

Teen Battle Chef— Roadmap to a healthier lifestyle



BY LYNN FREDERICKS
(NEW YORK)

My kids are in their 20s now, so summer looks different than when they were little or awkward teens.

Yet, I still spend my summer with lots of teenagers from across NYC who are part of our Teen Battle Chef (TBC) program. While most people consider teen-aged youth prone to trouble, lazy, irresponsible etc., I have seen first hand that there are critical junctures each youth faces. Similarly to the early childhood years, the quality of their environmental stimulation, parental and adult inputs and the deftness with which their invariable mistakes are dealt with form a tipping point where a young person will succeed to take a path towards a positive future or out of fear or lack of hope, turn to darker forces for excitement and a semblance of power.

So every summer, the non-profit I founded, FamilyCook Productions, offers an opportunity for a couple dozen inner city teenagers to have a part-time paid job teaching others to cook healthy meals. Graduates of our Teen Battle Chef program at their high school, these students have learned to cook and were nominated for our Summer Leadership Brigade

by their TBC instructors.

I developed Teen Battle Chef 10 years ago to inspire teenagers to find their path to a healthier lifestyle. We license the curriculum to schools and community organizations and train their staff to teach this unique curriculum. Hence the program has grown to over 100 schools in 20 states. Through our innovative formula employing time limits and weekly competitions, teens develop a preference to prepare their own snacks and meals using fresh ingredients.

Quite unexpectedly, we discovered that the empowerment of mastering the ability to cook delicious meals from scratch resulted in something amazing: they measurably influenced their families and friends to eat healthier too! Now we take the program to the next level, providing opportunities for internships during the school year and summer job opportunities to teach others in their community how to cook healthy meals as well.

We are strategic about the types of jobs we connect them to: teaching younger children to cook in preschools or summer camps; conducting cooking demos in farmers markets, among other roles. Each Tuesday, the whole group meets at a central location for a mentoring session or field trip, one of which



will be an organic farm to explore concept of sustainability.

As we grow the program further with the opportunity for entrepreneurship through partnership with Brooklyn Salsa, Chipotle, HealthCorps, among others, it is clear that more opportunities for empowerment around food is just what the doctor ordered. Our TBC Alumni are going on to collage in culinary arts and health related fields. Their experience with TBC is a real lifestyle changer, for the better. And that desire to 'pay it forward' and teach others is firmly established. Our 3 mentors for our Summer Brigade in NYC this year are all TBC students who are now high school graduates pursuing a career in food.

After watching how adults and children alike respond to Teen Battle Chefs extolling the virtues of cooking yourself, eating a variety of vegetables and supporting local farmers it's become crystal clear that our youth can play a central role in moving the needle on this obesity epidemic. They can become an example and symbol of hope and provide inspiration to young and old, as well as each other.

Teen Battle Chef crew in Canton, CT demonstrates seasonal fare at the local farmers' market.

"Stirring up change" through the Teen Battle Chef program.

Teen Battle Chef team at Kensington Brooklyn Youthmarket in a food desert. Photos by Lynn Fredericks

Expanding a Child's Picky Palate

BY SUSAN SLACK
(CHARLESTON)

Ew

...yucky! Toddlers and preschoolers are notorious for letting everyone know their food dislikes in a variety of expressive ways. Whether it's a small wrinkled nose or a temper tantrum, this kind of food review is sure to leave no parent or grandparent happy. Imagine then, the sound

of Nancy Tringali Piho's young son William squealing with delight after his first taste of octopus in an exotic appetizer. Nancy's exploration with food flavors exposed both of her sons, in their toddler years, to a wholesome, varied diet well beyond the usual toddler-friendly foods. She questioned why there were so many picky eaters and why parents were afraid to expose them to new foods and dining experiences. For answers, Nancy conducted an

in-depth study, interviewing a host of experts that included scientific researchers, psychologists and medical doctors. Her diligent research resulted in the acclaimed book, *My Two Year Old Eats Octopus: Raising Children Who Love to Eat Everything*. With a large dash of humor and style, the 310-page compendium offers practical advice to guide kids into well-rounded eaters with a life-long appreciation of food. Nancy believes the early