

In Touch

An opportunity to share news and
views with others tackling
inequalities in diet and health

9 September 2004
Murrayfield Stadium Conference
Centre, Edinburgh



Scottish Community
Diet Project

*Supporting local
communities tackling
inequalities in
diet and health*

Scottish Community Diet Project

Our overriding aim is to improve Scotland's food and health. We do this by supporting work within and with low-income communities that improves access to and take-up of a healthy diet.

Major obstacles being addressed by community-based initiatives are:

AVAILABILITY - increasing access to fruit and vegetables of an acceptable quality and cost

AFFORDABILITY - tackling not only the cost of shopping, but also getting to shops

SKILLS - improving confidence and skills in cooking and shopping

CULTURE - overcoming ingrained habits

We help support low-income communities to:

- identify barriers to a healthy balanced diet
- develop local responses to addressing these barriers, and
- highlight where actions at other levels, or in other sectors, are required

We value the experience, understanding, skills and knowledge within Scotland's communities and their unique contribution to developing and delivering policy and practice at all levels

Contents

Background	page 2
Programme	page 3
Introductory address	page 4
Workshop notes	page 6
Procurement	page 7
Scottish islands	page 8
Regional strategies	page 10
The strategy for Scotland	page 11
The Welsh nutrition strategy	page 12
Breakfast clubs	page 13
Lay food workers	page 14
Community gardening	page 15
Community catering	page 16
Community retailing	page 17
Final comments	page 19
Participants' contact details	page 20
End notes	page 24

Background

In Touch was a free networking event held at Murrayfield Stadium Conference Centre, Edinburgh on 9 September 2004. It was a workshop-based conference about food and health, covering policy and practice in local, national and international contexts, led by volunteers, fieldworkers and policy makers. The event was a great opportunity to meet with others tackling inequalities in food and health, pass on information and share news and views.

The Scottish Community Diet Project co-ordinated the day and took the opportunity to launch two publications: *the Directory of Community Food Initiatives 2004* and *Breakfast Clubs ... More of a Head Start*.

Over one hundred people participated in the event. Many of those participants consented to having their contact details published in the last section of this report so that they can continue to network. It is hoped that this report will aid further networking.

Programme

9.45 Registration, tea and coffee

10.15 Introduction
Bill Gray, National Project Officer, Scottish Community Diet Project

10.30 Local communities: the way forward
Gillian Kynoch, Food and Health Co-ordinator, Scottish Executive

11.00 **Morning workshops**

1. Procurement
2. Scottish islands
3. Regional strategies
4. The strategy for Scotland
5. The Welsh nutrition strategy

12.15 Lunch and market place (with leaflets, reports and giveaways)

13.15 Launch of 'Breakfast Clubs ... More of a Head Start'

13.45 **Afternoon workshops**

1. Breakfast clubs
2. Lay food workers
3. Community gardening
4. Community catering
5. Community retailing

15.00 Summing up the day

15.20 Launch of 'the Directory of Community Food Initiatives'

15.30 Tea and coffee available

Space was made available for people who want to organise their own meetings from 15.30 onwards.

Local communities: the way forward

Gillian Kynoch, Food and Health Co-ordinator

Gillian was invited to update participants on recent food and health policy developments. She has held the post of food and health co-ordinator at the Scottish Executive Health Department for the last three years and explained how the Scottish Executive is reorganising and establishing new structures to strengthen the delivery and focus on health improvement.

Gillian introduced *Eating for Health: Meeting the Challenge 2004*¹, which is a vehicle for taking forward *Eating for Health: a Diet Action Plan for Scotland*² (also known as the *Scottish Diet Action Plan*), and announced the establishment of two new structures to further shape and govern food and health policy developments. The structures, the Council and the Alliance have been designed to improve the combined ability to work together, add value to all efforts and communicate and learn from each other.

Gillian explained that the **Food and Health Council** will have a remit to provide leadership and expert advice, integrate cross-cutting policies and strategies as well as to focus on delivery and to be responsible for the planning and implementation of an annual Scottish Food and Health Action Plan. The membership will include senior policy advisors from the Scottish Executive Departments of Health, Education and Young People, Environment and Rural Affairs, the Office of the Permanent Secretary and Finance and Central Services; Food Standards Agency Scotland officials; strategic delivery partners in the NHS, local government, the voluntary sector and Communities Scotland as well as experts from the food industry and research. Specialists in other areas will be called upon as and when required.

The **HealthyLiving Food and Health Alliance** has been established jointly by FSA Scotland and the Scottish Executive Health Department. It is open to all, and will become, hopefully, a representative, multi-sectoral, food-chain-based communication network. There will be an emphasis on inclusion and wide engagement, seeking to involve people broadly, across all sectors, stakeholder groups and networks as well as individuals. The objectives of the Alliance are to:

- provide a forum for communication, dialogue and consultation;
- contribute to the definition and focus of national policy;
- support delivery of policy objectives;
- take part in a programme of consultation, information sharing, evidence gathering and partnership development; and
- to provide an opportunity to network and develop partnerships.

The Scottish Executive's response to the challenges of improving health in Scotland is set out in *Improving Health in Scotland: the Challenge*³ (also known as *The Challenge*). This is a framework rather than an action plan or strategy document that gives a focus on four key areas: early years, teenage transition, workplace and communities. *Eating for Health: Meeting the Challenge* is a response to *The Challenge* framework focusing on healthy eating.

Gillian went on to explain the ongoing policy development which encourages and enables healthy eating. The ongoing implementation of the Scottish Diet Action Plan is being focused around work in five key areas: food production, processing, distribution

and access, preparation and provision and the consumer. The Scottish Executive is working together with the Food Standards Agency Scotland to ensure that strategies work around a shared strategic framework.

Gillian explained that the new health improvement directorate has established a Joint Ministerial Group with an accompanying Stakeholder group, a cabinet delivery group on *Closing the Opportunity Gap*⁴ and new Ministerial Groups focusing on: Food, Physical activity, Smoking, Mental wellbeing, Drugs and Alcohol.

Gillian added that in addition to the development of government policy, the impact of changes in diet and health in Scotland was dependent on delivery agencies. She pointed out that NHS Health Scotland is currently restructuring following the amalgamation of HEBS and the Public Health Institute of Scotland to provide a national focus for the implementation of health improvement.

“But it is obvious that the Executive cannot deliver health improvement on its own – neither can the NHS. Everyone is clear that we must build a partnership for a better SCOTLAND”

Gillian explained that the government policy which may have the most impact in delivering changes to diet and health within community settings is a process called community planning. **Community planning** has been brought in by the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 which will bring people and agencies together to work on common problems such as food access within communities.

“It is a process ... whereby public services in the area of the local authority are planned and provided after consultation and (on-going) co-operation ... among all public bodies ... and with community bodies...”

This process is the platform for building the partnership and making the difference through Community Planning Partnerships (CCP). There are 32 CPPs with board sizes ranging from four to forty which will tackle common themes such as: jobs and the economy, lifelong learning, health and wellbeing, community safety as well as sustainability and the environment. Health is an integral part of Community Planning and all NHS Boards are participating in Community Planning Partnerships. Community Planning is the key framework for developing a shared plan for health improvement in each local authority area. This is called the Joint Health Improvement Plan (JHIP) and sets out objectives, strategies and actions for each partner. There is a JHIP for each council area and it will be part of the Health Boards' Local Health Plans. Community Planning Partnerships will be supported financially by the health improvement fund and money to improve quality of life.

Gillian finished by warning the participants that the challenges ahead are to make local community planning work for community food initiatives, to have realistic expectations and address initiative fatigue, show commitment and demonstrate real improvements as well as share success.

For further information contact: Gillian Kynoch, Scottish Food and Health Co-ordinator, Scottish Executive Health Department, St Andrews House, Regent Road, Edinburgh, ED1 3DG, 0131 244 4387, gillian.kynoch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Workshop notes

These workshop summaries have been written up to remind those people who attended and inform those people who were unable to attend on the day.

To ensure participants had the opportunity to discuss both policy and practice, the morning workshops focused on strategic matters and the afternoon workshops unravelled practical issues.

The workshops were scribed and kept to time by Scottish Community Diet Project staff and steering group members.

Each workshop started with two brief presentations from people working on the theme of the workshop. The majority of the workshop was a discussion around the theme, where the leader encouraged all participants to get involved.

Procurement

Procurement issues in this workshop were tackled from the producer and customer point of view. Flora McDowall from the **Southern Uplands Partnership (SUP)** explained the SUP public sector procurement project in Southern Scotland to promote local food, in particular mutton and lamb. The project was keen to tackle school meals and support the Soil Association's work to encourage schools to serve not just nutritional, but unprocessed food. The SUP had found it difficult to deal with local authorities who had to work to very tight guidelines in terms of specification, scale, administration and price. The partnership was aware that Best Value was a process by which local authorities tender for contracts and includes other factors apart from price, such as sustainability and freshness. The local authority works on the basis of three-year contracts, which is not the obstacle it might appear, as it is estimated that it will take roughly the same length of time for local suppliers to be in the position to compete. The SUP have applied for funding to go ahead with this project which is planned to start early 2005.

Ian Shankland described the **Edinburgh Community Food Initiative (ECFI)** which supplies fruit and vegetables to 16 co-ops and delivers Snack Attack, a fruit in schools programme which distributes 45,000 pieces of fruit a week. The initiative turns over more than a quarter of a million pounds per year and is constantly increasing the volume of fruit and vegetables it procures. In the last year ECFI examined the way it procures fresh produce and now has a committed supplier who will supply more at cheaper prices, but can also guarantee quality and flexibility. This change in procurement has resulted in an improved service to the co-ops they support because they no longer have to pay surcharges on small quantities. ECFI have also explored assisting similar community food initiatives in the Lothian area to purchase fresh produce at low prices and increase the buying power of community initiatives. Ian would like to increase the variety of produce he can retail and increase the range of suppliers he is in contact with, so he has been exploring the possibility of working with local suppliers of breads and salads.

Other participants who had experience of procurement found that seasonality and consistency were key issues. Producers were either geared up to work with big suppliers or were run on such a small scale they could not supply regularly. It was agreed that there was a potential role for small producers and this could be an opportunity for the crofting community.

It was agreed that both small suppliers and community initiatives needed support and assistance to understand and make use of the fresh produce supply network. It was noted that sharing resources such as vans could benefit community initiatives, or having a worker at the market to put suppliers in touch with community initiatives might encourage small suppliers to go to market. Participants noted that this was an issue which could be explored in a regional strategy as many of the benefits from access to fresh local produce and reducing food miles could be a result of a regional procurement policy.

Scottish islands

Very different experiences of working with food and health issues within island communities were presented to the participants. Frances Macneil explained her role as public nurse and midwife on **Barra**. She explained that she delivers a range of health advice to the schools on Barra, much of which includes information about food and nutrition for which she will often use a selection of fruit and vegetables available that day from the only supermarket on the island. Participants were interested to find out about the concept of limited shopping days linked to the ferry timetable and the arrival of fresh produce. Frances outlined that although the crofting life was still popular on Barra it was in decline. Many people either grew their own potatoes and carrots or sourced them from growers on the island. Paul Lawton from **Orkney** estimated that on his island about three-quarters of the vegetables consumed were home grown.

Mary Maclean explained that she is based in Stornoway on the **Isle of Lewis** and works with the largest social housing scheme in the Western Isles. A health needs assessment identified the need for fresh produce. A polytunnel was set up to grow strawberries on the only spare piece of ground, which proved popular. The New Opportunities Fund, which is now known as the Big Lottery, has supported the project by providing money for training and development for horticultural growers. Mary hopes that a social enterprise can be formed.

One of the main issues that emerged was that although it was popular to grow potatoes, carrots and onions on the islands, many islanders had a problem getting hold of a range of fruit and vegetables.

Annie Smith, who volunteers for a food co-op on **Harris**, explained that, *“there are many fruit and vegetables which I like to use because I’m adventurous, but elderly folk are nervous about preparing some of the more exotic produce and need much encouragement before they even try one – that’s why we can’t afford to stock a wide range of fruit and vegetables.”*

Participants found that island people had to deal with many of the same issues as the people on the mainland, such as provision of fruit in schools. A representative from the Food Standards Agency pointed out that Frances was using the English model of the balance of health to explain everyday nutrition to school children. The Scottish model, although similar, is called Eating for Health and uses products more familiar in Scotland.

Annie explained that people in island communities wear many hats and as well as co-ordinating the local food co-op, she has recently become the registrar for deaths. It was not until she took on this post and had the opportunity to look at the records that she realised that heart attacks were such a common cause of death on the island.

It was explained that it is a myth that islanders have the knowledge to regularly grow, cook and gather fresh seasonal produce. Razor fish, which are edible and popular with some islanders, are abundant on the beaches of most Scottish islands. However many islanders are unsure about what to do with them or simply do not like their rubbery texture. Similarly, on islands which have an abattoir, the best and freshest

meat is only available in large cuts which require further butchering – however not all islanders have these skills.

Participants who live on the mainland were surprised by the difference between island communities and the range of community initiatives running on Scottish islands. The Food Standards Agency representative wondered if there were any statistics for the consumption, affordability and accessibility of fruit and vegetables on Scottish islands. Those participants who were islanders explained that they were often unaware of what was happening on the mainland and were heartened to see how many other participants representing both support agencies and community food initiatives were interested in island issues.

Regional strategies

Linda Boodhna from **NHS Fife Health Promotion** outlined the Regional Food and Health Strategy which was published by NHS Fife in 1996. She explained that the following year after publication a multi-agency group with representatives from the local authority and the health board was formed, but failed to drive the policy forward. In 1999 a new Food & Health Policy was published with an agreed implementation plan. Representatives from the voluntary sector were invited onto a newly established Food and Health Group and the implementation plan was revisited. The original implementation plan did not consider environmental issues. In 2001 funding was allocated for a Health Promotion Officer and a Community Dietitian to take the implementation plan forward. The Food and Health strategy now uses the Scottish Executive's Challenge document headings of early years, teenage transition, community and workplace.

In 2001, a five-year **Glasgow Food and Health Action Framework** was launched, explained Anne Gebbie Diben from NHS Greater Glasgow Health Promotion. This was a joint approach which involved a range of stakeholders. The framework spawned many initiatives, such as free fruit for all primary school children five days a week; free breakfast club provision and support for the Scottish Healthy Choices Award (SHCA). Anne had been employed to get community activity more involved in the framework. To do this, as well as working with community groups, she has been involved with Local Health Care Co-ops and Social Inclusion Partnerships (SIP). Anne had helped link the SHCA to some of the community work by working with 13 community cafes in the seven SIP areas. Five of these cafes now have SHCA, some also have a weaning programme. Anne explained that Get Cooking and Get Shopping courses were regularly run by community initiatives. Glasgow's Food and Health Action Framework was in the process of being re-assessed to see what is still to be delivered.

"We struggled to get people interested in the beginning because we started something with a top down approach. It didn't really work with people on the ground. However, now we have started to work with people and find out what they have to say, there is a lot more interest."

Linda Boodhna

One participant mentioned that some communities such as black and ethnic people, asylum seekers or refugees might find it difficult to participate in food and health work. Anne explained that there were areas in Glasgow where such communities were taken into consideration, for example in Sighthill.

"In order to deliver food & health across a large city it needs dedicated time to get everyone involved and develop working relationships." Anne Gebbie Diben

"Stop being afraid of asking what practical things communities want - it is often not the moon." Louise Dobbie, Roots and Fruits

The strategy for Scotland

A brief presentation from Gillian Kynoch (Food and Health Co-ordinator, Scottish Executive) and Sam McKeown (Policy Officer, Food Standards Agency Scotland) kicked off this discussion. They highlighted how *Eating for Health: Meeting the Challenge* was not replacing the Scottish Diet Action Plan, but was the vehicle for taking it forward. Building on the presentation given to the whole conference earlier (see page 4), they highlighted how the new structures were intended to contribute both to planning and delivery through improved communication and greater involvement.

The complementary roles of the Scottish Executive and the **Food Standards Agency** in Scotland were explained. Also explained were how the proposed Food and Health Alliance and Food Council will feed into the Joint Ministerial Group on Health Improvement and how they will relate to other existing and developing structures (eg. Community Planning, Joint Health Improvement Plans).

Participants were asked to explore what was required to ensure their work gained added value from the new structures and what needed to happen to enable community initiatives to contribute even more effectively to the challenge.

One issue raised was the need to recognise that some sectors (eg. industry) would have the resources and the confidence to participate in an alliance, join working groups and feed into the proposed food council, while those working at community level faced a number of barriers, requiring both physical and psychological capacity building.

It was also noted that to be an inclusive structure, all communities, both geographical (including rural and island communities) and communities of interest (eg. sensory impaired, users of mental health services, black and minority ethnic) had to be encouraged and enabled to 'join up'.

It was noted that the structures were not intended to replace the Scottish Community Diet Project and that the project would play a major part in ensuring local communities were able to participate in, and benefit from, the new structures and policy context.

It was agreed that actions at community, regional and national level were equally significant in achieving change and had to be reflected in the way any new structures and systems operated within and between levels. Similarly, existing networks at all levels had to be enlisted and engaged.

The importance of training to support the strategy was raised and it was noted that the long-awaited elementary Food and Health training would be available nationally in a matter of weeks.

Communication was recognised as another key element. It was noted that no firm decision had been reached on what form and combination of newsletter, website, or electronic newsletter would maximise effective communication.

The Welsh nutrition strategy

Like Scotland, the recently launched **Welsh Food Strategy** exhibits strong support for community food activity. This workshop explored the background to *Food and Wellbeing: Reducing Inequalities through a Nutrition Strategy for Wales*⁵ and drew some comparisons with the approach being taken in Scotland to better support community food activity on a national scale.

To familiarise participants with the content of the Welsh strategy, presenters Lorna Thompson from the **Food Standards Agency Wales** and Maureen Howell from the **Welsh Assembly** circulated a short summary document of progress so far. As evidenced by the many waves of new and strengthened food activity, devolution in Wales would seem to be having a positive impact on national food policy and practice development. Thinking and acting in a more joined up way about food is also key to Wales' success, as described by Lorna and Maureen. Key developments in Wales, as reported by the workshop presenters, included the development of a Welsh Community Food Network and national grant support for food co-operatives.

Following the positive evaluation of the Welsh Assembly's community food initiative pilot in June 2003, a Community Food Network for Wales was established to provide similar support to Welsh community food initiatives as the Scottish Community Diet Project provides in Scotland. A practice database is currently being developed, together with a quarterly newsletter, and Open College Network training as well as resources and evaluation support. More information about some of these developments can be found on www.ifanc.bangor.ac.uk/about/examples.php

Similarly, specific support for food co-operatives in Wales is also growing. A grant from the Welsh Assembly's Inequalities in Health Fund is supporting a two-year pilot scheme to develop a minimum of 26 sustainable food co-operatives with associated links to schools and communities. Two community food development officers have been employed to co-ordinate the process. The project aims to connect farmers with communities 'cutting out the distribution chain and thus being able to provide food at prices attractive to both parties, returning a healthier diet and lifestyle to the communities, and viable trade to the farmer'.

Many other examples of good practice are taking off in Wales, including a ten-week media campaign in collaboration with BBC Wales called Big Fat Problem, a Welsh Network of Healthy School Schemes, a healthy vending pilot in three secondary schools in Pembrokeshire and a breastfeeding strategy. Welsh agencies are working ever closer with the food industry, as well as with schools, so that access to healthy food choices is the norm rather than the exception.

Despite time being short, the Welsh presentation had set alight many burning questions. Approaches to consultation in Wales cut across many of them, and in particular the Welsh approach to consulting with minority ethnic groups. One participant from the workshop suggested that translated written materials were often not useful for the older members of minority ethnic groups due to limited literacy skills. Instead, taped or pictorial resources about food and healthy eating were found to be far more effective – useful advice to both Scotland and Wales alike.

Breakfast clubs

Breakfast Clubs ... More of A Head Start, an update of the original toolkit produced by the Scottish Community Diet Project for people who are or would like to be involved with breakfast clubs, was launched at the workshop. The toolkit explains that breakfast clubs are more than just a breakfast outlet. The toolkit states “...*breakfast clubs should incorporate a range of additional social, health, education and childcare elements into healthy breakfast provision.*”

The toolkit also explains that the Scottish Executive has identified some of the strengths of breakfast clubs in the *Hungry for Success: A Whole School Approach to School Meals in Scotland*⁶ which states “... *breakfast clubs are also helping to improve children’s attendance, punctuality and educational performance at school.*”

Other strengths of breakfast clubs include “...*the promotion of healthy eating habits, personal hygiene and oral health....they also encourage greater levels of physical activity and social interaction in a safe environment.*” The Scottish Executive, NHS Health Scotland and the Scottish Community Diet Project conducted a mapping exercise of the breakfast service provision for school age children in Scotland in 2002. The research is outlined in the toolkit.

Feedback from children, teachers and parents highlights other strengths. “*Some children who were consistently late in arriving for school now manage to arrive for the breakfast club.*” Head Teacher

“... *my daughter won’t eat breakfast at home. She now eats breakfast at the club because she is eating with her friends.*” Parent

“*The breakfast club - It’s cool – It’s better than the hoose!*” Pupil

The way ahead is to continue to work together and learn together so that breakfast clubs diversify and evolve. Breakfast clubs are only part of the solution. “*Food projects are clearly not the only answer to addressing health inequalities, but they have to be part of a wider strategy to improve health.*” Food Projects and How they Work⁷, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1999

Lay food workers

Lay workers are those people who have identified skills and work on behalf of organisations in community settings without being paid. Heather Sloan, who works for **Have a Heart Paisley**⁸, the government demonstration project which had been set up to reduce coronary heart disease in the Paisley area, explained that Have a Heart Paisley had worked with some very experienced members of the community. Heather said that she found the term 'lay' off-putting, for example when it was applied to food workers it was seen as a position lower than qualified dietitians. The title community food worker seemed to be a better option than lay worker. She explained that there were two types of community food worker within the project:

- workers based within and managed by the Dietetic Department
- workers based in communities managed by Heather across the Paisley area.

Building up peer support is extremely valuable in giving lay workers the confidence to work alongside professional workers. Becoming a community food worker gives skills, knowledge and opportunities to local people in a flexible environment. It also gets the message across as the work is done at grassroots level.

Pamela McKinlay gave a brief background on **Roots and Fruits**, a community food project in East Lothian. She described how getting funding is a problem and staffing can also be an issue. Roots and Fruits co-ordinates various activities such as a garden, a mobile fruit and vegetable van, and work in schools and nurseries. To carry out all these activities Roots and Fruits supports a network of community food workers. Pamela explained that community food workers often get involved with the project because they have a particular skill or interest such as driving or working with elderly people. By being involved in the project they learn about other opportunities and the aims of the project as a whole.

The group agreed that the term 'lay' was off-putting and seen as a label. It was seen to be implying a 'sense of amateurism'. It was agreed that it is the small things that are important, including names. The projects are constrained as to how they reward volunteers and lay workers as they cannot give funding to non-employees.

Working with community food projects such as lunch clubs or fruit and vegetable delivery services is not just about providing food; it also provides a platform for social interaction – 'capacity building'. It's about being a communicator within the community. You have to be responsive to people – 'good old fashioned community work'.

Where there is little opportunity for development of the role of community food workers, many have become dissatisfied with their position. Participants commented that in some areas swapping roles had helped and in others integrating different people from different areas also helps to break down territorial barriers. Some food projects have closed because the community food workers have acquired enough experience to get paid work elsewhere.

Community gardening

Susan Whitfield of **Sustainable Communities Renfrewshire** gave a presentation focusing on community gardens. There are currently 20 community gardens in Renfrewshire, located on various sites, making best use of any spare piece of land. Susan explained that from her experience community gardens can encourage local people to take responsibility for their community and for decisions which affect their lives, helping to create a positive view of the community and build community spirit.

In community gardens plots tend to be small for easy maintenance. Community gardens provide an ideal opportunity to deliver practical sessions for communities focusing on cultivation, organic growing methods and composting, as well as promoting a culture of actively caring for the local environment. Some community gardens are linked to the eco-schools initiative and feed into wider aims relating to education and regeneration.

Mick Marston of the **Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens**⁹ widened the discussion further by introducing some of the key issues for developing and sustaining community gardens. Community gardens often require dedicated 'champions' to keep things going which results in a real risk of 'burn-out' for those volunteers involved. A great deal of effort is required to involve the wider community in the garden. He also added that the definition of community garden varies.

The discussion then moved on to issues such as selling produce and how to improve links with local distribution networks in order to distribute produce. There appears to be some legal issues relating to selling produce grown in community gardens. However, the main strengths of the gardens is the very valuable role they can play in terms of providing practical skills and knowledge relating to growing fruit and vegetables, highlighting issues around production and distribution process, and raising awareness of local regeneration and environmental issues.

Due to the enthusiasm of the group, Susan and Mick were kept occupied with questions on everything from how to grow tomato plants on your window ledge to how to make a greenhouse from plastic bottles — who needs Blue Peter!

At the end of the workshop, the group was delighted to learn that a Getting Started pack is available for all those interested in setting up a community garden in their area from the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens.

Community catering

Charlie McKay, family support worker at the **Rainbow Family Centre** Parents Drop-in, highlighted his experience of catering and cooking classes with families in Port Glasgow. He stressed the need to encourage the families to have interest and patience to allow the catering project to grow. He highlighted that their work was constantly evolving and moving on. However he warned that they also had to take account of new parents joining each year who were just entering the process.

Linda McCroskie from the **Coach House Trust**¹⁰ in Glasgow, described a similar mix of catering and cooking classes for service users. The project had similar issues to the Rainbow Family Centre despite working with a different community (ie. adults recovering from addiction, mental health problems, physical disabilities and learning difficulties). The Coach House Trust also has a food growing project which is able to provide a great deal of fresh produce for Linda's kitchen.

The discussion that followed highlighted the creative way cafés, lunch clubs and cooking classes are operated across the country. The importance of these activities as non-threatening, informal and socialising was raised repeatedly. Cafés and cooking skills classes were seen as excellent vehicles to encourage participation and build confidence and self-esteem. Examples quoted during the workshop involved weaning, intergenerational work and microwave cookery - all tackled in a non-stigmatising and non-intimidating fashion.

It was recognised that best-practice made use of the skills and knowledge that already existed in any community. Many people noted that they frequently found themselves also covering relevant related areas such as shopping and food safety. Many projects had involved people in producing their own recipe booklets (involving either recipes from cooking classes or meals available in a community café).

Community catering activities were generally recognised as not only providing a vital service to many vulnerable groups, often on a daily basis, but also as a very useful catalyst for other activities and agendas.

Community retailing

The range of community retailing initiatives represented by the participants echoed the range of supported retailing experiences found in both urban and rural settings in Scotland. Experiences from urban areas included that of Anne Hughes, who explained how a chain of fruit barras were supported by volunteers in the heart of Glasgow and popular with asylum seekers. Ian Shanklands from **Edinburgh Community Food Initiative** explained how he had combined purchasing power with other nearby voluntary run initiatives to keep costs down. Ian Armstrong, from another network of food co-ops called **Community Food Initiatives North East** and based in Aberdeen, explained how their food co-ops were well established in the city and run by volunteers. Several participants from different Scottish island communities explained that their outlets were both rural and remote. Paul Lawton, from a small island in Orkney, described the busy co-op of which he is Treasurer on a voluntary basis. He explained how the outlet sells food and other goods including machinery brought in by the ferry.

The discussion that followed focused on where successful community retailing experiences could be found. Ian Shankland explained that the most successful retail outlets supported by Edinburgh Community Food Initiative were those that had a diverse customer base. Ian Armstrong believed that success in Aberdeen was based on longevity of operation. He also explained that the retail outlets he would consider to be most successful were those which had been running the longest and could interpret the needs of the community, or those which shared resources with another long-standing community initiative such as a credit union.

The **Scottish Co-op** had found that the rural and remote food co-ops they had supported had been relatively more successful than those in urban settings. There seemed to be no clear reason why urban populations could not support a food co-op in the same way as those populations in remote settings, especially island communities.

Martin Meteyard, a consultant for the Scottish Co-op, explained that food co-ops which had been supported by or associated with the Scottish Co-op would be forming a new network called the Community Retailing Network. The aim for this network would be to help community outlets make the leap from funding dependent community retail outlets to competitively priced community food co-ops.

Gillian Kynoch, Scotland's Food and Health Co-ordinator, was interested in exploring the relationship between commercial and voluntary community retailing. She explained that the Scottish Executive was supporting work to assist commercial neighbourhood shops to improve and deliver a greater range of healthier options. Those participants who represented community food retailers explained that they were all constantly trying to improve their outlets to better serve healthy options to the communities they were based in. Ian Armstrong from Community Food Initiatives North East explained that, although Aberdeen is an important UK fishing port, it had been difficult to get fish sold through the co-ops because of the practicalities of selling wet fish or the equipment needed to store frozen fish. He was keen to encourage the sale of fish because it is often cited as a healthy option, but he has only been able to procure frozen breaded fish so far.

The discussion moved on to responsible retailing of food in communities. Tor Justad, who represented the Scottish Co-op in the Highlands and Islands, wondered if there was a role for the Scottish Executive to encourage commercial retailers to recognise implications and benefits of providing a more socially responsible service to communities.

Final comments

Two people who had participated throughout the day volunteered to share their final thoughts with the other participants at the event.

“There is so much said by the media about the poor diet of Scotland. Today has been a great example of all the good work which is going on in Scotland to improve the diet here within our communities. It has been a great opportunity to learn from the experience of all the work which is already going on.”

Ger O’Riordan, Catering and Maintenance Unit Manager, Flourish House

“Everything we all do is to do with food, from growing to catering. I was spoilt for choice when I looked at the list of workshops.

If you can come away from an event with a new piece of information or some connections made then you know it had been worth your time and I have certainly found today well worthwhile.”

Judy Robertson, Gorebridge Health and Regeneration Project

The SCDP would like to thank everyone who took part and contributed to the day.

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You may be interested in other information produced by the Scottish Community Diet Project, if so please visit the project's website www.dietproject.org.uk

End notes

¹ *Eating for Health: Meeting the Challenge*, Scottish Executive 2004 ISBN 0-7559-4196-9. Available to download from the Scottish Executive website www.scotland.gov.uk

² *Eating for Health: a Diet Action Plan for Scotland* published by the Scottish Office 1996. ISBN 07480 3138 3 Available to download from the Scottish Executive website www.scotland.gov.uk

³ *Improving Health in Scotland: The Challenge*, Scottish Executive 2003. ISBN 0 7559 0607 1. Available to download from the Scottish Executive website www.scotland.gov.uk

⁴ The Executive's *Closing the Opportunity Gap* approach for tackling poverty and disadvantage is focused on social inclusion strategy. More information is available from the Scottish Executive website www.scotland.gov.uk

⁵ *Food and Wellbeing: Reducing Inequalities through a Nutrition Strategy for Wales*, Food Standards Agency Wales 2003. Available to download from the Food Standards Agency website www.food.gov.uk

⁶ *Hungry for Success: A Whole School Approach to School Meals in Scotland*, Scottish Executive, November 2002. Available to download from the Scottish Executive website www.scotland.gov.uk

⁷ *Food Projects and How they Work*, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 1999. Available to download from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation website www.jrf.org.uk

⁸ Have a Heart Paisley is a government demonstration project. For more information visit www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/health/17360/8331 or www.haveaheart.org.uk

⁹ For more information on the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens visit www.farmgarden.org.uk

¹⁰ For more information on the Coach House Trust visit www.thecht.co.uk



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