

LOCAL HERO 1

MEALS THAT HEAL

"A gift of food says support," says Cathryn Couch, a Sonoma County chef who leads teens in making dinners for families coping with illness. The idea came to her last year while she was looking for a meaningful way to teach a friend's teenage daughter to cook. Years earlier, Couch had cooked for a woman undergoing breast cancer treatment. "I realized others could use this kind of support," she says. Through a cancer-support network, Couch identified three families who needed dinner help. The experience of preparing weekly meals for them was so profound that Couch decided



to grow the program. Now, she guides nine teen volunteers. A church donates kitchen space. Local grocers provide organic ingredients for meals, such as butternut squash enchiladas with black bean salad. Wholesome dinners nourish healing families; preparing them teaches teens about healthy cooking.

Couch hopes her program will inspire others. "It teaches people not only how to cook but also what it means to be part of something larger." —Elisa Ludwig