

Farm camp kids cook soup for local shelter at Cedar Glen

By Angela Gismondi

Youth from across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) gathered at YMCA Cedar Glen Outdoor Centre in King for farm camp recently. In its first year of operation, YMCA Cedar Glen Farm Camp exposed 20 young people, aged nine to 12, to farming ? a new hobby they wouldn't have the opportunity to try otherwise, explained Brandon McClounie, general manager of Cedar Glen Outdoor Centre. The week culminated in a soup-making day, during which campers helped Chef Evan Farley cook some homemade squash soup to donate to the local women's shelter Yellow Brick House, which provides confidential support to abused women and their children in York Region and empowers them to rebuild their lives free from violence.

?We had a great idea to add a philanthropic component to the program,? said McClounie. ?We reached out to a few local shelters and Yellow Brick House was quick to respond.?

Anieka Muirhead, a volunteer with Yellow Brick House, was on hand to thank the camp for its contribution to the shelter.

?By making this soup, you are helping these women and their children and making it easier for them to get from their situation to a better situation,? said Muirhead.

During the week-long camp, youth learned how to plant, weed and harvest vegetables in the two-acre garden located on the property.

Through the program, youth from Brampton, North York, Vaughan, Newmarket and Caledon learned the value of growing organic food. Camp participants included both full-fee and subsidized campers, making farm camp especially significant to those who may not be used to opening a fridge full of produce.

The camp was made possible thanks to partnerships with Everdale, a farm-based organization that provides hands-on food and farming education and Can YA Love, an organization which creates unique vertical gardens to help people grow food more efficiently. Youth spend half a day working the land and the other half doing traditional camp activities.

The goal of farm camp is to increase children's awareness of where their food comes from so they can make healthier choices. Campers were taught what it takes to grow their own food and how they can cook and share that food with the people around them. ?Campers help plant and harvest the food themselves,? said McClounie, adding children also learn about what makes good soil to make a bountiful harvest and what an acre can produce. ?A lot of the skills they learn here they can take home and apply to their household and their community.?

YMCA Cedar Glen is the perfect setting to host a camp of this nature, McClounie explained. The property is located on the 11th Concession between Bolton and Nobleton on the Oak Ridges Moraine and in the Greenbelt.

?It's a unique property,? said McClounie, adding the farm camp program filled up quickly. ?That's our community ? we're in a rural area on the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Greenbelt. There is a growing concern about where our food comes from.?

A variety organic produce is grown in the garden at Cedar Glen including kale, squash, onion, chard and beets. Other fruits and vegetables are brought in from local farms. The produce is used to feed campers and for the harvest share program.

?A lot of what campers eat here is either grown here on site or is grown at local farms,? said McClounie.

The harvest share program, run in partnership by YMCA Cedar Glen Outdoor Centre and Everdale, is open to the public. Once registered, each week (Thursdays from 3 to 7 p.m.) from June to November, participants visit YMCA Cedar Glen to pick up their weekly share. Share members have a specific amount of points per week based on the size of share they register for (small, medium, large, extra large) and they can choose the produce they want each week based on the amount of points they have.

For more information, visit www.ymccedarglen.com



Chef Evan Farley guided students as they made soup during a week-long camp at Cedar Glen. The soup was donated to a women's shelter.