

Evaluation of the roll-out of the Scottish Grocers Federation's 'Healthy Living' programme to community food initiatives



Background

The Scottish Grocers Federation's 'Healthy Living' programme works with convenience stores to improve the amount, range and quality of fresh fruit and vegetables and other healthier products available for their customers. The programme has been running since 2004, and works with around 500 stores across Scotland, targeting those that serve low-income communities. The programme is funded by the Scottish Government

The programme provides:

- a training package for shop staff that looks at promoting the sale of fruit and vegetables; and
- branded promotional materials and resources, including a fruit and vegetable display stand.

In September 2008, Community Food and Health (Scotland) launched a pilot project which rolled out the 'Healthy Living' programme to community food co-ops and outlets through the community food networks that operate in Aberdeen and Moray, Edinburgh, East Lothian, West Lothian, Lanarkshire and Glasgow.

The aims of the pilot were to find out:

- if taking part resulted in community food co-ops and outlets selling more fruit and vegetables;
- if the programme's training and resources met the needs of community food initiatives taking part; and
- what changes could be made to the programme to make it more suitable for community food initiatives

The pilot was delivered in partnership with the SGF 'Healthy Living' programme staff. The programme's co-ordinator delivered the training sessions.

An external evaluation of the pilot was carried out by EKOS Ltd. The evaluation began at the start of the programme and was completed at the end of August 2009.

What the pilot included

In September and October, the 'Healthy Living' programme co-ordinator delivered a training session for community food co-ops and outlets in each of the six community food network areas. An additional training session was held in Stirling in December for community food

initiatives operating in Stirling, Clackmannanshire and Fife. Around 80 people attended the training sessions.

In December, 27 display stands and sets of promotional materials were distributed to 16 of the community food co-ops and outlets that took part in the training.

What did the evaluation find out?

Everyone who attended a training session was asked for their views about its content and relevance to their organisation. Thirty-one people replied, with all but one stating that the training had been very helpful, or helpful, to their organisation. Information about how to display, present and promote fruit and vegetables was what participants found the most useful. Some participants felt that the training could be revised and tailored to better suit community food initiatives.

The 16 community food initiatives receiving display stands and promotional resources were contacted six months after receiving them, and asked how they had implemented what they had learned in the training session. Ten responded, with half saying that it had improved how they displayed or presented their fruit and vegetables. Three had cascaded the training information to other staff and volunteers. Two replied that they had used the training to develop their community food initiative. Others stated that it had enabled them to use existing resources better, or improve their pricing structure, stock rotation or promotion. One said that it had enabled them to use seasonal produce better.

They were also asked what impact using the display stands and other promotional materials had had on their food co-ops or outlets. Half of those that responded said that using these had resulted in improved marketing or promotion, or improved appearance or presentation of the fruit and vegetables that they sold. Two stated that they now could provide better information to their customers about what they sold. Two said that they had helped them improve their outreach activities. One stated that using the stand and materials had led to increased sales. Some of the co-ops and outlets said that the stands were more useful than the other promotional materials, with some saying that they could not use the latter as they operated in other people's premises.

As part of the evaluation, EKOS Ltd visited 11 of the community food co-ops or outlets taking part in the pilot, and included the experiences of nine of these in the evaluation report. The outlets operate in a range of settings, including a village shop; healthy living centres; community centres; a health project; a miners' welfare 'one-stop shop'; a multi-purpose service point; and a general hospital.

The stands were used for a variety of purposes. Some of the outlets used the stands to display big selling items, others for promotions. Some promoted other healthier foodstuffs – such as pulses, pasta, porridge oats – in addition to fruit and vegetables. Some plan to use the stand to sell pre-packed food (such as salads). Some outlets reported that using the stands increased the amount of impulse buying by customers.

Some of the outlets also use the stands for promotions at external events.

Feedback from the nine outlets was positive, with all but one highlighting how taking part in the pilot has benefitted their organisation. The positive impacts reported by the organisations included:

- improved presentation of the produce that they sell;
- increased sales (including impulse sales); and
- increased knowledge about fruit and vegetables resulting in staff being able to provide better information for their customers, run taster sessions to encourage their customers to try new and different fruit and vegetables, and reduce waste.

Being part of the pilot also provided unexpected outcomes for two of the organisations participating. One applied the learning from the training session to another retail outlet it ran. In another, attending the training was one of the factors that secured a volunteer paid employment within the organisation.

The evaluation ends by highlighting what worked well and less well in the pilot, and makes a number of recommendations for improvements that could be made to the programme if it is rolled out to other community food initiatives.

What worked well

Both the training and resources were found to bring benefits to the groups participating in the pilot.

Offering a package which included the training and resources meant that the resources were used more effectively.

As a result of taking part in the training, groups stated that they are selling more fruit and vegetables, and are more aware about reducing waste, seasonality of produce, and of pricing.

The display stands have proved useful for most of the groups taking part with customers commenting on how their use has improved the look of the fruit and vegetables for sale. Their mobility allowed some groups to use them in more than one location.

What worked less well

In some co-ops and outlets, the training was not always attended by the most appropriate person in the organisation, or was not cascaded to other staff and volunteers. This lessened the impact of the resources and the dissemination of the learning from the training.

Some of the people who attended the training stated that it could have focused more on the specific needs and constraints of community food initiatives.

The display stand could not be used as planned in some of the co-ops and outlets, because of a lack of space or storage facilities.

The other resources available were less useful for some of the co-ops and outlets, particularly for those that used other organisations' premises.

Recommendations

The report included a number of improvements that could be made if the pilot is rolled out to other community food initiatives:

- There should be strict criteria used in selecting community food initiatives for inclusion, to ensure that those that take part will benefit from doing so.
- It should be emphasised to organisations taking part that they will be expected to provide information, to assist with evaluations.
- Follow-up support should be available for groups from someone with expertise in the retail of food products and an understanding of community food initiatives.
- The training should be adapted to reflect the particular needs of community food outlets.
- Resources should only be available to organisations where frontline staff have taken part in the training.
- Refresher training sessions should be built in to the roll-out.
- Bespoke promotional materials that meet the specific needs of community co-ops and outlets should be designed.

A copy of the report can be downloaded from Community Food and Health (Scotland)'s website www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk.