

IMPROVING HEART HEALTH FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Educational program adopted as a standard in recognition of its value

Public Health Problem

- A third of New York's disabled adults are obese putting them at higher risk for having a heart attack or developing diabetes.
- Many more disabled adults have heart attacks or strokes compared to the average for New York adults.
- People with disabilities living in group homes are dependent on staff to purchase and prepare healthy food for them.
- Educating group home staff who are responsible for food shopping and preparation can increase the availability of healthy food and help reduce the risk for overweight and diet-related chronic diseases for the adults living in these homes.

Program

- With funding from the New York State Health Department Healthy Heart Program, dietitians from People, Inc. developed a nutrition training workshop to educate group home staff with the goal of improving the nutrition and health status of this population.
- Training covers the American Heart Association nutrition guidelines, the exchange system for people with diabetes, the benefits of fiber & water, healthful eating out, label reading, food storage & safety, cooking basics and portion control.
- Over two thousand staff members have received the training - these staff members are responsible for over four thousand individuals living in People Inc-run homes.
- The dietitians survey each group home yearly to evaluate healthy food choices.

Impact

- People Inc staff increased their knowledge of healthy eating principles.
- Resident eating habits have improved, both for in-home meals and away-from-home meals.
- A review of grocery receipts for group home food purchases shows a seven percent increase in heart healthy foods purchased, including higher fiber bread and cereals, lower fat meat and dairy products, and lower sodium foods
- The obesity rate in the homes has decreased slightly since the start of the program
- The training is now a mandated part of agency-wide orientation in recognition of its value in improving the quality of life for group home residents. The Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities adopted the People Inc. criteria for nutritional surveys and menu system as "best practice" for their own facilities, extending this valuable program.

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