

## **Cultural Kitchen After-School Program Proves Too Many Cooks Don't Spoil the Broth**

*Hostelling International-USA's Intercultural program serves Boston's inner-city youth*

Hostelling International-USA's signature youth outreach program kicked off its winter semester in Boston-area schools in January. Cultural Kitchen draws on the rich diversity of cultures in students' communities to use cooking as a means of fostering intercultural understanding and exchange. The program increases openness and comfort in multi-cultural settings by sparking dialogue and providing an opportunity for students to share their cultural origins and traditions.

"Throughout history, people have gathered around a meal to meet, settle disputes and build community," says Deborah Ruhe, Executive Director of Hostelling International – Eastern New England Council [ENEC]. "At a time when exposure to and understanding of other cultures is essential, Cultural Kitchen gets young people thinking about what it means to be an open-minded citizen."

Cultural Kitchen participants learn the importance of cultural context by recognizing stereotypes and identifying similarities in order to see difference as an opportunity for growth. Students research their own ethnic backgrounds, make presentations about their native cultures, share recipes and lead their classmates in preparing a meal.

Serving students ages 10 to 16, Cultural Kitchen aims to fill a gap in cultural competency programming that addresses immigration and segregation within the city, as well as the misunderstandings and conflicts stemming from them. The free program offers a productive after-school curriculum where students develop valuable life skills and break down misconceptions about culture that may contribute to tensions around youth violence.

"Cultural Kitchen impacts a new generation of world citizens who will become actively engaged in both local and international communities," says Ruhe.

In 2008, Cultural Kitchen will reach 10 Boston-area schools and 100 participating students, representing 28 different countries. The program receives in-kind support from Whole Foods.

"Cultural Kitchen helps young people learn to communicate and work cooperatively in groups, and take on a leadership role in the classroom," says Ruhe. "Students come away with an awareness of the various cultures present in their schools and the joy of sharing a good meal."