

The Kitchen Witches

Telling the Journey

In the summer of 2012 a group of woman with passion and enthusiasm created Kitchen Witches. With funding from the Lunenburg County Community Fund, Kitchen Witches was started so a group of families could pool their resources together and cost share on meals. The Local Food Team of Lunenburg and Queens met up with the group in April of 2013. This document tells their story and shares their insights. We all hope it will inspire you to try something new and create some community connections.



The Group

The name Kitchen Witches was chosen by the group when visiting a local shop they saw a small knitted witch. The group felt this little witch looked a bit magical and magic is certainly something they continue to share. Knowing that each member brought a unique set of skills and appreciating the different capabilities of each other, helped the group grow and make Kitchen Witches a success for them.

The women that came to form Kitchen Witches first met at a baby group held by the South Shore Family Resource Association . The idea of cost sharing on food was thrown around and the conversation grew from there. They asked, “How do we make life easy and still pool resources?” The plan was to come together every 2 weeks to cook a meal that could be taken home to their families.

The Process

Before they started cooking the Kitchen Witches felt it was important to put some time into problem solving and planning around logistics.

They then went on to build their basic shelf based on what they wanted to prepare. A basic shelf is a stock pile of those ingredients that are common in many recipes. They developed their basic shelf by scanning flyers and sharing food costs.

Kitchen Witches started cooking the meals they could take home to their families. They quickly realized that this was not working for them. It was not making life easier. After cooking the meal in a group, they often found they needed additional time to go home and reheat the meal. There were also no guarantees that their family would like what was prepared. They came up with another plan and modified their initial idea. Kitchen Witches decided they would come together and prepare things differently. They would prepare food that could be the base for a meal, something that could be finished at home. Things such as soup stocks, bread mixes, pancake mixes and meat sauces. It didn't take them long to see that their cost sharing was making sense and they were getting a lot out of their money.

How Would a Kitchen Witch Describe the Group?

There is not a simple answer or one thing the group could say to describe Kitchen Witches. To them it is the combination of many things.

Not only was it amazing to see the food that came from the group but it was amazing to see the diverse community that was created, rich in cultural experiences. It was about “new moms being able to get out of the house and make connections”, putting in a community effort to meal preparation. It is a place to pool ideas and resources to create and generate new ideas for food. It is a place to share, to try new things, and to experiment without the fear of wasting food. In a community there is always someone that will use the food. This is where skills are learned and excitement is born, “I want to do more” .



The Barriers to Overcome

With any project, there are barriers to face.

Location

Choosing the right location. The Kitchen Witches operated out of a local family resource centre kitchen. This location had a lot to offer, it was free and it had a space for small children to play away from the dangers of a kitchen. The drawbacks of the location was that Kitchen Witches could not expand because the space could not accommodate a larger group. The kitchen was also the way others used to access other areas in the centre. For the Kitchen Witches this raised concerns of safety.

Resources

There were many things needed to operate Kitchen Witches. The group was limited by the availability of the proper utensils, equipment and a stove. They were also limited by time. Trying to coordinate their own busy schedules with the busy schedule of the local family resource centre. Childcare, the group would have liked to meet more often but having childcare was a barrier. Finally there is a limit to what the group could cook based on their kitty. In the beginning, they were limited to preparing certain items because it took time to build their basic shelf.

Meeting the needs of the group

Each person has their own likes and dislikes, their own way of making things. In a group like the Kitchen Witches you have to be able to agree on what to cook, you have to find the things that everyone wants to prepare. It is also important to recognize and respect the different culture, values and traditions of each member. Learning the different terms we each use for the same food.

The Things that were Learned

The Kitchen Witches were able to identify what they would do again and what they would have done if they were starting again. These are the suggestions they can offer to others who wish to start their own.

Do Again

- You need to plan. You need to figure out the accountability and responsibility pieces before you start. You need to plan so that things can be adaptable.
- You need to have a willingness to try new things. A willingness to learn from the class and change the plan as needed. There needs to be an interest to do it and the motivation to work at it.
- You need to be flexible. Sale prices and the availability of certain food items may not match what you planned for the class. A group member may not be able to make the class.
- You need to communicate as a group. You need to be accessible to the other members. The use of social media was very helpful for keeping the group connected.
- You need to connect with the people that can help. For the Kitchen Witches the local family resource centre staff were very helpful, especially in the planning stages. Connecting with Feed Nova Scotia also helped.
- You need to build relationships. You need to know each other, what each others preferences are. What skill each person is bringing so you can have a mixture of knowledge and skills.
- For the Kitchen Witches they formed connections through the baby group. They expanded on the sense of community that was created at baby group. They were able to take that comfort level that they had with each other and create an atmosphere where they could talk about their needs.
“The vulnerability you have gives you the permission to ask for help”

The Things that were Learned

Would Have Done

- Think differently about food. Realize that food does not need to be perfect. “Food at the end of it’s life” can make some great meals. Need to make use of foods like deer carrots, drop apples, discount produce and stale bread.
- Consider the equipment you could use. Freezer space would open up the possibilities of what could be prepared.
- Determine the needs of the group. Cooked meals that you take home would not work for this group, mixes worked better.
- More planning for the classes. Plan classes ahead to take advantage of sales. If you are able to partner with Feed Nova Scotia, plan your classes to be flexible so you can take advantage of what is available from them. You may also be able to put a request in to Feed Nova Scotia to coordinate what is available with your class, especially if you are looking for food items that can not be divided (like a bulk can of tomato sauce). Look at where you can buy in bulk.
- Look at what you want to prepare and decide if your basic shelf list fits the needs of the classes. Spend time on your basic shelf list and get the entire shelf ready before you start classes.
- Once you are established consider what partnerships you can form. Using smaller local companies and farmers would support local economies. How can you partner with a local farm to find new ways to get the food you need for your class.

Skills and Benefits

There were many things that really stood out for the Kitchen Witches. They have learned a lot, saved some money and are having lots of fun. They are learning new skills, like the chemistry of food and trying new things, “cooking things I have never tried before”. They have expanded their culture and their community and developed new networks and new friends. The group was a benefit to be a part of, it did not take a huge amount of organization and it worked because they were cohesive.

“Things you thought would be difficult are really not, it increases confidence”.

“Hope we can grow, form new groups, keep going”

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