

## **Community Food and Health (Scotland)**

### **0-5: Children and parents including infant nutrition**

#### **Notes from a roundtable discussion 15 May 2007**

##### **Introduction**

Community Food and Health (Scotland) or CFHS recognises that the experience, skills and knowledge of community-based food activity is vital in contributing to how we plan and develop our future work. Information and sharing of experience around children and families are constantly requested through facilitated events and workshops at our annual networking conference. Similarly, requests for resources and publications from both national agencies and community projects are in constant demand. Many initiatives are regularly in touch requesting support and guidance to raise the profile of effective practice that they have developed to local, regional and national agencies. Numerous activities with 0-5's have been reflected too in the quantity of applications to our small grant scheme requesting assistance with developing and sustaining work further. The Scottish Executive have indicated that future food and health action plans would include actions on maternal nutrition and infant nutrition<sup>1</sup>. In response to this high level demand we felt that the time was right to invite a number of community food and health initiatives and national agencies to a roundtable discussion to look at what approaches are already being developed to address health inequalities through food from a very early age. The theme for a Sustain's Food Access Network UK Liaison event held in Glasgow also provided opportunities to enhance engagement, networking and sharing on the same theme.

Altogether there were nine community food and health initiatives represented alongside contributions from the Scottish Executive and the Food Standards Agency Scotland. The discussion was chaired by CFHS steering group member Moyra Burns NHS Lothian. We are very grateful for all the contributions that were made on the day.

The discussion was kicked off with general introductions from all participants and an outline of the agenda. Due to the large number of participants in attendance the large group broke into smaller discussion groups to enable all present to have ample time to consider a number of key discussion points while sharing their experiences:

**What do you do and how do you do it?**

**What works and why?**

**What support could make this work better?**

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<sup>1</sup> 'Stakeholder Perspectives on the Scottish Diet Action Plan Review', Scottish Consumer Council, May 2007 see page 19  
<http://www.scotconsumer.org.uk/food/StakeholderPerspectivesoftheScottishDietActionPlanReview.pdf.pdf>

## **What do you do and how do you do it?** (a summary of community initiatives and their food and health activities)

**Dundee Healthy Living Initiative (DHLI)** works with local people, to identify and take forward health issues that are important to them individually, within their families and their community. Examples of some of the work they are doing with children and parents include training volunteers to facilitate physical activities alongside healthy eating messages by building in healthy snacks, 'eating a rainbow' and smoothie making. DHLI are invited to work with primary school children, nurseries and parents. Having the parents involved encourages the transfer of knowledge and skills down to other families. Many parents go on to join cookery classes and groups to further their practical skills.

**Scottish Executive Health Department** recognises the importance of prioritising action on nutrition for mothers and infants. They hope to build on the previous successes of 'Hungry for Success', 'Breakfast Clubs' and 'Fruit in Schools' initiatives across Scotland. The Scottish Executive greatly appreciate the challenges of community food and health initiatives working on the frontline and expressed a great interest to find out what is going well and what could be done at a national level.

**Partnerships for Wellbeing ('Food First')** based in Inverness identified low income communities that would benefit from initiatives addressing food access and availability to tackle health inequalities through food. Activities are currently centred around a community centre in the Dalneigh area. The REAL Project, an organic growing enterprise operating out of Inverness High School, has been involved in terms of sourcing local food. Food First has engaged with local health visitors to assist with weaning initiatives, as well as volunteers who have been trained to facilitate a range of groups, for example cookery groups for children and families. Fruit and vegetables are sold at the community centre where Healthy Start vouchers are accepted with local produce used as much as possible.

**Fife Community Food Project (FCFP)** was represented by the project worker from Kirkcaldy, using her past experiences of implementing healthy eating in schools around the 'Hungry for Success' Initiative. FCFP has engaged with young mums in the area and is using resources published by the Food Standards Agency in this work. One group particularly mentioned was the 'Switch Off' group: mums of young children with challenging behaviours. FCFP worked with the mums to identify their needs resulting in practical skills and information around food being highlighted as a priority. A community kitchen was kitted out, with weekly cookery sessions developed to help the mums gain these skills. As the mums' own nutritional health is suffering as a result of some of the pressures at home, time is set aside to eat and socialise together during breaks. Discussions during these often focus on food issues in particular the links between food and behaviour. It was reported that the mum's confidence and

skills were growing as a result of these sessions. The work is being taken forward by participants in the cookery course who want to develop a breakfast club for mums in the nursery, open a fruit and vegetable co-op, and provide taster sessions in the nursery for the children.

**Community Health in Regeneration Project (CHIRP)** based in Midlothian works with the local community to improve the general health of people living in the area. A broad range of food and health activities are offered including Midlothian Community Food Initiative (MCFI) which operates 'Toot for Fruit', a mobile van that supplies fresh fruit and vegetables to nurseries, breakfast clubs, primary schools and other community projects. 'Fun with Fruits for under 5's' was set up to help reinforce healthy and positive messages around food by encouraging more nurseries to offer fruit as a healthy snack. Tasting sessions are held in nurseries giving an entire day's worth of activities. In some nurseries parents are involved and since the initial pilot more nurseries are requesting this programme. Many of CHIRP's clients are registered with the Healthy Start scheme and receive vouchers to purchase fruit and vegetables from the mobile van and other community venues operated by MCFI. CHIRP have worked closely with health visitors and attended events to support clients to register as members of the scheme. CHIRP have also worked closely with Midlothian Sure Start to develop a nutrition policy for Sure Start centres in the region.

**Have a Heart Paisley (HAHP)** was launched in October 2000 as one of the Scottish Executive's four national health demonstration projects. HAHP aims to reduce heart disease and promote healthier, longer lives for the people of Paisley. Renfrewshire Community Dietitians are partners with HaHP and Renfrewshire Council Early Years Staff and developed the 'Eat Well to Play Well' resource which involves games, flashcards, food models and songs. It aims to teach 3-5 year olds and their parents the importance of eating more healthily through active play. This has been rolled out through Renfrewshire and led by community dietitians and early years staff. There have been many national requests for it to be rolled out further and the dietitians are having early discussions with Health Promoting Schools Unit and NHS Scotland. The resource has evaluated well and has been integrated into the nursery school curriculum.

**The Food For Tot project**, which is based at Greengables nursery school in Craigmillar, is a community-based project that runs a variety of sessions for families focusing on diet issues relating to and about babies and young children. This outreach project delivers free sessions to parents/carers interested in finding out how diet impacts on children's health and wellbeing. Key areas covered are diet during pregnancy, feeding a new baby, weaning, toddlers, family mealtimes, nutrition for the family, dental health and practical skills. The project helps families develop skills and knowledge that encourage a positive start to young children's lives. Food For tot works with individual parents/carers, groups of parents/carers and also with parents/carers and their children together. During

one activity 'Cooking for Tots', 3 year olds come and cook with their parents/carers, discovering new tastes and developing an interest in food and cooking whilst the adults can talk through any food related issues. Food For Tot also delivers training to other professionals who work with children and young families.

**Healthy Valleys Healthy Living Centre** based in Rigside, South Lanarkshire, promotes activities and opportunities that contribute toward achieving better health, as well as addressing health inequalities identified through engagement with the local community. The Healthy Weaning Initiative encourages parents of young babies to give them the best start in life. This was made possible by the purchase in partnership with other local agencies in South Lanarkshire of a resource that could be reproduced and used widely. Parents are shown how to prepare and store home produced foods for babies using fresh produce. The sessions are provided over four weeks of two hours duration to groups of about twelve and all parents receive a free recipe book at the end. Health visitors, volunteers and others have been trained to be the main facilitators of this work.

**Midlothian Sure Start (MSS)** is a voluntary sector organisation that supports families with children aged 0-3 years. MSS has six centres situated in areas of deprivation throughout Midlothian. Families attend the centres and are offered a variety of support including support group sessions, healthy living, complementary therapies, parenting support, counseling, play therapy, confidence building and help for those wanting to return to education/work. The healthy living support provides group sessions on weaning, healthy eating, cooking skills and physical activity. This part of the project is linked to the Midlothian Community Food Initiative and so families have access to low cost, good quality, healthy foods and also a Healthy Start scheme where they can spend their vouchers in the food initiative. The healthy living co-ordinator also works with other professionals and agencies such as health visitors, oral health promotion, infant feeding advisor, Home Link and the Midlothian Healthy Living initiative. Groups and sessions are carried out in the wider community, outwith MSS.

**Janny's Hoose Healthy Living Centre** in Inverness has a parent and toddler group which meet once a week. The 'Healthy Eating Plate' is used to ensure that group participants are aware of and are catering to a balanced choice of foods as well as the provision of fruit and vegetables. All parents are encouraged to take an active role in all aspects of the group which encourages them to eventually run the groups themselves. Involvement in the preparation of foods is helped by another parent who is a former chef. The Janny's Hoose also offer outreach sessions in local nurseries and mums and toddlers groups once per term. Family cooking classes are also offered and during school holidays toddlers are also often included.

**NHS Forth Valley** are also involved in similar work which involves parents and children under 5 through family cooking sessions. The toddlers are encouraged

to be involved in all the tasks as much as possible. These sessions promote cooking and food preparation as a family event and the children particularly enjoy mixing ingredients together, especially in the bakery sessions. In this way food preparation is promoted and seen as a fun activity for everyone in the family. Other food activities include sessions which influence food choices, for example informal eating for health workshops targeted at parents of young children. Both Janny's Hoose and Forth Valley also mentioned local weaning initiatives.

**Food Standards Agency Scotland (FSAS)**, launched in April 2000, is committed to improving food safety and standards in Scotland as well as protecting the health of Scotland's population in relation to food. The FSA has various publications promoting healthy eating and nutrition throughout all the key stages of life. Of particular interest to the discussion theme are publications for eating while breastfeeding, and feeding babies, toddlers and children. FSAS is currently planning a 'primary school and nursery' mini roadshow which will promote all key FSA messages for 0-5's including games for this age group.

The following are examples of the broad range of thoughts, suggestions, barriers, aspirations and possible solutions that were mentioned as part of the small group discussions.

## **What works and why?**

### **Practice**

- Participants all stressed the importance of involving parents and families in food activities with children. The shared learning is beneficial to both and additionally has a knock-on effect with their peers and other family members.
- Ensure activities are fun and enjoyable so that participants stay interested i.e. physical activities, games, songs, puzzles etc. This supports the retention of key health messages.
- Involve children in preparation and cooking as this ensures they are more likely to try the food. In addition, parents will try new things with them.
- Encourage parents to include food preparation and cooking activities regularly at home, especially simple ones like making sandwiches, snacks and smoothies.
- Encourage group participants to identify what their needs are so that activities are relevant and in context. Listen to what participants say about activities.

### **Working together**

- Involving other partners in work can strengthen its influence and impact. These can be:
  - other members of the community i.e. more experienced family members and older mums and dads,
  - volunteers i.e. local people willing to give their time,
  - other professionals i.e. community dietitians, health visitors, midwives,

- nursery staff,
  - local authorities,
  - other voluntary sector organisations.
- Working with others can contribute to joining up groups by geography, topic and across agencies.
- Partnerships can be both formal and informal.
- Partnership working assists in using resources efficiently and can avoid duplication.

### **Time and Planning**

- Building relationships and developing trust across all levels takes time but is very effective.
- Timescales for all activities need to be realistic and relevant to all the groups involved.
- Consistency is important both in the messages that people are receiving and in keeping to the aims and objectives as identified with the groups themselves.

### **Telling Others**

- It helps to tell people you are doing what you are doing! (Community members and other partners, agencies and organisations). The groups themselves will inform others especially their peers. Giving feedback is important especially to those who may have helped in getting groups and activities up and running.
- Promote what you are doing, why and how you are doing it.
- Evaluate your work. This can be done in different ways. If the groups are happy with what they are doing this will spread by word of mouth.

## **What support could make this work better?**

### **Engagement**

- Better engagement with health visitors and other health professionals as their awareness of what is being provided in the community already is valuable.
- This knowledge of services would help in identifying groups and partnerships and vice versa.
- Identifying key people within all groups and agencies who can take on active roles.
- Having all key community workers, volunteers, health professionals and agencies working together would help with disseminating key messages especially around healthy eating and food safety. However, this also requires flexibility to facilitate work 'where people are at' i.e. taking small steps and giving people time to find their feet.
- Key agencies and organisations working together to enable sustainability of food and health activities.
- Engage better with Environmental Health Officers to make it easier for groups to run food activities. There are too many mixed messages from area to area.

## **Practice**

- A 'National Infant Feeding Advisor'.
- Highlight effective practice of involving children, parents and families in identifying, developing and involvement in community based food and health activities.
- A mechanism that ensures that practice, research, resources and inspiration are shared and exchanged.
- Recognition and acceptance that food and health activities take time to influence change and make a difference to health inequalities. More time given to develop activities and practice with matched commitment to funding and resources.
- Encouraging variation of foods for balanced weaning – not just promoting fruit and vegetables – more information on family cooking.
- Support for food and health activities to become the norm and not the exception (mainstreaming).
- Support for the work and interventions being provided by volunteers and lay workers and their influence on community based activities. (non-medical)
- Targets from Scottish Executive – can CHP's work for us and engender partnership working?

## **Accessibility**

- Better planning of transport routes addressing accessibility on all levels.
- Work with local shops to change perceptions about supply and demand. Better and affordable produce available locally (SGF Healthy Living Programme).
- Better distribution routes including better prices and quality of food items.
- Suppliers delivering to where people are located.
- Support for local food sector both in rural and urban settings.
- Taking work into local communities. Community work provided in more comfortable environments (community centres and community flats v GP surgeries and health centres).

## **Resources**

- Funding: smarter, flexible, and realistic.
- Overview of packs and resources – library? Through NHS Scotland?
- Free, evidenced good quality resources to support work. An example mentioned was forthcoming FSA publication 'What's Cooking?'.
- More joint training in breastfeeding initiatives – community, health service and local authority.
- Specific funding for weaning initiatives as they are expensive to run as crèche facilities can be required. It is less expensive to run practical sessions where the children can get involved.

## Information

- Sharing knowledge and raising awareness.
- Improved legislation on labeling – some foods aimed at children give a false impression that they are 'healthier'.
- Clear information on health and safety/food hygiene (national guidelines)

## Group Discussion

There was general agreement on the importance of highlighting 'what works' in the field: activities that are engaging, fun and creative, involving parents and children together with other key partners/agencies, combining educational, and physical elements. With recognition from all of what the important issues were, it was agreed that the focus now had to be on taking things forward, bearing in mind the variety of agencies at many different levels working in this area. Some ideas were discussed:

- National Resource

There was a discussion around the idea of creating a national library of resources/good practice/case studies. One participant mentioned that Health Scotland was currently in the process of pulling together a database of resources. Others in the group expressed some concern around agencies being on occasion protective of their resources and that this could hinder the creation of a central hub. It was therefore generally agreed that a national library was definitely an aspiration but that it may not be feasible as things stand.

The group felt that national agencies, collectively, could assist and support grassroots, and therefore enable community levels and national strategic levels to better join up. It was suggested that a national lead with a wide overview might be helpful.

- Capacity Building

In addition to the discussion on how best to tap into the wealth of activity out there, the group focused on the issue of training/capacity building. The group felt that community development training could be useful for food workers and that it was important to focus on building the capacity of lay workers as they can indirectly influence communities by delivering the 'healthy eating message' informally in their day-to-day frontline work. The group felt that supporting staff, volunteers (all those who are not necessarily qualified in nutrition) to work side-by-side with health professionals could make a positive impact on their clients' approach to food, in a non-threatening approachable way.

- Food Access

The group agreed that it was essential to link the topic of 0-5 children, parents and food to the wider issue of food access more generally. Participants felt that it was important to support those working with young families within their context, for example the 'food environment' they are in (e.g. availability of local shops, quality, affordability and availability of food stuffs etc.) The Healthy Start scheme

was mentioned in terms of its potential contribution to enabling wider food access. However it was noted that the take-up by shops of the Healthy Start scheme was uneven across the country. CFHS highlighted its current work with the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Grocers Federation. The Scottish Executive representative directed all those interested to the Scottish Grocers Federation HealthyLiving programme<sup>2</sup>

- Profile and Impact

It was generally felt that support for the evaluation of projects was important and that there would need to be further consideration of working with community food and health initiatives to raise the profile of their efforts and highlight approaches that are working and having an impact on local groups. CFHS have already tentatively approached Evaluation Support Scotland with a view to collaborating on a piece of work that would also involve building the capacity of local groups to promote the work and services they are providing and its impact. This could also involve ensuring that practice, research, resources and inspiration are shared and exchanged through wider national events such as national conferences and seminars.

- Communities of Practice

In response to the demand previously mentioned in the introduction it could also be considered that a 'community of practice' that could potentially share practice, experience and resources as part of an active network could be useful. This could take a variety of shapes and further discussion would be required to explore what would be most practical and effective.

## **Conclusion**

Participants agreed that the next step would be to raise the profile of this topic collectively at local level and share and learn from local experience and expertise with the ultimate view of raising the profile of the subject nationally and strategically.

Finally, it was noted that this meeting was the beginning of a longer term process, which aims to lead to tangible outcomes as the reflection and work progresses.

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<sup>2</sup> 'HealthyLiving Neighbourhood Shops Project' NHS Health Scotland 2007  
[www.healthscotland.com/uploads/documents/3857-Healthyliving\\_Neighbourhood\\_Shops\\_Project.pdf](http://www.healthscotland.com/uploads/documents/3857-Healthyliving_Neighbourhood_Shops_Project.pdf)