

# Good food, good company, good deeds draw Marie Graham to CHEP



When Marie Graham first volunteered for CHEP she wanted to help children, but she soon discovered that CHEP is also a lifeline to adults living on a fixed income.

At CHEP, she found friendship, nutrition and even gardening, plus the satisfaction of being able to help her community through volunteerism.

“Initially I was attracted to CHEP because it was trying to provide nutritious food at a reasonable cost for families,” says Marie.

She volunteered for CHEP six years ago after moving back to Saskatoon from Ottawa.

At the time, she was living on a disability pension which did not stretch very far. Faced with the need to refurbish her apartment – and also eat – she turned to CHEP’s Collective Kitchen for help.

The Collective Kitchen brings together home cooks who share ingredients and split the recipes so that everyone has nutritious meals to take home. Participants pay \$5 each, which CHEP matches.

“It was a real eye opener for me,” says Marie, 65. “I had never cooked with lentils before in my life and not too much with dried peas or chickpeas, so the Community Kitchen helped introduce me to some foods I’d never even considered trying before.”

She was so impressed that she took CHEP’s Community Kitchen Leadership Training program. She also joined community gardens sponsored by CHEP and is currently a member of the City Park Community Garden.

“One year I planted a 99-cent packet of seeds and I guesstimated that I grew more than \$100 of Swiss chard. It was phenomenal,” she says. “Swiss Chard is one of the few leafy green vegetables that you can freeze, so I always grow enough for the wintertime.”

She also attends CHEP’s Grub and Gab, an evening of healthy food, good company and informative discussion held every few months.

“It was such a good opportunity for me to be able to go out and enjoy a nice meal because I couldn’t afford to have a nice meal at a restaurant, and it was also as an opportunity to socialize and meet other people in the community,” she says.

Marie has provided childcare at CHEP events and has packed the Good Food Box, a subscription service that provides healthy, often local, vegetables and other foods at an affordable price.

In the future, she hopes to move into subsidized housing and organize a Community Kitchen for herself and her new neighbours.

“I am so impressed with CHEP,” she says. “They call themselves a community based organization and all their endeavours are community oriented. I really like that. I wish more people would get involved.”