

**Notes from the roundtable discussion on  
'Lay Community Food Workers'  
held in the offices of the Scottish Community Diet  
Project in Glasgow on  
29<sup>th</sup> May 2001**

The small group who attended this session included people who had worked in a non-professional capacity, had set up a community food worker scheme, and providers of training and other support services.

The **language** (lay community food worker, community nutrition assistant) used to describe non-professional staff was agreed as unhelpful (eg lay sounds uninformed, food is more accurate than nutrition, community worker is a qualified profession but community food worker isn't, etc). Unfortunately no-one could come up with an acceptable term that actually describes the post.

It was agreed that a key issue for the development of community food workers was **training**.

- ♣ Training had to be both participative and challenging.
- ♣ An adequate training budget was required.
- ♣ A jigsaw of training opportunities had to be available to match individual needs and changing needs.
- ♣ Training had to support both the carrying out of responsibilities and career development.
- ♣ Access to training in 'community development and health' and 'nutrition' were considered the crucial strands although an understanding of 'economic development' and 'sustainability' were recognised as important to many initiatives that could be supported (eg food co-op, community café)
- ♣ A directory or directories signposting the range of training opportunities, levels, costs, accreditation, etc was highlighted as required.

Another key aspect of the use of non-professional staff was the **status** applied to them and their work.

- ♣ The title applied to the posts, as mentioned earlier, could automatically either cause friction with other staff or diminish the contribution being made.
- ♣ Being termed 'assistants' was considered misleading as their skills and experience more often complemented the work of professional staff.
- ♣ Status could be reinforced or diminished through being/not being consulted, pay grading, access to resources.

**Recruitment** was also considered an important issue.

- ♣ Recruiting people with an understanding and experience of local circumstances was noted as possibly having advantages over simply stipulating applicants must live in a given community, and unavoidable if several communities are to be covered.
- ♣ A well planned induction was considered crucial for people who would/should be making a major shift in their contribution to community activity.
- ♣ Encouraging a mixture of backgrounds skills and knowledge would enhance a team (catering, youth work, etc)
- ♣ Recruitment/induction must be considered as a crucial ongoing aspect of any scheme, particularly as staff should be given the opportunity/encouragement to develop their careers if they wish.

**Support**, on an ongoing basis, was also seen as important in maximising the effectiveness of community food workers.

- ♣ Both the topic and the nature of the activities undertaken required support to be available from not only professional staff in the funding agency but other agencies as well.
- ♣ Real partnership working in the field was seen as essential to getting the most from community food worker schemes.

***PARTICIPANTS LIST  
LAY WORKERS ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION  
29<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2001***

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