



# factsheet

[www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk](http://www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk)

## Community café learning event report

### What were the learning visits?

Community Food and Health (Scotland) ran three community café learning visits between November 2014 and February 2015. The visits were held in Glasgow, Bellshill, Edinburgh and Elgin. Five community cafés hosted the visits:

**Theo's Café** in Orbiston Neighbourhood Centre, Bellshill

**Reidvale Community Café** in Reidvale Neighbourhood Centre, Dennistoun, Glasgow

**Punjabi Junction** in Edinburgh

**North Edinburgh Arts Centre Café** in Edinburgh

**Elgin Youth Café** in Elgin

A staff member from the healthy living award took part in all three visits to promote the award and encourage participants to apply for it.

The number of places available for two of the visits was limited to six to eight people to make the visits more manageable for the host cafés and easier for participants to speak to each other.

### Why did we run the learning events?

We wanted to give community café staff and volunteers opportunities to learn about and share good practice: we knew that community café staff and volunteers may have few (if any) chances to meet others working in community cafés. We also knew that community cafés are not always good at promoting themselves, and that good practice can go unrecognised within the community café sector.

While the visits were billed as opportunities to learn about the host cafés, they also provided opportunities for participants to learn from each other and for host cafés to learn from participants.

The visits were also seen as a way for Community Food and Health (Scotland) and the healthy living award<sup>1</sup> to make links with organisations that may be less likely to engage with them.

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<sup>1</sup> The healthy living award is a national award for caterers that are offering healthier choices for their customers. [www.healthylivingaward.co.uk](http://www.healthylivingaward.co.uk)

## How were the cafés hosting the visits chosen?

Some expressed an interest in hosting a visit at CFHS's community café networking event held in June 2014. Others were approached by CFHS. All of the cafés operate within low-income areas or to support people that are more likely to face disadvantage. All are recognised as examples of good practice.

## Who took part in the visits?

Eighteen people took part. This included staff and volunteers from four community cafés and seven organisations setting up a café. A staff member from a social enterprise support agency took part in the Edinburgh visit, and seven students and a staff member from Aberdeen University's Master in Public Health Nutrition course joined the visit in Elgin.

## What did the participants say about the visits?

The visits generated a lot of 'buzz' with participants reporting on the day and immediately afterwards about how much they had enjoyed them. However, we wanted to find out how the participants had benefitted. In April 2015, the 11 organisations participating were asked for feedback on the following:

- What were the most important ideas, issues or points that they had taken away from the visit they had taken part in.
- What they were doing differently, or intending to do differently as a result of the visit, if they were running a café, or what they intended to put into practice if they were setting up a café.
- If they had since been in contact with anyone they met at the visit.
- What else they would have liked from the visit.

Nine of the 11 organisations responded.<sup>2</sup> All were very positive about the visits.

**'I think it's a great idea to take time out and go visit other projects.'**

**'...made some great contacts on that visit'**

**'...it was great to meet others and share ideas'**

**'I felt it [the visit] gave me confidence in that it can work and have good outcomes.'**

For most, the ideas that they took away from the visits were very practical: the size and layout of the café kitchens; how they were staffed; the menus; pricing; reducing waste; and providing healthier options.

**'We made a note of how to provide hot food specials each day as well as some ideas on how to price them. We also got some ideas for menu choices and menu pricing.'**

**'Home baking is a winner...'**

Two setting up cafés stated that the visit had helped them understand the size and design of kitchen they required to run the activities they were planning.

One café commented about how well volunteer involvement was working in the two cafés visited. Another highlighted how useful it was to find out about the groups that use the host café, and the business model that it uses.

One organisation highlighted how to promote a new café. This group, which is setting up a youth café, also recognised the importance of encouraging and setting up structures so that young people have a greater role in decision-making.

Two organisations noted the importance of employing a chef or experienced person to run their café. Both highlighted using local produce and one said that promoting the use of local suppliers would be a good selling point for their café.

<sup>2</sup> Two were unable to respond by the deadline for doing so.

For one organisation, the main idea they took away from the visit was that

**‘community cafés are the heart of their communities’.**

Of those that fed back about what they had or intended to do differently or put into practice, one café had changed their menu:

**‘We have started to provide main meals each day at affordable prices.’**

Providing healthier menu options was highlighted by three organisations. One stated they planned to apply for the healthyliving award. Another setting up a café said:

**‘There [are] lots of ways of being able to run a healthy food café without people really noticing too much...’**

Two organisations hoped or intended to set up cookery classes.

Most of the participants had not been in touch with anyone they met on their visit. However, one of the organisations had contacted another visit participant and intended to maintain this contact. Another is planning to contact a host café. A third wanted to contact other cafés on the visit, but lacked the time to do so.

Only one organisation suggested what else they would have liked to find out from their visit, which was specific information about aspects of cafés’ operation. They suggested that this could be summed up as ‘getting under the skin of one of the cafés’.

## Other outcomes

Following the visits, one café and one host café have achieved the healthyliving award. Most of the other cafés being set up are intending to apply for the award.

## Conclusion

The community café learning visits were simple and effective ways of enabling people involved with community cafés to meet, and share and learn good practice. Feedback from the participants suggests that their organisations are (or will) also benefit. As one participant fed back:

**‘Both the centres were fantastic places to visit and very different... it was good to compare the centres and different communities as it is always good to see what other people are doing. We found the visit very helpful as you can always adapt what other people are doing in your area. We found the welcome at each of the centres very warm and friendly and it was fantastic to see the great work that is happening with the cafés and food and the centre, bringing everyone together... it will really shape what we can do in the future. We have plans to use the power of food in bringing people together to develop both our community café and our centre.’**





## Contact details for the community cafés hosting the visits

Theo's Café: [www.oncbellshill.org](http://www.oncbellshill.org)

Reidvale Community Café: [www.reidvalecentre.org.uk](http://www.reidvalecentre.org.uk)

Punjabi Junction: [www.punjabijunction.org](http://www.punjabijunction.org)

North Edinburgh Arts Centre Café: [www.northedinburgharts.co.uk](http://www.northedinburgharts.co.uk)

Elgin Youth Café: [www.elginyouthcafe.org](http://www.elginyouthcafe.org)

Many thanks to them all for their hospitality.