Impact Reports

2025-2026

WESTERN FAIR district

GROWING Chefs!

Partners in Food & Agricultural Education

GROWING

By the numbers!

448 Food Education Programs

74 School and Community Partners

10,726 Food Education Participants from

- 319 School Programs
- 57 Community Programs
- 72 Public Programs

& countless **food memories** made!

Growing Chefs! London Licious

Thank you to all of our sponsors!

The Londonlicious Festival supports us in realizing our vision of a healthy community that is engaged with our food system. Twice a year, the festival strengthens the connection between diners, restaurants, and the farmers and growers who make our local food economy possible, encouraging participating venues to feature Ontario-grown produce, meat, and dairy on their menus. All sponsors of the **bi-annual festival** also support our children's education projects, extending that same commitment to local food and community all year round.

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For more information on the new
Londonlicious Festival visit *www.londonlicious.ca*

Growing Chefs! Ontario

2025-2026

Fall Impact Report - Garden Programs

WESTERN FAIR district

GROWING CHEFS!

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Notes from the Field!

Our Learn to Grow; Grow to Give initiative blends food literacy and food security by growing fresh, healthy foods for families while providing equitable, accessible food education. **This summer we launched Phase 2 and broke ground on our new urban farm!** This expansion is already helping us grow more food boxes and cultivate additional learning and volunteer opportunities.

Phase 2 Progress

- Our first acre is underway, with a mixture of active growing space, cover cropping and tarping to prepare the soil for spring planting!
- Our team of staff and volunteers transformed what was just empty grass into a thriving urban farm with all the amenities: a shed, fencing, seating, shade sails, a washing station and water access. A huge accomplishment for our small but mighty team!
- A dedicated garden van now helps us harvest and deliver the fruits of our labour.
- Production has expanded from serving White Oaks Public School to also serving Lord Elgin Public School, with two additional schools planned for the new year.
- Spring field trips are being planned so students can dig into hands-on learning.

Partnerships and Community Impact

We could not have done this project without WSIB, who generously shared their land with us, and the ongoing support and guidance of the London Food Bank. Neighbourhood Resource Centres, OSNP volunteers and School Support Counsellors assist with distribution and gather anonymous feedback from families, ensuring what we grow is culturally-relevant, wanted and community-informed.

While growing this new phase, our other garden spaces have continued to flourish. We've run programs, attended community events and explored food systems with partners like the London Public Library, Storybook Gardens, Childreach, Western Fair Association, Kiwanis, Investing in Children and many more.

Check out some of the amazing photos from our urban farm and garden spaces - and thank you for helping us reap the rewards of a season well-planted!

- Christy Cook, Education Programs Manager

Welcome to our urban farm!

Many hands
make light
work!

Learn to Grow; Grow to Give Testimonial

"Through the Growing Chefs fresh food program, Lord Elgin Public School has been able to strengthen relationships between families and the school community.

The program provides fresh, nutritious vegetables that help ease financial pressures around food access. It also offers a safe, welcoming place families can gather near their home.

Lord Elgin is very thankful for the support this year and being able to give back to our families!"

- Stephanie Skrypnyk, School Support Counsellor, Lord Elgin Public School

Heaping
harvests!

Fun in the sun!

Growing Chefs! Ontario

2025-2026

Winter Impact Report - School Programs

WESTERN FAIR district

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Notes from the Classroom!

Throughout the school year, Growing Chefs! Ontario delivered inclusive, hands-on food education programs reaching students across multiple schools and learning environments.

This year, we engaged over 1,700 students through Growing Chefs! Ontario in the Classroom at Woodland Heights, Masonville, and Princess Anne French Immersion Public Schools, as well as Standing Stone Elementary School on Oneida Nation on the Thames. Students strengthened their confidence and food skills as they chopped, measured, tasted and learned together.

We also ran our first cooking class designed exclusively for blind and visually-impaired students – an exciting milestone in expanding accessibility! Read on for more details.

In partnership with First Nations Knowledge Sharers, students prepared a Three Sisters (corn, beans, squash) succotash with wild rice while learning from Ray John Jr of Oneida Nation, Turtle Clan about its significance and history, and from Joy Rogers of Six Nations of the Grand River, Seneca Nation about corn beading.

Coming up this spring, we will:

- Expand Classroom Kitchen programs for Grades 1-6, building on last year's pilot
- Continue Kindergarten Kitchen and Specialist High Skills Major field trips
- Host HQ field trips with our wood-fired pizza oven and Learning Garden, giving students in Alternative Education and Developmental Education Programs fun and seasonal culinary experiences
- Launch Farm Field Trips for Grade 7-8 students at our new farm location!

As our programs grow in reach and complexity, our commitment remains the same – creating meaningful, inclusive, hands-on food learning experiences for students across our community.

Thank you for helping us plant seeds of confidence, curiosity and connection!

- Christy Cook, Education Programs Manager

Classroom Memories

Testimonials

"Thank you!!! We are so grateful for the experience and all the classes have nothing but wonderful things to say about the program!!! The most common feedback I have received is how engaging the program is and how wonderful it is to see the students so willing to try new and nutritious foods."

- Jenny C, Woodland Heights Public School, School Champion, Growing Chefs! in the Classroom

"This program was a fantastic opportunity for my students to learn about food preparation, food history, and healthy food practices! They loved getting to eat their creations. I was really impressed with their engagement, enthusiasm, and willingness to try new foods. The chefs do an amazing job teaching valuable content while engaging the students and using age-appropriate strategies. What an incredible experience!"

- Princess Anne French Immersion Public School, Teacher, Growing Chefs! in the Classroom

Program Spotlight: After-School Snacks

This accessible, confidence-building cooking class, focused on after-school snacks, supported blind and partially-sighted youth from FDK to Grade 12 in building independence through fun, practical kitchen skills. Delivered in partnership with the Thames Valley District School Board, recipes were provided in braille and large print, and the program was hosted in the accessible kitchen at the Canadian Institute for the Blind.

“I wanted to reach out and thank you and your chefs. They were professional, knowledgeable and went above and beyond for our students. The care that went into this day was impressive. They ensured they gave each student individualized attention, allowed for many hands-on experiences, had examples to show the students, encouraged them to smell the ingredients, and delivered an awesome program.

This was a meaningful experience for our students and it certainly built their confidence in the kitchen. Our students and staff are still talking about it, and I've heard more than once that students have used these recipes at home, taught their siblings how to make them, etc. It was a wonderful experience and we are so grateful."

- Jaclyn F, Thames Valley District School Board, Vision Resource

Accessibility
Matters

Growing Chefs! Ontario

2025-2026

Spring Impact Report - Public Programs

WESTERN FAIR district

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Notes from the Learning Kitchen!

This winter, we launched a new series of **Family Cooking Classes**, creating opportunities for children and adults to cook, bake, and learn side by side. Designed for pairs, one adult and one child aged 8+, these hands-on sessions focus on building confidence in the kitchen while creating meaningful shared experiences through food!

Over the past year, we have seen increasing requests from both the public and community organizations for more intergenerational cooking opportunities. Families are looking for ways to spend quality time together, and cooking continues to offer a natural space for connection, communication, creativity, and collaboration.

So far, families have joined us to explore a range of sweet recipes - from festive cookies and seasonal muffins to baked doughnuts, quick breads, and classic pie-making - with our upcoming Spring Garden Tea Party already generating excitement!

These experiences have supported families to:

- Build confidence in the kitchen together
- Strengthen communication and collaboration between generations
- Encourage curiosity and experimentation with new ingredients
- Create space for shared learning and connection

One participant shared with us that our first class was: “Very well organized, everyone got to do something they enjoyed. I had a magical evening with my daughter.”

Alongside these new family classes, we also continued to offer our Monthly Kids’ Cooking Classes, Teen Cooking Classes, and 8-week culinary programs: Beginner, Children’s, and Advanced. These programs continue to fill quickly, and we plan to offer additional sessions next year to help meet growing demand.

Keep reading for more highlights from a season of hands-on learning, shared experiences, lasting memories, and growing confidence in the kitchen!

- Christy Cook, Education Programs Manager

Program Spotlight: Holiday Baking Class

Our first Holiday Baking - Family Cooking Class brought families together to celebrate the season! While the delicious smell of cookies baking in the oven filled the room, participants enjoyed warm hot cocoa and decorated their cookie boxes. Once the baking was complete, cookies were decorated and placed into their finished boxes to take home and share with family and friends. **The experience was full of holiday spirit, laughter, and collaboration from start to finish!**

On the menu:

- Cardamom sugar cookies
- Gingerbread cookies
- Chocolate crinkle cookies
- Shortbread bites
- Cranberry orange white chocolate bars

Testimonials

"A clean bright space for children to learn about seasonal food and how to prepare it - all with an engaging, enthusiastic atmosphere. My daughter comes home after each class ready to help with meals and curiousity about ingredients."

- Laura N

"My child was exposed to dishes and types of food that he hasn't been exposed to in the past. I can also see a noticeable difference in his confidence when cooking/ baking. He was so proud of himself that he could help serve a meal to his dad at the end."

- Nicole M

"My son loved the creativity of the menu for the class. He enjoyed the hands on chance to cut and prepare alongside other kids. Getting to eat all the yummy food after and take home some extra goodies was definitely a highlight. As a parent I love fostering new skills for my son! We get excited every month to sign up!"

- Amrita A

Celebrating with Family

Growing Chefs! Ontario

2025-2026

Summer Impact Report - Community Programs

WESTERN FAIR district

GROWING CHEFS!

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Notes from the Community!

This year, food education took root across London, growing through partnerships with so many of the great organizations and events that bring our community together. Across gardens, kitchens, and community spaces, children, youth, and families built food skills, explored growing and gardening, and connected through shared experiences.

Our partnerships branched out in many directions:

- **Garden Programs:** Growing, harvesting, and exploring through programs with Lifespin, Indwell, HART Hub, Unity Project, Salvation Army, Canadian Mental Health Association, Childreach, Hutton House, and Investing in Children.

- **Community Events:** Bringing food education into the community at Storybook Gardens, Kiwanis Walk Run Roll, Earthfest, Punk Rock Flea Market, Science Rendezvous, Forest City Road Races, and Seedy Saturday.

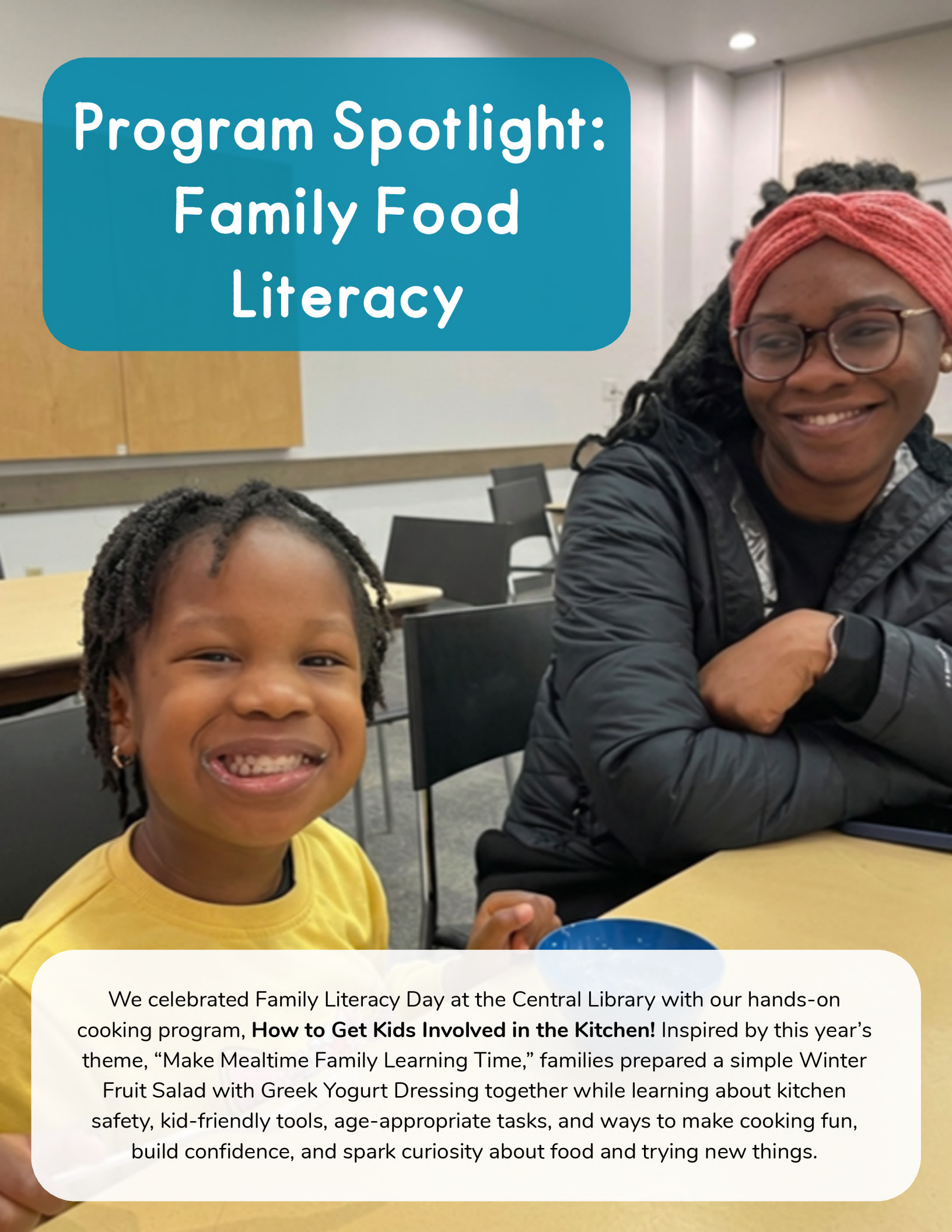
- **Cooking Classes:** Getting people cooking, tasting, and building food skills with Autism Ontario, London Public Library, Thames Bluewater Métis Council, and Sickle Cell Awareness Group of Ontario.

As demand for community programming continued to grow, we focused our capacity on partnerships with organizations serving equity-denied communities. Free and subsidized programming helped open the door to participants who might otherwise face financial barriers to taking part.

Together, these partnerships helped food education take root - growing confidence, curiosity, connection, and belonging through gardens, kitchens, and shared experiences across our community.

- Christy Cook, Education Programs Manager

Program Spotlight: Family Food Literacy



We celebrated Family Literacy Day at the Central Library with our hands-on cooking program, **How to Get Kids Involved in the Kitchen!** Inspired by this year's theme, "Make Mealtime Family Learning Time," families prepared a simple Winter Fruit Salad with Greek Yogurt Dressing together while learning about kitchen safety, kid-friendly tools, age-appropriate tasks, and ways to make cooking fun, build confidence, and spark curiosity about food and trying new things.

Volunteer Testimonials

How does volunteering positively impact your life? Why is volunteering important to you?

“I have an opportunity to communicate with other people, learn their language, culture, cuisine etc. My child follows my example which helps her develop social skills and grow as a person.”

- Tetiana P

“Volunteering in my community inspires me with a sense of purpose by contributing to a cause that aligns with my personal values of compassion and helping young children to learn to live healthy lives.”

- Mychelle B

“It’s vital in reinforcing to me that I have something to contribute to my community. That I have purpose outside of my regular occupation.”

- Caterina T

Getting our hands dirty!

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GROWING Chefs!

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