

## **Young Parents Program full time wrap up.**

Our course is going well. A bit of a shaky start as there was a blue in the house prior to our arrival on the first night. We had 6 mums, 6 babies and the two of us prepping lamb chops with roast veggies. The mums were cranky and all 6 babies were competitive screaming. It was chaos. The dish was a great food memory of Angie's and one that a lot of Aussie families would resonate with. With the chop's in the oven we started melting chocolate for a homemade banana sunday and the moods started to calm. I'm sure there must be science in chocolate and a women's inner peace.



We served the lamb chops and veggies on one big plate in the centre of the table. The mums and their babies all sat around and ate together. We walked away slightly confused, ears ringing.

I wasn't there for the second Friday but Angie and Yasmin taught the girls Apricot Chicken and Apple and Rhubarb crumble. It was a hit and we had a little win as everybody 'hated' rhubarb prior to having a try.

I caught up with Angie after week 2 for a debrief (Yasmin puts up with my weekly debrief at home). Angie is doing a super job but I had suspicion that she may not have been getting much out of the course herself. One of the big things we are finding is that the mums 'hate' most foods. I guess, the problem is much deeper than an absence of good food memories, but actual bad experiences with food. Our little 6 week course won't undo 16 years but I wanted to assure Angie

that at the very least we are showing the mums they are worthy of experiencing good food.

A lot of the mums would have been abused or come from places that treated them with no respect or value. Three random strangers showing up each week to cook and spend time with them shows them they are worthy. Chopping onions and roasting veggies together shows them they are worthy of more than french fries. And hopefully, when they are ready, they will know how to show a similar worth to their new family. We have worked out that the aim of our course is not to turn the mum's into good cooks but to teach the mum's about self worth.



The 3rd Friday we made roasted tomato soup and a deluxe macaroni and cheese bake. Each mum, of course, 'hated' tomato soup. One of the mums told us about her tomato soup experience of heated tins of tomatoes and whatever else mum had in the cupboard. When the soup was almost done we made each mum 'taste' it for seasoning.



We served the soup in a large bowl at the centre of the table. Our earlier taste trick worked and all mum's were converted, each one had seconds and also fed the soup to their babies. It was a special moment (and maybe a turning point) for our team as the same mum with the bad soup experience fed the soup to her 6 month old baby and the baby loved it. The baby has dermatitis and would only ever eat mashed banana but can now add homemade tomato soup cooked with love by mum!

If our cooking course was about self worth, we decided to show the mums some value. Our fourth night was our culinary peak. We stuffed fish with Moroccan spices, made cous cous, garlic and chermula prawns and a sliced cranberry, fennel and dates salad and finished the dinner with a Turkish Delight flavoured yoghurt and fruit salad. Of course everyone hated fish and nobody wanted to volunteer to fillet them! With encouragement and a demonstration by Angie, three of the mum's did it. We ended up with three well-filleted rainbow trout. The night was also full of new flavours and ingredients never tried before.



culinary climax

Later that night, watching how proud the mums were, feeding their babies the meal they made gave me goose bumps. Food is far more than food. It is a metaphor for who we are, who we want to be. That night alone made the 6 weeks worth it.

The following Friday we made it simple. Two quiches; a Lorraine and a mushroom, sage and fetta, followed by homemade pancakes and maple syrup. We wanted to give the mums something to cook from a recipe. We provided the ingredients and tried not to interfere. The girls did really well. Possibly would have done better if we weren't in the room. One of the mums is illiterate and it was easy to understand how making meals for her family would be a struggle. (Did you know that 46% of Australian's don't have the literacy to read a recipe [ABS 2006](#))



2 times Quiches

Our finale was a dinner party. We asked the mums to invite the volunteers at the refuge over for a three course thank you dinner. Our first course was a charcuterie (including a duck pate – originally sold to the mums as a savoury mousse) and cheese plate. Second course was home made potato gnocchi with a veal ragu and we finished off with a rich chocolate cake! We had 8 RSVPs, 12 turned up. The mums felt the pressure but we pulled it off and provided table service to the wonderful volunteers who help the mum's every day.



**Gnocchi Fingers and Veal Cheeks.**

I always get a buzz out of providing a well cooked meal to random strangers. The simple act of provide something to someone you have never met or possibly wont see again is humbling. Thank you Feather and Bone for helping to allow us to do this. A huge thanks also to Yasmin Nagy and Angie Sceats for their love, generosity and patience in the Young Mum's kitchen.

Rob