

Cooking up teachable moments

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Everywhere he goes in the world, Tulane alumnus Adam Aronovitz looks for ways to turn encounters with local food into teachable moments. Aronovitz, who received his undergraduate degree in 2003, and his wife, Alissa Bilfield, co-founded The Cookbook Project.



Adam Aronovitz checks out the local produce at a Crescent City Farmers Market in New Orleans. He was in town to train local leaders in the Lower Ninth Ward as part of The Cookbook Project, which he co-founded. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

A nonprofit organization, [The Cookbook Project](#) teaches underserved youth and trains local leaders to reconnect to food culture, healthy cooking and the benefits of using local and seasonal ingredients.

Haiti is among the places that the project has been active. There, “the project focused on empowering youth to take a leadership role in preparing local and sustainable Haitian dishes with an emphasis on nutrition concepts,” says Aronovitz.

In Haiti, iron deficiency is a problem, but pumpkins are plentiful. And pumpkin seeds are packed with iron. Aronovitz and other members of The Cookbook Project showed local leaders at an orphanage how to prepare pumpkin seeds, a tasty treat packed with nutrients.

Aronovitz and Bilfield spent two years traveling in Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, India and Haiti as well as Boston, Harlem and New Hampshire to develop and pilot The Cookbook Project. Their goal is “to empower kids to face challenges, and to take ownership of their health and the health of their community,” Aronovitz says.

“My studies at Tulane taught me that the only way to create lasting change is experience-based education with youth,” adds Aronovitz, who studied international political economy in the Murphy Institute at Tulane.

With a grant from the Institute for Integrative Nutrition, the project has developed an online training model for community leaders. Aronovitz and Bilfield hope to expand the project's efforts in Africa and to train Peace Corps volunteers. Each year they want to publish a cookbook that is youth-inspired and focuses on cultural perspectives that sustain communities.

Aronovitz's work as Cookbook Project education director is in addition to his job as a middle-school math and science teacher in the Boston public school system.