

The Best Possibilities for Seniors Are Choices

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Brief Description:

An overview of implementing a senior nutrition voucher program in schools.

This submission was selected as part of a national challenge issued to leaders in all communities seeking new “best practices” and “best possibilities” for the future of nutrition and aging.

Community partners, you just can't deny if we all work together, we achieve more “so no senior goes hungry®”. We should not look at community partners as a threat but rather a golden opportunity. Community partners are the answer to providing healthy meals in a variety of settings which allow us to maximize our budget dollars. The goal of the Johnson County, Kansas Nutrition Program is to provide an array of affordable voucher programs for senior citizens in conjunction with the traditional congregate nutrition centers.

In 2008, we implemented CHAMPSS our first voucher program. Choosing Healthy Appetizing Meal Plan Solutions for Seniors meal program was developed as an alternative dining option. Currently, we have three CHAMPSS programs at select Hy-Vee grocery stores that have dining areas with food courts. The voucher program provides flexibility and choice seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. This program has been very successful.

Now, we are in the process of implementing our second voucher program CHOICE (Choosing Healthy Options in a Community Environment) meal program. Schools exist everywhere. We all need to think outside the box. Just because schools don't offer meals year round, doesn't mean we can't partner with them. I believe we are only held back by our own lack of imagination or fear to fail. Our programs don't have to operate the same. We need flexibility and choice “so no senior goes hungry®”. Why not partner with the schools to provide healthy meals? It's a win, win situation. Many seniors love children and have wisdom to impart. Seniors could provide encouragement and kindness which children need to thrive. The experience would also allow seniors to be a part of their community and feel needed.

The child nutrition programs have healthy meal requirements and wellness goals. So, why not have inter-generational programs for seniors at schools? The number of meals served at schools would increase thus helping to lower the cost of meals due to the economy of numbers. Also, the revenue would help the schools.

Most importantly, the programs will be inter-generational and bring children and seniors together. Seniors could assist in classrooms, tutor children, the possibilities are endless.

Ask yourself, why not? The program would not be without its challenges but what program doesn't have them? I challenge you to make the CHOICE and implement an inter-generational program for seniors in your schools.