

My heart goes out to Jamie Oliver, a passionate chef from Great Britain who has been exerting himself admirably to change the eating habits of the population of Huntington, West Virginia. He chose the most difficult method! First, he came from outside the country, notwithstanding the success he had already achieved in England, into a culture he was not as familiar with as he expected. Secondly, he chose a community with apparently the worst eating habits in America as reflected by the highest percentage of overweight individuals. Third, he has made his target audience the public school cafeteria, where he has met formidable obstacles of a group of cooks, virtually all of whom do not share his passion or vision, a strict school food budget that must be adhered to, government standards that hardly match a truly nutritious diet, and a passel of children who weren't even able to identify potatoes and tomatoes!

After a very difficult beginning however, Jamie has hit on a potentially winning plan: He invited several high school students who shared his concern for healthy eating to prepare a restaurant gourmet meal to several of the community willing to give his food a try (not knowing that the students were the ones who were going to prepare it). These were a combination of parents, public servants, and state officials. Jamie spent time with these students winning their hearts to the project. With great camaraderie, they turned out a beautiful and tasty meal that everyone enjoyed. At the conclusion of the feast, Jamie announced that these students had done the preparation. He then asked each student to share why they did it and what they hoped would be the long range results. The response was electric! Jamie had hit on three keys to success: 1) Working with young cooks who shared his passion and vision, who wanted to change their own food choices and help others do the same, 2) Involving them in the food preparation, and 3) Beginning with a small selection of truly tasty recipes.

You can achieve the same success by involving your children in preparing tasty recipes, one-recipe-at-a time. You don't need to wait for an institution to teach them what to eat. When you prepare recipes together, you will be delighted to discovered that they leave trying their own recipes, and will own them with pride.

Sue Gregg, Jamie Oliver Blog, April 2010