

Applemead is one of the newly initiated Outreach Programs at Food for Life. The Applemead Program is based out of a co-operative housing complex on Driftwood Drive in northeast Burlington. But this is not your typical program, thanks to the leadership and vision of the program co-ordinator, Crystal McNerney.

Crystal's goal was to bring the community together - to help create an environment where they would work together to live and eat better. When she started looking for help, there was no outreach in the area, but she knew there had to be a way to make a difference.

Crystal found out about Food for Life by following the organization's progress through the years. She kept up to date on Food for Life through the website and was inspired by how Food for Life was serving the community.

The program now serves up to 32 families, including many with young children, but the real emphasis continues to be community. When Karen Bonham, the Food for Life Outreach Program Manager who also helped the Applemead program apply for a start-up grant, originally came to Applemead to train the volunteers who would support the outreach program, 20 volunteers showed up - not for the food, but to learn how to help and support each other. On their regular delivery day from Food for Life, many of these families now get together in advance simply to be together.

There have been additional benefits to this new outreach program. Teenagers who require volunteer hours as part of their school curriculum are helping out. They used apples from Food for Life to make candy apples for Halloween.

But one of the most amazing elements of Applemead is their community garden program. Through grants from Forestview Church and Burlington Community Foundation, they created 19 gardens - each one is 20 feet by 4 feet. Each individual family is responsible for maintaining one of the gardens and growing certain crops. Crystal says that she sees people out working in the garden that have never done this type of work before. Through their collective experience, knowledge and hard work, they now have a garden which not only helps feed their community, but any excess food they grow is donated back to Food for Life to help feed other families in need.

Crystal's vision of the community helping themselves has become a reality.

*NOTE: We have been so inspired by the Applemead garden that we have published a separate feature article on the Food for Life website.*