



Success Story Title: The Power of Cheese: Changing Lives One Batch of Mozzarella at a Time

Location: Hackley Community Care center (Muskegon)

Focus: Healthy Eating and Successful Groups

Strategy: They were ordinary women gathering on an ordinary day in an ordinary place. In fact, an onlooker wouldn't be blamed for failing to take note of the small group as they assembled in the kitchen at the Michigan State University Extension office in Muskegon, Michigan on that cool April afternoon. But something quite extraordinary was about to transpire, something almost magical. For the first time, each woman there would transform milk into cheese—Ricki Carroll's famous 30-minute mozzarella to be exact—and link to generations of women before her in the ancient art of cheese making.

Lifestyle Counselor, Callie Sierra, kicked off the half day class by talking about healthy food choices and the fact that many women don't get enough calcium. Cheese, of course, is an excellent source of calcium. But like all good things, it must be eaten in moderation. Portion sizes, how to read nutrition labels, and what to look for on the ingredient list were also discussed. Cheese maker and instructor Mary O'Connor followed with a brief presentation on the history of cheese and demonstrated how easy it is to make at home.

After a brief discussion about safe food handling and sterilization techniques, the group gathered around the stove to watch the rennet do its work. Within a few minutes, each participant was kneading her own little ball of soon-to-be mozzarella and swapping life stories, healthy recipes, and exercise tips. Somewhere in that mix of laughter, trips to the microwave, and more kneading, the cheese worked its magic. Seven women who began the day as strangers bonded around a shared experience of creating something nourishing and ancient and beautiful with their own hands. By the end of the afternoon, they were singing and clinking glasses of sparkling cider as they toasted their accomplishments.

Outcomes:

Thanks to a generous grant from the United Dairy Institute of Michigan and an in-kind donation from the New England Cheesemaking Supply Company, each woman took home her own mozzarella kit and recipe, along with the memory of a wonderful day spent in the company of kindred souls and a renewed commitment to living healthy. The pilot program was so successful that more classes are being planned, including bread making—cheese plus bread equals homemade pizza! In the words of one of the participants, “I never knew I could do something like this. Now, I can’t wait to show my family!” And that is the power of cheese.

Story Submitted By: Mary O’Connor and Callie Sierra
Hackley Community Care Center
2700 Baker Street
Muskegon Heights, MI. 49444
talamanc@hccc-health.org
231-733-6601 x2254

See pictures below



Hackley Community Care Center Cheesemaking Class (L to R): Marjean Rhods, Jackie Stapples, Cindy Mitchell, Noreen London, Callie Sierra, Donna Davis, Debra King, Mary O'Connor, Amy Thommen



Jackie Stapples stretches her mozzarella cheese just before the taste test.