

Children's home cooks up a different kind of classroom to teach life skills_72604

July 23, 2004

Posted: 7/23/04

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By Miranda Bradley

Texas Baptist Children's Home

ROUND ROCK-Eleven-year-old Armando spends a summer afternoon grating cheese in the Texas Baptist Children's Home activity center, helping prepare lunch.

It's not his first time to venture into the culinary world. He often helps his mother make dinner. But today he and his friends participate in a cooking class sponsored by HOPE-Healthy Opportunities that Protect and Empower.

"I really like it when I get to boil stuff," he said.

Three children from a Round Rock-area apartment complex learn the secret to making a great cake during the HOPE Cooking Class offered through Texas Baptist Children's Home.

While he is used to helping make tamales, rice and mole, during his weekly cooking class he learns to make various kinds of food.

“The goal is to help teach life skills,” HOPE Supervisor Melanie Martinez explained. “We want them to not only have interaction with other children but to also learn that you can make inexpensive, nutritional meals.”

HOPE is a Texas Baptist Children's Home program that reaches out to the Round Rock community, offering classes and programs to local apartment

communities.

One primary area of outreach involves the Chisholm Trail and Henna apartments, where HOPE has created youth groups.

In the past year, involvement in the groups has increased, providing an outlet for youth to grow and socialize in a positive environment. In an effort to expand the children's network of peers, HOPE combined both groups to make up the summer cooking classes.

But the classes aren't just about boiling water. HOPE staffers teach etiquette, proper table-setting techniques and, most importantly, the message of serving one another.

"They are able to make the meal, but then they have to help each other with their plates," Martinez said. "They also have to set up the tables and clean up when they are through."

Learning to sit down to dinner and "pass the peas, please" is becoming a novel concept for families, according to a recent study by the University of Minnesota. The study showed the number of families who eat dinner together declined by 33 percent in six years.

That lack of interaction can often lead to dwindling communication, Martinez said. "Interaction is very important. They learn about each other and how to cooperate when they are sharing responsibilities."

Lessons about food often spill over, not only into personal lessons, but into spiritual ones as well, she added. For example, they often relate the food pyramid to how God is involved in daily lives.

"By showing how the food pyramid is set up, we show that it is important to balance their meals," Martinez said. "Jesus Christ is that balance in our spiritual lives. He is the center."

Cooking classes have been taught at TBCH for the past three years, offering a variety of life lessons.-the most paramount being how God can show up anywhere.

“We are teaching children that we can feed the stomach and the soul,” Martinez said. “It's all in how you share the gospel.”

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