

## [Soup Sisters goes viral](#)

By [Mia Stainsby](#) 10 Sep 2010 [Word of Mouth](#)



Last year, nearing her 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, Sharon Hapton had a bad case of empty nest syndrome. “I hit the most giant nurture void of my life,” she says.

She could have been lost and blue but Hapton doesn't do blue. She promptly found a way to keep right on nurturing and keeping too busy to notice her son and daughter had flown the coop.

She founded Soup Sisters as a way to give back to her Calgary community. She and a group of 30 girlfriends made soup to donate to a womens' shelter. Word spread about this heartfelt and fun event. Other women (and men, too) jumped on board. Then Toronto wanted in.

“It went viral, to say the least,” says Hapton. Within a year, there was standing room only in her nest. Soup Sisters has grown to seven branches across Canada and is run by volunteers. And that's the simple truth behind Soup Sisters.

Since 2009, more than 5,000 containers of soups have been delivered to women's shelters in Calgary and Toronto alone.

“I'd always made soup for friends and family. That's how I take care of things,” says Hapton.

Soup Sisters launches its seventh branch in Vancouver on Monday at Quince Handcrafted Cuisine in Kitsilano, the Vancouver base. There are two branches in Toronto, two in Calgary, one in Burlington, another in Ottawa, and now, another in Vancouver. The Vancouver group's soup beneficiary is Kate Booth House.

At once-a-month soup-making evenings, participants pay \$45 each for the cost of ingredients, cooking class and the chance to be charitable. At the end of the evening they sit down for soup, bread, salad and wine and feel happy about the 200 to 300 servings of six varieties of soups ready for delivery. (Soups are ladled into re-usable glass bowls with lids for delivery.)

“We make simple, nourishing comfort soups,” says Hapton, “but it's a night out with friends. There's phenomenal camaraderie and people spend the night chopping and learning how to make soups. The beauty of it is, it's fresh, home-made soup, made from the heart.

“It goes a long way when a community of people come together and take a stand against family violence. This says you care about them,” Hapton says. “Soup Sisters is about nurturing . It's a tangible gift.” And, she says, it also seems to fill people's need to help out – and nurture.

Each Soup Sisters branch is launched with a name chef who gives a cooking demo and recipes. The Vancouver launch features Andrea Carlson, of Bishop's restaurant. Chefs, Hapton says, want to do it but it was never part of Soup Sisters' original plan. Volunteer chefs have included one of Canada's top chefs, Michael Stadlander as well as TV-star chef, Christine Cushing.

Soup-making groups have included families, groups of friends, corporate groups. “People go home with a little information. There's a speaker at all the events and one by one, people are learning about domestic violence,” Hapton says. “Calgary, where we started, for example, has the highest rate of domestic abuse in the country.”

The shelters, she says, house women and children from many cultures so recipes accommodate them. The biggest hit with kids, she says, is Hamburger Soup. “It couldn't be simpler to make. The kids could have it for breakfast, lunch and dinner. They love it.”

And don't be surprised when a sibling charity Hapton founded – Broth Brothers – sets up in Vancouver. It's based on the same idea of making soup for people in need, only this one's in support of street kids transitioning into mainstream society. Broth Brothers operates in Calgary and Toronto – so far. “It supports kids from 17 to 24 and the results have been absolutely phenomenal,” Hapton says. “It's a gesture that says we care about them. They come to us and ask us to make their favourite soups.”

Hapton lives in Calgary. She and her husband operate two eyewear shops; one of them, Bruce Eyewear, is in Vancouver.

If you'd like to join a Soup Sister evening, log onto [www.soupsisters.org](http://www.soupsisters.org).

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