

Developing a Model Nutrition/Family Education Program to Build Human Capacity in Low-Income Communities – Johannesburg, South Africa

**Joanne Keith, Michigan State University
Barbara Mutch, Michigan State University
Amy Slonim, Michigan Public Health Institute**

Introduction

In 1996, a report assessing the nutritional status of South Africans (Potchefstroom, 1996) documented the nature and extent of nutrition vulnerability among specific South African populations, in particular, low-income families with young children. Further, the report indicated that many government and non-government programs were perceived to be ineffective in addressing specific nutrition and health concerns in these populations. The technical assistance of Michigan State University (MSU) faculty and Extension staff was requested by the Greater Johannesburg Transitional Metropolitan Council (TMC), Nutrition Unit. The aim of the assistance was to provide technical expertise in developing, implementing, and evaluating a model, paraprofessional nutrition/family education program in Johannesburg, South Africa low-income communities.

General Objective

To provide technical assistance in the development and evaluation of a nutrition and family pilot educational program targeting low-income families with young children in the metropolitan area of Johannesburg, South Africa. The program was to be modeled after EFNEP, a food and nutrition education program that trains indigenous paraprofessionals to engage families in learning a competency-based curriculum.

Methods and Major Points

Recognizing the complexity of the issues and need for a multidimensional approach, adaptations of models, theories and best practices were presented for consideration in the development of a practical and meaningful program. The following guiding principles were at the heart of the provision of technical assistance:

- *Providing access to tested models and expert knowledge;*
- *Advancing active learning through linkages;*
- *Facilitating and guiding the generation of targeted understanding through community assessment;*
- *Promoting the application of problem-solving to address needs and expand understanding;*
- *Advancing diversity in thinking;*
- *Providing on-going vitality, creativity, and spirit to overcome on-going obstacles; and,*
- *Incorporating the MSU Extension Children, Youth, and Family people-centered philosophy and models to determine approaches, address needs, deliver programs, and define outcome measures.*

Conclusion and Educational Importance

The Mary Lewis Endowment funding was used to provide technical assistance in facilitating the development of a pilot nutrition/family educational program to be used in non-formal settlements in Johannesburg, South Africa. The co-creation of the model program employed the stewardship and expertise of MSU nutrition and family ecology faculty and staff and the experience and leadership of both South African health and nutrition professionals, as well as community members for whom the programs are targeted.