

Case study Vegetable Pedallers / Sound Bites

Summary

Sound Bites is a not for profit wholefood shop in Derby which is run as a workers co-op. The shop focuses on selling local and organic food, but also sells fair trade products cruelty free body care items, and eco-household cleaning products. Sound Bites operates a cycle home delivery scheme, for elderly and disabled people called Vegetable Pedallers, which has been funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and Cycle Derby. Vegetable Pedallers delivers fresh fruit and vegetables and other items from the shop to people who struggle to get their own shopping. The scheme delivers to people's homes and also to community venues, including sheltered housing schemes and lunch clubs.



People

Vegetable Pedallers began in recognition of the difficulties faced particularly by elderly and disabled people as a result of many community shops closing down. We felt that the health of some of the most vulnerable people in our society was suffering because of changes in shopping patterns. Vegetable Pedallers aims to make it possible for those people to get fresh ingredients so that they can continue to eat well and keep healthy. The scheme has no minimum order size, which was seen to be a possible barrier for many of our customers, as they tend to live alone and only need small amounts of shopping.

Produce

The scheme uses organic produce, although it is not all certified. In the summer and autumn the vegetable bags are often supplemented by produce from a local allotment project. Mixed bags of vegetables and fruit and other staple groceries are available for delivery. The vegetable bags always contain potatoes, carrots and onions and 3 or 4 other vegetables. The fruit bags contain 3 or 4 different types of fruit. Bag contents can be altered to fit personal requirements. The bags are currently (2010) priced between £3.50 and £6 per bag depending on the size. Soundbites use locally sourced vegetables and fruit whenever the season and availability allows. The fresh produce is delivered in re-useable jute bags.

Practical resources

Sound Bites applied for three years worth of funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, which was awarded in 2007. Two scheme co-ordinators were then recruited who ran the project, working as a job share. The funding was also used to adapt Sound Bites' existing delivery bike to give it motor back up for when the bike is fully loaded.

Vegetable Pedallers works well as an offshoot project of Sound Bites. Pre-ordered vegetables help the shop to plan their own vegetable ordering. Vegetable Pedallers was able to use the equipment that Sound Bites already had i.e. a packing room equipped with prep table, scales and sink. The most essential piece of equipment is of course the delivery bike, (an 8-Freight) which had previously been bought with a donation from Unicorn Grocery in Manchester.

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Promotion

The co-ordinators promoted the scheme by giving talks at community events, approaching luncheon clubs at churches, contacting the local 'Live At Home' schemes and many other organisations working with elderly and disabled people. They also directly approached individual sheltered housing schemes and where possible spoke to the wardens to offer delivery and leafleted door to door.

Progress

After the first year Vegetable Pedallers conducted a customer survey, having found that the take up of the service had not been as great as was originally anticipated. The survey found that the customers who used the scheme found it indispensable. Many had been unable to get fresh produce at all for years prior to getting a delivery from Vegetable Pedallers. The slow take up of the scheme was thought to be due to the higher price of organic produce, which many of the customers might not have chosen, however many of those who had continued to use the scheme commented that the fruit and vegetables they received were of a high quality and delicious. Those that had previously bought organic produce also commented on the scheme being good value. The scheme serves approximately 50 households.

After three years the scheme is now seeking further funding to continue. Funding applications have been submitted. It is hoped that in the future it can be subsidised by the shop but this is not yet feasible. Summer 2010 will see a fancy dress (vegetable costumes) bike ride fund raiser.

Procedures / Lessons learned

Maintaining the quality of fresh produce when it is delivered by bicycle is difficult. The project soon learnt not to use fruit that was very ripe, to take good care with packing and to pack certain items separately. Re-using the wholesalers packaging worked well. This is often moulded and prevents produce from bouncing around. The scheme uses jute bags which are strong and sturdy, they allow the produce to breathe and their box like shape means that they pack well. Each customer has two bags with their name written inside. They return the previous week's empty bag when they receive their delivery. Named bags make it easier to add specific things to individual bags when requested by the customer. Deliveries timed to co-ordinate with social gatherings at sheltered housing schemes such as a bingo session or communal lunch worked well (but be sure never to clash with the calling of the bingo).

A Customer Comment

"I have Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and we are unable to own a car. Because of this we had not had fresh fruit and veg in the house for nearly ten years. Thanks to you we are feeling healthier and enjoying a wider variety of food. You are really making a difference." SP

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