

Stone Soup Cooking

By **Alice Bhyat**, Principal
Archbishop Romero Catholic SS, Toronto CDSB



It seems that it does not matter what students are passionate about. Their passion infuses every part of their lives and affects their school academics and behaviour in a positive way. In the movie *Knights of the South Bronx*, Ted Danson plays real teacher David MacEnulty who used chess to enrich the lives of poor students in the South Bronx. In yet another movie, *Take the Lead*, Antonio Banderas who played the real dance teacher Pierre Dulane, used dance as the catalyst to motivate students to achieve

excellence. At Archbishop Romero students are passionate about cooking. Students cook in an after school program called *Stone Soup Cooking* which is supported by the Public Health department, the Police Liaison officer from Division 12, Parks and Recreation and Archbishop Romero staff. Students love cooking so much that students from semester one bemoan the fact that they cannot repeat the course in second semester.

At Romero students cooked on Tuesdays after school with a different guest chef each week. Students learned cooking techniques from local restaurateurs, chefs from big hotels like the Hilton, one of our teacher's mother and others. Students attempted recipes from many different cultures. The best cooking experience was when students prepared a West Indian chicken curry dish with desserts and appetizers.

Stone Soup Cooking is a great community effort and is the product of two years of discussion and consultation with our partners. Our public health nurse proposed the idea after she saw the difficulties our youth workers were facing. One day when she was visiting our youth workers, she observed that they were looking for socks for students; handing out lunch tickets; and helping students find a place to stay for the night. She could see that they were overwhelmed. She thought that it would be great if there could be a class that would equip students, who were homeless or almost homeless manage their finances, understand how to

prepare and cook food safely, build community and friends, and help them manage their difficult situations. This would be a program to assist our students at risk. It would support the recommendations of Dr. Bruce Ferguson (Sick Kids and U of T). In his presentation at the Ontario Co-operative Education Association (OCEA) annual conference, *Making our Kids Successful*, he stated that educators should be more understanding, be more proactive and be more flexible.

The result of our discussion was *Stone Soup Cooking*. The Public Health department provided the in-class lessons on food safety and budgeting. Our police liaison officer arranged for chefs to donate their time, all of the ingredients for a session, and all of the supplies needed for the program. Parks and Recreation supplied personnel who helped with the running and organisation of the class and the school provided the classroom, the students and some personnel.

The cooking sessions were quite wonderful. Each chef was different, brought recipes from diverse cultures and taught students in their own unique way. After the meal was prepared, students and chef tasted and discussed the intricacies of flavours. They thoroughly enjoyed the experience. Students who had great difficulties in the regular classroom were very successful in *Stone Soup Cooking*. This project was very popular with students and we look forward to its expansion next year. Our neighbouring public school, George Harvey Collegiate has already started a similar cooking program.



This program would not be possible without the involvement of our community partners. We greatly appreciate the involvement of our public health partners, Edie Cade, Kate Scrafield and their staff; our police community liaison officer, Barbara Spyropoulos; the Parks and Recreation staff,

Michael Campbell, Julie Gallie and Tina Case; and Maria Araujo and Carlo Cassano from Archbishop Romero. This was a very successful project thanks to their involvement. We look forward to their continued support and collaboration.

Contact Alice Bhyat at alice.bhyat@tcdsb.org for further information.