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For immediate release

July 12, 2010

**Nutrition education lays groundwork for healthy lifestyles in
Milwaukee's Lindsay Heights neighborhood**
Classes designed to 'meet people where they're at'

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Milwaukee, Wis.—“Get Moving!” “Make a Change!” “Celebrate!”--with titles like these, it's clear nutrition education classes in Milwaukee's Lindsay Heights neighborhood cover more than just healthy eating. Milwaukee County Extension nutrition educators and community partners promote an active approach in their lessons, building on learners' abilities to make lifestyle changes such as planning meals, shopping smart, saving money and exercising.

Extension nutrition educators and partners from Walnut Way and the Fondy Food Center—neighborhood groups that have helped revitalize Lindsay Heights—began collaborating to teach residents about nutrition via a federal grant in summer 2008.

Walnut Way and local organizations like the Fondy Food Center have worked hard to improve the quality of life for Lindsay Heights residents. Until the late 1950s, Lindsay Heights was a bustling area that was home to many diverse families and businesses. But in the 1960s and '70s, the neighborhood was ravaged by highway construction and other urban renewal projects. The original neighborhood began to fade away, replaced by growing numbers of vacant homes, poverty, crime and drugs.

But in 2002, a few residents stood together to face these formidable challenges and improve the neighborhood's quality of life. One outcome of that solidarity was the formation of Walnut Way, which has taken a lead role in providing educational opportunities for neighborhood children and adults.

Walnut Way shared an interest with Extension in helping the children of Lindsay Heights boost their understanding of good nutrition,” says Rosamaria Martinez, Nutrition Education Program administrator for Milwaukee County Extension.

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Extension nutrition educator Betania Silva began facilitating classes for youth that included lessons in food preparation and food safety, along with some basics of healthy eating. “Our educators really enjoyed collaborating with Walnut Way,” Martinez notes. “The kids asked many questions and the staff were engaged as well--it made for a great team!”

Nutrition lessons also encouraged neighborhood kids to make smart food choices in the face of temptations from corner stores and vending machines. “One of our activities is called ‘Vending Spending,’” says Martinez. “For example, if you had \$2, what would be some alternative options to a candy bar and soda? We teach kids to consider options with less fat and sugar content.”

In 2010, nutrition education classes were expanded to reach adults in the neighborhood. Extension staff met with Kimberly Njoroge from the Fondy Food Center, a member of the Lindsay Heights Neighborhood Health Alliance, about holding classes for Fondy’s Healthy Cooking Club members. The Healthy Cooking Club is funded by the Healthier Wisconsin Partnership Program, part of the Advancing Healthier Wisconsin endowment of the Medical College of Wisconsin. The Fondy Food Center offers cuisine and nutrition lessons to help neighborhood residents take advantage of nutrient-dense food options available at the local Fondy Farmers’ Market, which has served the community for more than 30 years.

In February, Extension nutrition educator Kathryn Cieszki held the first classes for Healthy Cooking Club members, discussing the USDA’s My Pyramid, snacking and whole grains, fruits and veggies, and the importance of dairy foods and calcium with the group.

“We were extremely grateful to have collaborated with UW-Extension on this,” says Young Kim, Executive Director of the Fondy Food Center. Kim believes that nutrition education partnerships such as that between UW-Extension and the Fondy Food Center, are vital to help reverse trends linked to diet-related illnesses.

“Adults tell us they enjoy the classes,” says Martinez. She points out that Extension’s educational programs are drawn from the latest research and designed to be practical and accessible--and always centered on the needs of learners. “We think it’s important to meet people where they’re at,” she says.

Visit the [Milwaukee County UW-Extension nutrition education programs](#) website to learn more.

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