

Project targets food security

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No matter how you dish it up, food quality is becoming increasingly important.

For that reason a series of meetings called, *Thought About Food?* are being held under the direction of Christine Schwarz, Food Security SOS community developer for the Pentiction and District Community Resources Society, South Okanagan-Shimikameen.

"This project is aiming to put together a community food plan and what we're doing is finding out from the communities what they want to take on as initiatives to address food security," said Schwarz. "Food security is defined as when everyone at all times has access to good foods. Good food is defined as something that is good for your personal health and good for your community because it supports the farmers and local economy as well as the local environment."

So far, a total of four meetings, two in Princeton and two in Summerland, have already been held. The Pentiction sessions, which are free of charge, are scheduled for March 6 and March 13 at the Main Street United Church from 5:30-8:30 p.m.

Dates for the Oliver and Osoyoos meetings are currently being finalized.

"Absolutely people care about this," said Schwarz. "Through the outreach I've done so far in Princeton and Summerland I've found people are reading a lot about this topic and becoming very much aware of it."

"At the same time there is an increase in awareness in environmental issues around our food system, people of course are also becoming more aware of the health implications of eating processed food that has high salt, fat and sugar content."

Funded by Interior Health through Public Health Agency Canada one of the chief goals of the project is diabetes prevention.

"I don't know exactly the reasons — you could speculate around demographics — Keremeos and Princeton are among the highest Type 2 diabetes rates in the Interior Health

region," said the co-ordinator. "One of the outcomes of this project is we would like to see is people having better access to fresh food, that is fruits and vegetables, and hopefully that will decrease the rate."

She noted that particularly in Princeton those attending the meetings were upset about what they say is limited access to fresh fruit and vegetables and point of origin which is often from outside Canada.

As well, Schwarz noted many people in that community cannot afford or are not healthy enough to make costly trips to centres like Pentiction to do their shopping.

The March 6 session will involve assessment of what is already in place in terms of food security as well as looking at what gaps need to be filled and ways to enhance the existing resources.

"The big challenge about the food security issues in the global economy is that it seems to be out of people's reach however we're all consumers, we can vote with our feet," said Schwarz. "We can shop at local farmer's markets, we can shop directly from the farmers, we can start working more with Mother Nature in the sense of taking advantage of the abundance of fruits and vegetables in the summer by doing more canning and freezing so that we have more local food in the winter and don't have to depend so much on grocery stores."

Individuals can also start gardening in their own backyard or in community gardens and helping others by volunteering at local food banks and the Soupateria.

The second meeting will look at prioritizing suggested initiatives to produce a working "five" document that can be added to as new plans are developed and identifying key individuals who can assist with the process.

"We want to see everyone; any member of the public, at the meetings," said the co-ordinator.

The sessions will include a light meal and participants must register in advance by calling (250) 487-2206 or online at <sosfood4all@gmail.com>.

PENTICTON WESTERN NEWS February 27, 2008

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Mark Brett/Western News

CHRISTINE SCHWARZ uses the successful "airplane" approach to get 20-month-old daughter Fiona to eat her apple at the family home. A series of meetings are planned as part of the SOS Food Security program in Pentiction next month.