Letter from Cathryn

Ten years ago this month I was unpacking groceries on a Thursday afternoon in the kitchen at Community Church of Sebastopol, waiting expectantly for a small group of teens to arrive from Summerfield Waldorf School and El Molino High School.

Thanks to Andy's Produce, the food was donated. Thanks to the church, we were paying just $25 a week to use the kitchen. I knew only one of the six teens scheduled to join me. I was excited and nervous. After seven months of work, Ceres Community Project was finally beginning. The idea was simple – teach teens to cook delicious healthy meals and provide those meals to neighbors in need. But I had no idea if or how it would work.

Those first weeks and months were pretty darn chaotic. Most of the teens didn’t know much about cooking. I had to be everywhere at once, teaching, answering questions, tasting. But miraculously, week after week, the teens arrived, the meals got prepared, and a small group of adult volunteers helped deliver them to their grateful recipients.

Suddenly we’d prepared 1,000 meals! I sent an enthusiastic email to our small group of volunteers and supporters. What a milestone. By the end of our first 9 months, with the help of 21 teen chefs we’d delivered 4,500 meals to 28 families. The teens were learning skills, and even more importantly, feeling pride in making a difference for their community. Our clients were raving about the meals and telling us they could feel the love in the food, and they felt so touched and cared for by our efforts.

We knew we were onto something special... but I had no idea what we’d accomplish together over the next 10 years.

Like our name says, Ceres is a Community Project. In 10 years we’ve touched thousands of lives in Marin, Sonoma and Alameda counties – and across the country. We’ve delivered more than 518,000 meals – and helped 2,300 young people gain knowledge, skills and confidence. We’ve been able to do that because you have stepped forward, donating your time, your talents and your treasure.

Today Ceres programs happen locally every week in three kitchens and one garden in two counties, and in 12 communities across the United States. We have a couple dozen staff members and more than 1,000 teen and adult volunteers. But the essence of what we do hasn’t changed from that first day. We’re a community, coming together with youth at the center, to care for our friends and neighbors struggling because of a health crisis. We’re reweaving the bonds of caring and connection that help make us healthy and strong. We’re putting whole organic food back at the center of what helps us get and stay well. And we’re empowering the next generation to be the engaged leaders our world needs.

I’m so proud to be doing this work with you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for being on this incredible journey touching and transforming thousands of lives.

Cathryn Crouse

Ceres adult and teen volunteers celebrating at our 10th Anniversary party on April 2, 2017
Former client Julie Carmen and her husband Billy discovered Ceres Community Project at the Sebastopol Farmers’ Market. They were new to Sebastopol, and Julie had just been diagnosed with Breast cancer.

We provided meals for both of them during Julie’s treatment. Billy recalls:

“When a patient experiences the torrent of emotions, fears and questions about a life-threatening condition, the shock and confusion are immense and overwhelming. Much the same are flooded over the spouse of a patient. And in most instances, there are few places one can go to find help and hope for relief. Ceres played an enormous role in Julie’s treatments, survival, overall spirit and abilities to heal and prosper. Without Ceres I would not have been capable of providing the proper nutrition and overall care Julie needed for her treatment and recovery.”

Today, the Carmen’s live in a small town in Michigan, where they continue to enjoy Ceres’ Immune Broth every day, and have convinced the local Irish pub to add more healthy food to its menu. Julie’s often the first one her friends call if they’re experiencing a health challenge.

Julie shares: “I consistently talk about how the experience with Ceres changed my life forever. I found myself through cancer. Ceres taught me how I wanted to live my life. To value what nutrition does to the body. Experience the support and love from a community and believe in one’s own strength. I will forever try to pay it forward to others.”

“I also said that I would like to do it until the client number reached about 20. Far-fetched at the time, I thought. When the client number reached about 45, my involvement was about 10-15 hours a week and I thought it was time for that to be a staff job. Now I deliver food again, one of the most rewarding activities at Ceres.”

A native of Germany, Bim has called Sebastopol home since 1994. “I have certainly noticed my relationship to my community changing since I moved here. In Germany there was much less involvement in the community, partly because there was much less demand for citizens to get engaged in helping out. Most needs were taken care of by governmental organizations. That was one of the things that our taxes were being used for. I think there is a necessity here to volunteer, especially for those of us who are lucky enough to have the time and energy to do it. There are just too many in need.”
Rose DeNicola was one of Ceres’ earliest Teen Chefs back in 2007. She shared the reasons she became a volunteer—echoing the reasons we still hear from teens attending our orientations today: “I love cooking, my mom encouraged me, and I wanted to spend time with my friends.” In this case, the friends were sisters Anna and Sarah Stuffelbeam. Not only did all three girls become long-term volunteers holding leadership roles, but Ceres became a family affair, with both sets of parents volunteering and three of them eventually joining Ceres’ staff.

Here are Rose’s reflections on her time at Ceres:

“I started volunteering in the kitchen which became my basic volunteer role. I would also help tabling at events and taking photos for the project. After a couple years I became a member of the Ceres board, until I graduated from high school. Having a teen on the Board really speaks to the way in which Ceres values and believes in their teen members. It was so exciting for me to be held to this level of responsibility. I also enjoyed having insight into the greater vision of the project.

I always found the visits from our clients to be very moving and inspiring. During many of these visits I was overcome with feeling incredibly powerful. The client’s heartfelt expressions of gratitude and sincere affirmations that the food was essential for their recovery was incredibly inspiring.

When I started Ceres was so small, very informal, not complicated, and very grassroots. It hardly resembles the Ceres that I know today - but there is a heart to the project that I have never seen waver.

I am now a bodyworker with a private practice at Flourish Integrative Health in Santa Rosa as well as Osmosis Day Spa. I love my work in part because I am able to hold others with healing hands every day- something that I felt at Ceres as well and continued to value after my time volunteering. I have also specialized in Oncology massage, and I was inspired to study Oncology massage in part due to my work with Ceres clients!

Very recently, I gathered with the Flourishing Women Healers Group at Ceres Café (in Santa Rosa) for a lunch. It was the first time I had been to the cafe since it opened. When I walked in I had a flashback to a group visioning and planning event in which Anna Stuffelbeam and I had gone for a walk and dreamt of a beautiful cafe where teens would cook for the community, learn job skills, and share the project with the general community. So when I walked into the cafe I felt how our dream had been realized! I saw how a whole community had come together passing on this dream from one person to the next, growing it, and feeding it healthy food until this dream came true. It touched me so much I started crying with joy in the cafe!”
CeresFest 2017

Dance into Spring! Tuesday May 2 • 5:30 to 8:30pm

This fun event at Lagunitas Brewery in Petaluma will feature live music from The Remedies, a great meal provided by Ceres, and Lagunitas’ famed brews available for sale, with all proceeds benefiting Ceres. Bring your friends and help us pack the house. All proceeds support our work delivering healing meals to our neighbors facing a serious illness and mentoring the teen volunteers who prepare them.

TICKETS
Price includes organic dinner
$25.00 adult
$12.50 children (ages 5-12)
children under 5 - FREE

www.CeresProject.org/CeresFest

Thank you to...
Lagunitas Brewing Company • Whole Foods Market
Wildbrine • The Kefiry • Fork in the Road

Celebrating 10 years of empowering teens, building community, and serving healthy meals to our neighbors in need.

518,000 organic meals made and delivered with love

2,300 passionate teens have learned to grow & cook healthy food

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