

Framingham WIC's Good Food Project takes benefits to a healthier place



Julie Mason, a nutritionist in the Framingham WIC program, demonstrates how to make pasta with spinach, tomatoes and beans Wednesday. The Framingham/Waltham WIC program was chosen as a pilot for the Good Food Project, a new nutrition program for low-income mothers. (Daily News Staff Photo/Ken McGagh)

By Brittney McNamara

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FRAMINGHAM – The smell of sauteing onions wafted through the Framingham WIC offices as Marine Rosa and daughter Amanda Olivera learned how to prepare a bean and spinach pasta salad.

The mother and daughter from Holliston were taking part in the Good Food Project on Wednesday, a series of classes and workshops at WIC to teach women and children how to prepare healthy food safely and on a budget. Officials from the state WIC office and the U.S. Department of Agriculture also stopped by the class to see the program in action.

WIC, or Women, Infants and Children, is a federal benefits program that provides grants to states for supplemental food, health care and nutrition education for low-income expecting or new mothers and their children, up to age 5. The Framingham/Waltham WIC office received a grant in November to pilot the Good Food Project, a program that supplements WIC benefits by taking an extra step.

The program offers cooking classes, demonstrations, recipe ideas and basic kitchen skills courses to women so they can make the most of the food they buy through WIC, Framingham/Waltham WIC director Sharon McCollum said.

“It’s something to enhance what we already do, but we are making sure people are using the benefits, enhancing the benefits,” she said. “It’s really good because there are a lot of aspects of it. We can use healthy recipes, healthy WIC foods, cooking on a budget. It’s a big variety of what we do.”

Julie Mason, a nutritionist at WIC, demonstrated how to best chop an onion, gave tips on how to add flavor to pasta without using chicken broth, and how long it’s safe to store most foods in the refrigerator. She cooked a pasta salad for the class, using mostly foods mothers can buy under the program.

A typical WIC shopping list includes milk, eggs, whole grain pasta or rice, whole wheat tortillas, dried or canned beans, peanut butter, fresh or frozen vegetables, fresh or frozen fruits, canned tomato products and more. The trick, senior nutritionist Ann Tierney said, is to teach women to prepare these ingredients in new and fun ways to form innovative meals that families get excited about.

Some Good Food Project recipes include veggie frittata, sweet cinnamon Cheerio bars and whole-wheat barbecue chicken pizza.

On Wednesday, USDA officials dropped in to see one of the project classes for themselves.

“I think it’s incredible. It really adds to what they’re doing here as far as nutrition information,” said Kurt Messner, the USDA acting regional administrator. “The goal is to fight hunger and obesity. You want to do that in a healthy way. (That) begins with WIC.”

While Mason certified the dish was healthy, the officials proved it was also delicious.

Sample cups of the pasta salad were scraped empty by the end of the visit.

To learn more about the Good Food Project, call the WIC office at 508-620-1445.

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Brandon Archila, 4, of Framingham, tries out a pasta salad dish after a cooking demonstration in the WIC office at the South Middlesex Opportunity Council in Framingham Wednesday. (Daily News Staff Photo/Ken McGagh)



Karla Tejada of Framingham and her son Jeremy Cardona, 3, left, and Marilene Rosa of Holliston and her daughter Amanda Oliveira, 4, watch a cooking demonstration at the WIC office at the South Middlesex Opportunity Council in Framingham Wednesday. (Daily News Staff Photo/Ken McGagh)