

## NEAFCS 2021 Greenwood Fryinger Award

Andrea Nikolai, MPH, RDN, LDN

UF/IFAS Extension Polk County, Family and Consumer Science Agent

### **a. Mentoring Experience**

My name is Andrea Nikolai, and this award immediately caught my eye because it involved my mentee experience and an opportunity to continue learning. In October 2016, about four years and four months ago, I became the Family and Consumer Sciences Agent for the University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) in Polk County, Florida, and within my first couple months on the job, also a member of NEAFCS. I am a registered dietitian, and my primary educational areas include nutrition, health and wellness, chronic disease, and food safety. I also work in partnership with Polk County's Indigent Health Care Program, which co-funds my position, to provide diabetes and other disease nutrition education to Polk County residents, targeting the financially vulnerable. These educational areas align with my areas of expertise, which include food and nutrition, childhood obesity, chronic disease prevention, and health promotion. I collaborate with numerous agencies and leaders throughout the community to determine audience needs and create relevant, impactful programs. I feel very fortunate to have a job where I can continue learning and growing while using my love of food and nutrition to do programs to help others feel better and live healthier lives.

My mentor is Wendy Lynch. Wendy has worked with the University of Florida/IFAS Extension in Putnam County as the Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent since 2006. Her education includes a Master of Science degree in Agricultural Education and Communication from the University of Florida in 2011 and a Bachelor of Science degree in Family and Consumer Sciences Education from Florida State University in 1998. Currently in her fifteenth year, Wendy specializes in chronic disease prevention including heart health, weight management/obesity prevention, and type II diabetes

prevention. She has done numerous impactful programs and collaborated with others such as the University of Florida, College of Health and Health Professions and Tufts University to provide interventions and do effectiveness trials to improve the health of others.

When my previous mentor retired, I needed a new mentor. I was unbelievably fortunate to have gotten Wendy Lynch to fill that position. For the past one and half years she has served as my official mentor and has been a coach, cheerleader, and role model for my personal and professional development. She is someone who truly cares about people and is unbelievably patient, thoughtful, kind, and an expert in her field. She carries herself with professionalism and portrays integrity and grace in all she does. She has become one of my key go-to people for my job and life, and I feel grateful for all she has done to help me.

I found out right away she wasn't going to be a hands-off mentor. She reached out to me, asking me to fill out a questionnaire and talked with me about my goals and objectives. She has set up regular check-ins with me to give me an opportunity to discuss future programming, questions about best-practices, and career advice. Her communication is terrific, which is important to me, and she will let me know if she can't look at something right away or directs me if someone else could better answer my question. She provides valuable feedback and constructive criticism while building my self-confidence with her encouragement at the same time. Her involvement has led me to an increase in my professional confidence and effectiveness, and I am grateful for all she has done to help me grow.

#### **b. Impacts of Mentoring Experience**

When COVID-19 started and all my in-personal classes and programming suddenly came to a screeching halt, I saw the affects of the pandemic on families and the sudden heightened interest from parents in cooking skills, healthy but satisfying foods for the family, and healthy snacks for kids. These parents and caregivers were time crunched and working to balance working from home and caring for their kids. I wanted to reach this group and had food and nutrition ideas and tips to meet their current

interests but wasn't sure how to get the info to them. My traditional approximately hour class didn't fit. I talked this over with Wendy, also expressing that I didn't want to overwhelm them with all the topics at once. She encouraged me to try something new and break up these ideas into a series of 15-minute classes. She helped me group the key messages I wanted to address into class topics and offered to help me watch the chat box as a zoom moderator so I could concentrate on the class. I sometimes worry about failure, but she reminded me this was a time to try something new and that I wouldn't know what works until I try. She reminds me of this often and helps give me the courage to do things no one has done which has brought me some unexpected successes, including much-needed program revenue this fall in the midst of a time when my traditional revenue-generating methods weren't an option. Wendy helped make sure my pictures were sourced correctly and labeled for the online classes and that I used the correct extension promotion in the presentation. Additionally, she helped me make sure my main messages and calls to action were clear and that I had necessary ADA and affirmative action guidance in place. She also helped me see how I could turn the work I spent on the series into other creative works and materials, such as handouts, fact-sheets, You Tube videos, and even video food demonstrations. In addition, she helped me market the class, and guided me through using the MailChimp email marketing service for the first time. The 15-minute class series she encouraged me to try, known as the "Foodie Fun at Home" series, was successful in outcomes and in helping me build an audience. As a result of the class, 78% (87/112) increased their knowledge of healthy meals and snacks, 77% (87/113) intended to make changes to eat and make healthier meals and snacks (22% already made healthy meals and snacks), and 92% (24/26) intended to decrease the amount of vegetables they throw away. As a result of the positive feedback, I followed this class with a "Foodie Fun at Home: Holiday Style" series in November and December. I grew so much through this experience, and it really helps exhibit my mentor's high standards for work quality. I have since found myself implementing these best practices when working with by peers. I make sure we are ADA compliant and that pictures are properly sourced.

She is cutting edge on wisdom and recommended practices, and I have seen many of her suggestions later become requirements.

The Foodie Fun series is just one example of how she pushes me to be better, try new technology, and use best-practices in my programs. She also helps me keep stretching my limits and reaching higher with ideas on how to engage participants and reach potential new audiences to make change. I feel very fortunate to have Wendy as a mentor and aim to continue to be open to suggestions and thoughts and utilize all her experience to help me continue to grow so I can best help improve the lives of others.

### **c. Professional Development Plan**

Attending the NEAFCS annual session would provide me professional development by giving me an opportunity to learn about other successful programs and strategies for implementation. It is a unique opportunity because unlike other professional development, which may help in general knowledge on topics such as leadership or technology, the NEAFCS annual session is specifically for people doing a job like mine. This can help me better understand how I could apply the knowledge and new practices in my programs. I will also be able to network with others who teach the same type of programs I do. This is a priceless opportunity to talk with others to troubleshoot problems, learn about programs that have been successful, and ask specific questions to apply it to my job as an FCS agent.

I have five personal and networking goals for the annual session, which include the following:

- 1) Talk with others to learn how to best streamline outcome data from multiple programs so that it is easier to show impact.

- 2) Learn about new programs that have had notable positive outcomes in the areas of food, nutrition, and chronic disease and stay up to date on topics relevant to my audience.

3) Learn tips on how to edit and record video food demonstrations.

4) Meet with other National Dining with Diabetes group members, who usually gather during the annual session to share updates and new resources.

5) Network with other FCS agents to build connections that would be helpful in resource sharing, multistate programing, and promotion packet review.

I anticipate that as a result of the NEAFCS annual session, I will have made contacts who I could partner with to implement multistate programs and who might be able to review my promotion packet. I also anticipate that I will learn about some new programs that I could adapt for my communities and get ideas on new technologies that have been used that could be successful in reaching my audience. I attended one other annual session and found it refreshing, enlightening, and affirming. I realized others dealt with similar challenges I did and learned strategies to deal with them. I am excited for this opportunity to potentially attend again. Thank you so much for your consideration!

**Financial costs of NEAFCS Annual Session November 2-5, 2021, in Grand Rapids, MI:**

\$425 annual session cost

\$350 flight + luggage

\$794 Amway Grand Plaza Hotel (4 nights)

\$35 airport parking

\$50 meals

---

**Total: \$1,654**

My county and district extension directors both know the importance of this conference in expanding networks and staying abreast of new impactful programs and methods and sometimes provide some funding to help with attendance. In addition, the University of Florida sometimes offers Professional Development Mini-Grants that I could apply for to attend the conference.



UF IFAS Extension – Putnam County  
Family & Consumer Sciences

111 Yelvington Road, Suite 1  
East Palatka, FL 32131  
386-329-0318

February 3, 2021

2021 NEAFCS Awards Committee

Re: Letter of Support for Andrea Nikolai  
Application for NEAFCS 2021: Greenwood Frysinger Award

Dear NEAFCS Awards Committee,

I am delighted to write this Greenwood Frysinger Award letter of support for Andrea Nikolai from the University of Florida/IFAS Extension.

When I think of Andrea, the first word that comes to mind is “Success.” As the Family and Consumer Sciences Agent in Polk County, Florida, Andrea has shown her commitment to delivering high-quality programming that meet the needs of her various clientele. She has enhanced as well as developed new partnerships and collaborations within her time in Extension. As a Registered Dietician and outstanding educator, she has provided her community with nutrition and health promotion outreach and support through a variety of platforms. She actively engages with the community, listens to the changing needs, and adapts programming to reach those who need assistance the most.

Andrea presents food safety, health and wellness and chronic disease prevention to her community in an approachable, fun, and inspiring way. She has such a strength for fostering an environment for her community to receive and learn the skills and behavior changes needed to make an impact on their health.

When the pandemic touched Florida, Andrea responded to her client needs quickly. She demonstrated excellence in program development of an online, nutrition education series, Foodie Fun at Home. She was meticulously thorough in program planning and was able to launch the series during a time when families needed the engagement and education of ways to consume healthier foods from home. Andrea’s Foodie Fun at Home series demonstrated strong impacts and outcomes and included additional opportunities for families during the holiday season, as well.

Andrea has been such a pleasure to work with during the mentoring experience. She has demonstrated a strong initiative for state, district and county level engagement and actively looks for opportunities within the profession to contribute. Andrea actively listens and applies

feedback from our mentoring meetings and is always driven to learn. She truly strives to be the best resource for her community. If ever given the opportunity to speak with her, you would quickly see her deep passion for helping others to live a healthier life.

Andrea has demonstrated success through her commitment to Extension, by understanding her audience needs and delivering programs in an approachable way. She is outstanding in developing relationships with her community partners and has made the mentoring experience so fruitful for us both. Andrea is "Success."

Andrea is so very deserving of this award, and I highly support her application.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wendy W. Lynch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Wendy W. Lynch, M.S.

Extension Agent III – Family and Consumer Sciences  
University of Florida/IFAS Extension - Putnam County