

Round table Discussion  
4 December 2002

## Developing Effective Community Catering Skills

Developing effective community catering skills is fundamental to the success of any community project involved in food provision no matter the scale or frequency of the provision. Examples of community catering initiatives include lunch clubs, breakfast clubs, community cafes, meals on wheels, and fruit tuck-shops, although this list is by no means exhaustive. Building on previous round table discussions on related themes<sup>1</sup>, a broad range of groups, projects and agencies involved directly or indirectly in community catering took part in this discussion to exchange their experience, skills and good practice as well as highlight the barriers and gaps that remain to be tackled. Representatives from community food initiatives and healthy living centres participated as well as staff from local authorities, further education, NHS Boards, the Food Standards Agency and the Scottish Healthy Choices Awards Scheme.

### ***Definition: Key issues for community catering in Scotland***

*'Community catering goes way beyond just cooking skills and getting food on the table. Community catering in its widest sense can have a huge positive impact in community life – from its physical and mental health and wellbeing to its financial fitness and productivity. It is vital.'*  
(Participant)

Based on the collective experience around the table, getting involved in a community catering initiative, be it a community café, lunch club, breakfast club or outside catering, has many benefits. The knowledge, skills and confidence gained by both paid and unpaid staff were described as many, and included practical cooking skills, knowledge and awareness of food hygiene, improved social skills and greater confidence with numeracy and organisational activities.

Improved cooking skills was of particular interest to the group as a lack of basic cooking skills has been defined as one of the four interlinking barriers to accessing a healthy diet in Scotland<sup>2</sup>, and is documented as being a problem across all socio-economic groups in the UK<sup>3</sup>. Disadvantaged communities in Scotland, however, often possess a wealth of untapped catering 'know-how'. As the 'Cookwell' Study<sup>4</sup> highlighted, these same areas where food skills were being

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<sup>1</sup> Past SCDP Round table discussions have included Cooking Skills (1999), Fruit in Schools (2000)

<sup>2</sup> Eating for health, A Diet Action Plan for Scotland: [www.scotland.gov.uk/library/documents/diet-00.htm](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library/documents/diet-00.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Caraher, M. & Lang, T. Can't cook, won't cook: A review of cooking skills and their relevance to health promotion. Int. J. Health Prom. & Educ., Vol.37; No.3; 1999 pp89-100.

<sup>4</sup> Cookwell Study – Key findings The 'Cookwell' resource pack is shortly to be made available on the Food Standards Agency website, watch out for details.

taught were also home to a number of people with catering training whose food preparation skills were often not harnessed enough.

As highlighted by contributions from around the table, good practice in community catering is growing across Scotland. This is a result of a number of factors including an increased workforce as more trained and funded community food worker posts are established (for example in Paisley<sup>5</sup> and Ayrshire<sup>6</sup>), better networking opportunities<sup>7</sup>, better resourced community catering kitchens and facilities such as the Skypoint Community Café in Faifley, Clydebank<sup>8</sup>, and improved community catering resources.

Edinburgh Community Food Initiative, along with the former Health Education Board for Scotland (NHS Health Scotland) launched the 'Just for Starters'<sup>9</sup> Community Café pack in 1999. This practical step by step guide to setting up and running a community café has proved popular with groups. An update and relaunch of the pack was raised as well as making the pack more accessible by putting it on the web and having a summary available as well as the full resource. Edinburgh Community Food Initiative also produced the Snack Attack<sup>10</sup> resource to help set up fruit tuck-shops.

The Scottish Community Diet Project's Breakfast Club Toolkit<sup>11</sup> has also proved to be a popular resource to share national good practice in setting up and running breakfast clubs. It is currently being updated for a relaunch scheduled for summer 2003. Another useful resource includes the more recent 'Food for Tot'<sup>12</sup>, a resource pack on feeding issues for babies and young children produced by Greengables Nursery School and Family Centre in Edinburgh.

The relaunched Co-operative Group's 'Get Shopping, Get Cooking'<sup>13</sup> resource for groups wishing to develop community based cooking and shopping skills is now available as a free down-load from the Co-op website. This popular resource has been recently revised and is now also available in Braille and large print. It includes nutritionally analysed, straight-forward recipes, which have been tried, and tested over a number of years since the pack was first launched in the 1990s by the National Food Alliance (now Sustain) before reworking from SCDP, local food initiatives, Greater Glasgow Health Promotion and the Scottish Co-op.

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[www.foodstandards.gov.uk/science/research/NutritionResearch/n09programme/n09projectlist/n09011/n09011res](http://www.foodstandards.gov.uk/science/research/NutritionResearch/n09programme/n09projectlist/n09011/n09011res)

<sup>5</sup> For more information, contact Heather Sloane at Have Heart Paisley. Tel: 0141 587 2479 or email: [heather.sloane@haveaheart.org.uk](mailto:heather.sloane@haveaheart.org.uk)

<sup>6</sup> For more information, Tel: 01294 466901 or email: [life@healthy3towns.org.uk](mailto:life@healthy3towns.org.uk)

<sup>7</sup> SCDP events: Spaghetti Junction 2000, Breakfast Daze 1999, Fruit in Schools Roundtable Discussion 2001

<sup>8</sup> Skypoint Community Café, contact Jim Boyle on Tel: 01389 879 797

<sup>9</sup> Just for Starters. For more information, call Agnes Allan at HEBS Tel: 01315365544

<sup>10</sup> Snack Attack: Contact Edinburgh Community Food Initiative (Tel): 0131 467 7326

<sup>11</sup> A Head Start, Breakfast Club Toolkit: Available at [www.dietproject.org.uk](http://www.dietproject.org.uk) or Tel: 0141 226 5261

<sup>12</sup> Cooking For Tot Resource Pack. For more information please contact Barbara Jessop Tel 0131 669 9083

<sup>13</sup> Get Shopping Get Cooking – down load from website [www.co-op.co.uk](http://www.co-op.co.uk) or freephone 0800 0686 727

The Food Standard's Agency's 'Catering for Health' publication was also highlighted and recommended as a useful practical guide to healthier catering practices.<sup>14</sup>

### **Gaps: What is needed?**

Building stronger relationships with local Environmental Health Officers was identified as a gap that remained to be filled in many areas. Community cafes, for example, often rely solely on volunteers, and although most have been trained in elementary food hygiene, the dilemma faced by many projects is whether a volunteer can have overall responsibility for catering standards, and what protection exists for them if something goes wrong. Some participants suggested that community-catering projects might adopt the same model as charity shops, which involves appointing a paid manager to take overall responsibility. Funding to make this feasible, however, was immediately identified as a barrier in the short term to making this a reality for most community initiatives. More guidance was called for highlighting good practice in the area of food safety and hygiene for community catering. Clarification around the need for food hygiene training and food hygiene co-ordinators in the context of community catering was also called for, as this seemed to be the source of much confusion for many projects.

Training was also identified as a gap within many projects, especially amongst users of mental health services where existing community catering resources are not always appropriate. Flexible, non-threatening training was called for so groups can adapt it to suit their own changing needs.

### ***Future Action: Opportunities to move forward***

The Royal Institute for Environmental Health in Scotland<sup>15</sup> will introduce a new elementary food and health training course in Scotland this summer. The group welcomed this development as a lack of knowledge around the health benefits of food was recognised to be lacking by many of the paid and unpaid workers within community catering. The group was also supportive that the existing community café pack was updated and relaunched, but at a local level with travelling roadshows or a mechanism to raise its profile more widely, particularly amongst community caterers that maybe had no specific link to health.

Some participants shared their positive experiences of working in partnerships with local colleges and encouraged others to do so too. For example, the LETS Café in Stirling was given free food hygiene training from a local college, and lunch clubs in Paisley under threat of closure due to insufficient funds have been saved as a result of working in partnership with a local college. Catering students now prepare the lunches as part of their training within the college kitchens with the result that the lunch clubs can remain open and bridges are being built

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<sup>14</sup> Catering for Health: A guide to teaching healthier catering practices. The publication is currently under evaluation. Copies available from FSA (Scotland) and SCDP - while stocks last

<sup>15</sup> REHIS: For more information, please visit: [www.royal-environmental-health.org.uk](http://www.royal-environmental-health.org.uk)

between the young and older communities of Paisley. Langside College<sup>16</sup> in Glasgow also has had positive contact with community food projects across Glasgow and can deliver tailor made courses for projects as required.

Recognition of good practice can help raise esteem, and some of the community cafes represented at the discussion were keen to find out how they could move towards and/or apply for recognised catering awards, such as the Scottish Healthy Choices Awards Scheme (SHCAS)<sup>17</sup>. The SCDP will continue to keep all participants at this event and others unable to be there up-to-date and involved with the progress of all the above, as well as any new developments, through its newsletter Fare Choice, conferences and other activities.

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<sup>16</sup> Langside College, Glasgow. For more information, please contact Fiona Weir Tel: 0141 649 4991

<sup>17</sup> SHCAS: For more information, please visit: [www.shcas.co.uk](http://www.shcas.co.uk) or Tel 0141 226 5261  
Glasgow is at the very early stages of a pilot piece of work to support community cafes aspiring to SHCAS standards. Watch out for future details in Fare Choice.