



Get Involved: One Meal at a Time

With Cooking Matters, helping area kids make healthy eating choices is as easy as pie.

BY EMILY BARLEAN | PHOTOS BY ERIC LAWTON

➤ Team up with the dedicated staff of Operation Food Search, and you'll be helping kids across St. Louis trade in meals with snap, crackle and pop for a skill set that allows them to sauté, sizzle and chop. How? By getting involved in the Share Our Strength Cooking Matters program—an initiative committed to making sure underprivileged kids not only have enough to eat, but also learn proper nutrition so they can lead healthy, active lives.

Thanks to Operation Food Search volunteers and the Cooking Matters program, hundreds of St. Louis kids can take advantage of classes that teach them how to prepare healthy meals and adopt better eating habits.

Marian Middle School is just one participating school that offers Cooking Matters' hands-on training with real chefs. Once a month, the school's lunchroom transforms from a pizza-tossing cafeteria into a health-conscious culinary study group when a team of Operation Food Search volunteers and a group of fifth graders put on their chef's caps, cinch up their aprons and prepare to learn healthy cooking habits.

During the most recent class at Marian, the chopping and mixing was supervised and taught by Chef Lauren McCabe. Formerly a part of the corporate scene, McCabe left the business world to open Meal Thymes, an in-home chef service that brings meals straight to your kitchen. By following her passion for cooking, McCabe is thrilled to



have the unique opportunity to work in a profession where she has time to give back.

"If kids leave these classes wanting to eat something that isn't packaged, you've made a difference," she says. "You might not change the world, but if a kid

says, 'Mom let's cook dinner tonight,' you might get a family to sit down for a meal together—and that's something."

Although healthy eating may seem like a cakewalk (minus the cake) to some, over the course of her time at Cooking Matters, McCabe has realized this is not always the case, especially for underprivileged students.

"I've met kids who didn't know that a peach had a pit," she says. "You would be surprised at how many of them don't realize that the chicken on their table used to be alive."

Luckily, with hands-on meal preparation, practical nutrition information and food budgeting skills, the children of St. Louis are learning, one meal at a time, that dinner doesn't have to be cooked in a microwave.

So, the next time you sit down to enjoy a meal at your favorite restaurant, remember there are kids in St. Louis who don't know where their next meal is coming from and others who think chicken nuggets and gas station burritos are the ultimate feast. With Cooking Matters, you can team up with top chefs like McCabe to help end hunger and encourage proper nutrition—and maybe even pick up some healthy cooking habits of your own.

Visit operationfoodsearch.org to volunteer and get more info.