



community  
food and health  
(scotland)



# Healthy Living Tastes Better: Housing Associations and Community Food Initiatives



### About Community Food and Health (Scotland)

Community Food and Health (Scotland) or CFHS aims to ensure that everyone in Scotland has the opportunity, ability and confidence to access a healthy and acceptable diet for themselves, their families and their communities. It does this by supporting work with and within low-income communities that addresses health inequalities and barriers to healthy and affordable food.

Barriers 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 the shops

**Skills** – improving confidence and skills in cooking and shopping

**Culture** – overcoming ingrained habits

Through its work CFHS aims to support 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

CFHS value the experience, understanding, skills and knowledge within Scotland's community food initiatives and their unique contribution to developing and delivering policy and practice at all levels.

### About Scottish Federation of Housing Associations

The SFHA is the national representative body for Scotland's housing associations and co-operatives. The SFHA exists to support the work of housing associations and co-operatives through positive influence on Government policy and promotion of the work of its members. Its affiliated members include housing associations, registered housing associations and co-operatives throughout Scotland as well as housing associations in Glasgow.

Its mission is

“To be the national voice and advocate of Scotland's housing associations and co-operatives.”

Its objectives (currently under review) are:

- to promote and support the work that its members do;
- to positively influence Government policy by representing the interests of its members; and
- to provide high quality services and advice to its members.



# What is this report about?

Through its work, CFHS was aware that a number of housing associations were involved in delivering or supporting community food and health work. Further research highlighted that a growing number of housing associations recognise the role that food and health activities can play in improving the health and wellbeing of their tenants.

This publication showcases some examples of housing associations involved in community food and health work. There are many more. The examples included highlight a range of community food and health activities. Some are run by housing associations, some by community food initiatives, and others in partnership. All are making real and demonstrable differences to people's lives.



## What are community food initiatives?

Community food initiatives are community-led or community-based organisations set up to improve access to, and availability and take-up of, an affordable, varied and balanced diet in low-income communities. Because they have been established to meet the specific needs of their communities, no two are the same. For some, community food work is a small, but important, part of what they do. Some provide services for particularly vulnerable groups, eg. people with mental health issues, homeless people or those at risk of homelessness, older people, and young parents.

The types of activities they run are very diverse and include community retailing; (such as food co-ops, community-run shops and fruit and vegetable stalls); community growing; skills development (eg. nutrition and cooking skills); food delivery services; community catering; and health promotion. Most are funded to deliver some or all of their activities.

## What are housing associations?

Housing associations are not-for-profit organisations that provide good quality, affordable housing across the country. They are run by a committee of volunteers elected by tenants. The committee employs staff to manage the properties. There is a range of housing association types, offering different kinds of accommodation to different kinds of people. Most of them, however, are 'registered social landlords' (RSLs), which means they register with the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Housing co-operatives are similar to housing associations, with a similar purpose and set of objectives, in terms of providing affordable housing. Like housing associations, they are also known as RSLs. Where housing cooperatives differ is that they are jointly owned and run by their tenants.

## What is the Wider Role Fund?

The **Wider Role Fund** supports RSLs to undertake projects in their local communities - beyond their principal role as landlords - that make life better for the people living there. RSLs often work in partnership with other organisations to deliver Wider Role projects. The Scottish Government determines the strategic priorities for Wider Role and in 2009-10 and 2010-11 these were:

- investment to address the causes of poverty, community decline and worklessness;
- making early interventions for vulnerable individuals, families and disadvantaged communities;
- improving employability as a key means of tackling poverty; and
- income maximisation.

Priority is given to projects that demonstrate the RSL's ability to work effectively with other RSLs, Third Sector organisations and, where possible, local authorities and community planning partnerships.



## Why community food and health activities?

Reducing health inequalities and obesity are priorities for the Scottish Government. Food and health policies launched in recent years outline the extent of these major health issues, and describe the actions that the Scottish Government intends to implement to reduce them. The role that community-led and community-based food and health activities can, and do, play in supporting the Scottish Government to achieve its priorities is recognised throughout.

### List of policies

**Equally Well** was published in 2008. The focus of the policy is to tackle the significant health inequalities that exist in Scotland.

[www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/229649/0062206.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/229649/0062206.pdf)

**Healthy Eating Active Living** reinforces messages from earlier Government policies that food-related activities need to tackle the barriers to a healthy balanced diet, i.e. access, affordability, skills and culture.

[www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/228860/0061963.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/228860/0061963.pdf)

One of the themes in **Recipe for Success**, the National Food and Drink Policy, considers how the Scottish Government will make food more available and accessible for all. It recognises the role that the third sector can play in achieving this.

[www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/2009/06/25133322/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/publications/2009/06/25133322/0)

**Preventing Overweight and Obesity in Scotland: A Route Map towards Healthy Weight** recognises that policies cannot rely on individuals being able to avoid becoming overweight and obese, but that work needs to be done to change the environment that promotes overeating. An action plan, outlining how these changes can be made, is to be published in spring 2011.

[www.scotland.gov.uk?Resource/Doc/302783/0094795.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk?Resource/Doc/302783/0094795.pdf)

## Why work together?

Housing associations and community food initiatives are very different, but have much in common:

- Both have been established to meet needs in the communities they work with.
- They provide support for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people living in their communities.
- They have expertise, not only in delivering their core activities, but also in engaging with their communities and identifying needs.
- Building the capacity of their communities is implicit in what they do, providing opportunities for people to use, enhance, and develop their skills.
- The aim of their work is to improve the health and wellbeing of the communities they work with.
- Both are working to meet national and local priorities, objectives and outcomes.

In many cases, both are supporting the same communities and individuals. By working together to tackle food and health needs in their communities, and combining their organisations' different expertise, skills and resources, they can achieve much more than by working alone.

# What is happening?

**The following examples give a flavour of the range of food and health activities run by and with housing associations throughout the country.**

**Margaret Blackwood Housing Association's** food co-ops are supporting people who find it difficult to shop by improving access to affordable, good quality food. Margaret Blackwood Housing Association (MBHA) provides housing and support across Scotland, particularly for disabled people and their families, and older people. In March 2008, one of its tenants in East Edinburgh set up the **Abbey Court Community Food Co-op**. Open every Monday morning, it is thriving, despite having a large supermarket just around the corner. Customers include the local primary school as well as individual shoppers.

**East Craigs Community Food Co-op** in West Edinburgh was set up by the housing association when the local supermarket closed in 2008, to meet the needs of local residents who had difficulty in travelling to other shops. Running out of Laura Fergusson Court, which provides sheltered housing, it is open every Monday morning selling milk, bread and eggs as well as fresh fruit and vegetables. A new, smaller supermarket is currently being built and the East Craigs Co-op is likely to close when it opens, having done its job.

The co-op has brought other benefits in addition to providing easy access to good quality, affordable fresh produce. It is hoped that some of these will continue once the co-op closes. It has become a social event for many in an area where there are few opportunities for community interaction: the coffee and home bakes on a Monday morning may have to continue for some time to come! It has provided opportunities for self-development for some of the volunteers with learning disabilities, building their self-confidence and self-esteem.

MBHA works with **Edinburgh Community Food (ECF)**, which supplies both co-ops with the fruit, vegetables and other products that they sell. ECF is a city-wide community food initiative that provides and supports a range of community food and health activities, including support to food co-ops.

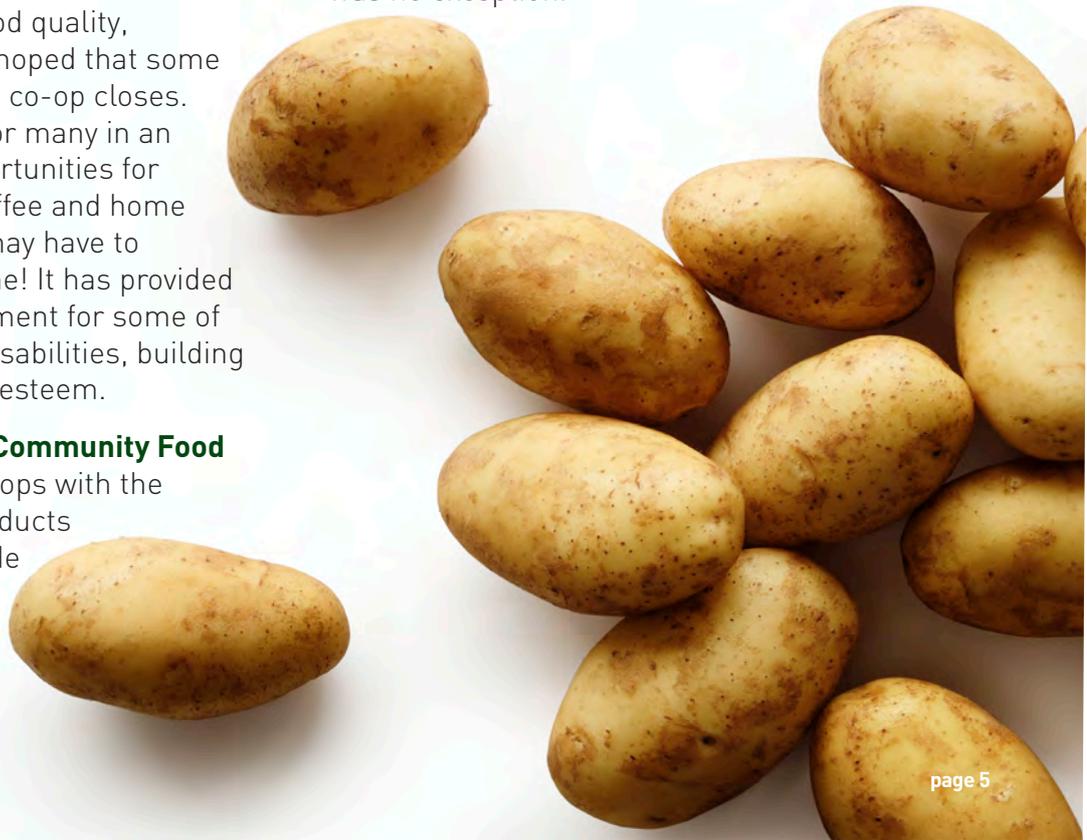
In Aberdeen, MBHA has set up food co-ops in two sheltered housing complexes, with the support of **CFINE** (Community Food Initiatives North East), a community food initiative that supports community food outlets across the North East of Scotland.

**Raeden Court** runs weekly on Fridays and **Eday Gardens** opens on the first Tuesday of each month, selling affordable, fresh produce that is locally sourced wherever possible. At the moment, most of the customers live in the housing developments. However, the wider community is being actively encouraged to support the co-ops. Many of the tenants are severely disabled, and are keen to see these initiatives continue; the challenge is to find the resources and people able to widen the customer base, to help its sustainability.

The development of both co-ops was supported with funding from CFHS's small grants scheme.

**Working in partnership to develop and deliver food and activities can 'add value', bringing in more resources and producing a much wider range of outcomes, as is the case with Auchmuty Allotments Project.**

Throughout the country, interest in growing fruit and vegetables has increased significantly in recent years, with demand for allotment plots far exceeding supply. Auchmuty, one of the regeneration neighbourhoods in Glenrothes, was no exception.



Auchmuty Allotments Project in Glenrothes was established in 2009, to meet some of this demand. This was the first new allotments site developed in Fife for several decades. The project provides nine allotment plots, seven for local residents and two for use by community groups. In addition, local people are being encouraged to grow their own fruit and vegetables through 'Hoe, sow and grow' classes run by Elmwood College at the allotments.

The project was developed by a multi-agency team, which included **Fife Community Food Project, Fife Housing Association Alliance, Fife Council** and **Elmwood College**, all of whom had an interest in increasing allotment provision across Fife. Working in partnership was the most important factor in ensuring the project's success, with each of the partners contributing their particular skills, expertise and resources.

The project development was co-ordinated by Fife Community Food Project. Most of the grounds work on the allotments site (including fencing, building paths, and clearing the site) was carried out by a work team of trainees, managed by Fife Council and Elmwood College. Because of the employability skills aspect of the project, Fife Housing Association Alliance was able to attract £25,000 of the £40,000 development costs through Wider Role funding. Providing opportunities for trainees and volunteers to develop skills that may lead to employment was one of the aims of the project.

A number of other factors also contributed to the success of the project. Carrying out extensive community consultation in 2008, to ensure local support for the development of the allotments, was vital. This included identifying any issues that local people might have, and working to minimise their concerns. Only allocating plots to local residents was also seen as important in building local support.

As a result of being involved in the project, Fife Housing Association Alliance and some of the other partners have established an allotment work team, which is successfully working on projects throughout Fife.





**Committed individuals are the key to developing a community food initiative from an initial idea. Finding people with this commitment can take time, as Linthouse Housing Association found when it wanted to develop an area of ground into a community garden in Govan, South West Glasgow.**

**LEG UP (Linthouse Elderpark and Govan Urban Planters)** is a community growing group based in the walled grounds of a farm in Elder Park in Govan. Established in spring 2010, the group has grown quickly. It now has around 60 members, with 20 people regularly working in the garden on Saturdays. It is run by local people, and has no paid staff.

There is a wide range of vegetables and fruit grown in the garden and local people are free to take what they need from the garden. Providing access to free produce is used as one way of encouraging more local people to become involved.

There is very little vandalism, as a result of group members engaging with the young people using the park. Some of the younger children that had caused a small amount of damage in the early days have since asked if they can help out in the garden.

**Linthouse Housing Association (LHA)** provided the group with £2,500 of funding. This was used to purchase two polytunnels, a wind turbine and solar cells. It continues to provide the group with support 'in kind' (LEG UP has had no other external funding). The materials used in the garden's raised beds, planters, cold frames and outdoor kitchen have all been donated, as have the seeds used for its first growing season. Glasgow City Council supplied some of the planters and the soil.

LHA has wanted to see the redevelopment of the farm for some time, as it is an important landmark in the area. Both the farm building and grounds had been unused for several years. Previous attempts to set up a community garden in the grounds were unsuccessful because there was insufficient community support to take this forward. The founding member of LEG UP approached the housing association about setting up the garden when he moved to the area early in 2010. With support from the housing association and other local organisations, a community gardening group was formed, which became LEG UP in May 2010.

LEG UP is keen to expand, and develop other growing sites in the area. It also wants to encourage more local people to become part of the group, particularly local residents from black and minority ethnic communities. The group is also in discussion with local agencies about developing a funding bid for the redevelopment of the farm building for community use.

**Improving access to and availability of food, is important. However, many people lack the knowledge, confidence and cooking skills to make changes to what they eat.**

**Elderpark Housing Association (EHA)** has a history of delivering community food activities. In partnership with Aberlour Childcare Trust, it ran a healthy eating and cookery programme in autumn 2009 for vulnerable young people living in the Govan area of Glasgow. The project was funded by CFHS and offered the young people and youth workers an opportunity to take part in a basic nutrition course (REHIS Elementary Food and Health course) and a series of cookery classes.

EHA continues to make it easier for local people to learn about healthy eating and cooking healthier meals. The housing association has refurbished and refitted the kitchen in its community centre, creating the Elderpark Eatery. The Eatery is a much needed resource in the area, enabling the housing association and other groups to run a range of food preparation classes. These are meeting food and nutrition needs identified by South West Glasgow Community Health Partnership's Food Strategy group. The group funded EHA to run cookery demonstrations in the community centre. This also promoted the Eatery and encouraged local people to take part in the Eatery's classes.

The classes provided at the Eatery are being targeted at different groups within the local community, including older people; young people holding their first tenancy; parents who are about to wean their babies; and residents from minority ethnic communities. The classes are free for participants. The Eatery is also hoping to link in with other community centre users and local community food initiatives, including LEG UP.



As well as supporting local people to improve their health and wellbeing through developing new cooking and nutrition skills, the

Eatery is playing an important social role in the community. It provides an opportunity for those taking part in the classes to meet new people and make new friends, develop life skills, and build up their self-confidence and self-esteem.

The project is funded by Santander, the Crudens Foundation and Crudens Building and Renewals Ltd.

**Building the capacity of communities and the people living within them is as important to many community food initiatives as the food and health activities that they deliver. Housing associations are playing an important role in supporting this capacity building.**

**East Dunbartonshire Food Co-op (EDFC)** was established by East Dunbartonshire Community Health Partnership (CHP) and launched in March 2010. The project was set up to increase the availability of affordable fruit and vegetables in four low-income communities in the area – Hillhead in Kirkintilloch, Twechar, Lennoxton, and Auchinairn. The project currently runs co-ops in three centres in Kirkintilloch, including Hillhead Community Centre and Hillhead Resource Centre, and is opening a fourth in Lennoxton. It also delivers fruit and vegetable orders to local organisations. The co-ops are very successful, generating significant sales and providing volunteering opportunities for ten local people.

The volunteers bring a wide range of skills and expertise to the project, as well as differing support needs. Providing opportunities for volunteers to share their expertise and develop new skills, and valuing their contribution to the project, are integral to EDFC's work. A volunteer development programme is being developed, and it intends to set up a volunteer reward programme. The project is also in discussion with a local college about offering work placements.

Currently, the project is managed and part-funded by the CHP, with a member of staff supporting its development and operation. The aim is to establish the project as a separate voluntary organisation, with support continuing from the CHP.

**Hillhead Housing Association** has been actively involved in the development of EDFC. For some years it successfully ran a weekly food co-op in Hillhead, but had to close it when the premises used were no longer available. It was keen



to support the re-opening of a co-op in the area, not only because there was local support for one, but also because of the difference that the previous co-op had made to the health and wellbeing of local people. Setting up a new co-op was also seen as a way of continuing to engage with its tenants, and to encourage and support them to participate in other community activities.

The housing association successfully applied for Wider Role funding, which supplemented the funding provided by the CHP. This has been used to purchase a van, start-up equipment (including scales, cash register, freezer and fridge) and to support the volunteer development programme. It also provides 'in kind' support, including promoting the co-ops, and offering volunteering opportunities to tenants and staff. And, as part of its commitment to the 'Healthy Working Lives'<sup>1</sup> programme, it purchases fresh fruit weekly from the project for its staff.

**Finally, food and health activities are increasingly being used as a tool to develop independent living skills, particularly within organisations that work with the most vulnerable communities.**

**Blue Triangle (Glasgow) Housing Association** provides housing support services to homeless people and those affected by homelessness. The housing association works closely with local authorities and voluntary and community organisations.

Its project in Viewpark in North Lanarkshire provides short to medium term supported accommodation for up to 12 vulnerable young people. The project works with the young people to prepare them to be able to support their tenancies once they are allocated a house of their own.

Part of the support the project offers is cooking sessions for the residents. The sessions are designed to encourage the young people to cook more meals from scratch, and incorporate suggestions for healthier meal options.

In 2009, the project was awarded funding from CFHS's small grants scheme to design and develop vegetable plots in the back garden. The project applied for funding to grow its own supply of fruit and vegetables to use in the cooking sessions it runs.

The project used a local contractor for the design and build of the new vegetable garden. The head gardener from the company that won the contract worked closely with project staff, exploring different ways that they could achieve their aim. As the project staff had limited gardening experience, he offered to return at the beginning of the planting season to help them get started.

The building work was completed by spring 2010. The garden now contains three raised vegetable plots, three strawberry planters, a greenhouse and a garden shed. In its first year the project has grown a range of vegetables, and flowers and strawberries. The residents have been encouraged to help staff with all the activities in the garden.

The project staff promote healthy eating by encouraging the residents to make changes to what they eat, rather than by 'preaching' at them. The young people are encouraged to use the garden's produce in their meals, and, if needed, the staff will help them with the meal preparation and cooking. The fruit and

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<sup>1</sup> Healthy Working Lives is an award programme that supports employers and employees to develop health promotion and safety themes in the workplace. [www.healthyworkinglives.com](http://www.healthyworkinglives.com)



vegetables are also used in the cooking sessions, as originally planned, and for the communal meals that are prepared each Sunday.

The project is also provided with fresh fruit weekly, supplied by **Lanarkshire Community Food and Health Partnership**, a local community food and health organisation. The residents enjoy the fruit, which is left in a communal area in the building for them to share.

The garden was established to provide a source of fresher, and cheaper, fruit and vegetables for the cookery sessions and for the residents to make use of, and it has proved successful on both counts. However, the development of the vegetable garden has brought additional benefits, particularly for the residents. Those taking part in the gardening activities have an opportunity to learn new skills. For some, being involved in growing the produce, from sowing to harvesting, is particularly important, because of the sense of achievement that this brings.

In the short time that the garden has been established it has already become an integral part of the project.

## Thank You

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to this publication. Their experiences and input have been invaluable. Thanks also to David Ogilvie from the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations for his support.

# Contact details

More information about the community food and health activities and the impact that they are making on their community are available from the following.

## **Blue Triangle (Glasgow) Housing Association**

[www.btha.org.uk](http://www.btha.org.uk)  
01698 816801

## **CFINE**

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## **East Dunbartonshire Food Co-op**

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## **Edinburgh Community Food**

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