a positive impact in our world, from our local communities to the larger communities that work to protect values shared by the Organic Valley Family of Farms.”

As a collaborative partner in the Nutrition Education Program, Organic Valley has committed to:

- Provide staff for four to five educational events throughout the grant award year.
- Transporting their “Mobile Kitchen” for education demonstration sessions.
- Consider soliciting additional donations to cover potential incidental expenses.

WAFER, La Crosse County’s largest food pantry, serves the largest constituency of people in need of education. It is the vision of the board to address the root issues of hunger, obesity, and chronic diseases compounded by insufficient diet, and by facilitating effects achievable by a group of collaborative partners invested in La Crosse County residents. WAFER staff, volunteers, and board of directors will provide:

- Valuable insight into the varying populations, specific needs and barriers within each community, provisions, effective approach based on previous experience, and the capacity to reach a large number of people.
- Fiscal management and tracking of award funds such as reimbursement for program expenses, bills, etc.
- Outreach to additional collaborators as needed for program expansions, to reach pre-established goals, or as feedback and evaluation indicate areas of additional need.
- A multi-purpose space within the WAFER building to be used for longer educational sessions, demonstrations, etc.

As indicated in the cover letter, difficulty in finding an alternative building for our operations resulted in a modification of the original plans with regards to the creation of the “Education Center”. After consulting with an architect on the WAFER board, the current kitchen/cleanroom will be reorganized and remodeled to maximize the space for educational purposes. Falling in line with Health Department sanitation requirements this room will feature an acceptable floor covering (due to asbestos in the tile adhesive), stainless steel demonstration cart, locking cabinets for demonstration equipment and supplies, tables and chairs, a minimum two sink washing station, refrigerator, and shelving. Upon completion, WAFER’s in-house education center will provide a permanent place for demonstrations and skill set development for years to come.

In addition to the programming and capacity offered by each collaborative partner, a test group of participants will be established to evaluate impact throughout the award year. The test group will be a cross section of clients currently utilizing WAFER services. The test group will be completely voluntary and participants will be rewarded at the end of the award year for participation throughout the entire process. Collaborative partners will recruit a wide-range of participants such as people who have chronic diseases, disability, family units, and varying age categories, gender, ethnicity groups, and education level.

The test group will undergo an initial assessment to gather general health history, quality of life, current medications, current dietary choices, and general mental health status. The test group

will be required to report in regularly throughout the award year. Upon program completion, the test group will undergo a final assessment to compare the results to the initial assessment. The collaborative partners will rely on the feedback and realized effects of the participants in order to modify future programming for greater success. Specifically we are looking for an increase in the quality of life, decreased medications, increased wellness, increased produce consumption, educated choices when shopping or meal planning, weight loss associated with program participation, increased activity, increased energy, and a change of habits to decrease future health consequences.

### Program Visions

A collectively shared vision among each of the partners is the creation of a “Farmer’s Market Education Program” to utilize locally grown fresh produce. The education program will occur at local farmer’s market and Senior Meal Site locations to cover such topics as the varying types of foods available, how to select them and when they are in season, preparation, uses, recipes, buying in bulk when quantities are unlimited, preservation, the nutrient properties of farm to table, and much more. This vision will be achieved through the incorporation of additional community partners as needed.

Together, staff and board members for WAFER and Hunger Task Force (HTF) believe that potential exists to create specific educational programming to encourage capacity building within smaller food pantries throughout local counties. It is our joint goal to be a resource for new or growing organizations to enable them to capitalize on their surrounding resources, to increase the nutrition content of their food packages, and encourage the incorporation and increased use of fresh produce daily. In addition to capacity building we will provide direction for safe food handling, financial and product resource development, and outreach.

Recalling that one in three of WAFER’s clients are under the age of eighteen, HTF and WAFER would like to design a proactive education program targeting school-aged children. With an emphasis on the schools which traditionally serve a higher percentage of impoverished children, this specific program would provide information about growing, eating, preparing, and cooking garden produce available locally. These children would gain skills that would allow them to recognize a variety of vegetables and the skill to help with preparation at home alongside their parents. Proactively educating children and giving them access to much needed vegetables will provide them with foods essential for proper development, set them up for the possibility of healthy decision making for life, and give parents the incentive to support this program and the interest of their children.

## Goals and Objectives

The intended goals and outcomes for this program are more subjective. The outcomes are difficult to measure and may not necessarily be achieved within the initial grant period. They include:

1. Increased self-esteem for participants.
2. Successful home implementation.
3. Skill development to encourage greater self-sufficiency.
4. Decreased food insecurity.

Additionally, objectives have been established to provide more concrete outcomes which can be measurable.

1. Increased nutrition knowledge to obtain healthy and affordable food choices.
2. Increased incorporation of fresh produce into daily meals.
3. Increased nutrition knowledge to utilize the large variety of fresh produce offered at food pantries.
4. Increased ability to maximize limited resources.
5. Food preparation skill development for individuals and families.
6. Food preservation skill development for individuals and families.

## Implementation and Evaluation

Program implementation and the organization of each collaborative partner, thorough evaluation, and final compilation of data will be administered by a “Program Coordinator”. This position will be funded through a portion of the grant award, not to exceed 10% of the award amount. Collaborating partners collectively agree that this position should be filled by a college/graduate student from one of the local schools of higher education. Not only would this position provide the student with a valuable learning experience, but it will allow us to take advantage of the latest tools available in program evaluation. The “Coordinator” will be responsible for:

- Tracking all programs/sessions with regards to when, where, target population, participant incentives, etc to avoid duplication or overextension.
- Determining the capacity of each collaborative partner, identifying their strengths, and determining outreach site placement.
- Routine reporting to collaborative partners regarding the efforts of each partner.
- Keeping current on any changes to programming, needs, or successes which would impact each of the other partner’s area of experience.
- All aspects of the “test group”, including regular contact, measuring parameters, participant selection, initial and final screenings, and more.

- Developing the evaluation template to be used by all partners for specific programs based on the areas of interest or data sets needed as identified by each partner.
- Assisting collaborative partners with marketing, recruiting, and scheduling for educational sessions.
- Year-end final report, compilation of data, etc.

## **Collaborative Partners**

In order to provide a comprehensive County-wide education program, dual effort (within the WAFER building and outreach to many communities) is necessary for success. Collaborative education partners include: Viterbo Dietetics staff and students, the UW-Extension WNEP (Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program), The La Crosse County Aging Unit, the Hmong Mutual Assistance Association, and The Hunger Task Force of La Crosse.

Educational sites outside of the WAFER “Nutrition Education Center” include, but are not limited to: Hmong Mutual Assistance Association, Hunger Task Force Kane Street Garden, Mindoro and Lewis Valley Lutheran Churches with Pastor Janet Wollam, Viterbo Dietetic School demonstration labs, Senior Meal Sites throughout La Crosse County, various farmers’ market locations, and the Presbyterian Church of West Salem. Each host site will offer varying equipment and education capabilities based on the facility as well as varying facility charges. Additional sites will be solicited in all communities after grant awards have been determined.

Each collaborative education partner will be responsible for planning sessions/demonstrations and could include programming based on population and population needs, age, (dis)ability, family structure, current skill set, season, and past educational successes. Examples of expected programming can be found in the Program Description section.

## **Current Collaborative Efforts**

In addition to the program collaborations stated in the “Organizational Background” section, WAFER has active collaborations with several additional organizations for effective service to families throughout La Crosse County.

To begin with, the Board of Directors has been working to expand services to include a “Nutrition Education Center” located within the food pantry. The Board believes that the key to increasing nutrition and decreasing food insecurity is to provide education in a location the clientele feel comfortable in. Therefore, the UW-Extension office currently provides several education sessions each month. These sessions encourage the use of products typically available in the food pantry, how to use large quantities of product we have received and do not normally have, as well as how to incorporate more whole foods and healthy options. The scale of this

current programming is small in nature, but offers our clientele a source of education not previously available. Increased frequency of the programming as well as food preparation demonstrations could yield greater results from these efforts.

In addition to more food related collaborations, WAFER also works in collaboration with the La Crosse County Health and Human Services Department to offer application assistance for County programs. The Health Department provided equipment and training in order for WAFER staff to assist individuals during the application processes. WAFER staff assists applicants with FoodShare (or the Food Stamp program) application, troubleshoots issues with an existing account, or getting the appropriate supplemental paperwork to County staff. The purpose of offering an application site at WAFER is to eliminate the transportation barriers to and around the County buildings, decrease wait time typically experienced at the County site, personalized one-on-one assistance, and the convenience of the “one stop shop” to get their food package at the same time. Application and acceptance to the FoodShare program decreases food insecurity and alleviates pressure on “emergency” food pantries.

Working in collaboration with the La Crosse County Health and Human Services Department WAFER is a community site for “marketplace” health insurance application under the Affordable Care Act. The La Crosse County Health and Human Services Department is coordinating with local insurance groups to assure complete coverage for all eligible persons and coordinates a weekly meeting to keep everyone apprised of any up to the minute notices regarding issues, changes, and more. Representatives from Benefit Advisors Insurance Agency and county trained Advisors have been available at the food pantry to answer questions and provide application assistance. This is a tremendous service offered to a population who are losing benefits and many who have not had insurance for an extended period of time, requiring assistance in understanding details about insurance coverage.

Supporting the efforts of food pantries throughout our county is achieved through collaboration with The Onalaska Food Basket and the West Salem Food Pantry. With a “give and take” relationship each food pantry supports the others to the best of their abilities. For example, each week WAFER drivers deliver a variety of product (produce, dairy, meat, bread) to the other two food pantries to supplement their food package. To support WAFER’s efforts these two food pantries provide canned goods when they receive more than they can handle before spoiling. Each food pantry serves as a resource for the other two in whatever capacity they can. The relationship that has developed between these three food pantries is one that cultivates collaboration, provides collective impact, and has mutual goals and objectives.

## **Future Funding**

Upon completion of the initial grant period WAFER will continue work with current collaborative partners as well as seek new partners to review, modify, and maintain nutrition and



educational programming based on effectiveness, success, and expressed needs. Future programming will be dependent on a complete evaluation which will determine future locations, topics, and targeted populations. The extent to which each partner will continue to offer education will also be a factor after evaluation. Future funding will be requested from grantors for program continuation, program expenses, incentives, and administration if necessary. Such requests will be made from local, regional, and national foundations to ensure continuation and success and will include award year findings.

Since 1996, the USDA has provided “Community Food Projects Competitive Grants” matching challenge to help develop community food projects promote self-sufficiency by bringing the whole food system together. This is achieved by assessing strengths and creating collaborations to increase food security. Specifically the initiative should increase access to fresh foods, increase self-reliance for communities to provide their own food, and “promote comprehensive responses to local food, farm, and nutrition issues.” Projects are funded one-time for up to three years. With the “Food For All” award, we would be able to leverage the funds and submit a proposal to increase the duration and intensity of our efforts. It is feasible to assume that the USDA grant would allow our Nutrition Education Program collaborators the ability to work jointly with Hillview Urban Agriculture Center (and collaborators) for combined assessments and the development of a more comprehensive response throughout our community.

With regards to future use of the “Nutrition Education Center”, after the initial grant period has ended WAFER will continue collaborating with various entities in the community to offer programming based on availability and identified needs. This learning environment will provide a space for critical and beneficial education for many years after the grant award.

## **Conclusion**

There is nothing more empowering or encouraging than to sit at a table with all of the collaborators enthusiastically supporting and invested in this initiative. There is heartbreak associated with the interpersonal relationships each of us have with the impoverished people we serve. We are blessed with good health, a solid education, and the resources to achieve in the areas we deem important. In a world where there is sadness and pain for the many we serve, our choice is to be the light of hope, the voice of reassurance, and the support of a friend to suggest that life can be different.

Food insecurity and insufficient education are issues that will require years of effort to change. Collectively we are confident that our education, drive, and compassion will be only the beginning of something too big to comprehend for thousands of people living in poverty. As Gandhi so eloquently stated, “*You must be the change you want to see in the world.*” We are ready, we are that change.