

Spreading Success, Sharing Solutions Part 2
Tuesday 7 November 2006
Millennium Centre

'Developing independent living skills around cooking and preparation of food with those who have experienced homelessness and other vulnerable groups'

Presentation

The aim of these two workshops was to explore the ways in which food can be used creatively not only to promote physical well-being, but as a vehicle to promote wider aspects of health, well-being and independent living and as a tool for engaging with excluded groups such as homeless people.

Claire Street from Community Food and Health (Scotland) - formally known as the Scottish Community Diet Project - kicked off the discussion by providing some background on Community Food and Health (Scotland) and the new national initiative around food, health and homelessness, which has a particular focus on food as a vehicle for developing independent living skills.

Kim Newstead, also from CFHS, then provided some examples of organisations in Scotland that are carrying out food activity around independent living skills with homeless people and other vulnerable groups. Among her examples were the Calman Trust, the Contact Point Day Centre and the Romany Youth Action Group. Finally, Sam McBain from the Aberdeen Foyer gave an outline of her work as an Assistant Support Worker at one of the Foyer's supported accommodation units in Banchory, Aberdeen. Firstly she provided some background to the Foyer's overall remit - the Foyer is a charitable organisation working with disadvantaged young people 16 – 25 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. At present they have six sites of supported accommodation in Aberdeen and the surrounding area. The Foyer not only supports tenants, but also other vulnerable young people thanks to a team of qualified professionals who deal with drug and alcohol misuse issues, mental health, mild learning disabilities, unemployment, offenders or those at risk of offending etc.

Sam then expanded on her 'food work' with the young people. She explained that each week a cookery session is organised in Banchory supported accommodation, which all tenants are invited to take part in. The young people decide what they want to cook and Sam oversees the session. All participants then sit down together to enjoy the meal they have cooked. Sam highlighted some of the challenges involved in this work, for example engaging harder-to-reach service-users, accessing affordable quality food in an area perceived as affluent etc.

Group exercise

Each group was split into smaller groups and asked to explore ways in which more effective independent living skills sessions could be run, firstly within a project, secondly on a national scale.

The summary of the two groups' feedback is as follows:

Workshop 1 groups

Within a project

- Need to link up with other services and agencies
- Ensure integration of the service-users in the local community e.g. through intergenerational schemes, befriending etc.)
- Provide help with money management and budgeting
- Help build self-respect, ownership and empowerment
- Ensure the engagement of wider stakeholders to guarantee the sustainability of the project
- Develop volunteering opportunities and ensure volunteers are retained + service-users themselves can become volunteers and act as role models

- Work at a level that is appropriate for the service-user e.g. 'where the person is at' in their life – how much support they require etc.

Nationally

- Sustainable funding
- Access and availability of appropriate foodstuffs to carry out food activity e.g. tap into local food networks, use community food initiatives etc.

Workshop 2 groups

Within a project

- Provision of food demonstrations and free taster sessions
- Ensure that project is tailored to the individual's needs
- Subtlety of the 'health message'
- Build a positive relationship with staff who can relate to service-users and have knowledge of the local community
- Ensure service-user participation
- Provide a 'starter-pack' of store cupboard goods and equipment
- Pictorial cook book devised by the service-users
- Access to low-cost fruit and veg
- Availability of 'grow your own' projects as a route into healthier eating
- Availability of appropriate equipment to carry out food activity
- Ensure that the location of sessions is accessible

Nationally

- Local and/or national strategy to combat homelessness
- Education policies around the acquisition of life skills
- Stronger links between strategy level and field-work ('upstream' and 'downstream' connections)
- More networking and exchange visits between agencies
- Lobbying
- Higher benefit levels (limited elasticity of food budget)

Appendix

This contains a list of all the comments made by workshop participants as they were worded on their post-it notes.

Workshop 1 group:

Within a project:

- Building self-respect, trust and dignity
- Skills sharing and community involvement
- Developing trust between the service-users and the local community + recognising the contribution of service-users to the local community
- Linking up with other services and agencies e.g. furniture donations, recycling projects etc.
- Encouraging ownership e.g. decorating, home repairs etc.
- Money management, budgeting skills
- Developing volunteering, encouraging participants to become volunteers
- Provision of support at grassroots level
- Involvement of all stakeholders
- More inclusive funding
- Engagement/social inclusion

Nationally

- Funding differences across the UK
- Development in policy terms from 'gift' to 'empowerment'

Workshop 2 groups:**Within a project:**

- Food demos and free taster sessions
- Tailoring to people's needs and 'healthy spin' + adapt recipes
- 'Starter pack' of store cupboard ingredients
- Service-user-written recipe book
- Free or low cost fruit and veg
- 'Grow your own' as a route into healthier eating
- Active service-user participation
- Accessibility
- Appropriate resources and equipment
- Trained staff
- Space to work together
- Food as a social activity

Nationally:

- Networking
- Exchange visits
- Lobbying for higher benefit levels
- Connections between strategy and project work ('upstream'/'downstream')
- Cookery sessions in schools (instead of 'food technology')