

Young mothers finding out 'Cooking Counts' with PELC program



COOKING CLASS- (Left) PELC Project Coordinator Jennifer Nelson and (Right) Cooking Counts program instructor Robyn Cakebread lead (From Left) Nicki McKinnon, Christian Everall, Katie Amey and Emma Crockett through preparation of harvest vegetable soup Tuesday at the Rick Hotston Centre. (Jason Parks/Gazette Staff)

APRIL 16, 2018 - JASON PARKS

The hands are busy and the talk is on the task here at a large kitchen space in Picton.

It could be a culinary arts class at the local secondary school or perhaps a food preparation training course at one of the local skills development agencies in Prince Edward County.

But the young ladies dutifully chopping, mixing, measuring and stirring have one or two tiny concerns in an adjacent play space this bright Tuesday morning.

For some of them, it's a brief mental break that time and a task in a kitchen can bring.

For others it could lead to some skills development that will suit well somewhere down the the road.

And, for all, it will lead to a healthy meal for that evening's supper.

The Cooking Counts program organized by the Prince Edward Learning Centre and supported by the Stark Foundation is a weekly cooking class taught to young mothers who are enrolled in the Babies and Beyond program offered by the Hub Childcare Centre.

Every Tuesday, about half-a-dozen young mothers attend the Rick Hotston Centre and take instruction from food educator Robyn Cakebread.

Jennifer Nelson, Project Coordinator and Literacy and Basic Skills Instructor for PELC, said the program provides several different avenues of learning for the mothers, many of which have had real life temporarily delay their education goals.

“We follow recipe cards so there’s a literacy component and we are measuring and scaling some recipes so there’s math involved with that as well as grocery lists and budgeting,” Nelson told *the Gazette*. “Another great part is that recipes are very healthy and balanced and quite easy.”

Moms under the age of 21 can also enrol in PELC programs that will assist in attaining an Ontario Secondary School Diploma while their children are cared for by Hub team members.

On Tuesday, Nelson and the moms and Cakebread were slicing, dicing and boiling their way to a hearty harvest vegetable soup that looked as delicious as it tasted.

Even those partaking in the Babies and Beyond program that day gets a taste.

“The bonus is we get to take this food home, even the other girls that aren’t in this program get to take some really nutritious meals home,” Christian Everall said. “We make some for everybody.”

And the program allows the mothers to connect with their learning abilities even when their day-to-day lives seem inundated with active toddlers and the task of rearing children.

“It feels like school in a very good way. We are learning skills that can help us for the rest of our lives-everyone needs to eat healthy right?” Emma Crockett added.

Cakebread said the program has consistently evolved since commencing at the Rick Hotston Centre, a space owned by Community Living Prince Edward and is also utilized by Food to Share.

“We’ve been able to develop grocery lists and we’ve found ways to stretch budgets by using healthier and cheaper versions of the types of foods the students like to eat,” Cakebread said.

The nutritional coach and food educator also mentioned the program is indebted to Food to Share who allows the usage of some of the supplies at the kitchen space.

“They are definitely very supportive of this program,” she added.