



Grace loves her weekly meals with a group of other women, where they chat about health and well-being. It's not just about advice—it's about connection.

## Food for thought

Grace has spent her life and career caring for others. In addition to raising three children of her own, she has worked in after-school programs and as a caregiver for families in her community. To many, she is considered a second mother—a wonderful legacy for someone whose own mother left her at an early age.

Born in Italy during the war, Grace experienced a childhood marked by scarcity and uncertainty. "I remember lining up for food with my mother and younger brother," she says. When she married, Grace and her husband wanted a fresh start. They moved to Canada with their daughter in search of a better life. The couple had two more children and did their best to settle into their new community and learn a new language. When Grace's marriage ended at 51, she was forced to start over yet again. To help support her three teenagers, she took a job working for a children's program at a local recreation centre. It was a perfect fit—and soon Grace became even more engaged in her community.

Today Grace is a retired senior living alone, like many others in the region. A United Way-funded initiative—the YWCA Halifax Food First program—has provided a vital lifeline and community connection for Grace. The

program educates women—most of them seniors—about nutrition, healthy living and cooking on a budget. Each week, a group of participants gather to share a meal and to discuss their health and well-being.

Grace sees the program, supported by donors like you, as an important source of companionship as well as information. "I'm learning from people every day. There's always a friend there. We all have something to give."

There have been health benefits, too. Grace, who once struggled with high cholesterol and high blood pressure, says the Food First program has increased her nutritional knowledge and improved her physical condition. She even does some of her local grocery shopping at another United Way-supported initiative called the Mobile Food Market. This initiative works to bring fresh, high-quality, affordable foods to neighbourhoods experiencing food insecurity through pop-up markets or produce packs. Grace, who has no car, appreciates the chance to get healthy ingredients close to home. "When I was born, during the war, there was no food, so we went in line for food," she says. "Now the food comes to me—how great is that?"



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