

Community Food and Health (Scotland)

The Scottish Executive's work with the Scottish Grocers Federation on neighbourhood shops and how this can be taken forward in low-income areas

Roundtable discussion notes Glasgow, 17 November 2006,

Introduction

Community Food and Health (Scotland) invited a number of community food initiatives and national agencies to discuss the Scottish Executive Health Department's work with the Scottish Grocers Federation to promote healthier choices in neighbourhood shops.

The meeting started with Bill Gray, National Officer, inviting participants to introduce themselves. He then explained that the meeting aimed to look at how the Scottish Executive's neighbourhood shop initiative could be used by shops and communities in low-income areas.

The HealthyLiving neighbourhood shops initiative

Gillian Kynoch (Scottish Executive Food and Health Co-ordinator) and Ross Kerr (Scottish Grocers Federation) began by outlining what had been done so far. The project had set out to support a number of independent retailers to improve the quality and quantity of 'healthier' food available in their stores. Changes that were made in stores included:

- increased area for displays of fresh fruit and vegetables and other healthier choices;
- wider range of healthier choices;
- signposting to healthier choices;
- positioning of healthier choices;
- fresh fruit and vegetables at point of sale.

Gillian showed parts of a DVD that had been produced for the project. It contained short clips showing some of the shops involved and the changes made in store. It also showed some of the results of the changes. For example, one retailer in the trial showed increased 'healthier food' sales of more than 60%.

By trialling this method and being able to show increases in sales and profits Ross hoped to be able to encourage other retailers to adopt these ideas and methods.

Gillian told the meeting that the Scottish Executive is taking the programme forward in partnership with the Scottish Grocers Federation under the new name of the Scottish Grocers Federation's HealthyLiving Programme. Ross and his colleague will be responding to convenience retailers who would like to take a similar approach to

marketing healthier foods in their stores. Retailers will be able to access information and advice, and, when appropriate, HealthyLiving signage.

Some of the retailers that Ross worked with as part of the trial were located in low-income areas and their sales saw similar increases to those in middle income areas. He explained that this shows that the approach works regardless of where the shops are situated.

Gillian told the meeting that costs of the healthier options had not been subsidised, rather acceptable and affordable prices were used to avoid having to increase prices at a later date. Many small retailers operate on the edge of financial viability and it is important to encourage retailers to price their products realistically, both in terms of cost to the consumer and profitability.

So far the focus of the programme has been on fresh fruit and vegetables and chilled items. Frozen and ambient foods could also be signposted, but as yet this had not been done. There was some discussion about how food items qualified as 'healthier'. Ross told the group that retailers chose the products they thought were healthier and this was policed by the Scottish Grocers Federation. Gillian pointed out that at this early stage of the initiative it is important to obtain 'buy-in' from retailers and at a later date there may be a need to develop specific criteria for the healthy living apple logo. The emphasis is on promoting 'healthier for you' choices within the category.

What is happening locally?

At the end of the presentation participants had the opportunity to ask some questions. They proceeded by giving some further information about their own work or perspectives on this initiative.

Bill Gray began by emphasising the connections Community Food and Health (Scotland), or CHFS, has with initiatives in England. Both 'Eatwell' in Sandwell and Community Food Enterprise in Newham have experience to share and would also be keen to learn from the work that takes place in Scotland.

Bill gave apologies from Brenda Sowney at **SEAL** (South East Area Lifestyle) Community Health Project. Parts of the South East area of Glasgow suffer from a lack of access to healthy food. Some of this is addressed by the food co-ops SEAL has set up, but they struggle for funding and are currently run by volunteers. These co-ops face further insecurity as the support they receive from SEAL is also under threat due to cuts in funding.

The **Food Standards Agency Scotland** has a remit to make it easier for the public to make healthier choices and the labelling scheme they have developed will help this. Jennifer Howie spoke about this and the food access work the agency has commissioned. The work has mapped which of a 'healthy basket' of food items are available in shop in the chosen reference areas. A report is due shortly and will include information on methodology. This will be helpful for community food initiatives and

other agencies that may carry out their own mapping exercises which could be used to build up a picture of food access across Scotland.

Jill Alexander works with the south asian community in Edinburgh through a project called ***Khush Dil***. She has been hoping to work with shop keepers providing for the south asian population (and other BME groups) to support them to stock healthier options and have shelf signposting for these options. She was concerned that this group of retailers may have very limited space and resources available for improvements. She thought it would be useful to offer training to retailers, but it may be easier to get a member of the family to attend, rather than the shop owner.

Communities Scotland was invited to the meeting because of its role in the regeneration and planning of local communities. John Langlands explained the support that Communities Scotland is able to offer social enterprise agencies, many of whom work with food. There is potential to use social enterprise models to establish community owned shops.

Ann Davidson has been working with local shops in Tomintoul, a remote rural village in Grampian, as part of the ***Moray Food and Health Project***. The shops were encouraged to buy in healthy items which were placed on a 'healthy shelf'. The project provided healthy recipe sheets and sign-posting to the healthier items. NHS Grampian had underwritten the cost of new healthy lines to encourage the retailers to increase the range available. Feedback from the trial showed that it had been successful in increasing the range of products available and the retailers said they would continue to stock most of the lines.

NHS Grampian is now keen to take this forward as the project will be ending in March. Annette Johnson, the Food Access Advisor for NHS Grampian emphasised how important work like this is in remote rural areas. She is keen to move this forward in line with their health strategy for outlying areas. She is also keen to see a mapping tool that could be used by communities.

Linda Newlands is the chair of ***Edinburgh Community Food Initiative*** and a founder member of ***Broomhouse Health Strategy Group (BHSG)***. BHSG has a shop in Broomhouse that sells fruit and vegetables that are supplied by Edinburgh Community Food Initiative. Linda told us about the informal agreements to avoid competition between BHSG and the local retailer from whom they rent the BHSG shop. Linda emphasised that BHSG's shop played a far wider role in the community than providing a place to buy good quality, affordable fruit and vegetables. The BHSG shop runs taster sessions that give community members the opportunity to taste before they buy and often informally signpost them to other agencies in response information revealed during friendly conversations.

Lizanne Conway, Health Improvement Manager for Communities and the Voluntary Sector at ***NHS Health Scotland*** highlighted the need for sustainability for community based projects to be addressed, an issue that is being worked on by the Developing

Healthy Communities Task Group. Some of the business issues would be useful to organisations that do health improvement work. It would be good to share what has been learned. It is particularly important to work within low income communities and part of the challenge of rolling out the work would be to engage with retailers in these areas, and/or the communities living there.

Anita Aggarwal, Development Officer at **CFHS** said she felt that it was important for community food initiatives to develop relationships with local retailers. She went on to share some of the suggestions around how this could happen made by CFIs at the national conference that had been held in September.

Bill Gray felt that the work of the **Community Retail Network** would be relevant. As most are situated in remote rural areas and in many cases are the only place to shop locally, providing fresh and healthy food is an important part of their role. They all operate as successful social enterprises with only minimal grant assistance, usually for capital costs.

He felt that other aspects of the work carried out by CFHS may overlap with this work. These are the REHIS food and health course that the team is currently promoting and practice development work in independent living skills, as well as the social enterprise work already mentioned.

Discussion

Having introduced themselves and their interest in this work, the meeting participants went on to discuss how the learning from this programme might be shared and how it might inform other efforts to bring healthy food to low income areas. For example:

- Would staff and volunteers in food co-ops benefit from training from the Scottish Grocers Federation?
- How do Community Food Initiatives encourage shops in their area to take part and what resources are available to support this?
- What about areas that are 'hard to retail'? Is there potential for communities to run shops using a social enterprise model, should the State support retailers in these areas or can private enterprise be supported by local communities to succeed?

There seemed to be some general conclusions:

- A community development approach that involves local communities is preferred for work with community food initiatives in low income communities.
- The expertise that the Scottish Grocers Federation had developed through this work should be exploited for the benefit of low income communities.
- The expertise of local community workers and food initiatives needs to be recognised and build upon. A local approach may differ in some respects to the national programme but maintain principles that underpin it.

- There could potentially be conflict between the objectives of promoting healthy products in shops and making a profit, but if these can be overcome, sharing expertise between community food initiatives, health promotion staff and retailers could bring opportunities for mutual support.
- Small retailers are increasingly finding it difficult to remain financially viable given competition from supermarkets. It is important to develop ways of supporting these shops to supply healthier food when they are in areas where access to healthy food is already difficult.
- Offer training to a 'second tier' or staff working at a local or regional level who could connect with community food initiatives and retailers to maximise resources.
- There needs to be a discussion about how physical resources e.g. fridges, signage etc. are provided to support this work.
- There are opportunities to develop work with particular groups e.g. BME retailers in Edinburgh.
- Materials and information from other agencies are useful e.g. Food Standards Agency leaflets.

Next steps

CFHS will continue this discussion informally with participants at the meeting and other interested parties with the aim of producing an action plan for this work early in 2007.

Conclusion

Further discussion is required to decide the best course of action. There is a clear role for retailers in the provision of healthier food in low-income communities. There is already a lot of local activity and experience within the retail and community health sectors and this needs to be built upon to develop best practice that can be shared.

Participants list

Gillian Kynoch	Food and Health Co-ordinator	Scottish Executive
Peter Faassen de Heer	Policy Officer	Scottish Executive
Ross Kerr	Project Co-ordinator	Scottish Grocers Federation
Jill Alexander	Community Dietician	Khush Dil
Linda Newlands	Chair	Edinburgh Community Food Initiative
Ann Davidson		Rural Environmental Action Project
Annette Johnson	Food Access Advisor	NHS Grampian
Lizanne Conway		NHS Health Scotland
John Langlands	Social Economy Unit	Communities Scotland
Jennifer Howie	Diet and Nutrition Team	Food Standards Agency Scotland
Bill Gray	National Officer	Community Food and Health (Scotland)
Anita Aggarwal	Development Officer	Community Food and Health (Scotland)
Ger O’Riordan	Development Officer	Community Food and Health (Scotland)

Useful websites

Information on Phase 1 and 2 of the Neighbourhood shops project
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/health/19133/wisefood>

The Scottish Executive and Health Scotland’s website containing information to help people in Scotland live healthier lives
www.healthyliving.gov.uk

Community Food and Health (Scotland)’s new website
www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk