Healing Meals for Healthy Communities

A Start-up Tool Kit

Introduction

Ceres Community Project began in early 2007 with a simple idea: bring teens into the kitchen and have them learn to cook by preparing meals for people whose lives had been turned upside down by a serious illness like cancer. Starting with five teens cooking for four families in a donated church kitchen, we’ve discovered that this simple model can bring about profound and lasting change for people and communities.

How we grow, process, distribute, sell, prepare and eat food has changed radically in the past 50 to 70 years. The shift from open range ranching to factory farming of meats has resulted in cruelty to animals, the overuse of antibiotics, environmental damage from waste runoff, and serious impacts on personal health. Pesticides and herbicides used in conventional farming of fruits and vegetables show up in our produce, are polluting rivers and ground water, and threaten the health of agricultural workers. Processed foods have become the norm. Children are growing up with no idea what fresh vegetables look like or where they come from. For many, family dinners are a distant memory and cooking has become a lost art.

The result has been a disaster. The numbers of people impacted by obesity, diabetes, auto-immune diseases, heart disease, stroke and cancer are skyrocketing. The generation growing up today may be the first in recorded history to have a shorter life span than their parents.

Many of us also live with fewer family members and friends to call on when we need them. A 2006 Duke University study found that 25% of Americans reported they have no one to turn to in time of crisis, double the rate in 1985. The average response fell from 2.94 people to 2.08 in the same time period, depicting what most of us already feel: a trend of growing social isolation. Numerous studies have demonstrated a link between strong social networks and positive health outcomes.

Mission

We create health for people, community and the planet through love, healing food, and empowering the next generation.

- More than 56% of all deaths in the US are from diseases where poor nutrition and lack of exercise are a precipitating cause.
- It’s estimated that $500 billion a year in health care costs could be totally avoided by changes in diet.
The good news is that the seeds of change are being planted in thousands of communities across the country. Ceres Community Project is one of those seeds. We believe that putting real food—whole, locally grown and organic—back in the center of our lives, and sharing it with others in times of need, leads to healthier and happier people, richer and more vibrant communities, and the potential to regenerate the earth that supports us.

- American Cancer Society estimates that 1/3 of all cancers could be avoided by changes in diet; nearly all cases of Type 2 diabetes could be avoided by changes in diet; heart disease and stroke are also closely tied to eating habits.
- In Sonoma County, the percentage of teens that are overweight or obese rose to 44.5% in 2009, and only 21% of teens report eating at least five servings a day of fruits and vegetables. Without a change in how they eat, this generation may have shorter life spans than their parents.

During our first eight years, thousands of teens spent more than 85,000 hours in Ceres’ kitchens, washing, chopping, sautéing, stirring, measuring, mixing, tasting and packaging. Working together, they prepared more than 400,000 beautiful and delicious meals that nourished thousands of families as they dealt with the stress of cancer and other serious conditions. In addition, thousands of adult volunteers, donors, and community in-kind partners found meaningful ways to make a difference, building vital webs of caring and connection.

Teens’ and clients’ experience with Ceres results in lasting changes in their eating habits, yet it’s clear that Ceres is about more than just food. It’s about community and the wellness that comes to all of us when we’re connected in meaningful ways with others. In any given week, hundreds of hands are involved in making Ceres Community Project happen. Clients tell us they can feel the love in the food and that “it feels like the whole community cares.” People want to and do care, they just need well-grounded ways to make their caring visible. Ceres provides that opportunity.

As Ceres has grown, the web of relationships holding it has become dense and fertile with possibility. We are reaching across the country by training new communities to replicate our model, presenting at conferences, and sharing our Nourishing Connections Cookbook: the Healing Power of Food & Community.
Our goal is to help shift the conversation about food, health, and the way we care for our environment, and to give people the knowledge, skills and inspiration to make whole, local and organic food the foundation for their own health and the health of their communities.

We’ve created this Start-up Tool Kit in response to the many people who’ve approached us, moved by the work we are doing and wondering how to start something similar where they live. In the pages that follow we’ll share our current understanding of the Ceres model and why we think it works. And we’ll present a simple framework to help you start a project like this in your own community.

Once you’ve worked through this guide and have your core team in place, we encourage you to attend a four-day training. Experiencing Ceres directly is the best way to fully understand the work we are doing. During your visit, you’ll spend time in our kitchen, meet with key staff, and gain an in-depth look at both the culture and systems that support our work. You’ll leave with an array of information and materials that will help ensure a smooth and successful start-up. We’ve included detailed information about our Affiliate Partner Program in Chapter Five. To arrange a visit or to inquire about a training, please contact us at info@ceresproject.org.

Chapter One of this guide covers our vision and mission statements and the operating principles that guide our work. Chapter Two explains the core structure of the program, the key jobs and the weekly flow of the work.

The third chapter provides our best ideas about how to start a project like Ceres in your own community. Chapter Four shares tips and lessons we’ve learned. And Chapter Five outlines how we can support you through our National Program. We encourage you to visit our website, www.CeresProject.org for up-to-date information about our programming, community partners, funding sources and materials.

Preparing food is not just about yourself and others. It is about everything. ~ Shunryu Suzuki
Chapter One

Vision, Mission & Guiding Principles

Ceres Community Project is a model for building healthier communities by strengthening people’s connection to “real food” and to one another. We believe that health grows out of a deep understanding that we have a place in the world, and that we are connected in meaningful ways with others and with the larger community of life. We also believe that our health and happiness is primarily in our own hands and grows out of the choices we make each day – what we eat, how we care for our bodies, what we choose to do with our time, and how we think about ourselves.

Preparing beautiful and nourishing meals for individuals struggling with illness and their families is a profound expression of our caring and connection with them as individuals. It says not only “you matter” but also “I matter.”

In our fast-paced information age culture, growing and preparing food connects us to the slower and more healing rhythms of nature. Working together with others – our hands in the dirt or washing, chopping and cooking fresh, whole foods – is deeply satisfying. We gain knowledge, learn skills, and discover our ability to make a difference for others and to shape our own lives.

Every aspect of the Ceres Community Project model aims to build this sense of connection to healthy food, to the earth that provides it, to one another, and to our own empowerment.

Here are the Vision, Mission and Operating Principles which guide our work.

Vision

We see a world of heart-centered, vibrant communities in which we live with an understanding that humans are deeply interconnected with all life, where we care for one another and our earth, and where everyone has access to beautiful, delicious and healthy food.
**Mission**

We create health for people, community and the planet through love, healing food, and empowering the next generation.

Key facets of our approach include:

♥ Supporting individuals dealing with serious illness with free and low-cost, organic, delivered, nutrient-rich prepared meals, nutrition education, and a community of caring.

♥ Involving young people as volunteer gardeners and chefs, giving them direct, hands-on experience of the difference that fresh, healthy foods and community make, and of their own capacity to contribute.

♥ Educating the broader community, including health professionals, about the connection between fresh, healthy food, strong social networks, healing and wellness.

♥ Connecting people of all ages and from all walks of life to one another, and to their value as an integral part of the community.

**Guiding Principles**

**Heart Centered & Love Guided**

We are committed to expressing love, trust, respect and integrity in our lives, work and organization.

**Everything Matters**

Nothing is left out. We work to have every action, choice and relationship lead to the greatest positive impact.

**Young People are the Future**

Young People are intelligent, responsible, capable, creative and caring, and must be central participants in shaping our collective future.

**The Universe has a Purpose**

Everything is connected, and life continually invites us to experience gratitude, abundance, connection, community and healing.
Chapter Two

The Basics – Healing Meals for Healthy Communities

Our core program, Healing Meals for Healthy Communities, is the foundation for all of our work:

♥ Youth volunteer in the garden and the kitchen. Working under the guidance of adult mentors, they prepare beautiful, delicious and nourishing organic meals for people dealing with serious health challenges.

♥ The meals are delivered by volunteer Delivery Angels free of charge to low-income clients in the community.

♥ Clients are supported by volunteer Client Liaisons who visit them at home, help them understand why this sort of food can make a difference for them, and stay in communication with them weekly to make sure the food is working for them.

♥ Food is donated from local farms, farmers’ markets, grocery stores and producers.

♥ Our Teen Education Program cover whole foods nutrition, issues of hunger and food insecurity in our community, the importance of local and organic agriculture, and the impact of our food choices. Clients visit the teens regularly to share their stories and the difference the teens and the food have made for them.

♥ Classes like Healing Foods Basics and resources like weekly “Nutrition Bites” support clients in making the shift to a whole foods diet once they complete the Meals Program.

NOTE: Some of our program sites include food production gardens managed by youth volunteers working under our Garden Coordinator and adult mentors. Most programs will not begin with their own garden, but if this is an option for you, we are happy to talk with you about how we integrate this aspect of the program and keep the teen experience consistent.
Our Core Program: Healing Meals for Healthy Communities

**Youth Program**
Youth learn:
- gardening & culinary skills
- healing properties of food
- impact of food choices
- service
- responsibility
- leadership
- job skills
- better eating habits

**Client Support**
Families dealing with health challenges:
- are nourished by organic whole foods meals
- feel cared for by the community
- learn about healthy eating
- adopt better eating habits

**Vibrant connected community**
Healthy local food system

**Education for youth, clients and the community**
- *Nourishing Connections Cookbook*
- Healing Foods Basics class & DVD
- Healing Foods Essentials class
- Events, Conferences & Movie Nights

**Food donated by local farms & businesses**

**Adult Mentors volunteer in garden & kitchen**

**Delivery Angels deliver meals**

**Client Liaison volunteers support clients**

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Key Jobs

**Project Manager or Executive Director**

- **Chef & Youth Coordinator**
- **Kitchen Manager**
- **Client Manager**
- **Delivery Coordinator**
- **Fund-Raising & Community Engagement**

**Volunteer Adult Mentors**

**Volunteer Youth Chefs**

**Kitchen Volunteers**

**Volunteer Client Liaisons**

**Volunteer Delivery Angels**

**Food Procurement Volunteers**

**Project Manager** – insures the smooth running of the program; trains, supervises and coordinates team members; recruits and orients volunteers, including youth; tracks volunteers, volunteer hours, clients, client meals and other key program outcomes; insures that volunteers are acknowledged and appreciated. As a program grows, some of these roles will be held by a Volunteer Coordinator.

**Chef & Teen Coordinator** – plans the menus; trains volunteer adult mentors; oversees food production; insures that youth are learning and being given increasing levels of responsibility as appropriate; identifies potential Teen Leaders; develops and delivers youth education program.

**Kitchen Manager** – may be the same person as the Chef in the beginning – maintains inventory of food; creates shopping lists and shops; prepares Delivery Letters for client food bags and labels for each food container going to the clients; scales the recipes and creates cooking plan for the week; manages clients’ dietary restrictions; maintains relationships with all food donors.

**Client Manager** – responds to calls from potential clients; screens clients for fit with program; completes client intake forms; manages priority list of clients coming on the program; sets start and end dates with clients; recruits, trains and oversees volunteer client liaisons.

**Delivery Coordinator** – recruits, trains, supervises and schedules volunteer Delivery Angels; plans weekly deliveries and communicates schedule to angels.

**Fund-Raising & Community Engagement** – plans and coordinates fund-raising activities and keeps all stake-holders informed, excited and inspired about the project’s work, impact and accomplishments.
The Weekly Rhythm

Every program will have a different schedule and flow during the week, depending upon your resources, management style, and preferences. This is just one example based on a two-day cooking schedule – the format we recommend that most projects use to start.

PRE-COOKING DAYS

Wednesday

Client Manager gets all information about new and completing clients to Kitchen Manager, Chef and Delivery Coordinator.

Kitchen Manager inventories food on hand including food donations and gets this info to the Chef.

Program Manager sends following week schedule to teens and adult mentors.

Thursday

Chef plans the weekly menu and prepares spreadsheet showing numbers of servings for each client and any dietary restrictions, then sends all the information to the Kitchen Manager.

Friday

Kitchen Manager prepares shopping list, cooking plan, Delivery Letters and labels. Cooking plan outlining each day’s tasks is sent to the Chef and adult mentors working the next week.

Delivery Coordinator creates delivery plan and sends each Delivery Angel the information about who they are delivering to, directions, etc.

COOKING DAYS

Cooking shifts happen at the kitchen with Chef, youth and adult mentors. In the beginning this was just one day each week. Kitchen Manager is there for one hour before the youth arrive to help the Chef and adult mentors set up for the day.
Sample schedule:

**Monday**

10 – noon  Adult volunteers prep for the day to get the youth set up
1 – 6 pm   Youth prepare and package meals, and prep for Tuesday

**Tuesday**

9 – 11 am  Adult team sterilizes and sorts all food delivery containers from last week’s pick ups
1 – 6 pm   Youth complete preparing and packaging meals, then pack all client bags

**Wednesday**

3 pm       Delivery Angels pick up bags for delivery

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I have found that delivering for Ceres is such a gift. Meeting the clients, briefly sharing in their lives, and experiencing their appreciation is far more rewarding than I ever anticipated. I volunteered so that I could do something for others, little did I know, I would receive so much in return.

~ Delivery Angel Jeane Polley
Chapter Three

Getting Started in Your Community

Every project using the Ceres model will evolve based on the people involved and the community you are serving. As you pull together a core team and begin sharing your vision with others, your project will take shape. However, there are four core pieces that are essential to the effectiveness of our model:

1. Engaging youth as central players and giving them primary ownership for the results in the kitchen (and the garden if you are including one).

2. Providing meals to people dealing with health challenges.

3. Using only whole, organic and preferably local ingredients with no white flour or sugar, processed foods or preservatives – making every bite count for the person and the planet.

4. Engaging the broader community as volunteers, in-kind donors and financial donors. The more people involved, the more learning and positive change ripples out.

Our most important advice is to start small and start simply with your core team of four or five people. Moving from just talking about the idea to actually doing it – even with just a few youth cooking for four or five families – shifts everything. Once people can see the project in action a different level of support begins to flow.
Before Launching Your Program

Before you can start cooking and delivering meals, even with a small, simple project, you’ll want to do the following:

♥ Put together your team
♥ Find a kitchen
♥ Connect with youth and one or two sources of youth volunteers
♥ Identify a referral source for clients
♥ Find a nonprofit partner or file your own 501(c)(3) application
♥ Get your core funding in place

Then you can launch your program, learning and refining as you watch your project grow, touching and transforming your clients, youth, donors, volunteers and in-kind supporters.

Put Together Your Team

Starting with a team gives you a stronger foundation. You have more hands to share the work, more heads to offer creative ideas, and more hearts to help remember why you are doing this in the first place! Bringing something into existence has plenty of rewards but lots of challenges as well. Having a team means that when one of you runs out of steam someone else will be there to pick up the ball and keep moving forward.

At a minimum, find one other person who is as passionate as you are about this idea and willing to dive in and share the work with you. Ideally, put together a team of three to five people who are passionate about this idea and who as a group have all the skills outlined in Chapter Two. An initial team might look like this:

♥ Project Manager – Someone with strong administrative and project management skills who can: outreach to schools to involve youth; schedule youth; secure donations; coordinate deliveries; create the delivery letters and container labels; track youth hours and client meals; manage the books; pay bills and send out thank-you letters to donors.

♥ Chef – Someone with whole foods cooking experience who can: plan the menus; create shopping lists and cooking plans and shop; oversee food production in the kitchen; recruit and train other adult mentors; successfully teach and mentor the teen chefs.

♥ Client Liaison – Someone with a background in counseling, social work and/or hospice training, potentially a cancer survivor who can: identify potential clients for the program; handle client intakes and home visits; act as the client contact; track client information; and eventually recruit, train and supervise client liaison volunteers.

♥ Fund-Raising Manager – Someone who is well-connected in the community and is comfortable asking for support. Ideally, this person is a good public speaker and writer, and may have experience seeking grants.
Find a Kitchen

You’ll need a place to prepare meals that is available at the same time every week, is large enough for eight to ten people to work, is recognized by your local Health Department as safe for commercial food production, and is not too expensive. Ideally it is already stocked with most of the cooking equipment you will need.

Most communities have plenty of commercial kitchens that are available for free or to rent at least some portion of every week. Here are some ideas for where to look:

♥ Call your local Health Department and talk to the person who oversees licensing for commercial kitchens. They may have a list or good suggestions.

♥ Churches and synagogues

♥ Community Centers

♥ Your local Meals on Wheels or Head Start programs generally have kitchens that are only used until 1 or 2 pm each day

♥ Veterans Buildings, Masonic Halls, Oddfellows Halls

Most commercial kitchens are rented by the hour. When you find a kitchen that you like, talk with the owner/manager about your vision for this project and how it can help your community. See if they will give you free or low cost rent if you make a regular commitment for six months or a year.

Our first kitchen was at a church and we paid $25 a week for about five hours of kitchen time. The next year, they donated the kitchen two afternoons a week in exchange for our volunteers doing a thorough cleaning once a month.

We began our project working one afternoon a week in this donated church kitchen. Teens came primarily from one school and we used word of mouth to find our first clients.
Connect with Youth

Where will the youth come from and how do you find them? There are as many answers to this as there are communities, but here are a few ideas to get you started. Remember to start simply.

♥ Perhaps you or one of your team members has a son or daughter in high school. If so, you can start by engaging a small group from this school.

♥ If not, is there a school or two close to your kitchen? Reach out to the school’s principal or assistant principal and let them know what you are planning. Is there an easy way to promote the program to students? If one of these schools has a culinary program, reach out to that teacher.

♥ Perhaps you or someone on your team is involved in a religious community. Would teens in the youth program be interested in helping?

Here are a few questions to help you think about how you want to design the youth part of your program:

1. What is happening with teens in your community? Are there particular needs for youth mentoring?

2. Do you want your project to target a particular group of teens such as youth in foster care or low-income youth, both of whom can benefit from job-readiness skills, or is your project aiming to involve a broad spectrum of youth from many different backgrounds?

We began primarily with teens from one school where we knew teens and where the teens were required to complete community service hours. Now the youth at Ceres have come from more than 85 schools. Our youth volunteers come from all walks of life and represent what are traditionally seen as “at risk” youth as well as others who are considered high achievers. We believe this mix gives all youth an opportunity to get to know others who they would otherwise not meet.
Finding Clients

When Ceres Community Project first began, we didn’t know how many meals we could prepare in three hours with a group of teens. And we didn’t want to have to turn people away who needed meals. As a result we started small – cooking for just four clients – and we promoted the project only through word of mouth for the first nine months.

Just like working with youth, you have some decisions to make about the type of clients you want to work with. At Ceres we define our clients as “people who are in crisis due to a serious health challenge”. While 80% of our clients are dealing with a cancer diagnosis, we don’t work only with people who have cancer. Other projects have focused exclusively on people dealing with cancer. While we know that cancer clients are a perfect fit for what we do – because cancer treatment goes on for a long time and is so debilitating to people’s appetite – we also know that the Ceres model can make a profound difference for people facing any illness.

Our intake process asks people about their diagnosis, potential treatment, support system and financial ability to afford other options such as a personal chef or even healthy meals from a place like Whole Foods Market’s deli counter and hot bar.

The goal is to help the people who most need it – because they live alone without much of a support system, are a single mom with one or more children, both people in the couple are dealing with an illness, or they are living on very low income. These days we also work closely with our local community clinic provider to make sure that people who have the fewest options know about Ceres’ services.

Once you are clear about who you want to serve, how do you find clients? We recommend that you start with one referral source – it could be a hospital oncology department, a community clinic, a church, a cancer support program, or a food bank. Make sure that the partner organization you are working with is clear about how many people you can help, what you are offering, who you serve and how to go about referring people to your program.

You might put together a simple brochure or handout that covers the basic points. We’ve found that it works best if the client contacts you about receiving service, rather than the referral agency asking you to call the client.

This food is such a miracle. When I think about it, I cry. If I didn’t have this service, everything would be so different. I wouldn’t cook for myself. It is too much effort to go to the store. And there is only so much you can ask of your friends.

I think ... I really should eat something and go to the refrigerator and see a container. I taste it and think WOW, this is really good. And then I have seconds. I have kept my weight on and just can’t thank you enough. I hope when I am through all of this that I can contribute in some way.

~ Past Client Kathleen
Nonprofit Status

There are two ways to start your project: 1) Filing to become your own 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, or 2) Finding a nonprofit in your community who will allow you to operate under their 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Filing for non-profit status costs about $3,000 and it generally takes around 6 months to get approval. The good news is that you don’t need to be your own nonprofit in order to launch your project and accept tax deductible donations.

We recommend that you begin by finding an aligned nonprofit in your community that is willing to provide “fiscal sponsorship” for your project. In our community, both West County Community Services and the Sebastopol Community Cultural Center offer fiscal sponsorship to smaller projects or start-ups that are not yet ready to file for nonprofit status. It is very likely that there are organizations in your community that offer this service. If not, any organization that has nonprofit tax status can provide fiscal sponsorship for your project, regardless of whether your project has anything to do with their mission.

The sponsoring organization agrees to accept donations on your behalf, maintain a set of books for your organization, pay your bills (and/or reimburse you for expenses), send donation acknowledgement letters to your donors, and include you in their annual tax filings to the IRS. In exchange, most organizations will ask you to pay from 7 to 12 percent of your donations as an administrative fee to cover their staff time and other expenses.

Even if you are working with a fiscal sponsor, it is vitally important to keep your own records so that you know how much money you are bringing in and what and where you are spending it. You’ll also want to capture the names and complete contact information for everyone that is helping or interested in your project. This is the foundation for your donor and volunteer base, and you’ll want to keep these people informed about the growth and needs of your project. We also recommend that you send personal thank you notes or call the people who support you financially.

To learn more about filing for your own 501(c)(3) status we recommend looking at Nolo Press’s helpful books on this topic, www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/nonprofits

There are people all over the country who specialize in 501(c)(3) filings. Because of the complexity of doing this, we chose to hire someone to help us with this process. We used Josh Wagner at PlanRight in Santa Cruz, California, www.non-profit-world.com
Get Your Core Funding in Place

Every start-up project will have different funding needs depending on the cost of your kitchen, if all the key players are volunteers, how much food you can get donated, and so on.

Here is a list of basic costs assuming everyone will be a volunteer in year one:

- **Kitchen rental**
- **Liability insurance**
  (often offered as “event insurance” available for less than $500 per year)
- **Food**
- **Meal delivery containers**
- **Cooking equipment** (not available in your rented kitchen)
- **Kitchen supplies** (cleaning supplies, parchment paper, foil, sponges, first aid kit, aprons, towels, etc.)
- **Office supplies** (paper, ink, envelopes, stamps, photocopying, computer programs for recipes, etc.)
- **Marketing & Fund-Raising** (website, brochures, etc.)

Our first year budget was $13,500. That covered cooking once a week for nine months and preparing and delivering 4,500 meals. We were an all volunteer project and had almost no donated food that first year. Our kitchen rent was $25 per week. Again, a specific budget will depend on the unique aspects of your situation.

Our start up funding came from these three sources local to our community: $1,000 from Bread for the Journey, a local group that supports start-up projects; $5,000 from a local grocer in the form of an in-store line of credit; and $7,500 from To Celebrate Life Breast Cancer Foundation in the form of a grant to provide meals to breast cancer patients. We received discounts and donations of services from a fish wholesaler, a copy shop, a kitchenware store, and the church where we rented the kitchen. We probably could have gotten more in-kind help if we had asked!

As part of the Affiliate Training, we will help you think through a first year budget using a budget template we’ve created, and also talk with you about how/when you might consider adding paid staff.
Where to look for start-up funding

♥ Rotary, Kiwanis and other service organizations are great sources of small grants for local projects, especially those involving youth and supporting the immediate community.

♥ Are there foundations in your community that support local efforts, possibly one that is health-oriented? Often hospital districts will have foundations associated with them.

♥ Who do you know? The easiest way to get funding is to ask individuals. A “prospect” for funding is someone 1) that you know personally, 2) who has the capacity to give, and 3) has demonstrated that they like to support good works. With your team, make a list of people that you think would be likely to help you. Meet with each of them, sharing your vision and your start-up budget, and then ask them to support it at a specific amount.

♥ Ask local grocery stores to give you an in-store credit line that will enable you to purchase anything you need. This might be anywhere from $500 to $5,000.

♥ Ask local grocery stores to donate their organic produce “cull” to your program – this is the produce that doesn’t look great and is often composted or thrown away. Grocery stores often will also have packaged and other forms of food that they need to throw out for various reasons. Farmers markets are also a great source of produce donations. Often farmers are happy to donate anything left at the end of market day.

♥ Other “in-kind” support – always ask everyone you are interacting with to either donate or discount their services. Local cooking supply stores may donate cookware. Your local copy shop might donate photocopying. Let everyone feel like they are part of the effort by giving them a chance to support it.
Chapter Four

Lessons Learned

Over the years, we’ve made many mistakes, and learned a great deal about why the Ceres Community Project model works, how to avoid potential problems, and what factors are critical to our success.

Here’s a short list of some of our most important lessons.

1. Define the length of service you will offer to your clients.

   Your project is going to be small for a while and perhaps forever. In Sonoma County, there are 2,400 new cancer diagnoses a year, and of course many other illnesses as well. At most, we believe we can support about 600 client families a year in Sonoma County. If you don’t define an end point for service, you will limit the number of people you can help and create the potential for difficult conversations when clients who are doing relatively well become attached to the service and don’t want to give it up.

   We’ve decided that six months is our limit for service. We believe this is long enough to make a significant difference for a client and help them learn about healthy eating, but short enough for us to be able to help many different clients. Our average length of service is about three months.

2. Require youth to make a commitment and hold them to it.

   Part of the youth development aspect of the Ceres Community Project model is expecting youth to be accountable – and holding them to their commitment. Just like with our clients, we want to engage youth for long enough that they get something important out of their participation.

   We ask our youth to make at least a three-month commitment. We schedule them for shifts every week. And we expect them to show up on time and stay until their shift is done. If a teen does not show up for his or her shift, and doesn’t call ahead of time to let us know why they are cancelling, we call them to talk about it. We let them know that they were missed, and that their absence had a negative impact on their peers and the program. We also tell them that if they miss their shift again without calling to communicate, we will give their spot in the program to someone else.
3. Track, track, track.

The more information you have about what you are doing the easier it will be to generate funding, especially from foundations. If you join Ceres’ National Affiliate Program and attend our training at Ceres Community Project we provide copies of our Client Intake, Youth Volunteer Application, Adult Volunteer Application and other forms that we use to gather information about our participants. We also review the custom database system that we use to track and to run our program. This database system is available at a low cost to our Affiliates.

Here are things we recommend you track from day one:

♥ Create an intake form for clients. Get complete contact information, including email and mail addresses, and phone numbers. Gather information about diagnosis, living situation, ethnicity, income level, household size, insurance coverage (un- or under- insured), and referral source.

♥ Have all youth complete an application. Gather complete contact information including the youth and parent email addresses and phone numbers along with home mailing address. Ask for the youth’s date of birth, name of school they attend and ethnicity.

♥ Have all adult volunteers complete an application with complete contact information, skills, areas of interest, age, gender and ethnicity.

♥ How many youth work each week and how many hours do they work?

♥ How many clients do you cook for each week and how many meals do you deliver to each client?

♥ How many volunteers work each week, what jobs are they doing, and how many hours do they work?

♥ Whenever you are interacting with anyone – donor, in-kind donor, or potential donor – collect their contact information as completely as you can, as well as information about their relationship with the project. For donors, capture the date and amount of each donation.

♥ Set up a recipe data base to collect all of the recipes you use and to scale your recipes for larger quantities. We use a very low-cost, easy to use program called Living Cookbook (www.livingcookbook.com).
4. Be particular about the adults who work with youth.

The kitchen at Ceres is a youth-centered space. The adult mentors who work with the youth are there to insure that youth are set up to be successful, to keep everyone safe and productive, to make sure we manage to the time available, and to oversee the quality of the food – from prep through cooking and packaging.

Our goal is to empower our teen chefs to become more competent and self-managing, to promote as much peer-to-peer teaching as possible, and to have youth experience their ownership for the results each day. In other words, in our kitchen the youth are not helpers for the adult chefs. If anything, it’s the other way around. We recommend that you always have two adults present. Currently we have three adults on each shift with 8 – 14 youth in the kitchen at a time. Too many adults can cramp the space for youth, making it feel like they are helpers.
Finding adults who see young people as “intelligent, responsible, capable, creative and caring” – and who don’t resort in times of stress to power dynamics – is harder than you might think. Finding adults who see youth this way, have production cooking experience, and are effective teachers can really be a challenge. But finding the right people is critical for these reasons:

♥ Youth are longing to make a real difference in their community in an environment where they are seen as capable. If you create this your program will never be short of youth.

♥ This environment of respect and empowerment is essential to creating a program where youth not only learn to cook, but also grow in their self-esteem, leadership and their understanding of their capacity to make a difference in their own lives and for their community.

♥ The atmosphere in the kitchen infuses the food you prepare. Your goal is to create an atmosphere of love, commitment, passion, caring and joy. This is only possible when the people working treat each other with respect regardless of their age or level of experience.
We start by interviewing adult mentors to get a “feel” for who they are, their cooking experience, their experience (if any) working with youth, and what is motivating them to want to get involved. If they seem like a good fit, we invite them to spend a couple of hours in the kitchen as an extra adult. We pay particular attention to how they interact with youth, and how the youth react to them. Often we’ll talk with a few of our Teen Leaders afterward to get their input. The next step is to have the potential mentor work a complete shift. If we’re still happy, we begin to incorporate them into the schedule. We always make it clear to potential mentors that this job isn’t for everyone and that we need to make sure it’s a good fit on both sides before we add them to our team.

Look for someone who is comfortable and confident in who they are, doesn’t need to be the center of attention, and has a good sense of humor. Natural leaders always give credit to others for the successes, and take responsibility when something doesn’t go right.

We ask mentors to work at least twice a month and to make a six-month commitment to the program.
Chapter Five

How We Can Help

We are committed to supporting communities across the country in successfully and sustainably replicating the Ceres Community Project model. Our work in this area began in 2010 when we helped a project in nearby Napa County get off the ground—and it hasn’t stopped since!

This led us to create an intentional approach to replication with the goal of building a learning community of projects all working with Ceres’ Healing Meals for Healthy Communities program. We see ourselves as the convener of that community, insuring the integrity of replication, the development and sharing of Best Practices, and the flow of innovation to all parts of the network.

This Start-up Tool Kit is the first step in the process of becoming a Ceres Affiliate Partner. The Start-Up Tool Kit provides a rich overview of the Healing Meals program as well as guidelines for how to begin visioning your project and putting your team in place.

Ceres Affiliate Partners

If your team determines that Healing Meals is something you would like to bring to your community, the next step involves formally signing our Ceres Affiliate Partner licensing agreement and scheduling your team for our four day on-site training. The training fee is $1,000 for up to four members of your team. The fee is a down payment on the value of what we will share with you during the four day training, and on an ongoing basis as your program grows and develops.
The rest of our compensation comes in the form of a 3% licensing fee on your gross income with a three-year minimum commitment. This means that you are able to reimburse Ceres over time, and that Ceres Community Project is a full partner in your success and sustainability.

Ceres Community Project has gained wide-spread recognition over the past six years, from a Silver Jefferson Award for the 9 county San Francisco Bay Area to being a finalist in 2012 for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Community Health Leaders Award. Our Ambassador Council includes nationally recognized experts including Michael Lerner, co-founder of Commonweal, Dr. Keith Block from the Block Center for Integrative Cancer Care, award-winning author and nutritionist Rebecca Katz, and journalist Michael Pollan.

In June, 2014, Ceres completed a two-year evaluation study on the impact of program participation on teens’ and clients’ eating habits and cooking behavior. Funded by a grant from the USDA, this study provides powerful validation that Healing Meals helps to save lives in the short term as well as preventing disease in the future. Building on this, Ceres now conducts ongoing program evaluation overseen by The Sarah Samuels Center for Public Health.

As a Ceres Affiliate Partner, you’ll launch your program on that solid foundation of knowledge, experience and national recognition for the work you are doing. As your program grows and develops, we’ll help you build on what you learned during the four day training with ongoing support and technical assistance calls.
Four-Day Affiliate Training

We currently hold two four-day trainings annually, in the Spring and Fall.

During the training we share information that will allow you to get your program off the ground smoothly and efficiently. You and your team will have a direct experience of what a fully functioning project looks and feels like, from the day-to-day logistics to the energetic quality in the kitchen. It will help you vision where your project might go. And it will give you a chance to ask and get answers to a wide range of questions that will probably arise in your planning process. We require that at least two members of your team attend the training, preferably including your chef, and welcome up to four people.

During your visit, you will:

♥ Spend time in our kitchen to understand how we work with the youth, the kind of food we prepare, and how we organize the cooking and packaging of meals.

♥ Meet with our Kitchen Manager and Nutrition Education Manager to review our criteria for foods we use, and how we work with client dietary restrictions, organize for each week’s food preparation, create labels and delivery letters, and organize the delivery process.
♥ Meet with our Client Manager to understand the client intake process, how to manage the priority list, the role of Client Liaisons, home visits, and the process for completing clients.

♥ Meet with our Youth Program Manager to understand how we think about our Youth Development Program, and specifically the youth education and leadership aspects of our work, how to work effectively with youth, and the process we use for onboarding, scheduling and empowering youth.

♥ Meet with our Volunteer Relations Manager to talk about successfully engaging, managing and appreciating volunteers; where volunteers work at Ceres; and our Volunteer Orientation process.

♥ Meet with our Nutrition Education Manager to talk about our food philosophy and how our Education Programs support and complement the experience for our youth, clients and volunteers.

♥ Meet with our Executive Director and Development Director to share funding and communication strategies to help you build a community of support for your work.

The four-day training includes an overview of the integrated database system we’ve created in partnership with NonProfitEasy to manage the Healing Meals program. You’ll also receive a Program Operations Manual and samples of the basic forms you need to launch your program.
On-going Support through the Affiliate Network

As a licensed Ceres Affiliate Partner, we are committed to the long-term success of your project. As your project grows, we want to be there to share our continued learning, as well as the learning and innovation happening at other Ceres Affiliate Partners everywhere.

The Ceres Community Project Affiliate Network connects you to all of the Ceres Affiliate Partners around the country. While Ceres Community Project is the lead agency, we view our role as both guide and convener. It is our intention to foster a learning community among the affiliate programs in order to support the success of your individual projects as well as the greatest contribution of the work itself.

As a member of the Affiliate Network, you’ll benefit from the following ongoing support:

♥ Regular calls hosted by Ceres on a variety of topics including developing and growing your board; fund development strategies; volunteer best practices; Ceres’ food philosophy; creating inspiring and cost-effective communications; working effectively with youth, and more.

♥ Four hours one-on-one mentoring annually with Ceres staff.

♥ Access to our constantly developing resources such as youth curriculum resources, client education resources, and more.

Learning more

If you are ready to talk with us about becoming a Ceres Affiliate Partner and attending the Four Day Training, please email info@ceresproject.org. We’ll send you a copy of the Ceres Affiliate Partner Licensing Agreement as well as information about our next training date.
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