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## Thompson

### A Bit of Time Makes a Big Difference

Bonnie Rempel gets goose bumps when she talks about the Families and Schools Together (FAST) program funded by CDPI in Thompson. “It’s absolutely amazing!” she said. “It really does make a difference.”

FAST is an eight-week program for families that targets nutrition, mental well-being and physical activities.

Families meet once a week from about 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. and a different family prepares a meal each week for the group.

Rempel is the school principal, but at FAST events, she takes a back seat, washing dishes and observing parents interact with their children. She said the program is very empowering for parents. As part of the evening agenda either the mom or the dad sits for 15 minutes with one child and has a special play time. They are instructed to sit with the child, listen to the child, and have child-directed play. “Some of these families have as many as eight children. I’ve seen parents crying because they have never played with their child like that

*“Such a small amount of time makes such a difference in a child’s life.”*

before,” said Rempel. “It’s just amazing. It gives you goose bumps!” Rempel said it is incredible to see what 10 or 15 minutes of one-on-one child-directed play can do for a relationship. “Such a small amount of time makes such a difference in a child’s life.”

Watching what happens in the kitchen is equally amazing. Families plan meals and take turns cooking for the whole group. A meal for more than a dozen families is cooked at home and brought to the FAST gathering where children serve their parents and everyone gets to play a role that is new to them. Gifts are given in return for a good, home-cooked meal.

FAST brings in speakers from organizations such as the Addictions Foundation and Mental Health to help adults make connections and increase their knowledge of healthy lifestyle choices. “They realize they are not the only one going through [their issues] and that someone is going to help them,” said Rempel. The FAST program not only benefits families, but the entire community. FAST graduates are now running the school’s parent council and others are volunteering in a variety of ways. One participant went back to school and got his high school diploma and volunteers at the school’s outdoor program, teaching children how to trap and skin animals.

FAST graduations are usually emotionally charged events where each parent receives a book with affirmations that the team collects during the sessions. They include things like, “you are so gentle and patient”

and “you are a strong woman.” Many break down and cry on grad night and many stay connected well beyond the eight-week program. The goal, said Rempel, is to assist families in developing protective factors for improvement in building community, conflict resolution, parent empowerment and parent-child bonding. Her conclusion after four cycles of the CDPI-funded program? “FAST works!”

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Take Note

**Nothing Beats a Home-Cooked Meal...**

- Home-cooked meals tend to include more vegetables and fruit and fewer fried foods and soft drinks.
- They offer a variety health benefits, including decreasing the risk of obesity.
- Meals cooked at home cost less than restaurant, takeout, or pre-packaged meals.
- Home-cooked meals can also be a fun way of showing others that we care.
- More than 80 per cent of Canadians say that they enjoy preparing meals at home.

<http://www.healthyalberta.com/HealthyEating/315.htm>

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## Thompson

### A Garden in the Zoo

You may not have known there is a thriving zoo in Thompson, not to mention a zoo complete with community gardens. The unusual combination has been a huge success, with summer day camps triple-booked and waiting lists for the popular garden plots.

Many residents in the northern Manitoba community of Thompson don't have access to healthy food, and Erin Wilcox is trying to help reverse that trend. As Executive Director of the Thompson Zoological Society, she works with CDPI and other groups to promote community gardening and food security. "We want gardens all around the community," Wilcox said. "Thompson has a huge number of low income families, and we want to offer the gardens to them so they are food secure."

Along with her duties at the Thompson Zoo, Wilcox sits on the Thompson Food Security committee, which is where she found out about CDPI. With help from CDPI funding, the zoo first planted

*"We didn't expect it to be that popular... We see there's a big need, and it's really hitting people's interest."*

vegetable gardens three years ago and has recently enhanced the program, teaching basic gardening, insect education, composting, harvesting, and preservation. All of its gardening is chemical and fertilizer free, and people are taught not only to garden but how to harvest some the natural plants that grow in that area. "We've run about 16 sessions so far," said Wilcox. "Initially it started out as a kids' camp, and now we have adult groups and children's groups."

All ages are welcome to come and garden, and children as young as two have participated alongside their grandparents, who appreciate the accessibility of the raised garden beds that allow easy access for the elderly, disabled, or those in wheelchairs. Volunteers built the 17 garden beds, which have proven so popular that there's a waiting list for the next batch of 11 beds. Seeds are supplied and shared, and a tool lending program is available for lower income participants. A summer student is on staff to give advice and assistance. "We want to have a holistic feel and encourage people to ask questions," explained Wilcox.

#### *Overgrown Demand for Earth Roots Camp*

The Earth Roots Kids Camp has been a smashing success, with six different elementary schools clamouring for limited spaces. The camp has a composting and germination project, and features different themes for each day. "Our approach is to really hit the younger generation – make it fun," said Wilcox. Judging by the size of the turn-out, the kids' camp accomplished this

goal and more. Word travels fast in small communities, and the first session of the camp was triple-booked! “We didn’t expect it to be that popular,” Wilcox said. “We see there’s a big need, and it’s really hitting people’s interest.”

Thompson residents are equally interested in storing the fruits – and of course vegetables – of their labours. Accordingly, Bayline Regional Roundtable, MB Food Charter and other partners have helped people to buy inexpensive freezers that they can pay off interest-free. The program educates people on how to best harvest and store their produce.

As for Erin Wilcox, the lifelong Thompsonite has a number of new initiatives to enhance the community’s

green-thumb momentum. “There are so many learning and teaching opportunities,” she said. In addition to working with other agencies to make more community gardens available to those who don’t have their own space, a Northern Farmer’s Market is being planned. It will showcase the potatoes, carrots, peas, beans, radishes and lettuce that are lovingly grown in an often unforgiving climate, along with the wide variety of berries, teas, and wild rice that grow naturally in the area.

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Take Note

Northern Manitoban communities are looking at many different ways to enable them to be “food secure.” Among these:

- Greenhouse pilot projects
- Northern garden initiatives
- Livestock production pilot projects
- Community foods program – making traditional foods widely available again
- Freezer purchase program
- Train youth for their future role as leaders in food self-sufficiency
- Develop food businesses like bakeries

[http://www.gov.mb.ca/ana/food\\_prices/2003\\_northern\\_food\\_prices\\_report.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/ana/food_prices/2003_northern_food_prices_report.pdf)

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## Thompson Food Bank Promotes Healthy Choices

Hungry people don't necessarily ask for healthy food when they access the local food bank. "It never happens," said Major Grayling Crites. "There's an immediate need to fill that hunger." Crites is a Thompson CDPI committee member who oversees the operation of The Salvation Army's food bank. He said occasionally people come in and say they are diabetic and ask for fruits or vegetables, but even that is rare. Knowing the risk factors for diabetes, especially prevalent in the North, food bank operators do their best to bring in healthy food. When they get donations of money to buy food they try to stay away from sugar-coated foods and shop for nutritious items.

CDPI funding enabled the food bank to buy shelving and more freezer and refrigeration space. With more room for fresh produce, the food bank can promote healthier eating for people who are going

*With more room for fresh produce, the food bank can promote healthier eating for people who are going through a difficult time and dealing with a limited food budget.*

through a difficult time and dealing with a limited food budget. They have also purchased books with healthy recipes which people are given along with their groceries. Another idea that has worked well is a "meal-in-a-bag," a grocery bag full of all the ingredients to cook up something nutritious. With the help of a dietitian and the Food Security Committee's CDPI funding, the ingredients needed for a meal are placed in one bag and given with the groceries. "Everything you needed to make chili was in it, including the chili powder and beans," said Crites. "We try to be proactive and promote different things."

Crites said food donations come from the general public as well as businesses such as the local grocery store. The food bank can suggest people make healthy donations, but for the most part they are grateful for whatever comes their way. "When food is donated, you use what you have," he said. At certain times of the year the food bank provides lists of items they require to put in grocery bags. "We need food that helps counteract health issues," said Crites. "We do what we can to help out at this end."

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Take Note

**Canadian Eating Habits:**

- Canadians of all ages get more than one-fifth of their calories from “other foods,” which are food and beverages that are not part of the Four Food groups.
- For most Canadians, snacks account for more calories than breakfast, and about the same number of calories as lunch.
- More than one-quarter of Canadians ages 31 to 50 get more than 35% of their total calories from fat, the threshold beyond which health risks increase.
- Seven out of 10 children ages 4 to 8, and half of adults, do not eat the recommended daily minimum of five servings of vegetables and fruit.

<http://www.heartandstroke.mb.ca/site/c.lgLSIV0yGpF/b.3661109/>