



factsheet

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The contribution of community-based food and health activities to *Improving Maternal and Infant Nutrition: A Framework for Action*

In 2013, Community Food and Health (Scotland), or CFHS, awarded funding amounting to a total of £100,000 to 48 groups and agencies across Scotland as part of its annual development fund. 18 of these groups and agencies focused on early years work, i.e. they developed food and health activities for pregnant women and families with children under the age of four years. Their activities contributed to some of the aims of *Improving Maternal and Infant Nutrition: A Framework for Action* (2011) (MINF).

This CFHS fact sheet provides an overview of the work undertaken by 17¹ of the groups and agencies and some examples of their activities.

About *Improving Maternal and Infant Nutrition: A Framework for Action*

This policy framework aims to improve nutrition for pregnant women and families with children under the age of four years. It is aimed at a range of organisations including the NHS, local authorities and the community and voluntary sector. It also aims to increase awareness of and use of the Healthy Start free voucher scheme. Pregnant women and families eligible for free vouchers can spend these on milk, infant formula and fresh or frozen fruit and vegetables.

¹ One organisation delayed its activities by a year owing to staff changes.

What happened?

Seventeen groups have undertaken food and health activities since being awarded funding in late 2013. 11 of these focused solely on early years work and six included this within a wider programme of work. Two of these six groups have not completed the early years part of their activities yet.

Who were the groups and agencies and who did they reach?

Eleven of those groups funded were voluntary or community organisations, varying from national charities to local volunteer-led community initiatives. The rest were local-authority-run or partnerships. The activities took place within nine of the 14 NHS Board areas.

All activities were delivered within low-income communities. Some groups supported particular participants such as families involved in the criminal justice system, women affected by domestic violence, parents with learning disabilities and women from ethnic minority groups.

Groups or agencies supporting vulnerable groups tended to reach smaller numbers of participants, i.e. fewer than 10, whereas some of those delivering larger programmes reached more than 100 families.

What food and health activities did they run?

Most of the groups focused on developing participants' cooking skills and learning about food and health. Some included weaning information, staff training, physical activities and social meals as part of the cooking skills activities. One group developed a learning-through-play programme and one community initiative ran a fruit barra that promoted healthy start vouchers. Here are some examples of the achievements and activities of five of the groups and agencies.

The **Scottish Pre-school Play Association (SPPA)** used the funding to develop and buy resources for nine parent and toddler groups in low-income areas of west Glasgow. SPPA play

practitioners developed resources that aimed to encourage healthy eating through play. They visited the groups and ran complementary workshop activities, such as learning how to prepare snacks, and fruit and vegetable tasting. They encouraged staff and parents to get involved so that they would be able to run the activities themselves in the future.

The resources included toy food, toys, books, food blenders, play dough, play dough fruit cutters and oral health information. Throughout the workshop delivery, play practitioners became aware that some parents had little experience of preparing healthy snacks for their children and families. Parents were supported to try out activities such as using frozen or tinned fruit to make smoothies.

The SPPA developed home learning sacks for parents to take home. The Early Explorer sacks contained toy fruit, instructions on how to make play dough, fruit and vegetable dough cutters, a rolling pin, songs, recipes and activity sheets. Over 90 parents received these.

The short-term impact of the activities and resources was assessed through staff and parent evaluation. Staff from six of the nine groups completed evaluation forms. All six reported that the resources had been useful, that they and the children had enjoyed using them and that they were more confident to run some of the activities themselves in the future. 36 of around 90 parents or carers who received the Early Explorer home learning sacks also provided feedback. All reported that it contained useful activities and toys for their children. Parents also reported on what they had learned and what had been most useful to them. The most popular information learnt was how to make play dough and smoothies.

The SPPA hopes to be able to incorporate similar activities into its support for parent and toddler groups in the future.

Citadel Youth Centre in Edinburgh ran a Meet and Munch cooking group for 11 young mothers aged between 17 and 21 years. Four of these were referred by a health visitor and the others were involved in other activities at the youth club. Citadel staff and an experienced chef led the nine cooking sessions for the

young mums. However, the staff were pleased that the young women took ownership of the group by getting involved in choosing recipes and recording information on flip charts. The sessions focused on healthy, affordable meals suitable for young children and the whole family. The group also produced its own recipe book and launched it at a Citadel summer event. Five of the young women volunteered to cater for the event, preparing recipes from the book itself.

Citadel plans to continue to develop further Meet and Munch groups for a range of participants and the young mums group hopes to continue. Citadel has recently been experiencing an increased need to refer families to a food bank, so it aims to ensure that cooking activities are suitable for those on particularly tight budgets.

Ailsa Nursery Centre is a local-authority-run nursery in Motherwell. It used funding to organise two cooking-on-a-budget courses for parents and carers with children at the nursery. The local authority Community Learning and Development (CLAD) team supported the courses by identifying parents who had not taken part in any CLAD learning activities before and encouraging them to get involved.

Each course lasted for 12 sessions, with around 10 people attending each course. Around 20 people have taken part so far and the nursery plans to run an additional course for 10 people after making some savings on their budget.

The nursery included physical activity sessions as part of the cooking courses. This proved to be very successful: eight parents who participated had not taken part in any fitness-based activities before. Some participants also reported that they had increased their knowledge of healthy eating on a budget, developed new skills and valued the opportunity to meet other parents in the same community. Four parents were made aware that there was a local community-run food co-op available nearby. 15 parents who completed the course are keen to form a committee to help ensure their children benefit from activities beyond the nursery provision; the CLAD team are currently supporting them to start this.

Raploch fruit barra is supported by, and based within, the local church and is run mainly by a pool of dedicated volunteers. NHS community food workers have also providing advice and training. The barra runs once a week and volunteers encourage customers by running a small-scale café in the church when it is open so that they can stay for tea and a chat. The volunteers used the funding to take the barra outwith the church and to run promotional activities, including raising awareness of Healthy Start and the fact that it accepts these vouchers. The volunteers provided activities for the wider community, including taster sessions, and ran food activities for children attending the local nursery. In the future, barra volunteers plan to further develop the café, provide more tasting and soup-making sessions and continue to take the barra out beyond the church.

The local-authority-run **Ladybird nursery** in Glenrothes used funding to run a series of cooking courses for parents and carers. It worked with partners such as Canny Kitchen, the Oral Health team and the Scottish Fire and Rescue service to provide additional activities throughout. The cooking sessions included a focus on preparing affordable alternatives to takeaway meals, such as pizza and curry, as well as learning about making meals with less fat, salt and sugar. Participants also learned about reducing waste (from Canny Kitchen) and encouraging fussy toddlers to try new foods. Participants used the informal setting to ask about and discuss other issues relevant to them, such as passive smoking, mental health issues and budgeting; staff provided signposting information where possible.

Staff reported that it took some time initially to encourage parents to take part. However, word-of-mouth methods have been successful and, as a result, the final course is full and has a waiting list.

Nursery staff hope to continue similar activities for parents in the future. One of the parents attending the cooking sessions was encouraged to take part in accredited food hygiene training and, since completing it, has been supporting the nursery with food activities.

Conclusion

As highlighted by MINF, a range of sectors all have a role to play in supporting and improving maternal and infant nutrition. The initiatives described here used small-scale funding to add food and health activities to their existing work and reach a wider range of families than one sector, or one partner agency, could alone. Many of the groups and agencies developed imaginative projects that supported wider aims, such as encouraging physical activities or taking part in further education or social activities.

More information

Our 2014 *Annual Development Fund* leaflet contains short articles on another five of the 17 groups and agencies funded to deliver early years work, including:

- **Aberlour Family Service**, which supported parents with learning disabilities
- **SCORE Scotland**, which developed a research project and activities with women from ethnic minority groups
- **Healthy Valleys**, which aimed to mitigate social exclusion by providing cooking activities and shared meals in a rural community
- **Just Play**, which ran cooking activities for families involved in the criminal justice system
- **Cherry Tree nursery**, which encouraged staff to complete training so that they could deliver cooking skills activities.

CFHS has demonstrated the contribution of the community and voluntary sector to the aims of MINF in the following CFHS publications:

Maternal and infant nutrition framework: supporting a Healthy Start, a report on an event hosted by CFHS on 29 May 2014 at the Albert Halls, Stirling.

Building Blocks and Baby Steps – How do community food initiatives make an impact on and influence maternal and infant nutrition? 2013.

Mapping of the Community and Voluntary Sector: Contributions to Improving Maternal and Infant Nutrition in Scotland, 2012.

From the ground up: a snapshot of community and voluntary contributions to improving maternal and infant nutrition in Scotland, 2013.