

GIVING BACK THROUGH COOKING WITH YOUR SUPPORT

“Cooking can be healing and nurturing, but cooking with skill can also mean a job,” says Cyndi Kleinbart, chef and program manager of the *Soups and Sweets Culinary Training Program* at the Jewish Family and Children’s Service, an agency of the Jewish Federation of Southern NJ. With funding from Kessler Foundation, thanks to your support, Soups and Sweets has helped secure jobs for people living with disabilities in professional kitchens throughout NJ.

Nancy Lewis, occupational therapist and training coordinator, explains that the program is not just about teaching top-notch culinary skills—how to properly slice and dice with a sharp knife, or how to work a deep fryer—but also incorporates “soft skills,” such as hygiene, conflict management, and professionalism. “Cyndi and I work closely to integrate these essential skills into the curriculum,” Nancy says. “Expert culinary skills may get our graduates the job, but the well-developed soft skills ensure their continued successful employment.”

Barbara Abrams, director of special needs at the Jewish Family and Children’s Service, attests to the rigors of the culinary program. “Our participants graduate with full national certification to work in a professional kitchen,” Abrams further explains, “We continue to work with our participants long after they’ve graduated. Throughout the pandemic,

we constantly kept in touch, hosting Zoom meetings for social interaction, skill review, and job coaching.” She adds, “The pandemic didn’t stop us in our tracks, but it did give us time to examine the possibilities for modification.”

“We looked around us,” recalls Abrams, “and what we saw in our community was a growing need for food security. We decided to add to the mission of our program. We’ve incorporated a partnership with our local food pantry into the culinary training program.”

Chef Cyndi was the creative force behind the Soups and Sweets cookbook, *Enriching Lives, One Recipe at a Time*. “It’s just as the title of our cookbook says,” Chef Cyndi remarks. “We want to enrich lives with good, well-cooked food. We want to give back to our community. Our mission is now twofold: employment *and* food security. I have the best job. I love giving back, and thanks to Kessler Foundation and its donors, I can help these newly trained cooks give back too.” ■



Chef Cyndi Kleinbart and Soups and Sweets Culinary Program participants



Chef Cyndi Kleinbart, the creative force behind the Soups and Sweets Cookbook, *Enriching Lives, One Recipe at a Time*

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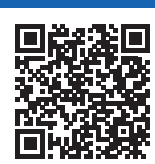
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LISTEN TO CYNDI KLEINBART SHARE MORE ABOUT HER PERFECT RECIPE FOR GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY.

RECOGNIZING HEALTH DISPARITIES AND THEIR IMPACT THANKS TO YOU

YOU MAKE A
DIFFERENCE
thank you



“People with similar injuries who receive similar treatment may have very different outcomes, because their race, ethnicity, and where they live influences whether they maintain a good quality of life.”

—Amanda Botticello, PhD

Changing the lives of people with disabilities means looking at all the factors that affect their ability to lead full and productive lives. In addition to the challenges of their disabilities, many face barriers that are rooted in the social and economic inequities that affect racial and ethnic minorities. Inequities in housing, employment, education, and health care underlie the health disparities that mean higher rates of chronic diseases and mortality and poorer rehabilitation outcomes, further complicating the lives of minorities with disabilities.

Recognizing the tremendous impact on rehabilitation outcomes, researchers at Kessler Foundation work to identify disparities that add to the challenges of recovery from disabling illness and injuries. Using geographic data, Amanda Botticello, PhD, a social epidemiologist, looks at the ‘big picture’ to map a pathway to better health for the population with disabilities. Dr. Botticello is assistant director of the Centers for Spinal Cord Injury and Outcomes & Assessment Research.

Her recent research focuses on the neighborhoods where people with disabilities reside, correlating their outcomes with the characteristics of their neighborhoods. “Where people live, work, and play makes a difference in their lives.

This is especially true for people with disabilities,” she explains. “The kind of neighborhood you live in strongly influences your health. Neighborhoods differ in the quality of housing, schools, job opportunities, green space, health care, and food sources. These factors are what we call the social determinants of health.”

Social determinants of health are fundamental to understanding the growing health disparities in the U.S., according to Denise Fyffe, PhD, senior research scientist in the Centers for Spinal Cord Injury and Outcomes & Assessment Research. Dr. Fyffe, a clinical psychologist, gathers data on health disparities at the grassroots level. “Going into the community to talk to small groups of individuals with spinal cord injury about their personal experiences adds an important dimension to population-based research,” says Dr. Fyffe. She studies health disparities in veterans and civilians from racial and ethnic minority groups, developing targeted interventions that help people overcome barriers

Amanda Botticello, PhD



to maintaining good health following spinal cord injury.

Dr. Fyffe leads an ongoing community-based study focused on Black and Hispanic men with paraplegia. “Personal and cultural issues often hinder the activities of racially and ethnically diverse wheelchair users, contributing to poorer quality of life. We are seeking to change that through this study,” she said. Using new technologies, Dr. Fyffe’s team monitors the wheelchair usage of their participants at home and in their communities, as a measure of their activity at home and in the community. “We’re developing recommendations for culturally sensitive interventions that help people care for themselves once they return to their community,” she added, “and achieve levels of functional independence and community participation that support a good quality of life.”



LEARN MORE ABOUT HEALTH
DISPARITIES AND COVID-19'S EFFECTS
ON THE DISABILITY COMMUNITY.

Denise Fyffe, PhD



In the Center for Traumatic Brain Injury Research, Anthony Lequerica, PhD, senior research scientist, focuses on the culturally diverse Latinx communities, which is at greater risk for traumatic brain injury, and has poorer outcomes after rehabilitation. Language barriers and cultural differences often compound the health disparities affecting Latinx communities, notes Dr. Lequerica, and resources for studying this population are often lacking. His current project involves the development of a Spanish language version of a structured interview aimed at accurately assessing the lifetime risk for traumatic brain injury. While it’s an important step toward understanding the scope of the problem, he echoes his colleagues Drs. Botticello and Fyffe, saying, “We need to move beyond detecting disparities to measuring disparities by looking at the social determinants of health.”

Anthony Lequerica, PhD



Victor Pena

“I’m passionate about sports,” says Victor Pena. “Staying active improves my physical and mental health.” Victor became paralyzed over thirty years ago, when a shot in the back on his 20th birthday caused a spinal cord injury.

Despite Victor’s physical strength from so many years of adaptive snow skiing, hand cycling, body surfing, and water skiing, he severely injured his shoulder while transferring out of his wheelchair one day.

Victor was reluctant to undergo surgery. Luckily, he learned about Kessler Foundation’s Lipogems research. Thanks to donors like you, he participated in a study and received Lipogems treatment—his own fat tissue was injected into his injured shoulder to heal the joint tissue.

“I sincerely thank the donors that support Kessler Foundation’s research. Without you, I wouldn’t be able to enjoy the sports I love, to maintain my physical and mental strength, or to live independently.”



LEARN HOW YOUR GIFT
MAKES A DIFFERENCE.



LISTEN TO DR. BOTTICELLO DISCUSS HOW
ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS DETERMINE
OUTCOMES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.