

# Teenagers get a crash course in food-justice issues at community classes

By Neal Morton, Seattle Times on 03.05.20

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Image 1. Dream Bernard, age 14, prepares the vermicelli bowls to feed the class and others working or playing at High Point Community Center on January 1, 2020. The Seattle Parks and Recreation department started a monthlong cooking class for youth ages 13 to 19 to learn about food-justice issues and basic cooking skills every Friday and Saturday night. Photo by: Amanda Snyder/The Seattle Times/TNS

SEATTLE, Washington — In a mostly empty High Point Community Center late at night on January 1, Asia Faircloth had one question for the seven teenagers, her captive audience for the next three hours.

"You guys want to go play with knives?" the cooking instructor asked.

Split into two groups, the students switched between the kitchen, where Faircloth taught them how to cook vermicelli bowls with tofu and chicken, or joined Jacob Alhadeff to practice new chopping skills with professional chef's knives.

Both instructors peppered the quiet class with seemingly innocuous ice breakers: What's your favorite fast food? Who likes to eat packaged ramen? Have you seen the prices of salads at chain restaurants? But Alhadeff, with the city's parks and recreation department, explained the larger lesson behind the questions and cooking class.

The four-week course, which will run through June at the High Point and South Park community centers, is framed around cooking and food justice — the idea that access to nutritious food should be thought of as a public-policy, health and civil-rights issue.

At the local level, food justice can mean increased shopping options for fresh and healthy produce in low-income neighborhoods.

"Low-income people of color are more likely to feel the adverse effects of food injustice," Alhadeff said. "So providing cooking instruction, an introduction to food justice and putting money back in the pockets of our community members seemed like a no-brainer."

By the end of February, two dozen kids will have completed the course. The city recruits 13- to 19-year-olds primarily through social media, and funds from the Parks and Recreation's department and Associated Recreation Council pay for the program.

"We hope we reach a demographic of more economically and institutionally vulnerable teens," Alhadeff said. "Any teenagers can join."

He started the classes to not only teach young people how to cook more than just microwaveable food at home. Alhadeff and Faircloth also try to connect the dots between individual choices — whether to eat out a lot or what you buy at the grocery store — and the economic cost of obesity, climate change and global food supplies. (Students also get \$100 at the end of the course.)

A crash course on Friday, February 7, briefly touched on those sweeping topics, but by the end of the four weeks, students seemed to grasp a bit more about food justice.

"I had never heard of that term before," said Dominic Tatro, a junior at Seattle Lutheran High School who attended the January course.

"We started with more personal things, then looked at the bigger, global view ... like, how climate change is related to food," he said. "It can be really bad when droughts turn places into actual deserts (and) food droughts can cause a lot of (civil) unrest."

Similarly, Tahir Adams and Najah Goodrich, cousins who joined the South Park classes, mentioned how farmers can struggle to put food on their own kitchen tables while growing fresh produce for the rest of the country. They shared their thoughts on the water crisis in Flint, Michigan, but also bragged about the new skills and recipes they learned.

"Always, always use the claw," Tahir said, referring to a food-preparation technique.

On Friday, Alhadeff stressed the one thing he wanted every student to learn was the claw grip — keeping your fingers pointed toward the inside of your hand to chop food evenly and prevent accidents.

One 13-year-old who organizes a weekly cooking club with his friends quickly got a handle on the technique. Dream Bernard, 14, had more difficulty with her knife and carrot.

"The way I cut it at home is probably more dangerous, but I think it works better," she said.

"Definitely cut myself a few times at home though."

Like many of the teenagers at Friday's class, Dream said she often makes boxed macaroni and cheese at home or packaged ramen. But she asked Faircloth if a later session could include how to

make her favorite fast-food meal: orange chicken.

Dream and her brother are home-schooled, so their mother, Dee Bernard, said community events like the cooking classes offer a chance for them to build social skills.

"Doesn't hurt if she learns how to cook a few new recipes too," Bernard said, "even though I'll always be the best cook in our family."

## Quiz

1 Read the following selection from the article.

*Like many of the teenagers at Friday's class, Dream said she often makes boxed macaroni and cheese at home or packaged ramen. But she asked Faircloth if a later session could include how to make her favorite fast-food meal: orange chicken.*

Which of the following can be inferred from this selection?

- (A) Dream does not have a sophisticated taste in food.
- (B) Seattle's new cooking classes are transforming the way teenagers are now eating.
- (C) Fast-food has had a huge influence on the lives of some of the students in the cooking class.
- (D) Despite the class's best efforts, not every student will eat more healthy after taking the class.

2 Read the following paragraph from the article.

*"Low-income people of color are more likely to feel the adverse effects of food injustice," Alhadeff said. "So providing cooking instruction, an introduction to food justice and putting money back in the pockets of our community members seemed like a no-brainer."*

Which idea is BEST supported by this paragraph?

- (A) Food injustice is the most important issue facing Americans today.
- (B) Seattle's new cooking classes are helping to meet some of the needs of its community.
- (C) Only people of color in cities are likely to experience the struggles associated with food injustice.
- (D) Seattle's new cooking classes will help to stimulate the city's economy.

3 Which piece of evidence from the article MOST appeals to the reader's sense of morality?

- (A) "Low-income people of color are more likely to feel the adverse effects of food injustice," Alhadeff said.
- (B) "We hope we reach a demographic of more economically and institutionally vulnerable teens," Alhadeff said.
- (C) "Always, always use the claw," Tahir said, referring to a food-preparation technique.
- (D) "The way I cut it at home is probably more dangerous, but I think it works better," she said. "Definitely cut myself a few times at home though."

4 What purpose is the author attempting to convey by including the following quote?

*"We started with more personal things, then looked at the bigger, global view ... like, how climate change is related to food," he said.*

- (A) The Seattle cooking classes are directly helping to fight climate change.
- (B) Students in the cooking classes are learning information they cannot learn at school.
- (C) Students will be more empowered to address food injustice in their own lives after the class.
- (D) The cooking classes hope to have an impact on how students see their world in a variety of ways.