

Community café learning visits, October 2016

What were these?

In October 2016 Community Food and Health (Scotland) or CFHS held three community café learning visits. The visits were open to anyone working in or with a community café, or wanting to set one up. The aim of the visits was to support participants to develop their practice through:

- providing opportunities to hear about the work of long-established / well-respected community cafés
- sharing of good practice between the host cafés and the visit participants
- providing opportunities for participants (and host cafés) to meet other community café practitioners

Who hosted the visits?

The three host cafés were the Annexe Café in Partick, Windmills Café in Motherwell and Fly Cup Catering in Inverurie.

Annexe Café is part of Annexe Communities, which provides a range of health and wellbeing services in the West of Glasgow. The café has been operating for over 15 years. It was the first community café to be awarded the healthyliving¹ award and healthyliving award plus. It provides catering for activities and events held in the building.

Windmills Café has been operating in Motherwell since 2011. The café was established to provide meaningful work experience and training for young adults aged 18-25 that have a learning disability. It provides a 3-year training opportunity which includes catering, employment experience and employment placements. The trainees are involved in all aspects of running the café. The café moved to its current site in the town centre in 2014. It is open 6 days a week.

Fly Cup Catering in Inverurie is a social firm which also provides training and work experience for young adults with learning disabilities. As well as running a busy coffee shop, it also produces bakery items which are sold through, and to, local retailers, and it provides an outside catering service. The coffee shop is open Monday to Saturday. Fly Cup has been operating for over 15 years.

The cafés were chosen because of their differing ethos, purposes and operating models.

¹ The healthyliving award is a national award for caterers that provide their customers with a choice of healthier menu options. The healthyliving award plus is awarded to caterers that have held the healthyliving award and are offering their customer more and a bigger range of healthier options.

www.healthylivingaward.co.uk

Who took part

Sixteen people took part, most from established cafés or groups that were setting up or thinking about setting up a café. The other participants were from a range of national and local organisations that supported cafés.

The number of places available for each visit were kept small, to encourage everyone to participate fully in the visit. The numbers taking part ranged from three to eight.

About the visits

The structure of each of the visits was very different, and was set by the visit hosts.

Two included an input from the organisation's manager about the history and operation of the café, with an opportunity to meet café staff, volunteers and/or trainees, and inspect the café's kitchen and other parts of the building. One also included a detailed input about the purpose and operation the café's 'parent' organisation (which met the specific needs of participants on this visit).

The third visit was led by the café trainees. As well as showing small groups of participants around the building, they spoke about the work of the café, and answered questions. This was complemented by an input from a member of staff involved in setting the café up, who spoke about the café's history, and provided more detail about its operation.

What did participants gain from the visit?

All the participant were contacted mid-January 2017 for feedback, and again in early and mid-February if they had not responded. Nine responses were received². The participants were asked:

- The most important things they'd taken away from the visit
- What they were doing differently, or planning to do differently as a result
- If they'd been in touch with anyone they'd met (or were planning to)
- What else they'd have liked to find out
- If there was anything else they wanted to say about it

Several participants visiting Windmills Café or Fly Cup Catering highlighted the ethos and values of the cafés as the most important thing they'd taken away.

'Positive attitudes and lots of smiles.'

'It was fantastic to see, like us, how supportive and person-centred they are'
'...good to see everyone working well together, no matter what stage of experience or ability ...'

Some highlighted aspect about the cafés' operation, including the systems and protocols put in place. Learning about the business aspects of two of the cafés was

² One participant did not wish to provide feedback, one had left their post, one participant was not able to stay for all of the visit and was not contacted for feedback as a result. Combined feedback was received from two organisations (each had two participants taking part in the visits).

also mentioned. One participant also stated they had learned the importance of taking small steps, and networking and sharing experiences.

Relating to what the visit participants were doing or hoped to do differently, one organisation had made changes to how it supports and actively involves its volunteers. One participant was planning to explore if social enterprise was the 'right' model for them, while another said they have a greater understanding of the differing needs of volunteers with learning disabilities. Another participant said they hoped to be able to work with the café they visited in the future.

A couple of the participants had been in touch with the café they'd visited. Others were keeping in touch with them via Facebook. Some said they wanted to contact the café they'd visited again.

Three of the participants said they would have liked more information from the visits about particular aspects of running a café, or to have heard more from the café's trainees and staff.

Other comments received from participants included how much they had enjoyed their visit

'..(it was) very inspiring'

'..we gained plenty of food for thought...'

'...the staff at X are incredible and their positivity and enthusiasm is infectious'.

'..I was really excited after I visited Y..'

What did we learn?

Two of the visit were fully booked, but a number of people did not take their places up. When asked why, the reasons given included staff shortages on the day, and not knowing that a place had been booked for them.

What we will do differently in future:

- Ask participants to confirm their attendance before the event
- Ask those booking places for someone else to confirm who will be taking part, and for the participant's contact details
- Emphasise that places that cannot be used may be able to be filled by others wanting to participate.

Fewer places were booked for the visits to Fly Cup Catering: this may be because of its location. It was also more difficult to identify community cafés operating in the area, despite the support of the local third sector interface. However, CFHS believe it is important to provide opportunities (like the community café learning visits) across the country.

What we will do differently in future:

- Continue to run events in areas outwith the Central Belt, or more difficult to reach by public transport.
- Consider alternative means of facilitating networking e.g. using teleconferencing.
- Consider supporting travel costs for participants.
- Continue to build links with agencies that may be supporting community cafés, to identify those operating.