

# Residents learn about food security

## Eleven people can help others achieve food security after taking mentoring course

**REBECCA HOWLAND THE DAILY GLEANER**

The Greener Village Food Centre just finished hosting its first community food mentor course.

The five-day course was held every Wednesday for the past five weeks in the centre's teaching kitchen.

Community food mentor programs are held throughout the province and country to give residents a chance to build their local food knowledge, skills and resources.

The food mentor project also builds community partnerships and enhances food security within the community.

This program is the first one the Greener Village Food Centre has held that involved volunteers, food centre clients and members of the public.

Facilitator Cliff Gunn said the skills each participant learned from the program will help them get involved in their community and help them give back.

"When they're finished, they're certified to go out into the community to help people with food insecurity in any way that they want," he said. "They can help people with arranging cooking programs, better shopping, menu planning, things like that."

Gunn hopes each of the participants will get involved in the community now that they graduated from the program.

"We hope that they get involved in their own community and in our community working with people with food insecurity in some way," he said.

"They could be starting a gardening project, starting to teach their kids cooking, working with people who are challenged with cooking, help them better prepare meals and how to better budget and plan for them. So, there could be a variety of things for them (mentors) to do. Mentors are trained to go out and empower other people in the community to better themselves."

Elizabeth Crawford Thurber, executive director of Greener Village Food Centre, agrees with Gunn.

"Empowering people to go out into the community and share their food knowledge has a great impact on others in the community, because it's not scary, you know, for me to have a friend come into my kitchen and share a knowledge that (they) learned. I think it's just a wonderful idea and concept, so Greener Village certainly supports that," Crawford Thurber said.

With so many different opportunities to give back and to get involved, it's obvious those who took part in the program aren't holding back.

Jenn Wambolt wants to infuse what she has learned about healthy eating into the biking program she offers to children. She also wants to teach a course similar to the one she took with new immigrants who have moved to the city so they can use the knowledge and apply it to their traditional cuisine.

"What I have found is we have a wealth of new Canadians in our community and I want to take the knowledge and expertise on budgeting and feeding large groups and get them into our community centre and get them to teach us how to make foods that we never even heard of," Wambolt said.

"I think that would help them with the language barrier and involve them in the community because they would be coming in and teaching us how to cook their foods."

Sisters Brenda and Jessica Heddad want to organize another food mentor course, but on a kid-friendly level so they can instill the skills and knowledge needed to lead a healthy lifestyle in the minds of the next generation.

"We want to bring a lot more kids into what we learned on a kid friendly-basis," Brenda Heddad said.

The sisters are hoping some community groups will get involved with their initiative.

"Even like, the Boys and Girls Club, if they want to link up with us," Jessica Heddad said, adding she enrolled in the course to gain cooking and budgeting skills.

"I'm a client at the food bank and I have lived on my own, but not with my son and I've also lived with my parents, so I've never really worked with cooking food or budgeting, which are a lot of things I learned in this course," she said.

"I took it because we were just actually here just getting food. We heard Cliff (Gunn) talking about it and I asked if there still positions. Next thing you know we were getting interviews and we got in. I'm so glad I got involved though."

Her sister agreed, saying that, although she didn't know what to expect, she was glad she enrolled.

"I wasn't really sure what the course was about at first, so I was just kinda like 'OK, we'll give it a shot and see what it's all about' and I'm really glad we did," said Brenda Heddad. "The information that we've obtained from the food mentoring course is literally mind-blowing. Like, we've learned a lot about local farming and how important it is to eat local."

In addition to what they learned about eating local, the sisters and the rest of the group learned about local community gardens and each participant received a certificate in food safety.

Jessica Heddad said she also learned how to cook using the items she receives from the food centre.

"They have given us a chance to build meals with it by showing us. They had a cookbook of things we can make with stuff we get in boxes here, which was amazing," she said.

After everything they have learned, the Heddad sisters want to see other people take part in food mentoring courses in the future.

"It was way beyond what I thought I was going to get, so I really think and hope other people will be interested," Jessica Heddad said.

Crawford Thurber said she hopes there will be many more food mentoring courses.

"We hope to roll out additional programs and maybe have some of these graduates come in and help us. My mind just gallops at the actual potential of this. It's absolutely delightful to have all the folks here and see how excited they are and how enthused and the ideas they've generated themselves," she said.



Greener Village graduated its first group from their new Food Mentoring course on Wednesday. Clients and volunteers of Greener Village, as well as members of the public took part in the program that is aimed to give people the skill to help others in the community make healthy meals. Photo: JameS WeS/ the daily Gleaner