

## Nutrition Council of Oregon (NCO) Oregon's Shared Meals Initiative



PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: Nutrition Council of Oregon (NCO) Workgroup members:

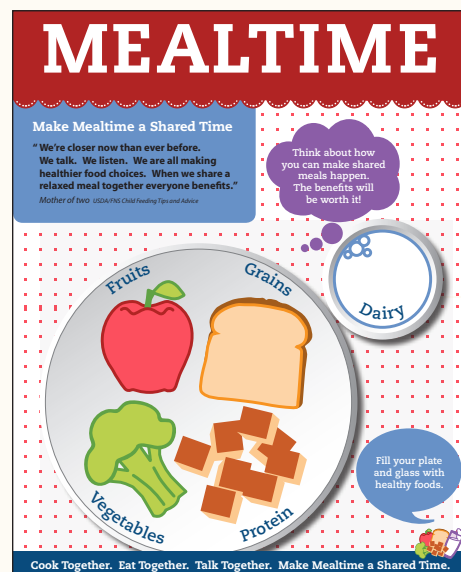
**Jennifer Young**—Public Health Division, Adolescent and School Health, **Robin Stanton**—Public Health Division, Maternal and Child Health, **Mary Rhode**—Public Health Division, State WIC Program, **Janice Smiley**—OSU Extension, **Anne Goetze**—Oregon Dairy Council, **Tracie Weitzman**—Oregon Food Bank, **Joyce Dougherty**—Oregon Department of Education, Child Nutrition Programs, **Kerri Lopez**—Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board, **Candi Quintall**—Department of Human Services, SNAP—Ed, **Renee Carr**—OSU Extension, **Jeri Greenberg**—OHSU Dietetic Internship Program, **Chris Bosak**—Oregon Department of Ed-Child Nutrition Programs, Community Team

**After** two years of hard work, in September 2013 Oregon officially launched the Shared Meals Initiative. The Initiative is a multi-year campaign to encourage people to eat together in child care centers, schools, senior meals facilities, and at home.

The Initiative began in 2010 out of a Nutrition Council of Oregon (NCO) workgroup. In 2011, the Oregon Public Health Division was awarded a Blueprint Collaborative Mini-grant from the Association of State Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN). ASPHN member Robin Stanton, Nutrition Consultant with the Division's Center for Prevention and Health Promotion / Maternal and Child Health Section and Nutrition Council of Oregon member, administered the grant.

The purpose of the mini-grant was to help the state's nutrition programs work effectively across multiple agencies and funding streams. Through the grant, ASPHN sought to help Oregon improve the nutritional wellbeing of all Oregonians with special emphasis on the maternal, child and adolescent populations as well as seniors and people with disabilities. Specifically, the grant provided technical assistance to help strengthen the NCO and to support NCO's strategic planning for its Shared Meals Initiative.

The NCO includes public health staff from the state's Maternal and Child Health, Adolescent and School Health, and WIC programs. The NCO also includes representatives from the Oregon Department of Education Child Nutrition Programs, the Oregon Dairy Council, Oregon State University Extension Service, NW Portland Area Indian Health Board, Oregon Health and Sciences University, the Oregon Food Bank, Oregon Public Health



"Make Mealtime a Shared Time" poster

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Institute and the Department of Human Services' Self-Sufficiency and Aging and People with Disabilities programs.

The NCO developed the Shared Meals Initiative based on research showing that sharing meals boosts consumption of dairy, fruits, vegetables, and grains, and reduces soft drink consumption. Children who have regular family meals also do better in school, are more motivated and are less likely to engage in risky behaviors. Eating together reduces obesity, helps prevent substance abuse, promotes better eating habits and strengthens family and community bonds.

## Outcomes and Successes

To kick off the Initiative, Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber proclaimed September 2013 as Shared Meals Month. The Nutrition Council developed **educational materials, recipes, and communication tools**, including fact sheets, talking points, sample press releases and letters to the editor to promote the Initiative. The **Shared Meals website** houses these and a wealth of additional resources that NCO designed to be simple, attractive and easy to read and understand. NCO's tagline for the Initiative is "Cook together. Eat together. Talk together. Make mealtime a shared time."

The NCO worked hard to create a program that all of its diverse members can support. NCO members designed all of their materials so that each agency and organization can adapt the resources and tools to meet their needs and their target populations.

ASPHN's grant supported the NCO's behind-the-scenes work to build an effective collaborative effort. ASPHN Consultant Helene Kent facilitated several NCO meetings, both in person and by phone. According to Robin Stanton, "We were spinning our wheels and Helene helped us to focus and to communicate more clearly." Helene's support helped the group develop a clear, workable structure, maximize their time together, and gain techniques for reaching shared decisions. "We had to recognize that a collaborative process is messy," Jennifer Young said. "It requires patience, respect, and a sense of humor." The group also had to recognize that assumptions about family meals varied among the participating organizations.

Because the Initiative is still in the early phases, the NCO does not have data yet to evaluate its success. However, NCO organizations have been actively promoting the program. For example,

- The Oregon Dairy Council included information in its fall e-newsletter, which goes to 6,400 people. Viewers opened the link to the Shared Meals Initiative **more than 1,100 times**.
- Mary Rhode, Oregon's Fruit and Vegetable Coordinator, partnered with Oregon State University Extension Service and dietetic interns to develop Family Meals Lesson Plans that WIC and Extension programs

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## The Important Role of Public Health Nutritionists

ASPHN members Joyce, Susan, Kim, Mary, Sue, Robin and Jennifer worked with other nutritionists on the Council. They all had a strong commitment to the group and to developing a project that was evidence-based and easily supported. One of the public health nutritionists' unique roles was to translate the research into easily understandable language and to convey why the approach they chose was important and valuable.

are now using statewide.

- Robin shared information at the Oregon Public Health Association conference in the fall. She also sent targeted emails to early care and education stakeholders.
- SNAP-Ed sent a postcard with photos and the Initiative's tagline to clients as part of a larger outreach.
- **Food Hero**, a monthly e-magazine published by Oregon State University Extension Service, included articles on the Initiative in the November 2013 and January 2014 editions.
- KATU-TV featured an NCO member speaking about the importance of families eating breakfast to help kids succeed in school. The segment was a feature on the station's AM Northwest program in August 2013.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

"Process matters," Joyce Dougherty said. At the beginning of the ASPHN Blueprint Learning Collaborative, the Nutrition Council focused on project ideas that did not meet all partners' needs. The facilitated process helped the group to step back and instead take an approach that better met all member agencies' missions and goals.

Another lesson learned is that it is very important to have a designated leader of a collaborative effort, rather than sharing leadership. Because the NCO did not have an identified leader to guide the project, some tasks fell through the cracks and the project took longer to complete.

NCO members learned that although they had worked together for a number of years, they often brought different expectations for developing and moving projects forward. They also learned that it was critically important to discuss these differences and to assure that everyone's voice was heard. The collaborative learning process — and particularly a facilitated process — was very helpful in clearly outlining the group's shared goals and objectives.

## ASPHN Members on the Nutrition Council of Oregon

- Joyce Dougherty is Director of Child Nutrition Programs, Department of Education
- Susan Greathouse is Manager of Nutrition and Local Services, Oregon WIC Program
- Kim LaCroix is Policy Specialist with Aging and People with Disabilities, Department of Human Services
- Mary Rhode is Nutrition Consultant with Nutrition and Local Services, Oregon WIC Program
- Robin Stanton is Nutrition Consultant with Maternal and Child Health, Center for Prevention and Health Promotion
- Sue Woodbury is Manager of the Oregon WIC Program
- Jennifer Young is Nutrition and Physical Activity Coordinator with Adolescent and School Health, Center for Prevention and Health Promotion

## ASPHN in Action

ASPHN is a non-profit membership organization that provides state and national leadership on food and nutrition policy, programs and services aimed at improving the health of our population. Our vision is to create new environmental norms where healthy eating and active living are the easy and natural choices for all Americans.

At ASPHN, we build our members' skills as public health nutritionists by providing key resources and professional development. Funding from our Association's Blueprint Collaborative mini-grant program helped Robin Stanton, an ASPHN member, build a more effective collaborative effort. The grant provided technical assistance to help strengthen the NCO and to support NCO's strategic planning for its Shared Meals Initiative.

To learn more about ASPHN, please visit us on the web at [www.asphn.org](http://www.asphn.org).

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