

IHA

Your Ally in Community Health
Late Winter 2009

Ithaca Health Alliance Newsletter

Community Efforts to **Improve Child Nutrition** in Tompkins County

By Lara Kaltman

It's not easy getting a healthy dinner on the table every night. Faced with rising food costs, and a lack of time, equipment, and skills to prepare nourishing meals the challenge is even greater, and many families are in need of resources to support their efforts. This past fall, I took on a mission to identify, support, and build on existing community resources that aim to improve child nutrition in Tompkins County.

I found the perfect fit when I discovered the Whole Community Project (WCP), a community-based childhood obesity prevention effort that supports and connects endeavors to improve our food and activity environments. Based at Cornell Cooperative Extension Tompkins County (CCE), the WCP is a collaboration of local individuals and organizations who believe "every single child in Tompkins County should have all the healthy food they need and plenty of opportunities for safe, fun and active play." Community members most affected by childhood obesity and food insecurity are encouraged to become decision makers and actors for policy and environmental change.

Inspired by the dedication and enthusiasm of Jemila Sequeira, WCP Coordinator, and Christine Porter, Cornell Ph.D. candidate, I became involved in an innovative collaboration between the WCP and CCE's Nutrition Program called "Cooking up Community." Starting later this year, host families throughout Tompkins County can invite CCE-



DeWitt students preparing a tofu marinade as part of *Cooking up Family Dinners*.

trained volunteer "citizen chefs" into their kitchens along with one or more guest families to learn how to prepare healthy, affordable meals. Some family groups will use this as a basis for creating cooking cooperatives, which save time, money, and effort. With the help of a United Way of Tompkins County grant, this program will provide groceries and cook-

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ITHACA FREE CLINIC HOURS AND OPERATIONS

Mondays: 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Tuesdays: 3 p.m. to 7 p.m.
Thursdays: 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Located at 225 South Fulton Street, Suite B
(upstairs), Ithaca, NY • (607) 330-1254

The Ithaca Free Clinic is a project of the **Ithaca Health Alliance**. More than 80 percent of our work is done through volunteer efforts. Whether you're interested in working with the Clinic or the Health Alliance, if you're looking for a volunteer opportunity, call the Clinic Coordinator at 607-330-1254.

The Ithaca Health Alliance

IHA was founded in 1997. Our mission is to facilitate access to health care for all, with a focus on the needs of the un- and under-insured of New York State.

Become a member of the IHA!

IHA members receive discounts from participating health providers and are eligible through the Ithaca Health Fund for grants and loans that pay for emergency and preventive care. To learn more about membership, call 607-330-1253 and ask to speak to IHA's office manager.

Information about the IHA

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This quarterly newsletter is a production of the Ithaca Health Alliance.

Herbs in Winter

By Shawn Tubridy



My herbs help me to make it through the winter, not just by their healing properties, but also by the memories they hold for me of warmer days when they were in bloom.

As I reach for my Echinacea at the first signs of a cold, I think about the beauty of the purple flower petals, the spiky texture of the cone. When I use red clover to relax my nerves and clear my respiratory system, it imparts to me the memories of the sweet smelling fields that I gathered it in and the buzzing of a bee in search of pollen. Dandelion root always reminds me of the first flowers of spring, as I use it to support my liver from winter indulgences. When I rub St. Johnswort oil on an ache or pain, or take the tincture to help combat the winter blues, I think of the magic that the yellow flowers displayed when they turned my fingers purple and the oil and tincture red. I remember the sunshine they were gathering when I picked them. While I am steeping stinging nettles tea to protect my kidneys from the cold of winter, I think about the tall plants blowing gently in the warm breeze, and the way my hands buzzed when I gathered them without gloves on. I add lemon balm for its relaxing, tummy calming, uplifting, and anti-viral qualities and think about how good the plants made my house smell as they were hanging to dry. When I take Elecampane tincture for bronchitis, I remember the beautiful sunflower-like yellow flowers in my horses' pasture, and the smell and feel of the dirt when I dug up and cleaned the roots. My jar of golden rod, which is helpful for clearing phlegm and urinary tract infections, reminds me of the end of summer as it gives way to fall.

As I look out my window at the blowing snow, I know that the winter will be breaking soon. Beneath the snow are the plants that I love, getting ready to bloom into another beautiful spring. ❖

Shawn Tubridy, herbalist and educator, works with a local non-profit human services agency and is a long-time supporter of the Health Alliance.

Child Nutrition, *continued from pg. 1*

ing equipment while strengthening bonds between families who can support each other's efforts for healthy eating. Community members who are interested in volunteering, hosting, or contributing to this program in other ways can contact Julia Hastings-Black at jh369@cornell.edu.

Through the WCP I also met Amie Hamlin, the ambitious Executive Director of the New York Coalition for Healthy School Food, a statewide nonprofit that has brought the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program¹ to Beverly J. Martin Elementary School. Knowing that most children aren't eating enough fruits and vegetables and that parents often lack control over what their children eat at school, I immediately recognized the enormous value of this program, which was piloted last spring. Becoming program supervisor this fall, I witnessed the impact of providing every student with the chance to enjoy two different fruits in the morning and two different vegetables in the afternoon; students now choose fruits and vegetables over chips and cupcakes. It's not surprising, since most of the produce comes straight from our local farms including Stick & Stone, Remembrance, and Eddydale.

Children love to cook and eat good food, and most parents could use an occasional evening off from preparing dinner. With that in mind, I developed an after-school program called "Cooking up Family Dinners" to give youth the opportunity to cook real meals (not just baked goods) and take home a wholesome dinner once a week. I am piloting this program at DeWitt Middle School in partnership with the Caroline Youth Program, CCE, the Super CAT program, and the FCS classroom. Each week students prepare a vegetarian recipe that they've selected from a variety of ethnic cuisines. I will invite students and parents to share something from their culture, because food is not just about nutrition, it is also social and cultural, and we should celebrate it.

¹ Funding for the program has come from the United Way of Tompkins County; United Way Youth Philanthropy Program; GreenStar Cooperative Market; Ithaca Alternative Gift Fair; Ithaca Public Education Initiative; and the Legacy, Howland, Rotary, and Gannett Foundations.

Our community is working to make healthy eating easier for families. In addition to the programs I've mentioned, CCE, among its many other nutrition programs, offers subsidized farm shares at local CSAs and works with local schools to build community gardens. I hope to see the formation of family cooking cooperatives throughout Tompkins County. For eons, cooking has been a community activity; only in recent generations has it become an activity isolated to one person. When we start to bridge that gap, our children's nutrition and health will improve vastly. ♣

Lara Kaltman, MPH, RD, is a local dietician and parent with multiple professional affiliations.

Roasted Winter Vegetables *with* Garlic

By Julia Lapp

4 large beets
8 carrots
1 bulb garlic
3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
3 tablespoons olive oil
Black pepper to taste



Peel and cube (into ½ inch chunks) beets and carrots. Separate garlic cloves from bulb. Do not peel, but slice off tops of each clove.

Combine oil and vinegar. Toss beets, carrots, and garlic with vinegar and olive oil mixture.

Spread vegetables on baking sheet and drizzle with remaining oil and vinegar. Sprinkle with pepper.

Bake at 400° F for about 30 minutes or until vegetables are soft. The garlic in cloves will be nicely roasted and soft, and diners can squeeze the cloves onto the carrots and beets or onto crusty bread served with the meal.

Julia Lapp, Ph.D., RD, is an assistant professor at Ithaca College. This is one of her original recipes.

Compiled and Reported by Brooke Hansen and Bethany Schroeder

Mercury in High Fructose Corn Syrup

Another health concern has arisen regarding high fructose corn syrup (HFCS) — toxic mercury contamination. In a recent study published in *Environmental Health* (Jan. 26, 2009) researchers report mercury in almost half of all commercial HFCS samples, although the sources might be attributed to a handful of manufacturers who use mercury cell chlor-alkali in food production. Daily consumption of HFCS is over 50 grams per day, with significantly higher amounts being consumed by children and teenagers. Mercury is a neurotoxin and its dangers increase with widespread exposure through foods, environmental contamination, and even vaccinations containing the mercury compound thimerosal. Assessing accumulative effects in children and sensitive populations should be a priority. To see a list of foods identified by the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy as containing mercury, go to the following website: <<http://www.healthobservatory.org/library.cfm?refID=105040>>. ❀

Dietary Treatment of Diabetes

According to recently published research reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, study participants with Type 2 diabetes on a high-fiber diet maintained better control of their blood sugar eating foods like beans and nuts rather than the whole-grain diet usually recommended. As it happens, beans and nuts only modestly increase blood glucose levels, because these foods have a low glycemic index. The new study lasted six months and is one of largest and longest to assess the impact of foods with a low-glycemic index. In addition to better control of their diabetes, study participants experienced improved cholesterol levels, including higher HDLs, or “good” cholesterol. These results are particularly important because people with diabetes are at great risk for heart disease.

Rabin, Roni Caryn. (2008). December 19, *The New York Times*. “Recommended Diet for Diabetics May Need Changing, Study Suggests.” ❀

Brooke Hansen, Ph.D., is associate professor of anthropology at Ithaca College, and Bethany Schroeder, MFA, MS, RN, PHN, is a local writer and healthcare worker.

Volunteer of the Quarter

Namar Al-Ganas is a graduate student at the Sloan Program in Health Administration at Cornell University, who has volunteered for the Health Alliance weekly since September, 2008. Namar has worked closely with IHA's Office Manager to evaluate medical bills and prepare grant recommendations for the Ithaca Health Fund, and he has initiated an analysis of Health Fund grant awards for the Finance Committee. Namar



is a delight to work with: he works well with everyone he meets at the clinic, picks up fine details of medical billing and assistance programs easily, is never afraid to ask questions, and is very reliable. He is well informed about the culture of health care in our country and regularly shares his insights on the subject with his coworkers. Namar is a great asset to our programs. ❀

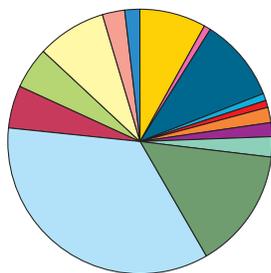
HEALTH FUND REPORT

By Rob Brown

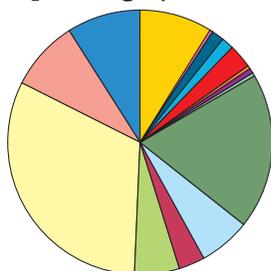
In January, 2009 the Ithaca Health Alliance Board of Directors voted to amend terms for the Ithaca Health Fund to include: “Each Ithaca Health Alliance member’s ‘membership year’ is in effect from the date member dues are received by the IHA to one year from that date. IHA members are eligible for grants and loans through the Ithaca Health Fund for healthcare services received during their membership year. IHA members must submit copies of medical or dental bills to request a grant from the Ithaca Health Fund within the same membership year as services are received or within a window of 6 months after the end of that membership year.”

In 2008, the Ithaca Health Fund made \$17,290.79 in grants to Health Alliance members. Emergency medical services continue to be the most costly grant categories for the Fund, while dental services continue to be the most requested types of grants. ❀

Percentage of Health Fund Grants awarded per category, 2008



Dollar Value of Health Fund Grants paid per category, 2008



- Emergency Appendectomy
- Ambulance Ride
- Broken Bones
- Dental Crown
- Dental Extraction
- Dental Exam
- Emergency Room
- Eye Exam
- Five/Ten Plan
- Genitourinary Exam
- Dental Loan
- Eye Care Loan
- Medical Exam
- Periodontal Exam
- Root Canal

HEALTH ALLIANCE FORUM

on January 30, 2009

By Betsy Caughey

The “Get to Know Your Ithaca Health Alliance” forum at the Unitarian Universalist Parlor was a great success. We had a good turn out, with more than fifty guests, and our speakers were able to provide important information concerning depression and anxiety, in addition to educating the community on the different facets of the Ithaca Health Alliance and its projects. A special thank you to the following fantastic volunteers who helped to set up, table, speak, and clean up!

- 7Song
- Evan Bander
- Jon Bosak
- Rob Brown
- Leonard Corwin
- Maria Corwin
- Richard Eshelman
- Lindsay France
- Judy Gonyea and the Ithaca College OT volunteers
- Kathy Halton
- Sadie Hays
- Xiaolan Huang
- Liz Holmes
- Ethan Pollack
- Bethany Schroeder
- Fran Spadafora Manzella
- Deirdre Silverman
- Abby Thomas-Costello
- Ji Wie

Betsy Caughey, Ithaca Health Alliance Outreach Coordinator, organized the 2009 forum. Look for similar events to be scheduled during the year. Announcements will be made in this newsletter and through other local media.

Rob Brown is IHA’s Office Manager. Call him at 607-330-1253 for Fund-related questions.



Ithaca Health Alliance

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Ithaca, NY 14851

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Find us online at

www.ithacahealth.org

Ithaca Health Alliance Newsletter

Ask Your Health Alliance

Question: How does the Health Alliance's Clinic compare to other free clinics in the US?

Answer: Roughly 2000 free clinics operate in the United States. Most free clinics are affiliated with universities or medical centers or both, and most rely on a conventional medical model for the delivery of care.

The Ithaca Free Clinic, on the other hand, is as far as we know the first medically integrated free clinic in the country and remains one of only two such clinics. (The second medically integrated clinic is located in New Orleans and was developed in response to Katrina.) Thus the Ithaca Free Clinic, just like the

Ithaca Health Alliance, its parent organization, is a unique organization. At the Clinic, our staff and volunteers offer conventional medical services, such as family practice, internal medicine, and dietary services, alongside the services of herbalists, chiropractors, acupuncturists, and other complementary or alternative practitioners.

To learn more about the Ithaca Free Clinic, visit our web site at www.ithacahealth.org and follow the links to the Clinic information. ❖