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The Intelligent Terminal: an FNS management tool

NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR THE ELDERLY

Two Texas projects offer meals, companionship, and recreation

By Melanie Watts

If it's true that life begins at 40, then it just stands to reason that people 60 and over still have a lot of living to do.

And it's this premise on which the Nutrition Program for the Elderly was founded. The program offers persons 60 and over, and their spouses regardless of age, a hot lunch along with social services and recreational activities. NPE projects across the country currently serve approximately 280,000 meals daily.

The Department of Health, Education and Welfare's Administration on Aging administers the 3-year-old program in cooperation with State agencies on aging. NPE projects receive funds under Title VII of the Older Americans Act, and USDA-donated foods help defray meal costs. In fiscal year 1976, USDA will provide about \$6 million in donated foods for the elderly programs throughout the country based on the total number of meals served by the programs in each State. The projects can also accept food stamps in payment for meals, making NPE the only existing program which can use both commodities and food stamps.

Project areas must include high proportions of elderly whose incomes are below the poverty level, but financial need isn't a requirement. The program tries to reach four specific groups of people—those who can't afford to eat adequately; those who physically can't shop and cook for themselves; those who don't know how to prepare well-balanced meals; and those who, due to the crippling effects of isolation and loneliness, have lost interest in just about everything.

Most participants fall into this last category.

There are about 153 NPE sites in Texas serving some 29,000 senior citizens in a year's time—240,000 meals each month. According to the Governor's Committee

on Aging which administers the NPE projects, two programs in particular illustrate the way projects can be tailored to meet the specific needs of an area. One of them, the Abilene project, operates four city sites plus a rural site in nearby Buffalo Gap. The other, San Antonio, is the Nation's second largest operation, and includes the entire Bexar County.

Walter Graham, in charge of the food service operation in Abilene, oversees an annual \$66,000 food budget, which represents about 36 percent of Abilene's total \$181,000 Federal grant. The city supplies an additional \$30,000 in actual cash assistance and in-kind services.

Mr. Graham points out that when the program first started in February 1974, the kitchen was located in an old, city-owned building.

"The only equipment we had was a four burner stove," he says, "so the cooks and I did a lot of cooking at home."

This technical problem was solved by using part of the first year's \$182,000 grant to purchase kitchen equipment. As a result, the program expanded from 150 meals a day to the present rate of 342 meals daily.

The Abilene program operates at community centers under the jurisdiction of the City Parks and Recreation Department, and uses a central kitchen at one of the sites, Rose Center. Three cooks prepare all the food, and vans transport meals, plates and silverware to the other four sites. Thermal food caddies keep the food warm for the 25-minute trip and electric steam tables at each center maintain the proper serving temperatures. After lunch, a central dishwasher at Rose Center handles all the utensil clean-up.

San Antonio's operation began a little differently in November 1973, using a catering service to supply meals at \$1.17 a

plate. Now 15 sites have kitchens in which all 2,300 meals are prepared daily, and vans deliver food to those centers without kitchens.

The San Antonio program allots about \$1 million of its annual \$1.7 million budget for food. Of the total budget, the city contributes \$185,000.

"We have set our sites up as individual businesses," says Nancy Bohman, San Antonio NPE director, "so they actually operate their own programs. We send them monthly checks for operating expenses and provide technical assistance. The rest is up to them."

All sites in San Antonio are located in churches. Site councils, made up of participants selected by the other participants, direct the program's operation.

The staff at each site includes a site leader and at least one cook.

The site is directly responsible for arranging transportation and paying food bills.

"We decided on this method of operation so if Federal funding ever ran out, these people would have some business skills with which to carry on," explains Ms. Bohman. "Too, we think participants are more involved in the program this way. It gives them something to do."

Meals in the San Antonio program average 58 cents each, while those in the Abilene program are presently about 75 cents each. USDA-donated foods usually average at least 10 cents a meal, although this figure can vary according to fluctuations in the value of individual food

Before lunch at an NPE site in San Antonio, a woman shows other participants how she uses magic markers to make colorful fabric designs. She tells them how to stretch the designs on wooden frames and make pocketbooks. Participants at this center frequently share their favorite hobbies with their companions.



items. The Texas State Department of Public Welfare handles distribution of these donated foods to NPE projects in the State.

There's no set fee for meals; each participant contributes what he feels he can afford. Obviously the meal, served on this basis, is a drawing card. But program leaders emphasize that it's just a means to get people to the sites for companionship and activities.

Ms. Bohman explains, "Food isn't enough to sustain the mind."

Contributions in Abilene run around \$100 a month while those in San Antonio total about \$700. These contributions and cash earned from the sale of homemade crafts and other site sponsored activities go back into the program for such things as art materials and trips. Carver Center in Abilene used its funds for a day's trip to Austin to visit Governor Dolph Briscoe, while Mt. Zion's participants in San Antonio spent a weekend in Monterrey, Mexico.

But even with these outside activities, the meal remains a very important part of the program, particularly since it's the only good meal of the day for many participants.

"Some people just can't afford to spend very much money on food," says Jeanette Karrenbrock, outreach worker for the Abilene program, "and others just don't bother cooking at home. But the meal here provides a third of what an adult needs to eat in a day so at least they're getting that much."

To insure this high quality diet, Walter Graham in Abilene and Patricia Pope, a registered dietician in San Antonio, prepare menus several weeks in advance and submit them to the Governor's Committee on Aging, which checks the menus' nutritional value.

Even with a program as comprehensive as NPE, participation remains a problem.

In Texas, outreach is a continuing effort to contact the isolated elderly in the community, those who are most in need of NPE. Participants, along with welfare and food stamp certification workers, often provide names of those who are in need of help.

"There are 110,000 people in the Bexar County area eligible for the NPE program, and 35,000 eligibles in the project areas," says Arden I. Lewis administrator for the Metropolitan San Antonio Office on Aging, Department of Human Resources and Services, which operates NPE proj-

ects in San Antonio. "We reach 5,800 during a year's time."

Lynda Calcote, NPE director in Abilene, estimates that about 3 percent of the elderly population—about 1,500 persons—participate in the program sometime during the year.

One problem outreach workers face is the attitude that the program is charity, the Abilene director explains.

"We have to convince them it's not welfare, and their contribution no matter how small is a fair exchange," she says. "They don't like the idea of depending on someone else for anything, no matter how great their need is."

Although participants can pay for their meals with food stamps, Abilene and San Antonio programs discourage this use of the stamps, since program officials feel they are better used to buy food for meals at home.

About a third of the participants also take part in the food stamp program, according to Ms. Karrenbrock, who obtains this information during interviews with those interested in joining the program.

Through Title VII, NPE delivers meals to participants temporarily homebound due to illness. This service averages about 20 meals a day in Abilene and 200 in San Antonio and is not provided on a regular basis.

"After all, the whole idea behind NPE is to get these people together and involved in activities," says Ms. Calcote. "We can't accomplish this goal serving them meals at home."

Another community program provides meals on a regular basis to those people restricted to their homes.

In addition to meals for those temporarily homebound, Mr. Graham also prepares about seven special meals a day, for diabetics, those requiring bland diets, and a man who recently had throat surgery.

"I have to serve a completely liquid diet for this man," says Mr. Graham, "so I had to do some studying to come up with ideas for his meals."

But this is typical of Mr. Graham's interest in the participants and their health needs. To sharpen his nutrition skills, he recently took a 100-hour college course dealing with the subject on his own time. He finds a knowledge of nutrition an advantage, not only in planning regular and special menus for program meals but also in helping participants plan menus for home use.

"These people are really interested in what foods are best for them," he says. "They realize that their health is dependent on what they eat."

Nutrition education is a requirement of Titel VII and the regular presentations on this subject at the sites keep participants aware of their dietary needs.

"Most of our menus can be altered slightly to meet special diets," explains Mr. Graham, "but we also keep things on hand like chopped steaks and certain vegetables that can be substituted when necessary."

Mr. Graham manages to stay within his 75-cent meal range even when preparing special diets. The San Antonio program, on the other hand, makes no provision for special diets, because these meals are too expensive to prepare, but participants in the San Antonio program understand that special needs can't be met.

"We're careful in preparing all our food to see that polyunsaturates and little seasoning are used," says Ms. Pope. "This way, the regular meal is safe for almost everyone."

But bland, tasteless food is not standard fare at these sites and participants enjoy all kinds of food.

In the responses to one of his quarterly questionnaires to participants, Mr. Graham found requests for chili burgers and jalapeno peppers as well as the all-time favorites of cornbread, greens and beans.

Mr. Graham points out that participants eat most of the food they are served, even if they have never eaten it before.

This eagerness to try new things is apparent in San Antonio where participants at one site, with a predominately Mexican-American enrollment have developed a preference for chop suey served with Spanish rice.

While most NPE programs encourage constant rotation of seating arrangements at meals in order to insure a thorough mingling of participants, this presents a problem at some San Antonio sites where certain ethnic traditions are still followed.

"The Mexican-Americans tend to segregate at meals, with the men eating at one table and the women at another," says Ms. Bohman. "This is part of their heritage, so we don't try to change it."

This effort to interest participants in each other extends to the social part of the program, too.

Pool, dominoes, horseshoes, painting,

ceramics and even an occasional softball game are just a few of the activities available.

Community volunteers who teach and direct these activities are an essential part of this aspect of the program.

"We find many senior citizens never had time before to play games, so they don't know how," says Ms. Calcote. "We teach them to play and how to enjoy it."

Shopping trips are another periodic activity. Participants at both the San Antonio and Abilene programs take trips in the vans the centers use to transport the elderly to and from the centers, a requirement of Title VII.

There are educational opportunities, too.

Abilene's adult education department sponsors courses in American history, Texas history and math. Both history courses were very popular and the education department plans repeat sessions for the fall.

Meanwhile, many participants in San Antonio are studying for high school diplomas they never had a chance to work on before. Others are learning to read and write English for the first time.

"They share each other's accomplishments and are so proud of any educational achievement," says Ms. Bohman.

Participants share many things.

Like the wedding of two widowed San Antonio participants who had been sweethearts 40 years before. Fellow participants attended the formal church ceremony and the reception afterwards.

But some things aren't nearly so pleasant.

Two Abilene participants planned to marry but postponed the ceremony until after the prospective bride's needed surgery. She died, and her fiance was heartbroken. He reluctantly returned to the center the day after the funeral. Several participants and site leader, Virginia Ferebee, greeted him at the door.

"You're back with family now," they told him, "and somehow we'll all get through this together."

Results of the NPE program are obvious to those familiar with the program.

(Above) The menu and seating arrangement at this San Antonio site reflect the cultural preferences of Mexican-American participants. Men and women sit at separate tables to enjoy a lunch of spanish rice and turkey. (Below) At another site, participants practice for a competition game of dominoes, which they'll play with a nearby NPE project.

Senior citizens who were once unkempt now appear dressed in their best clothes, with their hair fixed perfectly. People who were withdrawn and almost bitter are now the first to greet visitors and sell newcomers on the program.

But little selling is necessary—the program speaks for itself. Participants are coming out in droves, citizens are volunteering their time and city governments are providing additional support, outside the required matching fund contribution.

Abilene centers are being redecorated at city expense and San Antonio sites can

plan trips using free city transportation within a 50-mile radius.

"I've never seen any program go over so big," smiles Mel Neese, director of the Abilene City Parks and Recreation Department. "Everyone is anxious to see this program succeed and they're doing everything they can to make sure that it does."

But the real success is that senior citizens now have more to do than spend idle hours in a rocking chair.

As one Abilene participant put it, "Keeping busy keeps you young." ☆



Information for Food Stamp Shoppers

...at the Supermarket

By Herb Strum

The intricacies of the subject could provide the basis for a new college curriculum or scientific theorem.

Yet most supermarket shoppers, particularly those receiving food stamps, do not have access to higher forms of education for this new area of study.

Instead, the average push-cart pilots steer their way through the maze, going up Row 4—baby food, canned goods, cereals—and down Row 8—coffee, spices, bread—trying to stay within their budget and stretch their food dollars to the utmost.

Money saving coupons, newspaper ads, house brands, name brands, convenience foods, high protein, low calories, unit pricing, ingredient labeling, 2 for 35 cents, 6 for a dollar—it's bewildering.

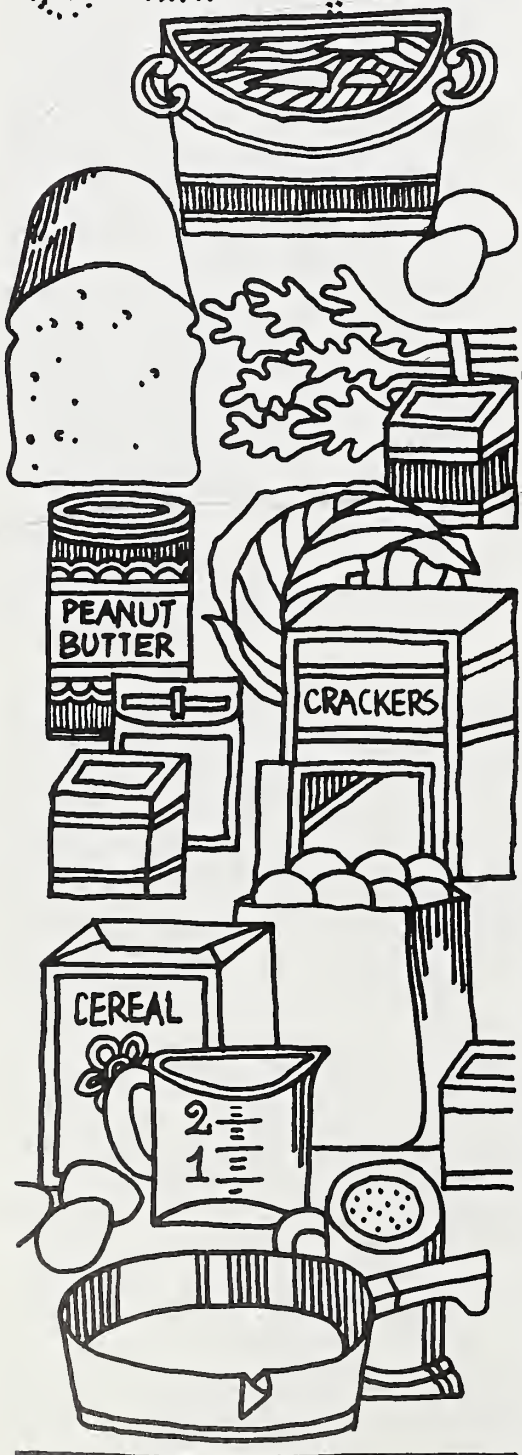
For food stamp shoppers in New York, New Jersey and the District of Columbia, the spring brought some help in the form of an information program run by a team

of experts from Federal and State agencies and a large food chain.

The experts included representatives from FNS, the Cooperative Extension Service, the State food stamp programs and local social services offices, and in this case Grand Union, although other chains throughout the country have participated in similar efforts.

The project's main purpose was to inform consumers of ways they can get more in the supermarket for their dollars and food stamps.

The information effort included 11 stores. At each site, FNS program specialists, extension service nutrition aides and personnel from the State food stamp agency arranged exhibit tables with foods from the basic four food groups: milk, meat, breads and cereals, vegetables and fruits. Other necessary items, such as shortening, margarine, coffee, tea and seasonings were also on display.



...at the Food Stamp Center

By Katherine G. Thomas

It isn't everyday that food stamp recipients find vegetable stew bubbling away in the waiting room of a food stamp certification center, but it does happen in some centers in Washington, D.C.

For over a year, Pearl Howard, program assistant with the Cooperative Extension Service at Washington's Federal City College, has been working in food stamp certification offices, demonstrating food preparation techniques, distributing nutrition information, and conducting discussions on ways to use food wisely.

The program, coordinated by Elaine Blyler, a public health nutritionist with the Department of Human Resources in Washington, was developed specifically for presentation in confined areas to changing audiences.

"Frequently you'll have the same people over a half hour period," said Ms. Blyler. "They come in and in many cases there is a waiting room, and frequently they have to wait to be seen for their problem or to be certified. So the idea is

to make this a meaningful time."

The best time to reach a wide audience is in the morning, when food stamp offices are the busiest, according to Ms. Howard. But a large number of people in a food stamp office presents a problem of space. Ms. Howard has solved this by using equipment that is compact and portable—a small table with a hot plate or electric skillet when necessary.

"I demonstrate by preparing the food, mixing it together and cooking it, serving it, and letting the audience taste it," said the nutrition aide. As she is making a dish, she answers questions and discusses nutritional aspects of the foods she is working with.

Some foods, like vegetables, can be washed and chopped in advance. But Ms. Howard likes to do as much as possible at the demonstrations so the audience can see what goes into a dish.

"I open a canned food in front of them, and put it on display, then I mix it right in front of them. It isn't like a big kitchen," the program assistant pointed out. "We

Nutrition aides discussed how shoppers could make the most of their food dollars. Suggestions included planning menus, comparing prices, making shopping lists and other ways a family can get nutritious meals on a low budget.

FNS representatives and State officials explained food stamp eligibility requirements, told shoppers what information they would need when applying for food stamps, and gave them addresses of local food stamp offices.

The highlight of the exhibit was a display of foods included in a sample economy diet for a four-person household.

Along with the display, the exhibits offered printed material for the shoppers, including Grand Union's booklet, "10 Ways to Stretch Your Food Dollar."

Exhibit workers found consumer reaction to their presentation particularly interesting.

"I am surprised about the response

we've received," said James Casey, of the New York Department of Social Services, which helped staff exhibits at several stores in Rockland County.

"Usually, people are reluctant to talk about themselves or their financial and economic situation," he explained. "The possibility that they might be eligible for food stamps is in the back of their minds, but rarely surfaces: perhaps, they don't want to get involved. But at the exhibit, they appeared to be more relaxed and anxious to ask questions about the food plan and food stamps."

Nutrition aide Carmen Caban also commented on the positive consumer reaction she encountered at a Rockland County store.

"At first, many of the people who stopped by thought we were selling something," she said. "But as soon as they learned that it was free information and pamphlets, they became interested

and wanted to talk about the plan."

One store manager, Ray Dubois, said he was pleased with the exhibit because of his store's large volume of food stamp business.

"There was no need to worry about food stamp customers stopping by the exhibit—we had plenty," the manager said. "It was good for them to sharpen their buying habits."

An important sidelight to the exhibit was bringing together Federal, State and county agencies as well as food chain representatives at the consumer level—that is, in the store.

"I think it is important that we show shoppers that 'officials' are interested, involved and concerned," said Tom Keating, outreach coordinator for New Jersey. "We wanted to make the consumers feel that they can avail themselves of the services being offered by both public and private sources." ☆

use the kinds of food where you don't have to do a lot of washing."

During the demonstration, Ms. Howard distributes copies of the recipes to the audience. Generally, the handouts include a section called "Nutrition Facts for the Consumer," which treats subjects like protein foods, foods containing "empty calories," and nutrition-related diseases. These recipes, based on nutritious, low-cost foods, come from a number of sources: cooks in the community, Ms. Blyler, and other nutrition experts.

Among the recipes are hot chocolate, using instant milk; farina cereal and farina bread; peanutty caramels, made with peanut butter, rice cereal and instant milk; bean salad, using string beans; and turkey salad.

Ms. Blyler tests and reviews the recipes for ease of preparation and nutritional value. She also helps train the people who run the demonstrations in various aspects of the procedure, discussing information with them that is of particular importance to their audience.

The program is dependent, to a great extent, on volunteers and part-time workers. "We don't have too many permanent positions, but we have a lot of people coming through," said Ms. Blyler. "So we have set up educational programs that can be stopped and started. Because of our lack of permanent staff, we try to utilize staff of other agencies as much as possible."

Ms. Blyler also recruits from other areas. The staff for last summer's program, which operated in five of Washington's 13 certification centers, was diverse. "We had a number of college students, some majoring in nutrition, some in sociology and other areas, doing the programs, as well as Ms. Howard and another program assistant," explained the nutritionist.

The program has been well received by people working in food stamp offices, according to Ira Oliver, assistant manager of the Deane Avenue Center. The demonstrations present the audience with useful information without interfering with the

staff's routine, he pointed out. "If a client is involved with the demonstration, I imagine it would be left to the discretion of the worker and the client how they would handle it—there are no hard and fast rules," Mr. Oliver said. "The worker wants to do what's in the client's interest at that precise moment."

The audience's reaction to Ms. Howard's demonstrations has also been very positive.

"I've talked with some of the people out there and some of the people here. One of the things we've found is how simple eating can be," Mr. Oliver said. "Just like the bean salad the other day. She didn't use any seasoning at all. A couple of ladies were talking about how unusual this was in terms of their life long habits of using seasonings."

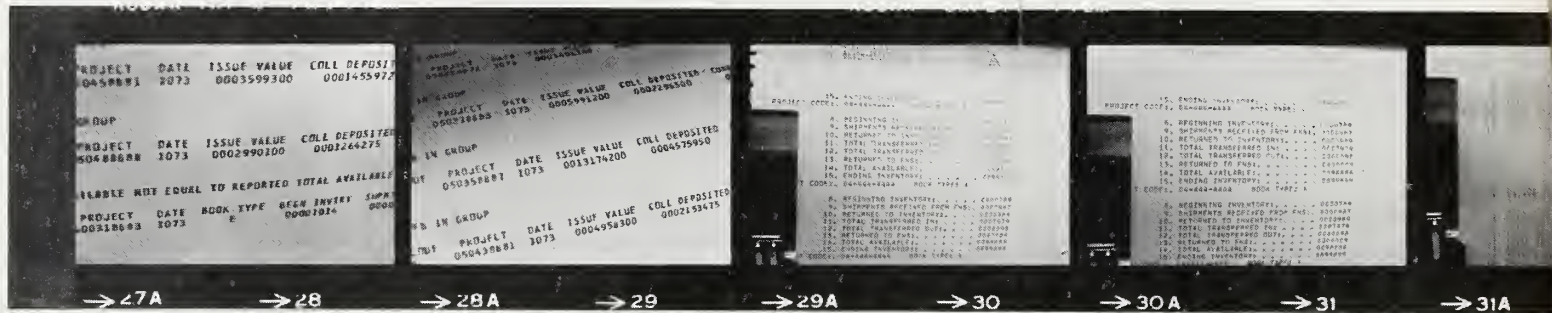
Have the demonstrations been helpful to food stamp recipients?

"Most of the people who are exposed to the demonstration seem to feel it does provide them with additional means of eating cheaper," Mr. Oliver said. ☆

THE INTELLIGENT TERMINAL

Computer provides up-to-date information

By Russell Forte



Plut, plut, plut-ta-plut-ta-plut-ta-plut-plut. Agile fingers type out the information, filling the once-blank television screen with green letters and numbers which follow a pulsating cursor across the line of type.

Plut. A simple tap of another key spreads line upon line of characters across the screen. An aluminum disc whirling in its plastic case stores the characters along with millions more, ready to release them all at a signal from the computer's programmer. In moments the information travels a thousand miles to a master computer, or across the room to a printout machine which sprays the letters on paper at an eye-blurring rate of 300 lines per minute.

For the lightly curious, it's easy to get carried away with hardware and flashing lights. A whiff of the computer-age is heady.

But for the serious management person, computers are one of the fastest, most accurate and ultimately least expensive ways to keep an up-to-date record of the food stamp program.

Since its beginning in 1961, the food stamp program has grown rapidly, presenting new management problems to FNS and the State and local agencies which help administer the program. To make decisions about program operations, it became essential to have access to vast amounts of information on all aspects of the program, from participation rates to distribution and redemption of the stamps.

The agencies administering the program looked for new management tools — among them the computer.

In late 1973, FNS began investigating the possible benefits offered by a new device called the "intelligent terminal."

A result of dramatic advances in microelectronics, the intelligent terminal is a combination of a communication terminal and a small computer. The communication terminal accepts information—typing it out in words and numbers on a television screen—translates that information into a code, and sends it over telephone lines to either a computer or another terminal where it is decoded and

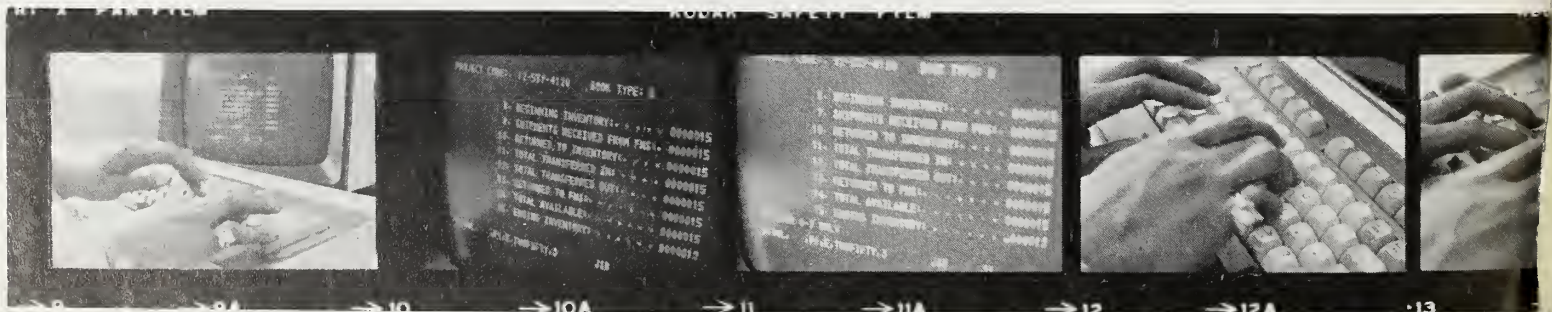
translated back into words and numbers on another television screen. The computer checks the information for errors.

Frank Pulju, director of the FNS automatic data processing division, felt that efficiency could be improved if each FNS region had an intelligent terminal checking information fed into it before transmission to Washington.

Working with the data processing division, Dennis Doyle, administrator of the FNS midwest region, developed a proposal to test the computer system in two States in his region.

Under the proposal, a specific report form that had been a major source of difficulty became the basis of the project. The form was the Food Coupon Book Report, FNS-250. Following a period of equipment selection and personnel training, the test began in Iowa and Nebraska.

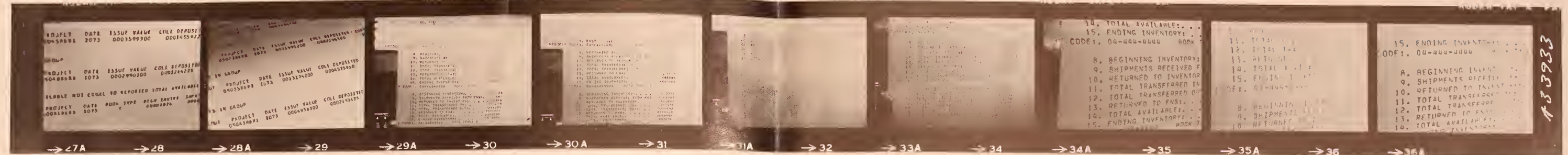
Under the old system, the region forwarded activity reports from inventory, issuance or depositing points to Washington, where a key punch operator made computer cards based on the numerical information in the reports. Then the cards



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Under the old system, the region forwarded activity reports from inventory; issuance or depositing points in Washington, where a key punch operator made computer cards based on the numerical information in the reports. Then the cards

were fed into the main computer.

If a key punch operator made a mistake on a card, or if the original form was incorrectly filled in, the computer discovered the error when it checked the arithmetic of the information programmed into it. The Washington office then sent the reports containing errors back to the regions for correction.

The process was time-consuming and, because of the lengthy correction process, information on activities in the regions could never be up-to-date. The errors also restricted both the quality and quantity of information needed by FNS management, the Treasury Department, Congress, and the public.

With the new system, an intelligent terminal in the region can detect mistakes made by either the report's originator or the terminal operator before they get to Washington.

The intelligent terminal is programmed for each reporting form used in the program, and it will accept only certain types of information. For example, if question number seven requires an an-

swer that is A, B or C, the computer will not accept a numerical answer. So, if the operator accidentally hits the wrong key, or if the original entry was incorrect, the computer stops until the operator puts in the correct entry.

The intelligent terminal can also detect errors in addition. In some cases the operator has to enter a column of numbers and the total shown on the form. The computer automatically adds up the column and checks it against the total that is fed into it. If the two are not equal, either because of an operator error, or an error on the form, the computer flashes an error sign on the terminal's television screen and waits for correct information.

When the test began, the average time to identify and return erroneous forms to the region for corrective action exceeded 60 days. By using the terminal, the regional staff could begin the correction process in less than 3 days, allowing States to submit the corrected data within 2 weeks.

Because some advantages of the system are applicable to all food programs, FNS expects to use its intelligent ter-

minals to keep tabs on many areas of its child nutrition and family feeding activities.

By reviewing computer-provided information, management will be able to spot significant changes in program participation more quickly and avert shortages, for instance in supplies of food coupons.

Immediately available information will allow program managers to make timely and accurate reports to Congress and the public on the status of FNS programs.

Because of a rapid exchange of information between local and Federal agencies, FNS will know about any problems in the programs far more quickly than before.

State governments will have access to newer information, to give them a better overview of their part of the program operation, and more control over their financial responsibilities, which will reduce the clerical load on their staffs.

Intelligent terminals are the newest tool being used to help the staff of FNS and its State and county cooperators run the program even more efficiently. ☆





Training team members work with lunch aides individually and as a group to help them understand lunchroom problems. They also discuss ways to motivate children to eat.

Unique training program helps lunchroom aides deal with individual problems

PERSON TO PERSON

By Carol M. D'Arezzo



When Mary Pickins first heard from her neighbor Carol Schofield that the department of education was starting a lunch program in her children's school, she was worried, even though the program was needed desperately.

She knew that most of the children in her Pittsburgh neighborhood were from poor families and would get a free lunch, but the school was old and had no kitchen or cooks—just a lot of hungry kids. What if the lunch program was just some give-away deal that would put down the kids, or serve food that wasn't fit to eat?

The neighbors resolved to keep a close eye on the new lunch program.

They spotted their chance to get a first-hand look at the new food service when the school advertised for lunchroom aides to work with the lunch program. However, when they began working at the school, they became aware of a number of problems they hadn't anticipated.

Like many of the other aides, Ms. Pickins and Ms. Schofield had hoped to do more for the children than just hand them lunch. They wanted to concentrate on getting the kids to eat. But instead the women found most of their time spent on keeping order in the lunchroom and cleaning up.

One situation that particularly disturbed the aides was the large amount of plate waste, but they were unsure of the

best way to approach the problem. For example, many of the children weren't used to milk and balked at drinking it at lunch. Should the kids be urged to drink it—or was it bad for them to drink too much, as some of the women had heard?

The aides had divided opinions about menu items other than the milk. In their section of Pittsburgh, a lunch was considered good only if it was hot, and the school's satellite system served cold pack lunches—prepackaged Type A meals that did not have to be heated.

Many aides wondered if the cold packs were nutritionally adequate.

Although each of the aides had different attitudes about the lunches and how to handle the kids, all of them agreed on one thing: they needed a better understanding of nutrition and food service.

Last fall, some lunchrooms within the Pittsburgh city school systems were receiving satellite lunches for the first time—and hiring neighborhood women and mothers like Mary Pickins and Carol Schofield to take charge of the lunch operation.

The city's school food service director, Donald Bussler, and his staff at the Pittsburgh board of education's food services department were very concerned that the aides were having to carry out their tasks without any orientation or



A lunch aide takes time to answer a child's question as she hands out cold pack lunches.

training in nutrition or food service practices.

Stretching his budget to its limit, Mr. Bussler had succeeded in getting lunch programs started in a number of old inner-city schools by arranging for them to receive satellited cold packs. But there had only been enough money to get the satellite feeding programs off the ground, and the aides hired; the city had no money left for a training program.

So Mr. Bussler turned to the Pennsylvania department of education for help.

Working with Zela Fox, coordinator of the State division of food and nutrition services, Mr. Bussler found that funds might be available through an FNS grant to the State of Pennsylvania for nutrition education under Section 6 regulations of the National School Lunch Act.

Ms. Fox and Mr. Bussler worked with Gertrude Marsh, area consultant for the Pittsburgh region, to draft a proposal for an aide training program. The concept they used was an adaptation of a cook-manager training program originally conceived by Matilda Fine, a school food service supervisor on Mr. Bussler's staff.

The Pittsburgh project received Federal approval during the winter, and was ready to roll in February. The project was designed to test the effectiveness of using an interagency approach—combining the

expertise of food service supervisors and behavioral scientists from the Pittsburgh department of education with health communicators hired on contract from the city's health department.

The result was an "all star" team.

Judy Dodd and Roberta Dillon, health department nutritionists, conducted the nutrition training, while Eugene Cain and Vera Forsstrom, social workers from the department of education, used their expertise to help the aides understand and solve their individual problems.

"We tried to help the aides with their own feelings, too," Mr. Cain commented. "The women entered the workshops unsure of themselves and feeling inadequate. I hope we were able to change that."

Matilda Fine and Willie Wester, both food service supervisors, taught the aides how the school food service system worked and showed them the importance of their role in making the operations successful.

Sixty aides from more than 30 elementary and secondary schools in the city attended the training program, which began in February and consisted of five 2-hour workshops held at Pittsburgh's new food service commissary—the hub of the city's food service operation.

Mary Pickins and Carol Schofield were among the aides selected for the nutrition

education project. Although the two friends were excited over the prospect of getting information and advice that would help them in their jobs, they weren't sure what to expect from the training program.

But they were encouraged by the friendly atmosphere of the first workshop on nutrition. Instead of lecturing, instructor Judy Dodd welcomed the aides' questions and invited all the women to join in the discussions.

The aides jumped at the chance to work out solutions to problems that had been unresolved for so long.

Mary Pickins later commented that the workshops were the first time in a long while she had felt as if her thoughts and feelings were important to other people.

"The aides really gained confidence in themselves when they realized that someone wanted to listen to what they wanted to say," explained nutritionist Roberta Dillon.

The aides shared one main interest: they wanted to learn all they could about the nutritional needs of children. What kind of food should they be eating; how often; how much; and is it okay for them to eat just the things they like? The Type A lunch and its contribution to a child's well-being became the central focus of the workshop.

The training sessions stressed not only

what children should eat, but ways to motivate them to eat. The women learned that a child's willingness to eat is closely tied to social and emotional factors, such as background, environment, and attitudes of other children. And the aides were challenged to use "force" to persuade the children to eat—the force of compassion and love.

As part of their assigned readings, the women read two articles by Dr. Bruno Bettelheim. One aide made a poster for her lunchroom—a big red heart inscribed with Dr. Bettelheim's statement, "Food given to children unwillingly and without love is not good nutrition, but an insult."

Workshop participants received assistance from Roberta Dillon in setting up nutrition training sessions for aides and school administrators in their own schools. Ms. Dillon estimates that this secondary training probably reached as many as 400 aides.

"Not only did the aides at all the schools I visited show a great interest in learning about nutrition, but many principals and their assistants made a point of attending the training session, too," the nutritionist said.

McIvory Jennings, one of the city's vice-principals, was one of Mary Pickins' "pupils."

"I'm very happy to have taken part in this training," Mr. Jennings said. "It's given me a chance to learn how worthwhile the school lunch program is and many pointers on how our office can support the efforts of our lunch aides."

And the lunch aides were as glad to have Mr. Jennings in their class as he was to be there.

"It's nice to see that the administration is interested in what we're doing," one young woman observed. "The class here at school has really brought everyone together."

Before the nutrition workshops, the aides had very little contact with anyone involved in the planning and administration of the city's school food service.

Holding the workshops at the new commissary was Don Bussler's idea. He felt that this would demonstrate to the aides the amount of effort and the quality of work backing them up in the school lunchrooms.

Mr. Bussler's approach paid off. As a first step, school food service supervisors Matilda Fine and Willie Wester introduced the aides to all the people working behind the scenes administering

and planning the lunch programs in Pittsburgh city schools.

"The workshops gave the aides their first chance to feel part of things—like valued members of the school food service team," explained Ms. Dodd.

"And they were really glad to finally see the person behind that voice on the other end of the phone," added Ms. Dillon.

Following the workshop training, the aides were enthusiastic about all their new contacts in the city's school food service, and felt more confident as food service managers. But it was the commissary tour that sold them on pre-packaged lunches.

The aides saw each feature of the production system. And they were particularly impressed with the familiar brands of ingredients in the storeroom, and the way that entrees, breads, and desserts were all made from scratch.

"I feel good about the lunches now," remarked Ms. Schofield. "I know Mr. Bussler is taking care to see that the ingredients are first-rate—the same ones I'd cook with at home."

Another aide added, "You know, kids often only want to eat things the way they are fixed at home. The little ones at school will look at something on their plate and tell me, 'My mama doesn't make it this way.' Now I just tell them that somebody's mama made it . . . and they think it's okay."

According to Judy Dodd and Roberta Dillon, the aides' positive attitude about the lunches has boosted acceptance and understanding of the school lunch program back in their communities.

But increased community acceptance was just one of the positive results of the program already evident by the time the school year ended. Overall participation in the lunch program was up, even in the warm weather months. The number of applications for free and reduced-price lunches was up. The amount of plate waste was down, especially milk. And, tardiness was down, since the children were required to place their lunch order first thing in the morning.

But if there is something to be learned from the Pittsburgh workshops, Judy Dodd said, it is that the success of a lunch program is not measured so much in terms of participation figures and application forms as it is in human terms.

Just ask Mary Pickins, Carol Schofield and the kids in their lunchroom. ☆

Food Stamps in Greenville

PROGRAM CHANGES MEET PARTICIPANTS NEEDS

By Thomas A. Gregory

There's been a change in the food stamp program in Greenville, South Carolina, thanks to local leaders.

Not too long ago the food stamp program operated in a dilapidated 65-year-old school building lacking in just about everything—especially space.

"It was so crowded that we had as many as eight caseworkers interviewing applicants in one room," says Erskin Carver, director of the Greenville County Department of Social Services. "There was no privacy and the noise was almost unbearable."

Worse than that, he adds, was the time applicants spent waiting for the interview. There was little space for a waiting room, so even on cold and rainy days people stood outside the building. A local transit company sent a bus out to shelter people waiting their turn to be interviewed, but the wait was still uncomfortable.

Compounding the problem was the size of Greenville County. The county is large, 789 square miles, and heavily populated, nearly a quarter of a million people. This meant that recipients had to travel long distances.

"I guess the economic slump did more than anything else to make the community aware of the deplorable conditions at the food stamp office," recalls Gary Ray, county food stamp supervisor.

Greenville is in the heart of South Carolina's textile industry, and hundreds in the area became unemployed when manufacturing plants closed, or reduced their work force. The number of people participating in the county's food stamp program almost doubled in a short time.

A large segment of those buying food stamps were applying for food assistance for the first time, and it was a new and trying experience for them.

County leaders began discussing the condition of the food stamp program, and things began happening.

The biggest boost came from the Textile Hall Corporation, owners of a beautiful large building with plenty of parking space. The building's sole purpose was to

house the International Textile Show, so it was vacant most of the time. The corporation offered the department of social services the use of the building for the food stamp program.

When the Greenville County Council approved \$7,200 for the move, the transformation became a reality, and the 41-member food stamp staff welcomed their spacious new quarters.

An exciting change greets food stamp recipients entering the new building. The large, cheerful new waiting room has plenty of comfortable chairs, and, inside, the staff members have individual offices, allowing private consultations. Caseworkers have room to interview applicants in a spirit of privacy and dignity.

"The atmosphere is so different," comments Mr. Carver. "Not only have the attitudes of the recipients changed, but our staff members now work in more relaxed and pleasing surroundings. The morale is so much higher."

In addition to improving the main office in Greenville, local officials also took steps to help recipients who live far out in the county. They set up satellite offices in Greer, Travelers Rest and Simpsonville, making it unnecessary for residents in these areas to make the long trip to Greenville to be certified.

In fact, no one has to travel far to purchase food stamps since 17 post offices in different areas of the county now sell them. However, recipients may still buy stamps at the main office at Textile Hall.

There were other improvements in the county food stamp operation designed to help the food stamp staff process the increased caseload. New sophisticated computers now enable them to process transactions faster and more accurately.

The pride of the office is a computer which calculates the amount a recipient must pay for coupons, and then prints the basis of issuance and variable purchase options. It is also connected with the State office in Columbia which compiles changes in individual cases.

County leaders point out that textile mills in the Greenville area are beginning to return to normal operation, unemployment is dropping, and the county food stamp rolls are decreasing.

There are still a large number of low-income people in the county who look to the food stamp program to assure them of a proper diet. They will continue to enjoy the benefits of the improved administration in Greenville County. ☆

THE FOOD AND NUTRITION INFORMATION CENTER

By Dianne E. Jenkins

FNIC.FNIC.FNIC

Costs are up, productivity down. You feel pressure from "above" to operate more efficiently, and tension from your employees—the general distrust that always seems to surface when management talks about change.

As one school food service manager said, she faces a peculiar isolation in all of this. Hesitant to take her problems to an administrator who may feel she is not capable of handling her job, reluctant to confide in her fellow employees, she usually ends up dealing with her problems by herself.

"I just can't understand why people insist on re-inventing the wheel," exclaims Christine Justin. Remnants of a faded Texas drawl filter through as she adds, "We have so much here and people just don't seem to realize it."

The "here" that Ms. Justin refers to is the FNIC—the Food and Nutrition Information Center. And together, Chris Justin and the FNIC just might be the answer to the isolation which sometimes confronts cafeteria managers and others involved in school food service.

"What we want to do," says Ms. Justin, "is alert people to the fact that the problems they face have been faced by others. They're not alone. We're here to help them share ideas developed by their co-workers across the country."

The FNIC is a library designed exclusively for people involved in school food service or people interested in school food service careers.

The Center has a collection of almost 7,000 books and journals as well as nutrition education curriculum guides, children's books, cookbooks, plus educational games, puzzles, posters, records, filmstrips and motion pictures. In addition to all that, the FNIC uses a computer terminal hookup at the National Agricultural Library which provides access to material in information centers in other areas.

Any school food service person, from the cook in a local high school to the State supervisor of school lunch programs, has access to these materials free of charge.

How does the FNIC help people involved with school lunch?

Lots of ways.

A district supervisor, for instance, who needs background material on child nutrition programs for a speech to a local organization can find it at the FNIC.

A State school food service director who needs training material on safety and sanitation or even comprehensive curriculum guides for training materials can turn to the FNIC.

School food service people can get information on things like quantity food purchasing, storage and equipment use, seating schedules as well as how to prepare menus that deal with special ethnic foods.

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But most importantly, the FNIC provides information on employee training and self-instruction. Consistently, the most sought for materials, says Ms. Justin, are those which address themselves to the problems of management and motivation of employees.

And the FNIC can do more than respond to questions from school food service personnel.

"We can help school food service people respond to questions from the community," says Ms. Justin.

The FNIC was established in 1971 and became fully operational in 1973. It is funded by FNS and managed by the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Maryland.

The Center came about as the result of a recommendation made by the National School Lunch Task Force in 1968. The task force was composed of people from a variety of organizations. It included State school food service directors, and representatives from FNS, land grant colleges, and ASFSA—the American School Food Service Association. But everyone agreed that the training needs of school food people are unique, requiring a central information source and special services.

A small staff runs the FNIC—Chris Justin and four other people—but they make it work. It clicks and hums and everyone seems synchronized. Ms. Justin is a born fighter, feisty and sparky with an energy that spills over into warmth because she cares. She cares about the people she works with and about the people who bring food to the kids at school.

"You know, there's something that I'm trying to change," she says, "and that's the attitude that 'I'm just a cook.' Nobody is 'just' anything. But in addition to that, the FNIC is here to help school food service people explore their potentials. A reader is a leader. It's an advantage to learn about the field and advance."

Several States are in the process of building career ladders to enable their food service workers to move to better jobs, and Ms. Justin sees the FNIC as an integral part of that process. The FNIC can provide educational materials that people can use to teach themselves. With State approval, this type of self-instruction can be used in the American School Food Service Association Certification Program.

In fact, the Michigan Certification and Continuing Education Committee is planning to conduct a pilot project to explore this possibility, according to Ms. Justin. If proven successful, credit for self-instruction through the State certification program can help upward mobility—and may become a reality in many areas of the country.

Ms. Justin, a graduate of Texas Women's University, began her career as a community nutritionist in her home State of Texas. She then came with USDA as a food inspector and spent the next few years traveling all over the country with a

small group of fellow workers as they followed the crops. For almost her entire career, Ms. Justin has worked with USDA in the area of nutrition and nutrition education.

For the past 2 years, she has been working to improve the resources of the FNIC. To do this, she and her staff have been intensely involved in workshops, conferences and seminars across the country.

As a result, the number of requests to borrow material from the center this year is almost seven times what it was last year.

The American School Food Service Association has also been working to let people know about the availability of resources from the center. This year, ASFSA is encouraging each of the State committees to appoint a library chairperson to help acquaint association members with the services of the FNIC.

Ms. Justin believes that the FNIC can be an invaluable tool and resource for school food service people.

School food service people, at State or local levels, who are interested in learning more about the FNIC can write: *Food and Nutrition Information Center, Room 304, National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, Maryland 20705.*

Or, they can telephone 301-344-3719. There's a 24-hour answering service and just as soon as they get a request, the people at the FNIC will be glad to help in any way they can. ☆

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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