



Community Mobile Food Initiatives

**Case studies of two community
operated mobile food initiatives**

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Introduction

Scotland has many health problems and poverty and poor diet are implicated in most of them. With the recognition of food as an issue and the support of national policy this issue is beginning to be tackled. One of the identified action themes is that of community development work on food and poverty. Much of this work is built around the promotion of access to healthier foods, primarily fruit and vegetables. Two projects on different sides of the central belt have attempted to tackle issues around food poverty and access by developing their own local mobile healthy food shops. This report looks at how each of these projects has developed.

National Policy Context

Over the past 15 years growing concerns about food, health and social inclusion have gradually brought a focus to public policy around food this has been building more quickly since the development of the Scottish Diet Action Plan (SDAP)⁽¹⁾. The plan is an attempt to bring together interests across the entire 'food network': farmers, fisherfolk, food processors, retailers, caterers, educators, the health services and media, as well as consumers. The Scottish Parliament has continued to endorse its work on food issues.

'I want the healthy choices facing Scots to be the easy choices. That means educating people, raising standards in school and hospital meals, making fruit and vegetables more accessible to everyone in their own community and changing quality within the industry. This is not an overnight campaign, it is a long term commitment to improve our nation's health. Small changes like eating more fruit and vegetables can have immeasurable benefits.'

Jack McConnell, First Minister at the launch of the healthy living project and website Jan 2003

One of the nine areas identified in SDAP as being key to a healthier Scotland is that of local community action around food and health. Local activities have gained pace over the past 15 years or more and the work of these projects have helped in the development of policy ideas around Health and Social Inclusion.

Community food initiatives cover almost every link in the food chain and there has been a developing expertise in the local food economy. Starting from the development of small local food co-ops with the support of key activists we now have local and national networks of support for local food action. This wide range of local activity provides an important test bed for new policy and practice and it is important to explore the factors that can help or impede these projects.

Food and Health

In this country, inequalities in health have been on the political agenda for some time, and the role of food and diet in this is seen to be increasingly important. Both research and local action repeatedly show that food access for poor people is critical in shaping food patterns and intakes.

The Acheson Inquiry into Inequalities in Health⁽²⁾ recommends that there should be policies to increase the availability and accessibility of food stuffs to supply an adequate and affordable diet and the further development of policies which will ensure adequate retail provision of food to those who are disadvantaged.

The recent food and farming report⁽³⁾ points out that many poor people live in areas which have been abandoned by retailing. With the growth of super-supermarkets there are local areas with little retail food provision. This is the problem of so-called 'food deserts' (a term

'Next to smoking, poor diet remains the most significant contributor to Scotland's poor health. It is a major source of our 'big three' - heart disease, cancer and stroke, and also contributes to other health problems such as obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes. The good news is that the health surveys show encouraging signs that Scotland is beginning to adopt a healthier diet, for example there has been a 6% rise in the number of people eating fruit daily'

Gillian Kynoch Scotland's Food and Health Co-ordinator SCDP 'Rich Pickings' conference 2001

first coined in Scotland with reference to Ferguslie Park). A study of Sandwell in the Midlands, showed that while there may be shops within the area, there are large networks of streets and estates where no shops selling fresh fruit and/or vegetables exist,⁽⁴⁾ where such shops do exist, they are often expensive.

Access to a healthier diet can mean the expense of travel by car or public transport the extra time needed is also an additional cost.

There is also evidence that healthier foods cost more. In a comparison of a regular basket of foods with a healthier basket the more healthy basket of goods costs considerably more than the less healthy⁽⁵⁾. Recent work in Ayrshire⁽⁶⁾ found that a basket of fruit and vegetables was on average 14% more expensive in rural areas than in town centres. In small urban shops on housing estates the average cost was 20% higher than in the town centre.

The preventive contribution of fruit and vegetables

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that the increased risk from poor nutrition, obesity and low physical activity in Europe, calculated in DALYs,* is 9.7%, which compares to 9% due to smoking⁽⁷⁾. Recent work suggests that promoting healthy eating and dietary change was one of the most cost-effective ways of preventing heart disease.⁽⁸⁾ The WHO recommended that people should eat approximately five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, increasing fruit and vegetable consumption could reduce deaths from heart disease, stroke and cancer by up to 20%.

Community action the way forward?

The practical experience of community projects has given Scotland a wide range of

expertise in local food action and the development of new ideas and materials. However the voluntary nature of most of these projects and the precarious state of their funding means that they also have a wide range of experiences of rejection and loss.

In looking at the role of 'Local Food Projects' in response to social exclusion Dowler et al⁽⁹⁾ have concerns about a focus on increased community and voluntary participation without action on the structural barriers to improved food access. However they do point out that there is great potential in local food projects for improving food access. They suggest that local food projects provide common ground for local people and professionals to work together, and that the best of them achieve a wide variety of goals.

'A key finding of the research was that security of funding was usually vital to guaranteeing the success of food projects.... A second crucial element is community involvement and, to some extent, ownership. Projects that are 'parachuted in' by community based professionals,... but which do not have good grounding and roots in what local people have identified as their wants and aims, tend to fail within a few months. ... Local people have to be seen as equal partners with local professionals...'

The two projects described here are tackling similar problems in different settings and this report aims to describe their development and practice. As well as informing good practice the report hopes to give a realistic picture for policy-makers, planners and practitioners of what is involved in identifying, establishing and operating this kind of initiative and the outcomes that can be achieved.

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3. Why Health is the Key to the Future of Food and Farming Edited by Tim Lang and Geof Rayner UKPHA / Thames Valley University 2002
4. Dowler E, Blair A, Donkin A, Rex D, Grundy C (2001). Measuring Access to Healthy Food in Sandwell. Final Report. August. Sandwell: Sandwell Health Authority/Health Action Zone
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6. Smith F (1998), "Promotion of Fruit and Vegetable Consumption in Areas of Deprivation in Ayrshire", Ayrshire and Arran Community Health Care NHS Trust [unpublished]
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8. World Health Organization. 1990. Diet, Nutrition and the Prevention of Chronic Diseases. WHO in Caraher M, Anderson A (2002). Five-a-day: A review of current promotion, action and policy. Thames Valley University and University of Dundee
9. McGlone, Dobson, Dowler & Nelson. (1999) Food Projects & how they work. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, York.

* DALYs (disability adjusted life year) measure the gap between some target life expectancy in equivalent good health and what is actually obtained by the population.

Methodology

The central theme of this study was the examination of the key factors in establishing, operating and sustaining mobile food initiatives. Using lessons from the experience of two initiatives in Paisley and East Lothian which had some common factors. The retail mobile food vans were both quite recently purchased and purpose-built and had been developed by local people with wide experience of community food work.

Scotland's health problems are well known and there are many groups working to address and offset them. In the area of food, poverty and diet there has been a growing concern and action at the community level for more than a decade. Community food projects are involved in a wide range of activities; in terms of mobile food initiatives, there are retail delivery schemes for people living in isolated communities, deliveries to the housebound, wholesale deliveries to food co-operatives, community cafes, schools and nurseries. There are vans linking small producers and isolated consumers and even a mobile demonstration kitchen. There are mobile initiatives with a wider health promotion remit which include giving healthy eating advice. Often a combination of the above activities are undertaken. One of the defining characteristics of the two projects being studied here is that they are mobile retail projects, they are not primarily delivery services, they are 'proper' local mobile shops.

The case studies were interested in exploring the following factors:

- **CONTEXT:** The local health and social policy environment and level of community food activity that preceded the initiatives.
- **PROCESS:** The experience of stakeholders in the development of the initiatives.
- **OUTCOMES:** The outputs and outcomes of the initiatives in operation
- **OUTLOOK:** Future hopes, concerns and options for key stakeholders.

The underlying aim was not to judge the effectiveness of these two particular initiatives but to learn from them to assist others considering a mobile food initiative as an option.

Methodology

The Paisley and East Lothian projects are complex projects addressing complex issues. A good approach to the description of complex organisations is that of the case study. Case studies aim to bring out the details from the viewpoint of the participants by using multiple sources of data.

The unit of analysis in the case study is typically a system of action (eg a whole project or initiative) rather than an individual or group of individuals. Case studies tend to be selective, focusing on one or two issues that are fundamental to understanding the system being examined.

Yin (1994) presented at least four applications for a case study model:

- 1: To explain complex causal links in real-life interventions
- 2: To describe the real-life context in which the intervention has occurred
- 3: To describe the intervention itself
- 4: To explore those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear set of outcomes.

In this investigation, the case studies are two mobile food vans, both vans are part of larger community food initiatives and some detail about these initiatives is presented in the case study reports as context for the case studies themselves.

The approach developed for this investigation has six elements:

- Review of project documentation and activity
- Desk Research
- Postal Questionnaire
- Depth Interviews
- Focus Groups
- Interviewer administered questionnaire

An explanation of each element is given below.

Review of project documentation and activity

As well as reviewing reports and evaluations from each of the two projects the research team spent a day with each of them, observing the work and exploring in greater depth issues identified in the documentation.

Desk Research

A programme of desk research to collect information on mobile food initiatives throughout the UK was carried out. This allowed the research team to put the Scottish case studies into a wider context and to identify opportunities for development and support.

Postal Questionnaire to Scottish Community Food Initiatives

All of the community food initiatives in Scotland (from the Scottish Community Diet Project database) were surveyed to explore how initiatives with vans used them and their views on retail projects.

Depth Interviews

A programme of depth interviews was conducted for each initiative with the following types of key informants:

- Project managers/Co-coordinators
- Drivers
- Volunteers
- Funders
- Representatives of other agencies eg education and care
- Licensing officers within local government

These interviews addressed a number of the objectives including; the perspectives of the stakeholders, issues around sustainability and funding, perceptions of strengths and weaknesses, evaluation approaches and the impact of licensing on the initiatives. Depth interviews are a useful tool in this setting as it allows the researcher both to address a set of issues but also to pursue issues arising from them.

Focus Groups

Two focus groups were held, one in each initiative area, consisting of users and non users of the project. They explored the benefits and spin-offs of the project in each community and also helped to get an understanding of local perceptions around the further development of the project.

The focus groups enabled exploration of some of the issues from a wider perspective than through individual interviews alone.

Interviewer administered questionnaire
100 face-to-face interviews were carried out with residents in each of the project areas 50 with users and 50 with non-users. These interviews explored why people used or didn't use the project, what use they made of the local shops and their feelings about the service. They also explored how they thought the service could be developed.

Background

In developing this research proposal the funders did not know of any other community run mobile shops. The researchers searched local and national databases with little success. They then contacted key community food projects nationally looking for guidance and put requests on appropriate web networks. The trawl did not find any operating community mobile retail projects. Further exploration included a short postal questionnaire to clarify use of transport and views on mobile initiatives of Scottish initiatives. This questionnaire found no other mobile community retail vans. Three projects had run initiatives like this in the past and five had considered it. The questionnaire did give a good overview of the type of delivery work that goes on in Scottish community food projects.

Findings from the Desk Research

The search through the Sustain 'Food Poverty Projects Database' was unsuccessful, at the time of the search it had only 270 projects (Feb 2003) many of those were Scottish, many others were now finished (and marked so, although some were not). Unwilling to believe that the database was an adequate reflection of reality the researchers decided to use health, poverty and food networks and recommendations to explore what food projects were doing. They carried out telephone interviews with a range of local projects and placed a request for information on HAZ net (the Health Action Zone webnet) with no success.

There were some interesting finds, the Barrow in Furness food co-op had delivered fruit and veg. by bicycle and horse and cart. Many of the projects contacted had vans or contacts who carried out deliveries for them - the deliveries ranged from personal supplies for housebound elderly through to large orders of vegetables for community cafes and other food co-ops.

There was a great deal of interest in the mobile retail projects explored in this research and many requests for a copy of the final report.

The desk research confirms the commissioners views that the two projects described in this report are new developments for community food work and that it is timely to undertake this study.

Postal Questionnaire

A postal questionnaire exploring use of transport and views on mobile initiatives was sent to 360 initiatives in the SCDP database, 63 projects responded to the questionnaire, a response rate of 18%.

Types of area covered

Nine projects indicated that they cover urban communities, a further three stated that they covered rural communities three others indicated that they dealt with a mix of rural and urban communities.

Use of transport

Five groups that respond stated that they had a mobile van/shop, ten projects stated that the food project they are involved with currently have a delivery van for home deliveries. The delivery activities covered:

- Deliver lunches to lunch club members when they cannot attend the clubs
- Delivers to schools, nurseries, playgroups, crèches, breakfast clubs etc.
- Fresh fruit and vegetables delivered as when required by employing a driver
- The North Lanarkshire Federation of Food Co-ops makes their van and driver available to co-ops for home deliveries
- Delivery to member co-ops
- Home delivery service - orders only
- Delivery of 'snack attack' to schools and fruit/veg to OAP clubs, parents groups and community centres.

Past Initiatives

Three respondents indicated that they had at some point in the past set up and run a mobile food initiative. Comments with regard to this included:

- Customers were looking for other food items besides fruit, veg and eggs. We granted their wishes through lottery funding and health promotions
- Supplied council offices with snacks and sandwiches - staff shortages made it impossible to continue
- Van and logistics too difficult/time consuming to maintain

Reasons for not developing a mobile food initiative

Five respondents stated that they had considered operating a mobile food initiative. Reasons for not developing a mobile food initiative included:

- After weighing up costs, maintenance etc decided against buying a van
- Funding bid to develop such a project, was turned down. Group are at the moment developing a food growing project, ... will pick up mobile food initiative again in the future
- No demand was expressed
- Couldn't get enough volunteers involved to make it feasible
- Did offer this service in the past but group lost funding.
- Cost of transport
- Considered briefly as an extension to current project. But facilities and additional funding to progress it not available
- Problems with licensing

- Resources unavailable
- Avoid duplication - food train operates in area
- It would cost too much/ use too much time... to run own mobile food initiative. Instead group are working with local retailers.

Types of transport

For those community food initiatives that did have a van, only two stated that it was a purpose built/fully modified van. (These were the two projects in this study) A further eight projects indicated that they had ordinary vans with no modifications these included:

- Use of local transport groups van,
- Refrigerated bought vans
- Estate car

Delivery Services

Most food initiatives deliver products to peoples homes. Most initiatives provided a wide range of goods; fruit and vegetables, pre packed groceries and eggs, some also provided milk and cheese, three projects provided pre-packed meat.

Other products delivered included:

- Assorted frozen foods
- Stock cubes, lentils,
- All other household grocery shopping
- Dinner/snacks
- Fish
- Batteries, detergents, cleaning materials, light bulbs etc

One project provided an external catering service selling vegetarian food on site e.g. festivals and community events

Project One: Health on Wheels

Working within the Paisley boundaries this innovative project provides residents of this urban area with access to a range of healthier food products which are difficult to get in the local shops in this area. Based on a custom converted van and fully funded by 'Have a Heart Paisley' (a National Health Demonstration Project) Health on Wheels takes this mobile shop round a selection of areas across Paisley.

Geography

Paisley is the largest town in Scotland and the major urban area in Renfrewshire. Like many similar industrial areas it has suffered from the decline in local manufacturing. The related downturn in the economic, physical and social environment of the area has impacted on many of its residents. Within the

Renfrewshire local authority boundary there are 58 census enumeration districts ranked (in 1998) by the Scottish Office as being in the "worst 10%" of excluded areas in Scotland in terms of deprivation. The Public Health Institute of Scotland's (PHIS) Paisley Profiling exercise in 2002 identified a significant 'quality of life' gap between residents of the paisley priority

PHIS paisley profile can be found at:
<http://www.phis.org.uk/info/sub.asp?p=BBD>



areas and the wider population of Renfrewshire. This was evident across a wide range of exclusion factors.

The impacts of social exclusion in the areas around Paisley were identified by many of the respondents:

'Shopping deserts – poverty ... unable to access supermarkets'

'Its difficult accessing affordable healthy food for households on low incomes'

'We have a lot of food poverty issues particularly in peripheral housing schemes such as Foxbar and Ferguslie'

'Lack of fruit and vegetables in these areas'

'... a lot of housing estates throughout Renfrewshire are actually shopping deserts. A lot of people live in poverty and cannot access the supermarkets, it is all very well a two bus journey to a supermarket but then if you are looking at taxi fares home you are then looking at added cost to their food bills and they don't have that added cost'

Background

The poorer areas in Paisley such as Ferguslie Park have had active community projects addressing issues around social exclusion and health for a number of years. Ferguslie Community Health Project has been addressing concerns around food and feeding for 12 years. Across the area in general there has been the development of a number of projects and the sensitising of local workers and volunteers to food, poverty and health issues.

'... its about community engagement - the community identified this need through the food mapping exercise'

In the development of the Health on Wheels Initiative there was support from workers who had originally come from Ferguslie Park and developed their skills and interests there.

'Never have happened without the full time workers ...'

'...without them it would have never worked. Its all right us being volunteers and can go in and do bits of work but they have the qualifications and they knew where to get the funding'

The Renfrewshire Food Federation supported by workers from the Renfrew Community Health Initiative and the 'Have a Heart Paisley' community team worked up the idea, secured the funding application for Health on Wheels and now manages the initiative. The Food Federation is a collective organisation for projects and groups of activists working on food issues in the community.

'... it started in 1996. It was a lot of wee fruit co-ops happening in various community centres and they thought get together and give each other support. And that is where the food federation sprung from. Membership has grown and dwindled over the years.'

The Food Federation as well as managing the project provides a range of support, its relationship with Foxbar Resource Centre has given access to a store for the mobile shops goods. The Food Federations van is used to supply and support the mobile shop and members of the federation provide general support.

'The project would not have happened without the funding and support of 'Have a Heart Paisley'.'

History of Health on Wheels

The project idea was developed within the Renfrewshire Food Federation based on members experience in addressing food access issues in the area. This experience was reinforced by the results from a community consultation and a food mapping exercise (shopping and eating habit survey) conducted by the Federation and the Poverty Alliance, which highlighted the problem of food access in different areas of Paisley.

The idea of a mobile shop had been considered for a number of years but there were limited opportunities for accessing the level and type of funding that it would require. The local development of 'Have a Heart Paisley' with its strong focus on community action allied to a budget and willingness to develop new approaches to heart health provided an ideal funder for this project .

With the combination of committed community activists, local workers who knew the area and the issues and a supportive funder, Health on Wheels was nearly rolling. However two funding bids were made before health on wheels was successful.

During the development of the bid to the Scottish Executive for Have a Heart Paisley, a community consultation exercise to develop community bids to be 'Have a Heart Paisley' flagship project was carried out. This resulted in the Federation making the first bid for a Health on Wheels type project. This first proposal was for a similar set up to the present project but included costings for a co-ordinator/ administrator and all of the project costs. This bid was rejected and respondents were concerned that the bid might have been too expensive. They also alluded to a concern that giving this amount of money to a single community in an area where there was a lot of

competition for funding may also have played a part in the funding rejection.

The bid was then revised reducing its cost from £150,000-£160,000 to £86,000. This revised bid was put to the 'Have a Heart Paisley' Healthy Community Bids group where it was examined in detail. The participants in the funding presentation reported that there was a lot of discussion about the bid and it may well have failed if it had not been for the efforts of an NHS Board Health Promotion worker who described how Health on Wheels could be linked to many relevant strategies to maximise its use.

The timescale for the gestation, development and funding of this project could be described as being as much as ten years from the first ideas and discussions. The activists and workers interviewed described it as a long hard struggle.

'...It was a huge project and we didn't realise how much support and input it would require from all of the parties concerned.'

' Development of the bid for funding – long hard struggle'

Have a Heart Paisley (www.haveaheart.org.uk/)

Awarded £6 million by the Scottish Executive, 'Have a Heart Paisley' aims to reduce heart disease and promote healthier, longer lives for the people of Paisley by bringing together the community, health professionals and local organisations to work in partnership for a lasting improvement in the health and well-being of everyone in the town.

The support and development of community health projects that meet local needs has been at the centre of Have a Heart Paisley's prevention work. Now in its second year, a total of 84 such local projects have been set up, each focusing on one or more of the main risk factors associated with heart disease: unhealthy eating, lack of physical activity and smoking.

Aims of Health on Wheels

The project aims and objectives are:

1. To provide local communities within the Paisley area access to affordable healthy food.
2. To offer a food delivery service to frail, elderly, disabled or families with difficulties.
3. To provide a delivery service to local food co-ops in the area.
4. To provide training in retail and commerce for local people.
5. To provide employment for local people.

The project enables families and individuals to gain access to low cost healthy food. It ensures that there is a range of fresh fruit and vegetables and other healthy produce at an affordable cost. It gives people in communities who have little or no shopping facilities a choice and accessibility to a healthy diet.

Structure and staffing

Managed by the Renfrewshire Food Federation the Health on Wheels project

has a volunteer project manager with day to day responsibility for the management and smooth running of the van. The project manager is also the chair person of the Federation. The project has three paid members of staff consisting of a full time driver, part time driver/store person and a full time member of staff serving on the van. In addition the project has received considerable support from members of the Have a Heart Paisley community team, and until the beginning of 2003 had the ongoing support of a community health worker from Renfrewshire Community Health Initiative.

Funding and support

The financial support for the project from Have a Heart Paisley has been substantial (see Fig1). This funding has been supplemented by a set of grants to meet unexpected costs eg the van was attacked by thieves and subsequently had to have security grills and video monitoring installed. In addition to the funding the project received the support of a community health worker from Renfrewshire Community Health Initiative who assisted in various organisational aspects of the project and regular support from the 'Have a Heart Paisley' community team. In the development of the initiative it was agreed that Renfrewshire Community Health Initiative would fund sessions providing training in cookery skills although at the time of writing (June 2003) this development has yet to start.

It is intended that the project will ensure its sustainability by income generation. Several respondents indicated that the break even point for the project would be £500 per week. This cost has been revisited by the research team (see Fig 2 on the facing page).

Fig 1: Funding for the project

Capital		
Mobile shop including adaptations	£26,325	
Cold storage unit	£500	
Initial Stock	£1000	
Total Capital Costs	£27,825	
Revenue Costs		
	Year 1	Year 2
Full Time Driver	£12,800	£12,800
P/T Driver/storeperson	£6,400	£6,400
Insurance	£1,200	£1,200
Tax	£155	£155
Running Costs	£1,000	£1,000
Sessional Workers	£7,800	£7,800
Total Revenue Costs for year 1 and 2 - £58,710.		

Fig. 2: Reassessing the cost of running a Mobile Initiative

Van purchase costs - from Health on Wheels bid document	£26,325
Assume the depreciation of the van over 4 years therefore each year the van costs -	£6,588
Running Costs: estimate 40 miles per gallon and £3.50 per gallon - 60 miles per day/ 5 days per week 50 weeks of year (15,000 miles per year)	£1312.5
Tax	£155
Insurance	£1200
Traders licences x2@ £60 each approx.	£120
Servicing, tyres, maintenance etc. (this will vary annually some years less)	£1,000
Estimated Total Van Costs (per annum)	£10,375.50

These costs are before factoring in staff and stock costs. Staffing for this initiative is a driver, a server and a part time driver/storeperson. It was originally thought that the van could run with just a driver who also served, however following the robbery of the van it is now assumed that there will need to be two people on board. This results in the need for additional staff and the costs associated.

Staff if costed at rate in Health on Wheels bid document is as follows

Full time driver	£12,800
P/T driver / Storeperson	£6,400
Sessional workers (this could be the server)	£7,800
Staffing costs (per annum)	£27,000
Total costs	
Estimated Total Van Costs (per annum)	£10,375.50
Staffing costs (per annum)	£27,000
Total running costs	£37,375
Weekly gross profit required to break even (£37,375 / 50 weeks)	£747.50

Assuming an average mark up of 100% on each item resulting in 50% of all turnover being gross profit. i.e if an item is sold for 50p then it has cost 25p for the project to buy. Profit will vary between items particularly when looking at fresh fruit and veg. The van would require a turnover of **£1,495** per week to break even. If the profit margin was higher than this then the break even point will reduce.

For the van to be self sustaining financially will depend on a variety of issues - these being average profit per item, average weekly turnover, wastage and the overall capacity of the van. How many times does the stock on the van need to be replenished to allow it to develop a suitable turnover. ie if the van can carry £500 worth of stock it would need to be restocked fully 3 times per week to be self sustaining using the above estimates.

Health on Wheels Mobile Shop

With the funding secure the Renfrewshire Food Federation management committee set about appointing and training staff, specifying and commissioning the van and addressing all the regulatory issues that apply to running a mobile shop. This proved to be more complex than people had imagined.

'The process can be quite drawn out – you need to have the van then get a compliance certificate, employ staff and get street traders licence. Plus insurance, road tax etc. Each new member of staff for the van needs a street traders licence and to be police checked.'

'Staff were in post for nearly three months before they started trading.'

'It's not the van that gets the traders license but the individual. So every time we started new staff we had to get a new traders license. It's not cheap, it was £54.00 a time!'

'It would have never worked without the full time workers ...they have the qualifications and they knew where to get the funding'

Getting suppliers for the wider range of goods needed for the mobile shop was another learning curve. The group had

experience of, and contacts for, accessing fruit and vegetables and tinned and packet goods but meat and fish were new territory.

'...the greengrocer that they went into partnership with was already in partnership with a community group in Ferguslie and had been for a number of years, So it was just a matter of building on that relationship'

'They are quite fortunate that they have the small van that goes for the stock ... he would go to the fruit shop in the morning and pick up fresh fruit and vegetables and pick up fresh butcher meat. He can stock up the big van on route and they are linked mobile to mobile ... it is a good way of working'

'The meat supplier is very accommodating with the group.... So they have only been buying in small loads and on a daily basis rather than stock up.'

In developing this work from a community base there were skills and knowledge that the group didn't have, and in the beginning didn't realise that they would need them. As well as managing the ordering and storage of stock the management committee had to develop systems for book-keeping and financial administration. They were now employing people and running a retail business with salary, tax and insurance considerations.

'...its different doing a wee barra where you have only volunteers and you just purchase the fruit and sell it on the stall'

'The harder bit is employing staff... all the different things like tax and insurance that they didn't know about...one of the workers was getting family tax credit so we had to claim all of that back!'



The Health on Wheels van at Foxbar resource centre

The Van and the law

The van was commissioned from a specialist coachbuilder who advised the project team on the conversion. The converted van was built to a high standard and included a cold display as well as the shelving storage and sinks etc. One of the unconsidered drawbacks of having a van made to their specification was the fact that it then took a while for the new van to get its certificate of compliance. This is the environmental health certification that the van is fit for the purposes that it will be used for.

This process took about three months, and in the meantime the project had a van, workers with their traders licence but were unable to trade. The traders licences at £54 each are specific individual licences, if the worker moves on the project has to pay for the licence for a new worker!

Storage

The Health on Wheels van is garaged with the local authority (Environmental Services Department). The Foxbar Resource Centre provides the project with a base and storage space for tinned and dry goods and access to refrigerators and freezers.

'...we don't have a shop front but have a central store which is Foxbar Resource Centre.... where they keep all their tinned stuff and dried goods and stuff like that.'

This storage space was free in the beginning however changes in the centres contract with the Local Authority has led to them charging the food van. This is only £400 a year, but it was not built into the original bid.

Route

The original idea for the van was that it

would cover all of Paisley and this fitted in with the four Have a Heart Paisley localities. This gave coverage of a wide area (see Fig 3). The experience of running the van on an area wide model has been that there are areas that do not generate enough income. The project is looking at streamlining the service to target those areas most in need - which are also those areas that generate most income for the initiative.

'... Ferguslie Park/Foxbar/Gallowhill are the three main housing schemes that are in dire need. Gallowhill is particularly bad – seems to be an area with no shops around about it'

Project Activity

Health on Wheels is a mobile food shop offering affordable, healthy produce to people within communities requiring this service. The emphasis is on the provision of reasonable priced quality foods with encouragement of the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables.

The van sells fresh fruit and vegetable, a variety of tinned and packet goods, fruit juices, bread and fresh meat, fish and chicken.

A normal day for the van

The van provides a service Monday to Friday 9.30 -3.30. A normal day consists of loading the van at Foxbar resource centre and then taking it round its agreed routes.

Health on Wheels areas covered

Monday
Foxbar and Glenburn

Tuesday
Ferguslie and Gallowhill

Wednesday
Seedhill, Lochfield, Todholm, Hunterhill
and Gallowhill

Thursday
Foxbar, Glenburn and Ferguslie

Friday
Ferguslie, Foxbar and Glenburn

The van drives to the area, parks up and sounds its horn to let people know it is there. As well as selling their goods they take special orders, particular potatoes, different vegetables,. Special requests ordered at one visit are brought on the next. Depending on customer numbers they can spend up to 30 minutes at each spot and then move on. As well as selling in the street the van occasionally attends two nurseries in Ferguslie where it sells fruit to the children. It also offers a telephone ordering and delivery service.

Who uses the van?

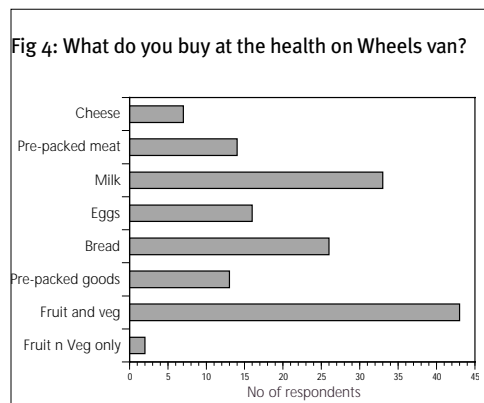
72% of its customers are women with more than half of the customers being over 45 years of age, 26% are over 65 years of age.

How frequently do they use it?

36% of respondents use the van twice a week, 34% use it once a week. The reasons for using the shop were stated as price and accessibility then quality and freshness.

In general very few people use local vans for regular shopping this is also true of Health on Wheels shoppers, with 70% of respondents using it for top up or emergency shopping.

The shoppers buy a range of goods at the van but very few people use the van only to purchase fruit and vegetables (Fig 4).



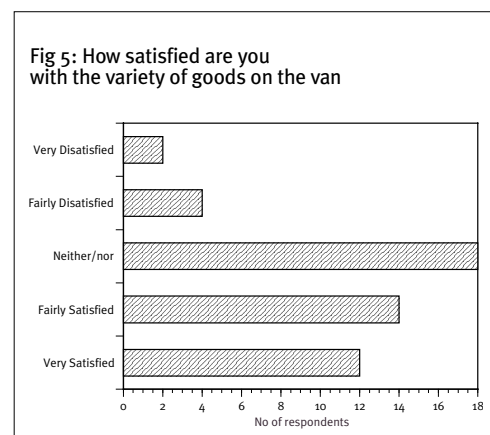
Users views about the service

66% of users are very/fairly satisfied, with the time of the van, and 60% are very/fairly satisfied with the frequency of its visits (although 28% were dissatisfied). 76% are very/fairly satisfied with the day of visit.

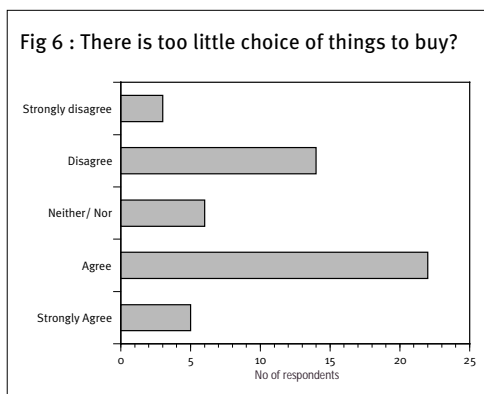
In terms of quality of goods and value for money, 98% are very/fairly satisfied as to quality and 84% are very/fairly satisfied re value for money.

There was very little concern around safety issues related to shopping in the street, with 84% saying it was not an issue. 80% of respondents thought that the van was a pleasant place to shop with friendly staff who had a good attitude. There was a slight concern about access to the van with 34% of respondents disagreeing / strongly disagreeing that it was easy to get in and out of the mobile shop.

There was also a more equivocal view about the variety of goods sold in the van. As part of a general rating question, respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the variety of goods on sale in the shop. As can be seen in Fig 5 while more than half were very/ fairly satisfied 36% were neutral and 12% were very/ fairly dissatisfied.



When asked directly whether they thought that there was too little choice of goods on the van (Fig 6) 54% agreed/ strongly

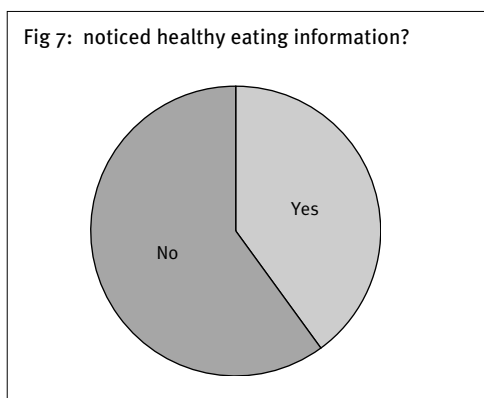


agreed with that statement while 34% disagreed/ strongly disagreed.

In summary, there is a generally positive view of the vans schedule among users, the quality of goods and service are fairly highly rated. There was some concern about access to the van and also some concern about the range of goods available however, overall, as a mobile shop it seems to be received well.

The role of the van

Looking at the vans role as a health information point the picture is less clear. When respondents were asked which roles they thought the Health on Wheels van fulfilled, the main themes arising were access to shopping and access to healthy foods (78% and 74%). 38% of respondents identified it as having a role in giving people healthy eating



information while only 4% thought it was just a mobile shop like any other.

When asked if they had noticed the healthy eating information and recipes (Fig 7) 40% had and 60% had not. Of those who had noticed the healthy eating information (20 people) 12 had gone on to use the information and recipes. However when asked directly to rate the usefulness of information given on the mobile shop a much broader picture appears; with 46% describing it as very/ fairly good and 42% describing it as poor / fairly poor.

The development of the project: views from the key informants.

As part of the research a set of depth interviews with workers, funders and supporters of the project were carried out. This section uses material from these interviews to look at the experience of the project over its first 18 months. Overall the interviewees value the Health on Wheels project and perceive it as a success. However their have been problems in its development and running.

Overview

At the end of its first year of operation 'Have a Heart Paisley had this to say about the Health on Wheels project.

'Health on Wheels (HOW) - a mobile food initiative providing easy access to healthy affordable, good quality food - has now been operating for one year. The first review of this community-managed service was very positive, with figures showing a marked increase in the sales of fruit and vegetables to the local community. Operating throughout Paisley, five days a week, has not been without difficulties however, and it is a measure of the group's strength and hard work that inevitable obstacles have been overcome.'

The first year of operation had highpoints and lowpoints. The van gradually built up a customer base and the workers learned about the good and bad trading areas on their route. They gradually built up their trade. However the project suffered from turnover in staff.

'...It is hard to get a good team... we have had a large turnover of staff.'

'... It was difficult we went through 3 drivers and sales assistants.'

Turnover of staff is problematic not only because of difficulties in recruitment but because of the need to apply again for a traders licence.

Customers using the van seemed to recognise its special qualities and the van was building its customer base;

'... if someone wants something special we get it for them. There is one woman likes these special potatoes ... She puts her order in on a Tuesday and she will get them delivered on Friday'

Over this period the van was gradually building its business and increasing its turnover.

Issues that arose in developing Health on Wheels

- Designing and specifying the van
- Ordering and modification of the van
- Different road tax and different insurance - commercial van and public liability insurance
- Health and Safety compliance certificates
- Length of time (and cost) it takes to get a street traders licence
- Employing staff - issues around tax, NI
- Training and support issues for staff and management.
- Garaging for van
- Servicing costs
- Storage for stock
- Suppliers for Fruit, Vegetables, Meat, Fish and pre-packed goods
- Marketing and evaluation

'...the van was making £72 a week when it went on the road at first. Then the turnover was getting better and it was going up to £200 or £300 a week. And then it went up to nearly £500.'

However a major problem arose. It was pointed out to the funders that the van was not keeping to its contract to supply healthier foods difficult to source in these areas and was providing an unacceptable range of foodstuffs. The van had started stocking sausages and pies. In its efforts to build its customer base it had neglected its responsibility to only sell healthy foods not available in local shops. Have a Heart Paisley was concerned that the van was not sticking to its contract and tackled the project team about this.

'... they are so good hearted and so committed to what they were doing ...they didn't see that they were doing anything that contravened any of the objectives they just thought that they were doing people a service.'

'... it was a very difficult time, but working with the group we were able to overcome the concerns, and also to convince the hierarchy that this was a slip and that the funding should be continued. ... in essence the van belonged to Have a Heart Paisley and the conditions of grant meant that if they didn't stick to their agreement they could take it back.'

This issue brought about a refocusing of the project and led to a change in purchasing policy. The takings on the van fell as people returned to their old suppliers but there were still market opportunities for the van.

'...in the summer it is amazing the amount of fruit they go through; because of the kids

Holidays... In Ferguslie Park the van went back to the fruit shop (supplier) about five times to get more fruit... You can be wiped out in a matter of minutes as they all come in for their 10p worth of grapes'

The services of the van are particularly welcomed by people with young families and the elderly - and some local home helps are now using the van to get their clients shopping.

'... a nutritionist (is) employed in the social work department through 'Have a Heart Paisley' and she is very good at taking leaflets and giving them out to home helps and letting them know when the van is in the area'

Over the end of 2002 the van was again starting to build its customer base and profits.

'...the customers fell away after they removed the sausages. It was starting to build its customer base back up again and then we had the incident in December.

'The incident' was an attack on the van by two men who stole the cash till and slashed the driver who tried to stop them, and clearly this was a substantial drawback for the project.

'We didn't have any problems at all for 13 months ... then on black Friday 13th December, two guys jumped (robbed) the van and slashed Thomas. Not that they got away with anything much, it was only about £40'

The van was out of commission for six weeks and had to be refurbished with safety screens and video recording equipment. The van went back on the road with the same staff.

Summary

This project arose through a combination of need, experience, expertise and opportunity. The project was developed by committed and experienced community groups and workers. However they had a fairly steep learning curve in finding funding and operationalising the idea. While the group were very experienced in community and voluntary working some of the skills and knowledge required to start up a small business from scratch were underdeveloped. The group had little idea of the regulatory structures that small mobile shops had to work within - certification as to fitness of purpose for the van, traders licences for workers, commercial insurance for the van, national insurance and tax for the workers- the importance of the order in which these processes took place and the timescale for them all came as a bit of a surprise those involved.

The experience of the group in running local food co-ops meant that they had good links into fruit and vegetable suppliers and knew about wholesale markets, they did not have similar links with meat and fish suppliers.

Health on Wheels received its funding to provide access to foodstuffs in deprived areas of Paisley. As the funding proposal states;

'The project would be in the form of a mobile initiative that would provide a food retail service to central accessible points within communities. Local people would be able to purchase low cost affordable, health produce. The emphasis would be on the consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables. The service would also encompass the provision of leaflets that give advice and information about healthy diets.'

The project also had objectives relating to cookery demonstrations, training for staff and the development of an expanded project which would have other food co-ops and food groups using the Health on Wheels project as a supply project. The project has yet to operationalise these objectives.

The project has proved to be well liked by users and the work carried out has shown that there is a need for a local service like this in some of the areas.

Discussion

Health on Wheels is an innovative project in a number of ways;

- it is a community run, NHS Board funded retail organisation
- it is an attempt to make a direct impact on the failure of the retail market to provide for the needs of people in disadvantaged areas
- it is an attempt to develop the lessons learned in community food co-ops on a wider stage
- it is an attempt to tackle some of the structural issues that relate to heart disease as well as delivering Health Promotion activities
- it is trying to develop a new type of health improvement action

For the volunteers, worker, funders and supporting organisations the first 18 months of this project have been a very steep learning curve. There have been problems, however, the project has demonstrated that there is a market there, although it may need a more co-ordinated approach to maximise it.

'The mobile van is not an alternative to the corner shop. There is a demand for it from people who are less mobile - people with mobility issues, parents with children etc.'

'The down side is it is only one van and spreads itself very thinly. The up side is it is targeting those that need and it is addressing some of the health inequalities'

With nearly two years of experience under its belt the project now needs to stand back and look at the lessons from this period. It needs to understand its main role and its contribution to the bigger picture - it needs to be focused. It needs to clarify its position on the range of opportunities available to it.

Project Strengths

- New form of retail provision
- Specific support to elderly and families with young children
- Committed experienced local activists
- Has shown that there is a market
- Understands the community it serves
- Fulfils a need in the area
- Good van
- Supportive funders

Project Weaknesses

- Suffered due to lack of experience re issues around developing mobile trading
- Not enough development of the funding application leading to a lack of clarity as to purpose - retail / retail-health improvement/ social retail?
- Not enough joined up working in supporting and developing a wider health promotion role
- Timescale too tight, 2 years not enough
- Relies too much on small team of community activists

Sustainability

Over the first eighteen months the work of the mobile project, while it has had to be redefined, shows that it is possible to develop a working model of a new type of retail. It is unclear however whether this type of mobile shop can be financially self sufficient. In the research the issue of sustainability and the business model that the shop subscribed to was a regular theme.

'... if Health on Wheels has to be run as a commercial/self financing operation it may be selling products that people may not want - healthy foods.'

It is probably spread too thinly across too many areas - the van needs to be where

people want it when they want it- it needs to be regular.

'The staff need a clearer role, more support and training if they are to be health promoters.'

'People tend to expect retail services to be available 7 days a week and open long hours.'

This pilot project has been developing a new approach to the problems around food and health in deprived areas. It has worked on:

- new forms of access to good food,
- new ways of providing information and support and a
- new way of funding pilot projects.

It has had more than its fair share of teething troubles. It has provided a setting for lots of learning around new work on food and health (and it is important not to lose the lessons learnt). To build on the lessons from this first attempt it needs to find time and funding to re-assess the business model and to develop a broader approach on the lessons that have been learned over the first 2 years.

Conclusions

Through the research it is clear that the users of the van are generally happy with the service and recognise that it is "a bit different from the ordinary van". Non-users of the van expect a more traditional van service.

The interviews with the staff, funders and supporters of the mobile van project however raised a number of issues that they felt had to be addressed for the mobile food van to maximise its service potential and health promotion function. These have been grouped into two themes.

Staffing and support

The intention behind this project was to give local people access to healthier foodstuffs and to provide health promotion support. To achieve the health promotion aims the workers need to be supported and trained to tackle the key roles of giving information and helping choice.

The management and support roles have proven to be particularly difficult and time consuming. There is a need to provide some funded management and development support to the project.

Structural Issues

Funding; the project needs to find a broader funding base if it is to continue as part of the local health improvement agenda this means the development of a clearer set of objectives for the projects health promotion/ improvement activities.

There is also a need to look at the business model for the project. There is also a need to move from 'grace and favour' to more formal structures re storage and garaging and management and development. The project is too reliant on community volunteering and informal support structures.

Project Two: Roots and Fruits

Providing services over an extensive rural area in the east of Scotland Roots and Fruits have been running both retail and delivery services to areas which have poor access to fresh fruit and vegetables for over five years. Over this time they have developed a mix of support and funding to enable them to develop this well regarded local project.

History and context

Roots and fruits grew from work by the East Lothian Voluntary Organisations Network (ELVON) and its concerns around local food issues:

'ELVON identified food and poverty as an issue and the community conference obviously rung a bell with local people.'

In April 1997 ELVON helped organise a community conference at which local people and organisations decided that there was a need to tackle food, health and poverty issues in East Lothian. A steering group was set up and a start-up grant from East and Midlothian Health Projects Steering Group got the project started. With the commitment from volunteers and funders that arose from that meeting the organisation that was to become Roots and Fruits was born. With this grant a second hand minibus was purchased and converted into a mobile shop which went round the priority areas in East Lothian selling fresh fruit and vegetables.

'...we had to have a van to target the rural areas- we were very conscious of the need to cover all areas.'

The produce was sold without adding profit to keep the price low for customers. There was no funding for workers in the beginning and the project relied on committed volunteers. Because of the support it had as an organisation and the

high profile of its work an approach to the education department to explore the idea of developing work promoting healthy eating in schools was warmly welcomed. The funding from the East Lothian Education Department enabled the project to employ a part time development officer, who was able to build on the earlier work.

This saw the expansion of the provision of fruit together with an educational input in schools and the development of new activities with community groups. Delivery of fruit and vegetables to a wider set of projects grew into the mobile shop provision that operates today.

Projects need to develop and grow both for the workers and for the funders (particularly charitable funders). The need to gain further funding helped the growth of the project expanding from providing healthier foods, to working with teachers and children and on to the development of a specifically designed and targeted retail van.

Aims of Roots and Fruits

Roots and Fruits aims to promote good health among the people of East Lothian. Its main objectives are:

- Promoting healthier eating
- Promoting access to good quality fruit, vegetables and provisions at affordable prices

- To enable its members to have a say and take part in the project, by becoming members of the Management Committee or volunteer helpers

‘... in rural areas like this there is often a much more direct link between the councillors and citizens. When the project had difficulties with its funding from the health board not only did Pamela (development worker) lobby the council- a number of the officials and members children voiced their concern at losing their school fruit ‘

Setting

As can be seen from its geography (map below) Roots and Fruits is based in a predominantly rural area with some pockets of mining (now defunct). Like many rural areas East Lothian has a number of voluntary organisations with good levels of participation. An important part of the projects early success was its setting within ELVON.

‘ELVON’s links to the health board and the Council helped get it noticed’

The strong links with the community and community organisations that the project has built has led to it being seen as a key player in local food issues by the Health Board and Local Authority. A member of Lothian Health acts as an advisor to the management committee as does the Director of ELVON. And Roots and Fruits take part in the Local Authority Health Committee.

The food project was part of ELVON in the early years; and now as an independent project still benefits from close links and support.

The early work by its volunteers and its development worker raised its profile not only in the communities and schools but also within council and health board departments.

The collection of small villages that the project serves, their schools and in particular the needs of the elderly and infirm have shaped Roots and Fruits development and service provision. The need to be able to transport fruit and vegetable to customers and service users has been the thrust of much of its work.



Structure and staffing

Roots and Fruits is a registered Scottish Charity overseen by a voluntary management committee of 12 members who meet monthly. As well as local residents the committee has co-opted advisers from the Health Board and ELVON.

At this time (March 2003) Roots and Fruits has 6 staff, all working part-time:

- 1 development officer
- 2 van driver /salespersons
- 3 out-reach workers

Funding

As with many voluntary projects Roots and Fruits has a mixture of statutory and charitable funders supporting its work. Accessing funding for voluntary organisations is generally regarded as becoming more difficult. Charitable funders change focus every three years and there is a need to stay one step ahead. Statutory funding is increasingly tied into service level agreements and finds collaborative funding difficult to do. At present Roots and Fruits main funding is jointly provided by East Lothian Council (two departments, Education and Social Work supply £6,000 each annually) and NHS Lothian gives £12,000 per year. Additional funding is supplied by Lloyds TSB who provide funding for the part-time workers with the three outreach co-ops, the Tudor Trust who fund the delivery driver, and the Scottish Community Diet Project who have provided funding for the fruit in schools activities eg taster sessions and has helped to fund the community garden project. As a charity Roots and Fruits are not allowed to make a profit so all its activities are run at cost price. In July 2001 The National Lotteries Charities Board awarded a grant to purchase the

fully accessible mobile shop, the focus for this research.

Project Activity

Roots and Fruits has a range of activities which provides good quality fresh fruit and vegetables at low prices around the towns and villages in East Lothian. These comprise a delivery service, three local food co-ops and a mobile shop.

It also has a strong role in education and development around food issues and is developing a community garden project.

Delivery Service

Roots and Fruits provide schools, breakfast clubs, play groups and community groups with fresh fruit to sell in tuck shops as an alternative to crisps and sweets. Fruit is supplied cheaply to 17 schools to be sold on in tuck shops for as little as 10p per piece as an alternative to crisps and sweets. Thirteen nurseries, three breakfast clubs and two playgroups are also supplied with subsidised fresh fruit and vegetables. In addition six day care and resource centres purchase produce from the project.

Food Co-ops

The project has three outreach food co-ops covering villages in East Lothian (Elphinston, Longniddry and Whitecraig). Each of the outreach co-ops has a part-time worker who collect orders from customers, pass them to the main office and make up and deliver the orders to the customers door.

Mobile shop

Roots and Fruits provide a retail service for fruit, vegetables and canned goods over a wide range of East Lothian villages. The Mobile Shop provides a service to people who are housebound. People in

wheelchairs are able to come on to the van with help from the drivers.

Education and development

A range of educational activities are carried out, the development worker regularly gives talks about the work of the project to community groups in the area. She also organises tasting sessions for a range of young peoples groups, schools and nurseries to introduce them to ideas about healthy eating and healthy diets. The development worker also runs a range of cookery classes and workshops encouraging people to cook healthy low cost meals.

The project is in the process of developing a community garden growing and training scheme which will come onstream in the coming year.

Networking

Voluntary Organisations are often particularly important in rural areas in linking communities. Roots and fruits is active in the local network of voluntary organisations, liaising with and meeting other agencies for mutual support and development.

Roots & Fruits Mobile Shop

The mobile shop is an integral part of the work of Roots and Fruits project. Over the six years in which they have been addressing issues around food access in East Lothian they have built upon their skills and expertise and developed the services they offer. The work made them aware of a range of issues around the needs of residents of rural villages and in particular the needs of the elderly and less mobile members of the community.

The delivery van that was being used to support its work was not suitable to offer a proper service to this group. The project applied to the National Lotteries Charities

Board for a grant to purchase a wheelchair accessible mobile shop in order to develop services for this group.

This bid was successful and in July 2001 the Project took delivery of its new purpose built mobile shop.

Costs of the Van and legal requirements

The van is a professionally converted wheelchair accessible mobile shop based on a Renault box van and cost £29,000.00.

One of the drawbacks inherent in charitable and small grant funding is that it is often difficult to get funders to fund areas as basic (but vital) as the running costs of a van, instead they often prefer innovative developments. It is often difficult to get the funders to accept the inclusion of a large enough contingency fund in the original bid to cover most eventualities.

Other costs that need to be taken into consideration (see fig 1) are Road Tax, Insurance, Street Traders Licence for the driver/ salesperson and any costs arising from the annual health, safety and hygiene inspections. There may also be costs involved in putting staff through Health and Hygiene certification courses.

Fig.1 : Running a Van

Purchase costs - Roots and Fruits Van	£29,00.00
<hr/>	
Depreciate the van over 4 years each year the van costs	£7,250
Running Costs - estimation of 40 miles to the gallon and £3.50 per gallon at 60 miles per day/ 5 days a week, 50 weeks a year (15,000 miles per year)	£1312.5
Road Tax	£155
Insurance	£1600
Traders licences x2@ £60 each approx.	£120
Servicing, tyres, maintenance etc (this will vary annually some years less)	£1,000
<u>Estimated Total Costs (per annum)</u>	<u>£11,437.50</u>
<i>(These costs are before considering staff and stock costs)</i>	

Garaging and storage

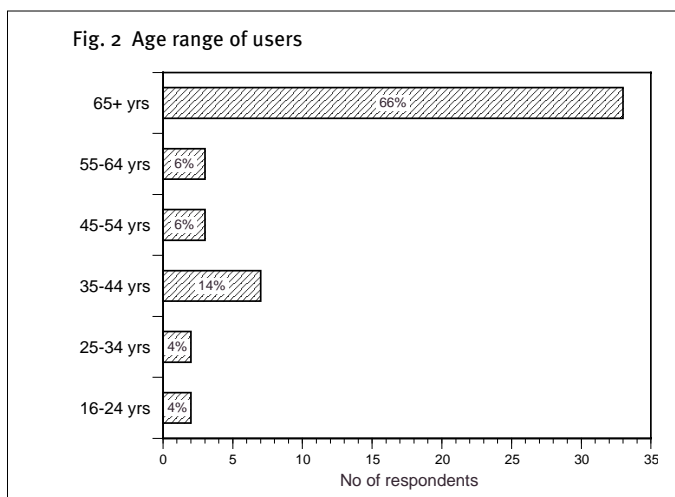
Roots and Fruits shop does not have a garage or a storage area. It is parked in a parking bay beside the drivers house and is restocked from the fruit and Vegetable suppliers.

Mobile Shop Schedule

The mobile shop operates five days a week, Monday to Friday. The van services 23 areas throughout East Lothian covering 19 different towns and villages, with up to 10 stops in each place. The map on page 27 shows the coverage of the project. It also goes to 8 nursery schools a fortnight giving the children experience of choosing their own fruit. And it provides a service to 13 housebound people and eight day centres.

Who uses the shop?

While the service provided is for anyone, the bulk of the customers are women (74%). Most of the customers are aged 65 or over. The Project believes it has over 300 customers.



How frequently do they use it?

Customers of the Roots and Fruit shop are very regular users with 84% of them using it on its weekly visit.

What the shop offers

As well as being a source of a much wider range of fresh fruit and vegetables than can be found in small local shops, the van carries some tinned and pre-packed goods. It offers recipes and healthy eating information and will also access special requests for particular types of fruit and vegetables if asked.

As part of the rationale behind the project is to give people with restricted mobility or who are wheelchair bound independence, the van is wheelchair accessible and has ramps to allow access. Wheelchair bound users can select their own produce, chat to the driver and also see some of their neighbours when they purchase produce. For some the social contact with other customers seems to be as important as the purchasing of fresh produce on their doorstep.

Another part of the service is that the driver goes to the houses of customers who are housebound, collects their orders, packs it and brings it back to the customer (in some cases also returning to them their purse which has been handed over with the order). It is a social interaction as well as a commercial one:

'... have you time for a cup of tea, Davy?'

In some cases, the van driver is the only person to come through their door that day. The Roots and Fruits mobile shop is not a normal retail outlet. It provides what could be described as a type of 'supported shopping'.

Views of users about the service

80% of customers filling in the questionnaire, thought that the van provided a much needed service and nearly all (94%) thought that the people

A typical day for Roots and Fruits mobile shop

In the morning the van is restocked with fruit and vegetables from the supplier, any special orders are picked up and the stock of tinned and pre-packed goods loaded. It then visits a local nursery, allowing the children to visit the van and choose their own fruit, the van carries a wider range of fruit and vegetables than the children would see in a local corner shop. At the same visit, the van may be dropping off some exotic fruit for tasting session or a prize basket of fruit for a parents' raffle.

The van may then move on to park at the centre of a sheltered housing complex. Here mobile residents will pop out to the van for their supplies. This can range in quantity, with some customers buying their weeks vegetable shopping:

'... me and my man like a good pot of soup'

and others buying a small quantity of fruit for consumption that day. Less mobile residents send out the sheltered housing staff or members of their family to pick up their orders for the week.

The shop is also a place to chat, 'rib' the driver, order something special or enquire after neighbours and 'tales from the toon'. It is seen as a 'real' local shop not a special service for the disadvantaged or a food parcel or meals delivery service.

In the afternoon the van may be out on one of its routes through local villages. The van parks in its regular spot at its regular time in the middle of a housing estate. The driver opens the door, switches on the till, and then pops over to a nearby house where the resident is waiting for him at the door. As she has mobility difficulties the driver comes over and picks up her shopping list. After a chat about local worthies the driver then goes back to the van, fulfils her order and returns it to her. By now there is a small queue of local women chatting away. They have questions about the stock and the locality, one of them keen to get a particular type of potato and to know whether the driver had heard about the state of health of a man in the next street.

The approachability of the staff is welcomed, as is the accessibility of the van:

'...it's big door makes life easier'

At the next scheduled stopping place, two or three streets away, the driver knocks on one of the customers doors to pick up an order, and on getting no reply he goes toward the neighbours house. The neighbour appears with a friendly greeting and the information that her neighbour is away visiting her daughter and she will see the driver next week. The van again has one or two customers waiting to be served, chatting about the world and buying fruit and vegetables, squeezing the tomatoes, asking if there are any 'strawbs' where are the mushrooms and did they get any more of that 'Big Soup'.

This pattern is repeated throughout the afternoon across eight regular stops. The van providing not just access to good quality fruit and vegetables but a friendly and accessible local community service.

who worked on the van were friendly and helpful. In terms of the frequency of visits of the mobile shop, 96% of customers were satisfied or very satisfied with the schedule at the moment, and a similar proportion were very or fairly satisfied with the day of the week of the van's visit.

Satisfaction with the quality of the goods supplied was very high with 90% being very or fairly satisfied with the quality.

The project has clearly generated a very positive profile with all of the sites and the users contacted by the researchers. Its work and its staff are both warmly described and welcomed.

'...she (development worker) is just so accessible and supportive Any special project or bit of work we are doing and Pamela gives us support and prizes for the competitions, always quickly and with a smile.'

'Word of mouth' has been an important factor in the project's development and satisfied users have recommended the project to others.

'How did I know about the project?'



Roots and Fruits Mobile Shop in West Barns

(Primary School Worker) ... my next door neighbour got stuff delivered and recommended them... they are really good!'

Views of funders about the service

The positive view of the users of the van is also reflected in the perceptions of the funders. With its good links into both the Local Authority and the NHS Board, Roots and Fruits is perceived as a model of good local collaborative work.

'Public Health work needs to take place across sectors and this is a difficult juggling act; Roots and Fruits is a real example of what is possible.'

The project as a whole is seen as linking into a number of the Local Authorities' targets. It is at the core of the Councils healthy eating policy for schools, and is an enabling component of the food and diet education in schools and Nurseries. Through its delivery and food co-op projects it helps address access and social exclusion issues and it is involved in education and health promotion with adults. The council views its work very positively.

The NHS Board funds Roots and Fruits through its Health Promotion special fund and sees its work as a model worth exploring.

'Roots and Fruits provides all sorts of added value that straight contracted services would not - good community service - good neighbourhood stuff!'

The NHS Board provides funding for the broad range of Roots and Fruits activities. It recognises that the work addresses a range of important health issues:

- access to fresh produce,

- issues around social exclusion and social justice,
- access to healthy eating options,
- community based education and action,
- the development of a community focus on health, food and poverty with a growth in community focused solutions

this type of work fits into the NHS Boards food and health strategy.

Evaluation

In a project with a stretched budget and part-time staff there is a limit to the depth of evaluation that can be carried out. The project staff have carried out practical information gathering to see how to develop services. Information about numbers of users and the amount of fruit and vegetables used are kept, and a users questionnaire to gather information about the kind of stock the van should carry has been carried out.

Discussion

The Mobile Shop cannot be considered separately from the rest of the work of the Roots and Fruits Project. The retail project is part of the work of Roots and Fruits shares the staff and support network and is thought of by users as being part of the whole service. Feedback from funders, supporters and users of Roots and Fruits mobile shop has been overwhelmingly positive. The project's other work has also generated a raised profile for food and health action in East Lothian and a positive reputation among funders and service providers. From information gathered through interview and project papers supplemented with observations from the researchers a description of project strengths and weaknesses has been drawn up.

Project Strengths

- The work of Roots and Fruits and the Mobile Shop is viewed positively by users, funders and supporters. The projects are obviously held in high regard with particularly positive views about the staff.
- The project has committed, active staff who appear from observation to do more than they are paid for.
- The project has retained its links to the community who developed it.
- The project is very community focused; the work of the van being set within a framework that looks at the needs of the community as a whole. This shows in the concerns of the staff for the users as members of the local community not just as customers
- The van is seen as part of a range of interrelated activities and services including: deliveries to schools and care homes, cookery demonstrations, healthy eating information, local food co-ops, community activity around food and eating
- The project is set within a wider supportive framework (ELVON and Funders)

Project Weaknesses

- Funding -with a range of funding sources and demands Roots and Fruits is in a vulnerable position.
- Staff: overworked staff risk burn- out (projects like this often find it difficult to replace committed individuals if they leave). The project is arguably, too reliant on existing staff skills
- "Real" running costs for the van such as servicing, insurance etc are difficult to fund
- The project has had little time for reflection and consolidation and will need to address this with reference to sustaining activity and staff.

Conclusions

Like many community based and developed projects this one relies on the commitment of a group of community activists. With flexible management and willing participants local work can be developed and run well. However as time goes on the need to support and develop participants and to consolidate the activities of the project means that stronger funding sources are needed. In the case of Roots and Fruits the issues to be addressed are:

- The work carried out by Roots and Fruits, while focused on issues around access to good food, can also be described as being work for the common good. The breadth of work carried out, provisioning, community support, education and training, health improvement work, policy and service development make it difficult to match this type of work with funding organisations structured budget headings. While this breadth of activity is useful in the search for charitable funding, allowing the development of new strands of the work to appeal to different funders it can also mean a

culture of 'permanent change' which can be challenging to staff . It may be necessary for the project to spend some time teasing out its core values/ services from the work of the past years, to look at which parts of the work should be further developed.

- Notwithstanding the need to explore a firming up of its core values/services the project needs to find funding for an increase in staffing time to reduce pressure on existing staff and to support staff and service development. New funding structures need to include proper funding for infrastructure, running costs, garaging and storage.
- Management structure: the flexibility of the management at the moment means quick response and active and interested participation. This may be lost in a move to a more formal structure. There will be a need to consider the importance of the voluntary relationships in this project when developing more sustainable funding structures and service developments.

Discussion

Lessons from the projects

As will be obvious from the descriptions in this report both of these projects are more than just retail businesses. As community actions attempting to address similar problems in similar ways there are a range of common experiences. Both projects provide a needed service, both have had similar problems around funding, developing the van, licencing issues and staffing. They have similar sets of strengths:

- Committed staff
- Links into the community
- Links with other services
- Understanding of the issues
- Broad funding
- Supportive funders

There are however also a range of differences between the two projects, these differences encompass:

- Projects history and development
- Projects remit and definition of role
- Geography
- Funding structures
- Timescale.

From the work of these two projects can be drawn a set of themes and issues that need to be considered in setting up a community run mobile retail project.

Issues to consider

- Objectives and philosophy
- Types of funding
- Geography
- Support structures

- Territoriality and community rivalry
- Timescale
- Evaluation
- Staffing
- Issues around van
- Sustainability

Objectives and philosophy

While it might be thought odd to consider issues around philosophy in terms of a mobile shop the lack of a clear understanding of why and how the activity is being undertaken can raise problems with funders, supporters and users. Most community projects have to have charitable funding to get access to funding - charitable status affects the way in which projects can make or use profit. There can be differences in perception of acceptable outcomes between a project with a purely retail set of objectives and one with a health promotion or improvement agenda, this can affect what you sell - vegetables ok! hamburgers not ok! what about chips??- and also where you trade. The way in which these types of projects conceptualise themselves has implications for the types of funding available, the perceptions of community and the views of professional workers in the areas the shop trades in. Clarity and agreement about the projects rationale and actions has to be sorted out before anything else.

Types of funding

The two case studies have very different funding structures. Health on Wheels has a contractual relationship (fixed term)

with a single funder (the local NHS Board through its Heart Health project). The original bid document suggested that the mobile shop would be self financing, this may have been over-optimistic

Roots and Fruits has a more diverse (and difficult?) set of funding arrangements which have grown over time. This loose funding arrangement allows for flexibility in developing new activities but the funding process is very time consuming and in a small project uses up scarce staff and support time. It puts great pressure on workers.

At the moment both projects are underfunded for part of their needs eg garaging, storage, vehicle servicing and contingency. And the staff appear to be under supported for the range of their activities

The richness of activity that these types of project are involved in makes access to long-term funding sources difficult, complex projects have compound outcomes and these are difficult to evaluate. Funding is often easier to access from charitable sources as they will provide developmental funding and can cope with the complexity of the projects. Local authorities are more used to contracting service level agreements and to fit into these structures means that some of the richness of the projects may have to be stripped away. The other funding problem relates to the notion of these projects being retail businesses (that could make a profit). In reality this has not been a concern for either of the case-studies and could be addressed by an exploration of a mix of funded health promotion and fruit and vegetable delivery activities with some support from sales. This could prove to be a better long term prospect which removes the projects from the problems associated from being a purely retail enterprise.

Both projects have funding issues to deal with if they are to continue to support and develop their work.

Roots and Fruits with a long history of gaining funding from a range of sources needs to work towards some sort of funding stability. It has local support and a good track record in providing a mixture of services. With stronger local funding support it could bring together its mix of retail food services, health promotion and education service under a joint funding arrangement with health and local authorities possibly through the new Scottish community planning structures.

Geography

Size and population density obviously have an impact on the activity of the project. The two projects looked at here worked in geographically contrasting areas, one rural with a large catchment area and a mainly elderly user group the other urban with a high population density and a number of areas of social exclusion. The impact of these settings differ. Roots and Fruits mobile shop has to cover large distances and can only visit areas once a week. Shopping activity at the mobile shop is fairly evenly spread across the served areas at the moment - to increase its areas of activities the project would need to purchase another van and find funding for staff storage etc.. In Health on Wheels case the problems are different - while their trading areas are much closer together the use of the shop differs. They have some areas where uptake of their services are very poor and others where they could get much more custom by spending more time there. This would mean that they would not be providing a comprehensive service rather a targeted one (in terms of a purely retail model of provision this could be seen as a sensible move) if the project is seen as a

health promotion / health improvement project that set of actions may not be appropriate.

Support structures

Both of the case studies grew from a strong foundation within active communities and community organisations. They built their projects on strong volunteer efforts and gradually gained support and funding from local professional and service organisations. The range of supports covers:

- Local Volunteer Development agency
- Community Activists
- Local Health Promotion Departments
- Community Health Projects and Workers
- Health Authority Services and Projects
- Local Authority Education and Social Work Departments
- Local Authority Councillors
- National Support Bodies eg Scottish Community Diet Project
- A wide range of charitable funders

But support can also be found in policies at the National and Local levels eg Scottish Diet Action Plan, National Policies supporting collaborative approaches to health and social exclusion issues and at the local level the policies around school meals and access to fresh fruit.

Both of these projects have activists and support workers who are well aware of the needs of local and national policy makers to find and support action which can be seen to meet policy drivers eg 'joined up working' 'community development on health' 'community level action' 'links with local economy and environment' and can use this to support the local work. However as can be seen in the next section this may not always be plain sailing.

Territoriality and community rivalry

These are huge demands made on funding for community based work particularly in urban areas where there can be many competing groups for limited finance.

This was a problem for the Health on Wheels project where some other groups viewed the funding success of the project with suspicion and provided a range of gossip and backbiting about the project and its activities.

This can be an issue wherever projects develop and needs to be considered when developing project structures, issues around clarity of process, links with other local projects and an open and friendly relationship with other projects and workers all help to offset these possible problems.

Timescale

Do not underestimate the length of time that it takes to get projects like these off the ground. Both case studies had long lags in the development of funding proposals and the gaining and accessing funding. Even with funding agreements in place sometimes the organisation structures of the funders delayed the transmission of the actual funds. Then there were long delays involved in the conversion of vans, the licencing of the van and the gaining of operators (street traders) licences.

The other issue around timescale is that of the timescale of expectations placed upon projects by funders. A two year funded project working on issues around access to healthier foods and with the long term aim of health gain for a community is not going to be able to produce outcome measures showing increased life expectancy over a two, five or ten year period. The projects and funders have to

have realistic expectations of what is achievable in the short, medium and long term. This can be difficult for keen community projects who are developing new forms of work and desperate for funding - they can find themselves agreeing to inappropriate targets.

Evaluation and communication

Neither of the two case studies had been able to carry out extensive evaluations of their work. In East Lothian lack of funding and staff time restricted the evaluation they could carry out to practical data keeping about numbers of users and the amount of fruit and vegetables used they also carried out a users questionnaire to gather information about the kind of stock the van should carry.

In Paisley an evaluation framework was developed with local Health Authority workers but due to changes in staffing it has yet to be implemented.

Evaluation of projects like these is time consuming and needs to be built into the

original bids with sensible funding and support from external workers.

Community projects (and many statutory projects) are often remiss in either measuring activity or describing action and much learning and information is lost. While carrying out the work for this report the researchers were often quizzed by other project as to the availability of information about the mobile shop projects, as it was 'something we have been thinking about for a while'. There is a great deal of interest in this type of project and the case studies should be supported in the production of a range of descriptive materials.

Staffing

Commercial retail mobile vans need to employ people who can interact with the public and count their change. Projects like the case studies in this report make a much higher demand on their staff. It can be difficult to write an accurate job description for the workers in these types of project; how do you write into a job description a role that encompasses policy level work both locally and nationally, support for local school projects, delivering fruit to peoples homes, visiting them in hospital as well as providing input to support national level work as the development worker for the Lothian project does.

Community activists who develop these types of projects have high levels of understanding about organisations and their operation and great focus and determination. However they sometimes have few formal qualifications or qualifications in seemingly unrelated areas and this can lead to difficulties when trying to access proper levels of remuneration (particularly if funding is from statutory services).

Voluntary giving underpins the

Things to consider when developing this type of project

Timescales for the projects
Timescales for the outcomes

Specific issues : Philosophy
 Joined up working
 Staffing
 Territoriality

Pre-requisites: Clear model
 Good funding
 Support from community
 Support from agencies

Needed to further develop the work

- local Autonomy
- reasonable and regular funding
- projects linked into a broader set of provision - new public health workforce.

development and much of the work of these projects there is a need to explore how this would be affected by the need to make a profit.

Issues to consider when thinking about a mobile shop

- Design and specification of the van
- Ordering and modification of the van
- Health and Safety compliance certificates
- Timescale and cost of street traders licence
- Length of time for all above
- Different road tax
- Different Insurance - commercial van and public liability insurance
- Employing staff - issues around tax, NI etc

- Training and support issues
- Garaging for van
- Storage for stock
- Suppliers for Fruit, Veg, Meat, Fish and pre-packed goods

Sustainability

The development of new types of provision that incorporates different sorts of activity eg health promotion, food provision, community business, local training, educational support, common good is difficult as can be seen from the case studies in this report. Providing funding and support to make such projects last and give them scope to develop - making them sustainable - is a trick that is yet to be properly attained.

