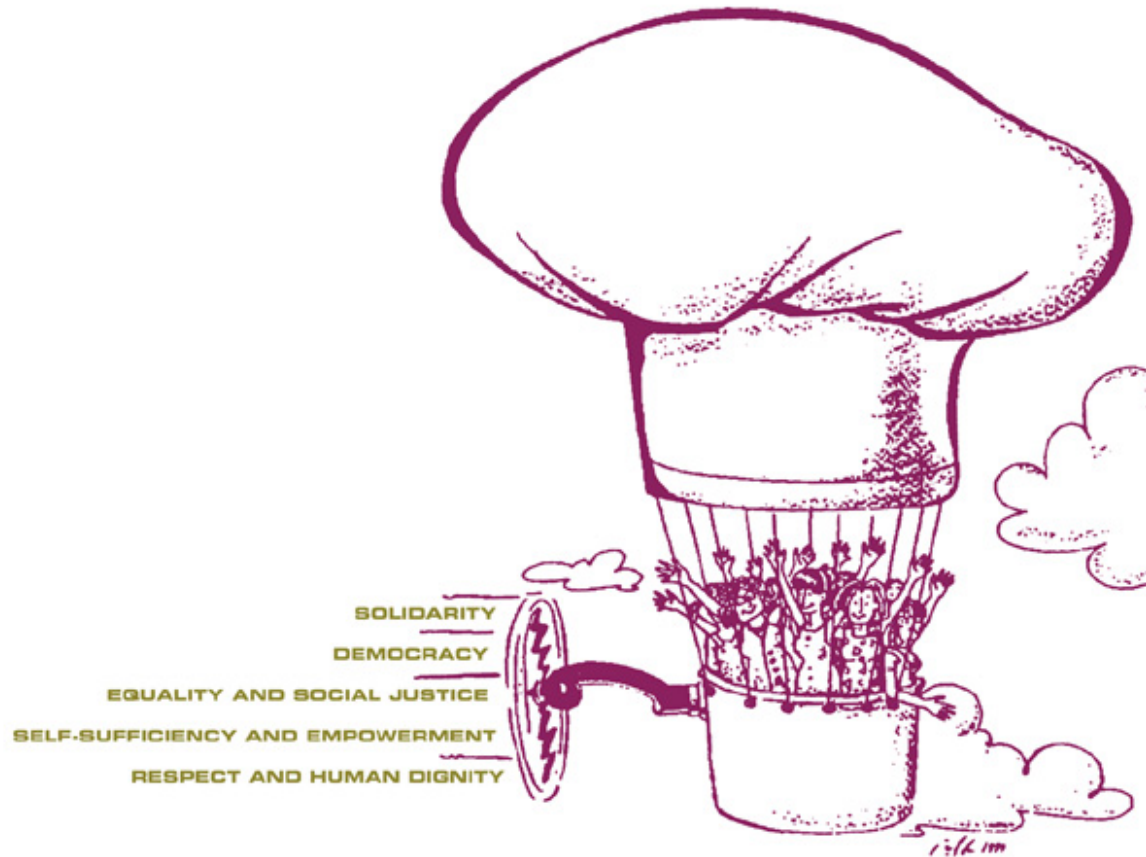


RCCQ

Basis of Unity



Basis of Unity

Québec Collective Kitchens Association

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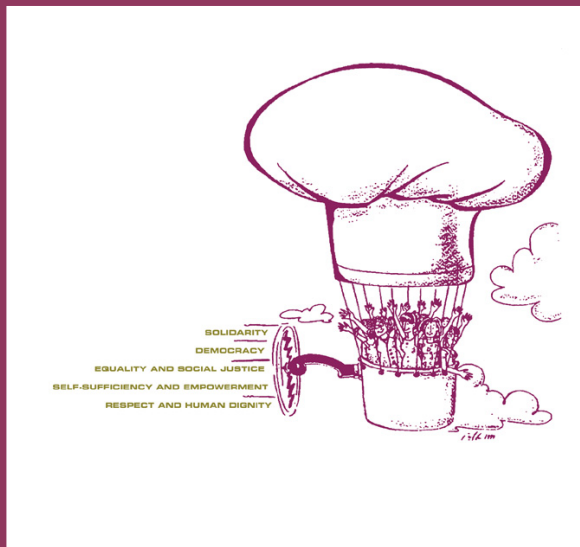
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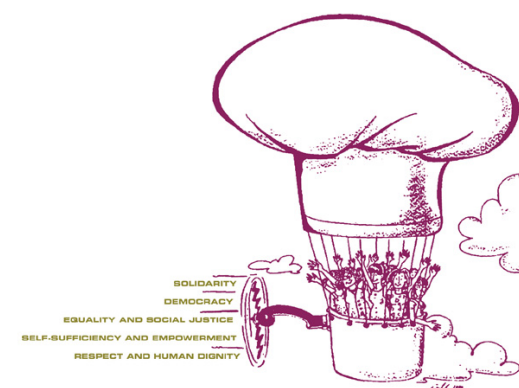
The feminine is used throughout the text because the vast majority of collective kitchens participants are women.

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2005

2nd edition - New graphic design



Introduction

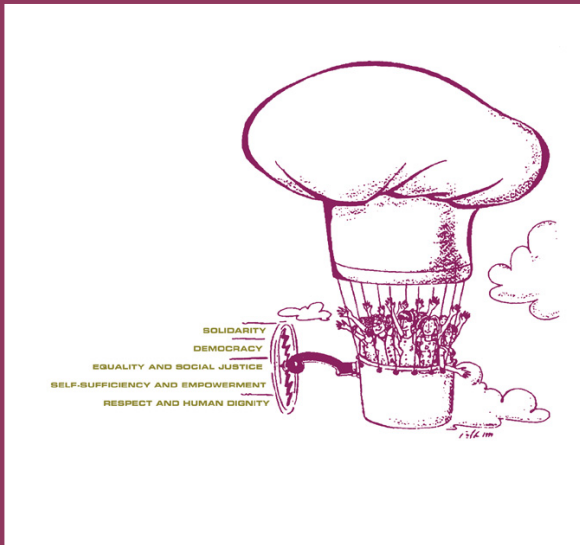
In this document, the Regroupement des cuisines collectives du Québec (RCCQ) presents its Basis of Unity. A basis of unity serves to identify the characteristics and values needed to define the orientation of a social practice.

The document includes a brief history of collective kitchens, information on how the movement has evolved and the definition of a collective kitchen. You will learn that collective kitchens are about more than just cooking. They are also an awareness-building environment where individuals take centre stage.

You will also be reminded of the steps the collective kitchen movement took to acquire its Basis of Unity.

You'll then savour the values adopted by the collective kitchen movement, which are presented and illustrated using real-life examples. It is these values and principles, along with the voluntary participation of group members, that make collective kitchens such a winning recipe.

Becoming a member of RCCQ means adhering to its Basis of Unity. This involves applying the movement's values in all spheres of your activities, including Board meetings, group meetings, interaction with collective kitchen participants, group facilitation, cooking days and appearances.



Collective kitchens: from yesterday to today

A little history

It all starts in 1982 in Montréal's Hochelaga-Maisonneuve neighbourhood, when Jacynthe Ouellette suggests to her sister that they pool their money, ideas and time to buy food and cook nutritious meals collectively. Occasionally, a neighbour joins them. They meet once a month to make two dozen meals to take home to each of their families.

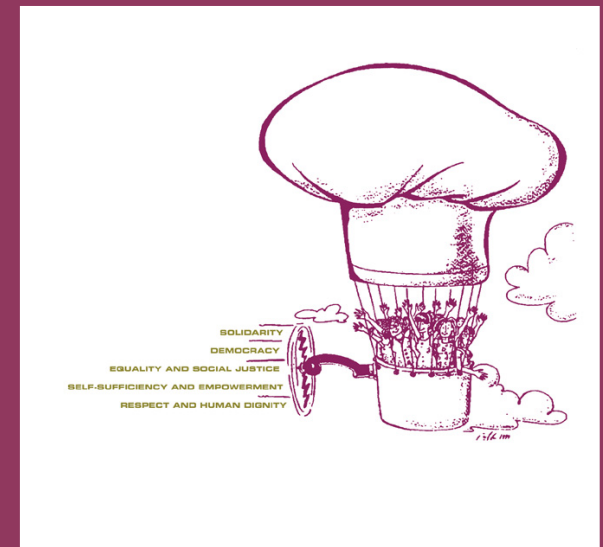
Community initiatives

Social workers at the Carrefour familial Hochelaga-Maisonneuve think cooking in a group is a great idea. They persuade Ms. Ouellette to share her experience with other women in the neighbourhood.

After a few meetings at the Carrefour and the Maison des femmes La Marie Debout, several women want to start up collective kitchens. This starts a new community activity that snowballs! Today, several hundred organisations host collective kitchens. In 2002-2003, there are more than 1,330 collective kitchen groups in Québec that are members of RCCQ.

The growth of collective kitchens...

Eating enough, making ends meet and becoming independent from food banks were some of the Ouellette sisters' concerns. These continue to be needs in our society and are ones that collective kitchens meet.



It is very important, however, to spread the word about the various types of collective kitchens created for reasons other than those initially promoted by Jacynthe and Sylvie Ouellette.

Collective kitchens to your taste

Since the movement's founding, collective kitchen groups have become more and more diverse. There's something for everyone!

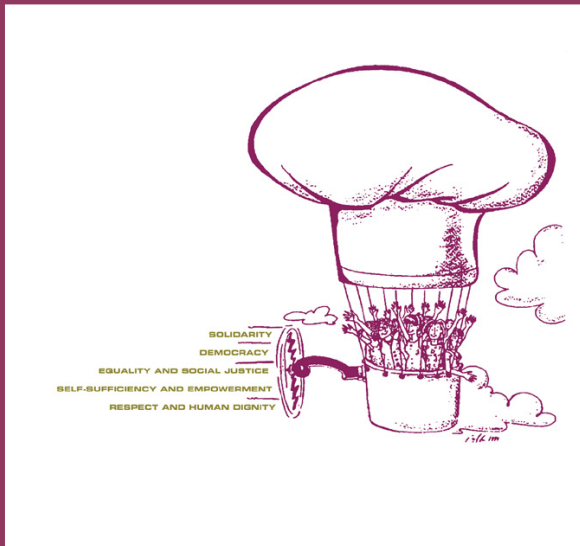
For example, there are collective kitchen groups that are:

- ❶ **Multi-ethnic:** to reflect cultural diversity and share culinary secrets from afar
- ❷ **Vegetarian:** to allow vegetarians to cook collectively and introduce others to vegetarianism
- ❸ **For babies:** to give parents an opportunity to make homemade purees for their infants
- ❹ **Health-related:** to make meals that meet the dietary restrictions of those with diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and other health issues
- ❺ **For weight-loss:** to help those who must or want to lose weight do so collectively

These collective kitchens are for children, teenagers, women and men, as well as for the elderly and people with disabilities.

A privilege... for all!

All collective kitchen groups have the privilege of preparing good meals, of keeping action-oriented empowerment simmering and of harvesting the fruits of a healthy diet and an improved quality of life.



More than just cooking

A collective kitchen is...

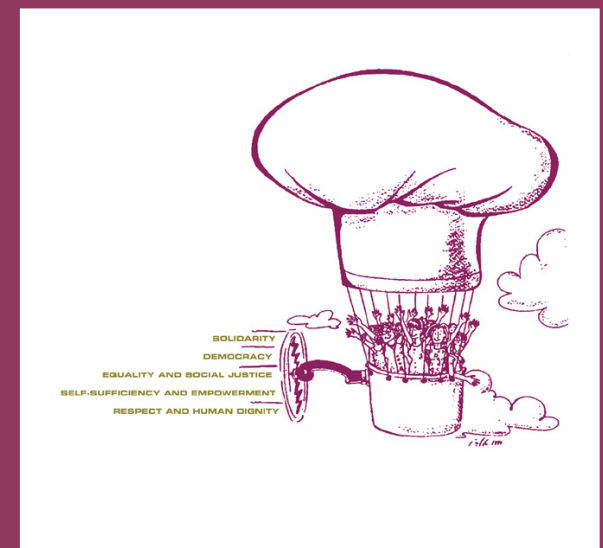
- ❶ A collective kitchen is a small group of people who pool their time, money and skills to undertake in four stages (planning, buying, cooking and evaluating), the preparation of affordable, healthy and delicious meals, which they then take home to eat.
- ❷ Collective kitchens are for anyone interested in healthier dietary habits, in a better quality of life for themselves and their families.
- ❸ Collective kitchens are an opportunity to get involved individually and collectively in the community.
- ❹ Collective cooking is pleasurable and follows the principles of popular education. Collective kitchens incorporate basic values, such as solidarity, democracy, equity and social justice, autonomy and individual and collective empowerment, respect and dignity.

Collective kitchens: A contribution to society

Collective kitchens contribute to socioeconomic development, greater buying power and better physical, mental, social and spiritual health.

Collective kitchens: More than just cooking!

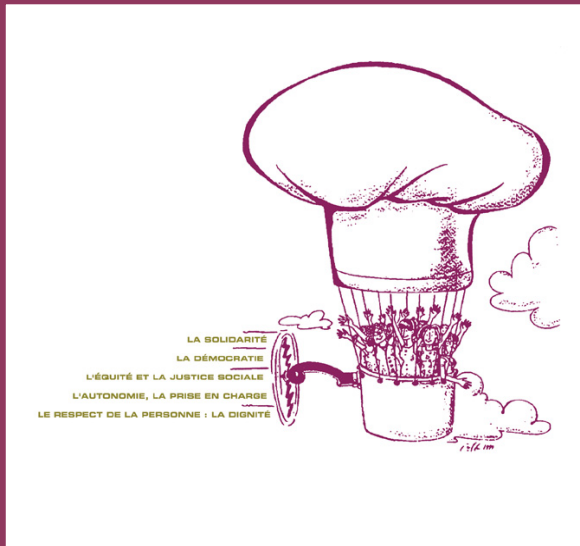
The collective kitchens are autonomous community resources developed to meet the daily needs of the people involved.



Collective kitchens allow participants to create a place of belonging and a network for popular education and collective action.

They enable them to:

- 🕒 Get out of the house
- 🕒 Meet people and make friends
- 🕒 Build self-confidence
- 🕒 Promote initiatives
- 🕒 Gain greater autonomy and empowerment
- 🕒 Enhance, acquire and share knowledge
- 🕒 Gain work experience
- 🕒 Build a support network
- 🕒 And so on



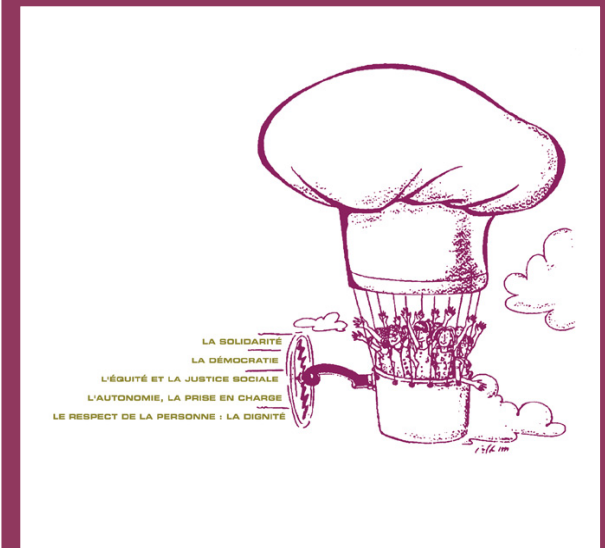
Our winning recipe: the Basis of Unity

A Basis of Unity for collective kitchens

Our numbers are growing rapidly. Collective kitchens are springing up all over, and the term *collective kitchen* is being used in many different contexts. We wish to safeguard our identity, our philosophy, our values and our principles, especially:

- ❶ Democracy
- ❷ Social justice
- ❸ Equity
- ❹ Solidarity
- ❺ Collective and individual empowerment
- ❻ The desire to participate in social change
- ❼ Work geared to popular education
- ❽ Giving participants the power to make changes in their lives, both personally and collectively
- ❾ Respect for the whole person

The collective kitchen movement began speaking of political unity in 1997. A Development Committee was set up, composed of collective kitchens from Montréal, Trois-Rivières, Drummondville, Victoriaville and Dégelis, as well as RCCQ employees.



In June 1998, at the RCCQ Annual General Assembly, members adopted the following statement: “The Development Committee dedicated to formulating the Basis of Unity shall pursue its work and submit the results at the next General Assembly.”*

In November 1998, a questionnaire was forwarded to members to learn about how collective kitchen groups functioned and the real issues they faced, along with questions about their similarities and strengths. The aim was to draw up a portrait of collective kitchens. The committee based its work on the answers provided by the RCCQ collective kitchen members.

This work made it possible to identify the shared practices and values promoted in collective kitchens. It also gave the collective kitchens the opportunity to define themselves and to show in what way they differed from cooking classes or workshops. The values of the Basis of Unity make this a recipe for success.

The Basis of Unity was presented, developed and adopted by the RCCQ collective kitchen members at the Annual General Assembly in June 2000.

The values adopted by collective kitchens

These values are dynamic, flexible and adaptable; their application evolves over the years. Each collective kitchen member of RCCQ agrees to respect the values and principles of the Basis of Unity:

- Respect and human dignity
- Autonomy and empowerment
- Democracy
- Solidarity
- Equity and social justice

* Translation



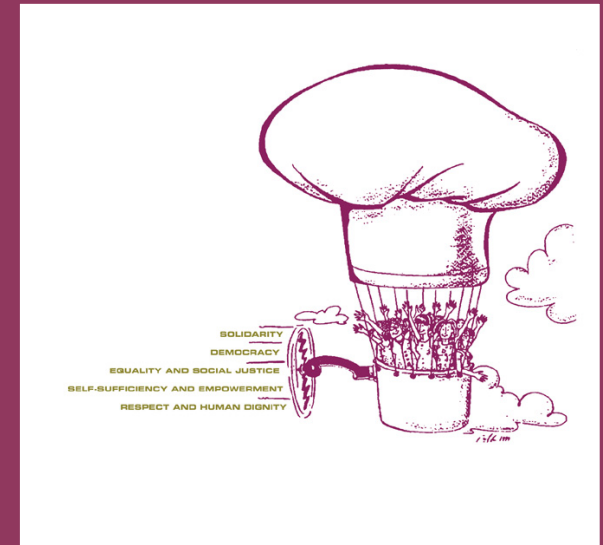
Open to diversity

These principles and values, along with the voluntary participation of individuals, are what make the collective kitchens such a winning recipe.

Collective kitchens are decision-making environments that encourage participants' autonomy and empowerment. They operate in a spirit of dignity by respecting the pace and choices of each person.

Collective kitchens are accessible to everyone in the community. This unconditional access prevents exclusion, avoids the formation of ghettos and eradicates prejudice. The collective kitchen movement reinforces human values through its open-mindedness and total lack of discrimination.

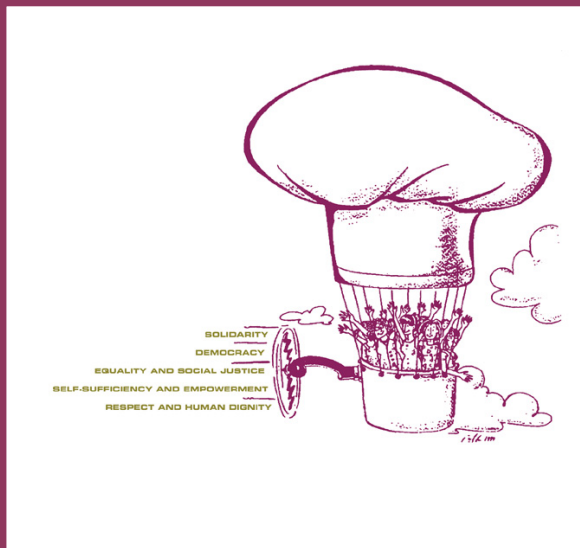
The collective kitchen is about more than just cooking. It's an awareness-building environment where the individual takes centre stage. Collective kitchens have a mission to educate the public. Accordingly, they encourage and enable the implementation of initiatives that favour collective and social development.



Our values, our principles

Respect and human dignity
Autonomy and empowerment
Democracy
Solidarity

Equity and social justice occupy an important place in the everyday life of collective kitchens and help empower participants.

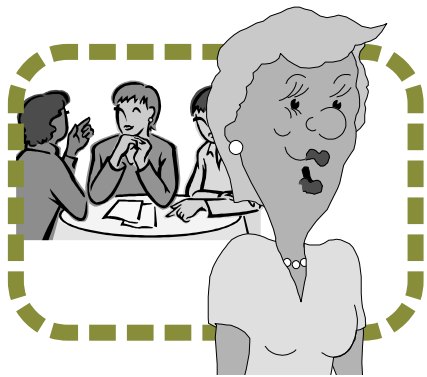


We could set up projects to help us learn and share information, such as talks on nutrition or labour laws. We could also make meat pies during the Holidays to raise funds, grow a collective garden or start a buyer's club...



Collective kitchens, you know, are about more than just cooking!





During RCCQ training sessions, we take time to talk about our Basis of Unity.

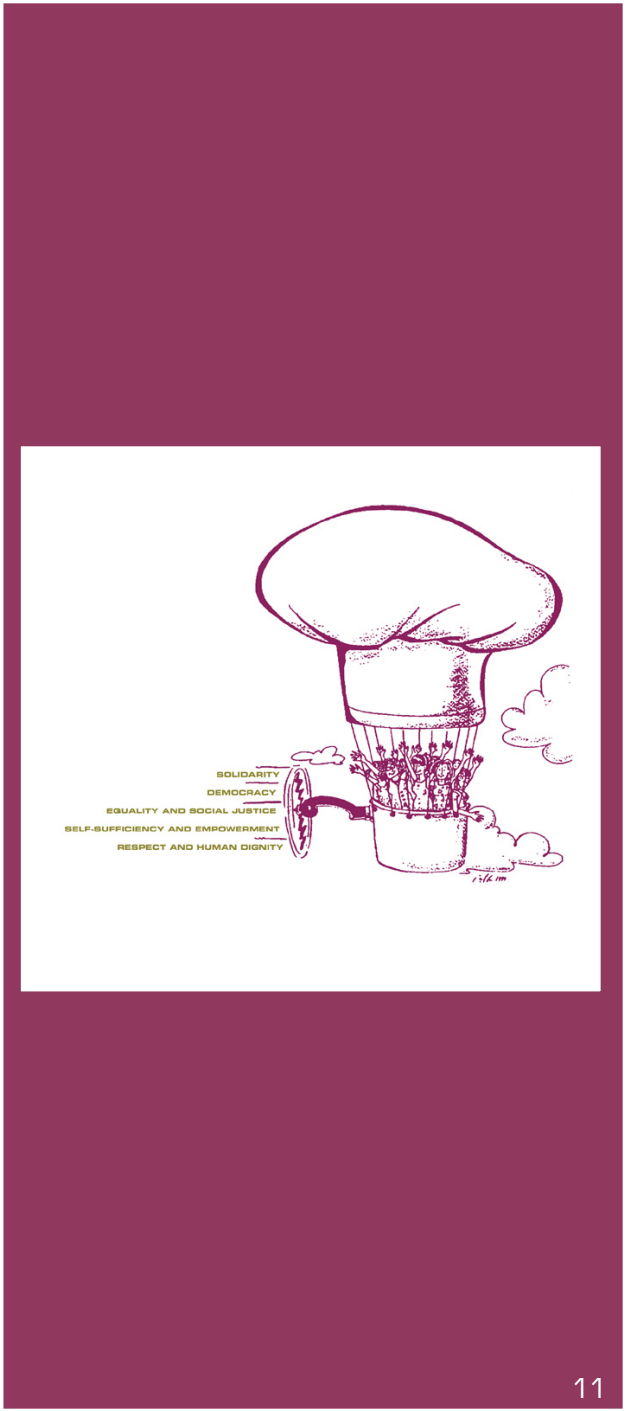
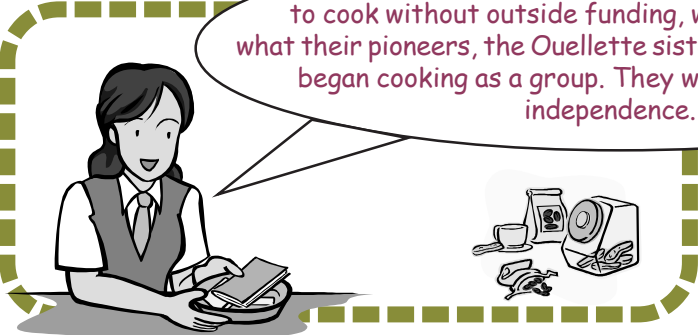
In collective kitchens, it's the participants who decide on recipes and make purchases. We can do this too.



We're going to join the RCCQ. Our Board of Directors, director, employees and participants will be responsible for applying and conveying the Basis of Unity in everyday life.



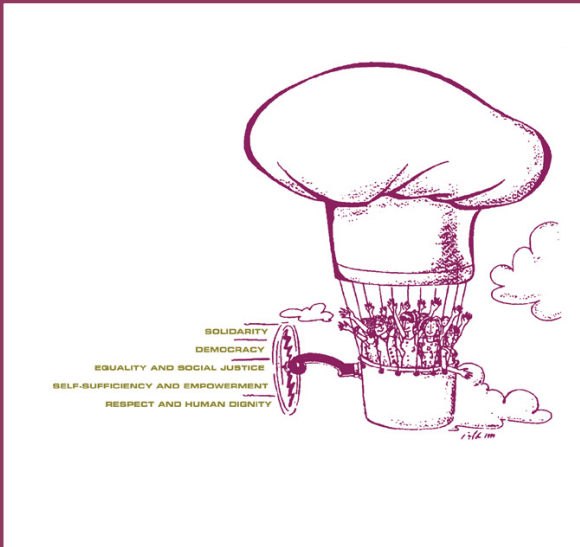
Collective kitchen groups manage to cook without outside funding, which was precisely what their pioneers, the Ouellette sisters, intended when they began cooking as a group. They were proud of their independence.



Respect and human dignity

By choosing a strong, unified approach, we refuse to divide people's realities into a thousand and one separate issues.

This approach favours change in all facets of participants' lives by emphasising their potential, not their limitations. The action of collective kitchens is geared to enhancing strength, knowledge, experience and expertise, thus demystifying each citizen's role.



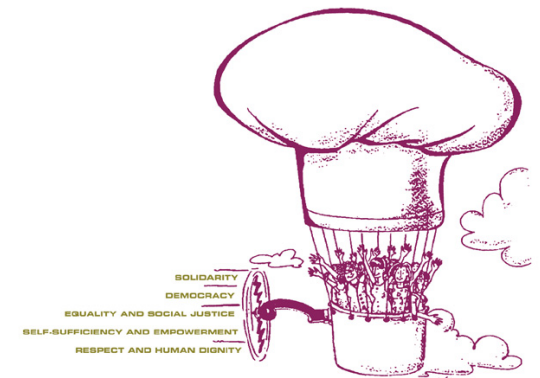
You know,
it's important to feel accepted when
you come to the collective kitchen.



We feel respected:
Nobody asks how much money
we make or other details about
our personal lives.



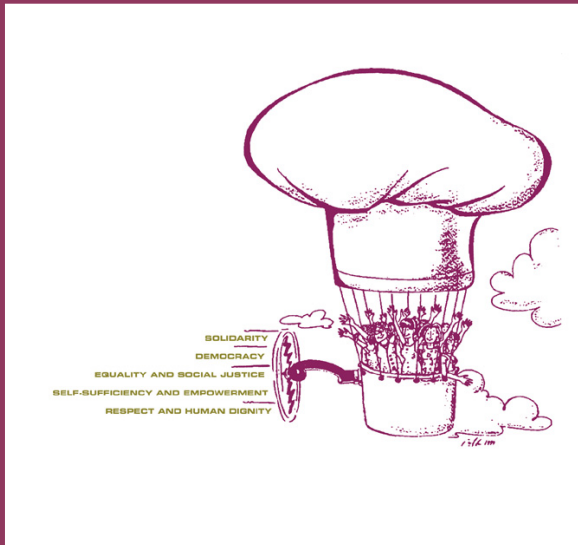
I like the fact that the collective
kitchen meets my needs: healthy meals
and the chance to get out of the house,
meet friends and become a better cook.
What's more, it lets me go at my own
pace and respects my skills.



Autonomy: Individual and collective empowerment

Our activities promote and encourage autonomy and empowerment.

By respecting the evolution, choices and voluntary involvement of participants, collective kitchens contribute to the development of equal relations and the increased autonomy of the group and of each participant.



Great! Two of our participants, Patrick and Jana, are going to be our delegates at the RCCQ's Annual General Assembly!

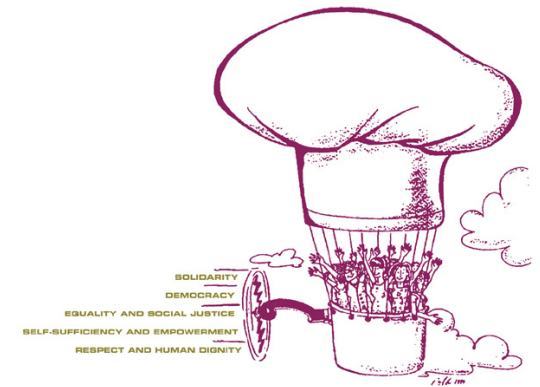


It's true, Jana, that we're capable of organising and representing our group. But even so, we have to be prepared...



I like meeting people from other collective kitchens.

When we get back, we'll let you know everything that went on!

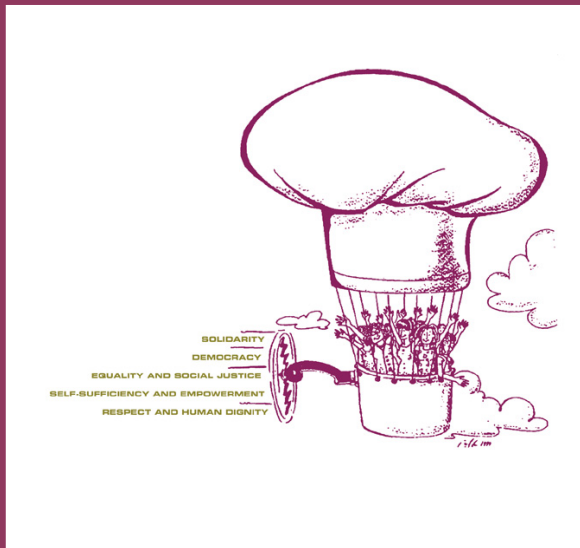


Democracy

Participation in democratic life, a staple of collective kitchen groups, offers individuals the means to increase power over their lives. It allows them to improve and transform their social, economic, political and cultural conditions.

In collective kitchens, individuals play an active role at every stage. They are not service consumers. They are invited to become involved in the associative and democratic life of their movement—a participation that may take various forms:

- Joining a collective kitchen group, thereby participating in management and decision-making
- Sitting on the Board of Directors
- Collaborating on work committees
- Speaking publicly to share ideas
- Sharing power by exercising the right to vote
- Participating in the General Assembly and submitting proposals
- Doing volunteer work

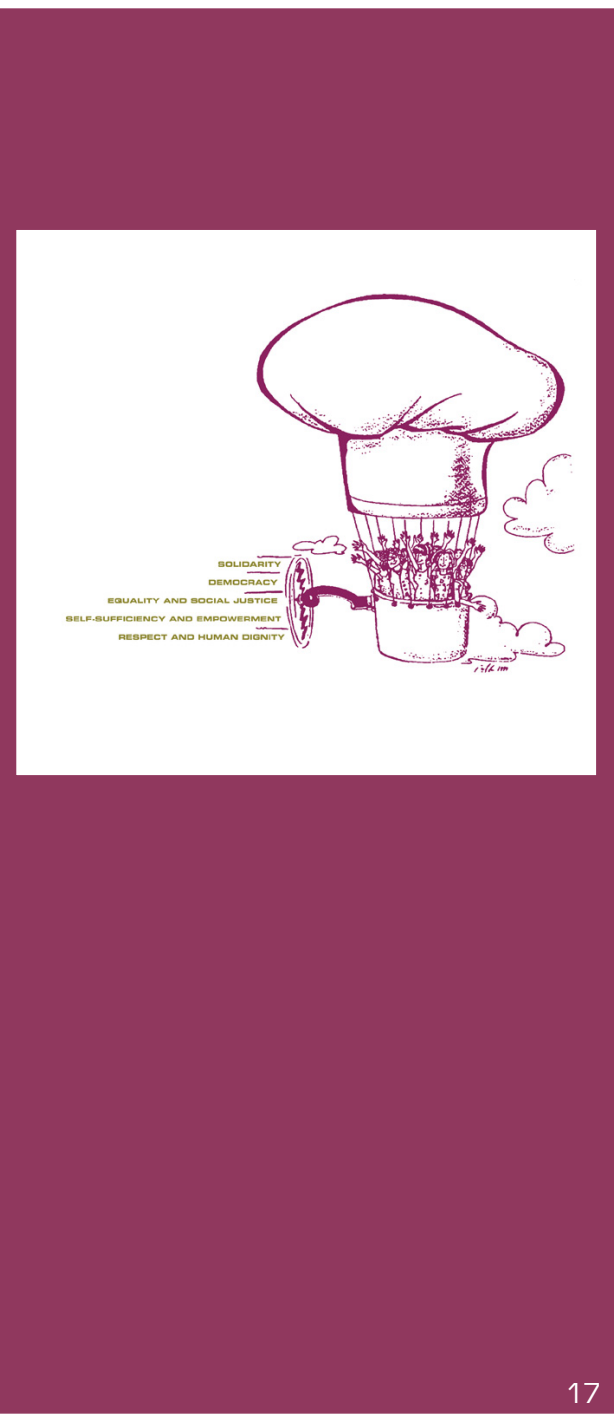
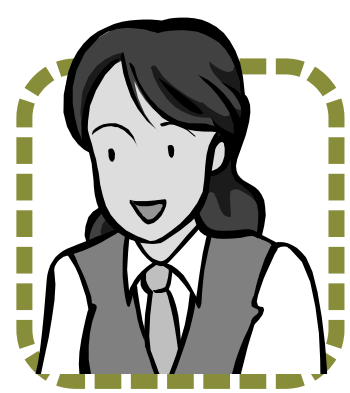


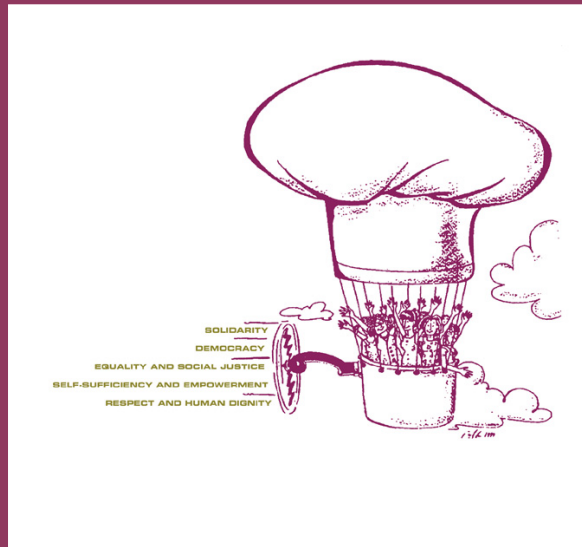


Sure... When you think about it, our Basis of Unity says collective kitchens are for everybody!

She could give us a few new ideas, it might be a good change in routine. I say we try her out.

Good. Okay, everybody agrees. Long live democracy!





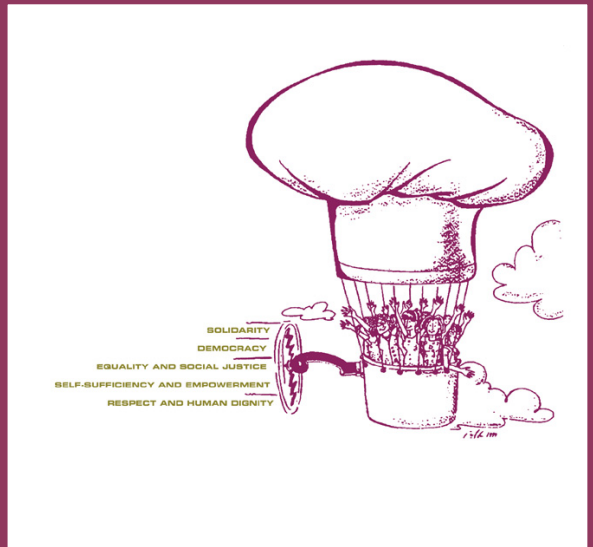
Solidarity

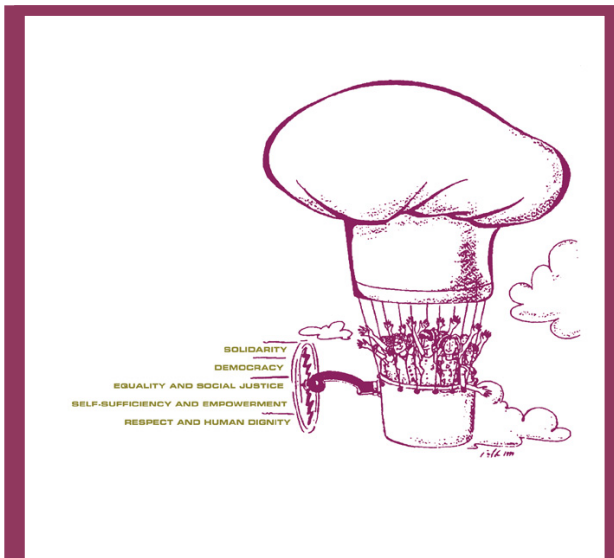
There are two common threads to our activities, collective actions, ongoing contacts and associative life: learning and critical thinking. This popular education approach leads to greater individual and collective awareness.

Collective kitchens form a partnership of shared action that seeks collective solutions to individual needs and interests. Thus, they create a framework of true solidarity around commonly held problems or collective projects.

A democratic decision-making process encourages participation and fosters partnership and solidarity among individuals.

Together with other community groups, we work to improve and transform the living conditions of people and communities and to develop resources for supporting socioeconomic autonomy and nurturing cooperation.





Equity and social justice

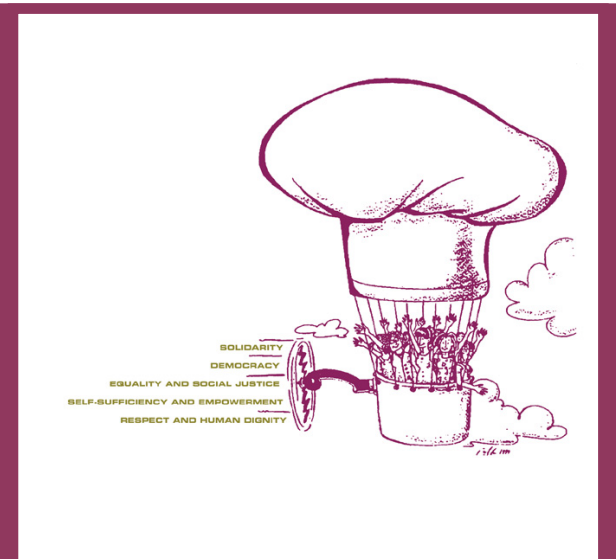
We contribute to the struggle for a just and equitable society in order to:

- Promote equity and equality among people
- Take action to change discriminatory laws
- Denounce violence in all its forms
- Demand access to power and the decision-making process for everyone, without discrimination
- Promote equal relations between men and women
- Reaffirm the state's social, economic and cultural role as a guarantor of social welfare in our society and of the redistribution of wealth
- Reaffirm solidarity with and support for the world's women, men and children in their fight against poverty
- Recognise and affirm the feminist ideals underlying our vision of society

As a result, participants in collective kitchens view themselves as agents of change and citizens with an active role to play in the democratic and social life of their community.



It's important! We have to voice our opposition to cuts of all kinds because those cuts affect our quality of life and the well-being of our community.

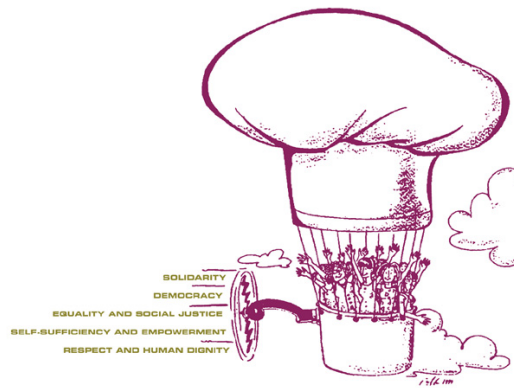


Conclusion

Applying the values of the Basis of Unity in everyday life contributes to the smooth functioning of collective kitchen groups and to the greater empowerment of participants. What's more, daily implementation of these values has an impact on the longevity of collective kitchen groups.

When you become an RCCQ member, you agree to adhere to its Basis of Unity and apply it in all spheres of your activities, including Board meetings, group meetings, interactions with collective kitchen participants, group facilitation, cooking days and appearances.

We hope this reference document will provide a better understanding of the collective kitchen movement and encourage greater adherence to its values. If you need further information, the RCCQ team will be pleased to answer your questions.



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