



Soup sisters spread warmth one bowl at a time

By Dianne Wood, Record staff

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WATERLOO REGION — When a person's tummy is warm, their heart usually is, too.

That's the thought behind an organization called Soup Sisters which makes soup for homeless and abused women, children and youth.

The group — which is starting a chapter in Kitchener next week — was launched two-and-a-half years ago by a Calgary woman looking for something meaningful to do as she approached her 50th birthday with an empty nest.

"I'm good at making soup," Sharon Hapton said she thought to herself, and the rest is history.

"That's something I've always done for family and friends when they've been sad or (there's been a) death in the family," Hapton said this week from Calgary. "I've always showed up on someone's doorstep with soup."

Since beginning Soup Sisters, Hapton has helped warmed the hearts of thousands of youths and women in crisis simply by giving them a hot, filling bowl of soup.

"Those are people who receive the nurturing and nourishment from our soup," said Hapton, who will be in Kitchener next week to launch a Soup Sisters here.

"Where people are pretty down, it's really making a difference. It's been incredible."

Her vision of "Warming Hearts ... One Bowl at a Time" has "gone viral," Hapton said.

There are nine Soup Sisters' groups across Canada and another launching in Waterloo Region next Wednesday.

The idea is simple. A group of women meet monthly and make about 200 bowls of soup for youth in crisis or women and children in shelters.

Participants won't just show up at someone's kitchen and start chopping onions. They'll work in state-of-the art



Soup sisters. Janet Uffelman, Sandi McCrory and Norma Weiner got together to share some soup at McCrory's home on Tuesday. The three women founded the local Soup Sisters program to provide soups for local shelters. Record staff
Source: Record staff

kitchens at The Culinary Studio, a recreational cooking school located in the former Vincenzo's, at 740 Belmont Ave. W., Kitchener.

Trained chefs will come in to teach and supervise the soup-making. Fresh produce from local markets will go into each bowl.

The sessions offer a fun night out for the women, Hapton said.

There's a lot of "kitchen camaraderie" and the women end the evening by sitting down to a bowl of soup, a salad, some bread and two glasses of wine. Each woman pays \$50 to cover Soup Sisters' monthly costs.

Sandi McCrory, co-ordinator of the local Soup Sisters, said three women decided to start the Kitchener-Waterloo group after attending a Soup Sisters' night in Toronto.

The women had already made soup for local Out of the Cold programs and for youth at ROOF (Reaching Our Outdoor Friends), a Kitchener centre for homeless youths and youths at risk, aged 12 to 25.

"Soup represents home for someone who doesn't have a home to go to," McCrory said. "Most of us are empty-nesting right now. The homeless youth is near and dear to our hearts."

The soup made in Kitchener will be delivered to ROOF and Marillac Place, a Kitchener shelter for young mothers aged 16 to 25 at risk of homelessness or at risk of losing custody of their child.

Hapton has letters from young people touched by a simple bowl of soup.

"It reminds them of grandma," she said. "I've got these handwritten letters that make me cry."

A 19-year-old woman who fled an abusive relationship wrote Hapton from a shelter.

"She said she had to go to work one day and she was able to take soup from the freezer at the shelter. Just the fact that she had that soup with her at work, by people who cared, helped her to make it through the day."

Soup Sisters KW will hold its launch at 6 p.m. Sept. 28 at The Culinary Studio. Hapton will be there, along with representatives from ROOF and Marillac Place.

Certified Toronto chef Andrea Nicholson will teach the art of soup-making. The cost of \$95 is meant to cover the purchase of a freezer for Marillac Place, a commercial slow cooker for ROOF and reusable glass soup bowls.

Participants don't just make the tried-and-true chicken noodle soup, either. The list of recipes includes such exotic-sounding concoctions as pureed cauliflower soup with mushroom crostini, curried squash and coconut soup, and spicy Jamaican pumpkin soup.

A favourite of youth in Calgary is hamburger soup, Hapton said.

Angela Murdoch, business manager of Marillac Place, said the soup will provide "nutritious healthy meals for the moms."

The home can take 10 mothers and 11 infants, up to age two. The mothers are taught life skills, including

cooking, and are responsible for making dinners. The soup program fits in nicely with that, she said.

Sandy Dietrich-Bell, executive director of ROOF, calls the Soup Sisters "amazing. We're very excited about it," she said.

The soup will be available for teens who drop in, come for dinner or stay overnight and want a snack.

"Soup Sisters is going to be pivotal. It will ensure, at least on a monthly basis, we have some nourishing, fantastic soup for our evening drop-in that didn't have to be made by staff or youth," she said.

"It's something they can eat quickly, then be on their way."

Many street youth feel they've been discarded and are unwanted, Dietrich-Bell said. When they hear that "a group of women you don't even know, who aren't getting paid, are making you soup ... it will mean a great deal.

"It sort of debunks the myth they carry that everybody hates them."

For more information, go to kitchenerwaterloo@soupsisters.org.

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