



THE MAIN INGREDIENTS



Carolyn



Sandi, Norma, Jan



Barb & Michelle



Lynnie



Robyn



Harriet, Miriam, Sandi

Soup Sisters Volunteers

The essential ingredient stirring up some love in the kitchen

Soup is more than just a dish. It's comfort, warmth and solace in every spoonful. And behind the scenes of these heartwarming bowls lies an unsung team of heroes: the volunteers of Soup Sisters. These incredible individuals spread across cities like Winnipeg, Calgary, Vancouver, Kitchener, and beyond, are the essential ingredients in a recipe that goes far beyond the kitchen.

No matter the city, Soup Sisters isn't just about ladling out a warm meal; it's a movement that believes in the healing power of this universal comfort food. In moments of crisis—be it seeking refuge at an abuse shelter or facing the harsh realities of homelessness—a bowl of nourishing soup becomes more than sustenance. It's a tangible reminder that someone cares; someone took the time to craft a bit of comfort.

But here's the secret ingredient that makes every batch of soup truly special: the volunteers themselves. They are as essential to the recipe as the carrots, chicken, noodles, and spices. Each soup they make carries not just nutrients but intentions and love stirred in every ladle. It's this selfless act of kindness that flavours every spoonful.

Winnipeg can be bone-chilling in the winter, and Harriet, Sandi and Miriam knew that a hot bowl of soup can be a lifeline in the freezing cold. Three retired teachers are now the forces behind the Winnipeg location, recruiting more volunteers and soup-making groups to ensure Willow Place Shelter has the soups for its clients.

Volunteer Harriett, who single-handedly has delivered more than 300 pounds of soup to the shelter every month since the pandemic, said, “We hear from former residents that it’s comforting to get a hug in a bowl. It’s not just a saying; they really mean it!

Miriam added, “Sometimes, we get to know former residents who come out to the events to share their stories. One lovely young lady considered us like her mothers! And to think the sharing of love and kindness just started with soup.”

In the beautiful city of Vancouver, there is a bustling kitchen filled with laughter, clinking utensils, and the aroma of simmering broth. Volunteers are preparing the labels that will be affixed to each individual container of soup, each with a message of hope and encouragement to every recipient.

Volunteer Barb started helping 10 years ago when she heard about Soup Sisters from her sister-in-law. She organized her friends for a soup-making event and hasn’t looked back since. She says, “There is something that happens when you are cooking together – the chatting when chopping, the conversations over a bowl of soup. It’s powerful for our soup-makers and powerful for those receiving the soup.”

She adds, “Unfortunately, there is a great need in our city. It’s so evident. You can feel bad, or you can do something even if it’s a small thing. If everyone did a small thing, the world would be a better place. My contribution may just be a drop in the bucket, but it’s something.”

The beauty of the events lies not just in the soup they cook but in the connections they foster. It’s about communities rallying together, sharing stories over chopping boards, and realizing the power of collective kindness. It’s about transforming simple ingredients into something that nurtures the body and the spirit.

In Kitchener/Waterloo, volunteer Sandi knows that “the warmth of soup can bring up a lot of childhood memories. For both the recipient and the groups cooking together. That’s why it’s so heartwarming.” She was inspired by this comradery when she attended a Soup Sisters event in Toronto. After that she started her own in Waterloo and has been organizing events ever since, and delivering to four local shelters nonstop.

Sandi says, “These places are so busy multitasking to provide for their clients. When the kitchens receive our hearty soups, they know this is one less expense they must make, one less thing to do, and then they can focus on the needs of the clients. It’s simple but means so much to them.” One of the things that sticks with Sandi is that “some of these young kids on the streets are carrying everything, including their trauma, from place to place. In the cold. That is hard work, so to be able to sit and relax with a delicious bowl of soup, then that’s a likely bit of solace we can provide.”

In Calgary, where Soup Sisters originated 14 years ago, volunteers Linnie, Robyn and Carolyn are some of the original volunteers to catch the contagious spirit of coming together to make soup and care for others. This simple principle of helping is what has them contributing to this day.

Linnie says, “I was honoured to be included in that first soup-making event. It was inspiring and I thought, why stop? It’s an easy way for me to help.”

“Every time I deliver soup, the people are so appreciative, so happy, so sincere. And I get to be the one to hear that. I feel so proud to represent Soup Sisters.”

Robyn echoes this sentiment: "When I call to say soups on the way, people are so happy to hear from you. The agencies are so appreciative because they can provide their clients with fresh, healthy and nutritious meals for much less than they could have done themselves. And the recipients feel valued when they receive (the soup). It doesn't take much to feed the body, soul, mind and spirit.”

And it doesn't take much to inspire volunteers to take action. Carolyn explains, “When I saw the article in City Palate right after the first event, I just picked up the phone to say what can I do. And here we are today!”

Carolyn continues to be driven by the thought of how clients must feel, adding, “I think about how rattled someone who has just come into a shelter. They are expected to fill out forms on an empty stomach. To have some time to relax over a warm meal - it's why I keep giving.”

From the coast to the prairies to the great lakes, volunteers represent the heart and soul of Soup Sisters, reminding us of the profound impact of a bit of kindness. They teach us that a shared meal isn’t just about the food—it’s about nourishing the soul, fostering empathy, and reminding us of the immense power of human connection.

Let’s raise our ladles to these and the hundreds of other Soup Sisters volunteers on this International Day of the Volunteers! Here’s to their relentless efforts in transforming mere ingredients that a little kindness can simmer into something truly extraordinary!