

Success Story

New Mainers Learn Strategies to Shop, Cook, and Eat Healthy in Their New Communities

SUMMARY

Since 2015, **Maine SNAP-Ed** has reached a total of **1,326 refugees and immigrants** in Maine with nutrition education. In collaboration with **Portland Public Health, Healthy Androscoggin, and St. Mary's Nutrition Center**. Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educators provide culturally-appropriate classes that utilize USDA-approved curricula. The immigrants and refugees, or "**New Mainers**," are from numerous countries of origin and participants have represented at least six different languages. With the support of interpreters, adult and youth participants overcome **language and cultural barriers** to learn key nutrition concepts. Adult participants learn how to shop and prepare healthy and familiar meals on a limited budget, an essential skill to support adjustment to their new communities. Adult participants report high satisfaction with the nutrition education. They indicate excitement to share the information with family members and will encourage others in their community to attend classes.



CHALLENGE

The New Mainers in the SNAP-Ed classes often tell Nutrition Educators they already know how to cook and eat healthy. The challenge for them is **shopping and finding the foods they are accustomed to** in order to prepare familiar and healthy meals on a budget. This is a common story for recent immigrants in the United States who often experience poor health outcomes because they are introduced to new, unhealthy foods; their physical activity decreases; they are exposed to advertising for fast food; and they face barriers to retaining native food and cultural habits. Many New Mainers struggle with adjusting to grocery stores where items may be unfamiliar or their desired fresh fruit and vegetable items are only available as frozen or canned, requiring new preparation skills.



Maine SNAP-Ed

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Education

Maine SNAP-Ed is a **USDA-funded program** that teaches low-income Mainers the knowledge and skills needed to make healthier lifestyle choices. The program has 44 Nutrition Educators throughout the state that implement 7 evidence-based curricula, reaching the entire age spectrum.

In 2016, Maine SNAP-Ed delivered 11,548 nutrition education classes, reaching a total of 34,190 youth and adult participants.

In 2015 and 2016, Maine SNAP-Ed reached a total of 1,326 refugees and immigrants in Maine.

SOLUTION

SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educators teach New Mainers how to navigate local grocery stores, convenience stores, and farmers' markets and learn to use low-cost frozen and canned food items to **make meals that are healthy and familiar**. Adult classes include basic cooking skills, food safety practices, and food resource management. Children and teens are taught key nutrition concepts and are introduced to foods unfamiliar to them, but readily available in their new communities.

To ensure culturally appropriate nutrition messages, Maine SNAP-Ed revised the translated USDA's **MyPlate graphics to include familiar foods** from Arabic, Somali, Swahili, and French-speaking African cultures. Nutrition Educators reaching immigrants from Somalia use Kaaley Ila Kari ("Come Cook with Me"), nutrition education and cooking classes designed with Somali and Somali Bantu women.



SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Two different teaching models are used to effectively reach Maine's immigrant populations. The first model utilizes **interpreters** to assist with instruction. The second model relies on **Nutrition Educators fluent in the most prevalent languages and cultures in their community**. Going forward, Maine SNAP-Ed will work with Nutrition Educators and community partners to support both models. Developing and sustaining relationships with partners that work with New Mainer families is essential for promotion and recruitment and helps ensure participant retention. State-level partnerships with immigrant organizations would add support to local-level engagement.

As immigrants and refugees continue to relocate to Maine, there is an ongoing need to provide translated materials and culturally appropriate resources. As the countries of origin change, SNAP-Ed and community partners must adjust and respond to the varying needs and opportunities for nutrition education.



PARTNERS IN SUCCESS

- Healthy Androscoggin
- St. Mary's Health System and Nutrition Center
- City of Portland, Public Health Division
- Catholic Charities
- Cultivating Communities
- Islamic Society of Portland Maine
- Neighborhood Housing Programs

"I learned a lot from the SNAP courses because it's not that we don't know how to shop. It's not that we don't know how to eat. But we didn't know really how much our body need. Now each time we go shop we make sure that we have a little bit of whole grain, little bit more vegetable, little bit some of protein, so we can have a complex mix of food that our body need to stay healthy."

—Mayuma, SNAP-Ed Participant

For more Success Stories from the Maine SNAP-Ed program, or to get in touch with your local Nutrition Educator, please visit www.mainesnap-ed.org.

Data sources are available upon request by emailing mainesnap-ed@une.edu.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider. Maine SNAP-Ed is funded by the USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, which is administered by the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and implemented statewide by the University of New England (UNE) through contracts with local community coalitions. Maine SNAP-Ed educates low-income families on low cost, healthy eating and active lifestyles.