



EcoShops: Destigmatising surplus food

Middlesbrough Food Power Alliance: Interim report, October 2020

Improving access and affordability to good quality food during lockdown

During the lockdown in March to June 2020 Middlesbrough Environment City launched a Virtual EcoShop, offering an open access, online and telephone ordering service to residents across the town. The project provides weekly food deliveries of ten items of food, plus fresh fruit and vegetables for a suggested £2 donation. Through the extensive support of the National Lottery Community Fund, the Government's Emergency Food and Essential Items funding and PD Ports, we serve over 180 households every week, predominantly in wards of high of deprivation.

We have helped to reduce stigma in a number of ways. We present the project as an environmental project. We offer a high quality service, including 4-hour delivery slots like some other online shops. Community members have also actively taken on distributing parcels amongst themselves. This also allows us to reach more people, including people not be at home on delivery day.

Challenges and learning

Establishing the project was time and skill intensive to ensure sufficient storage and preparation space and maintain food safety. The team at MEC and PD Ports at Tees Port have worked tirelessly to ensure clients receive the best service and maintain the core environmental principles at the heart of the EcoShop project. Originally working in connection with Trussell Trust food banks, the VES now processes primarily self-referrals into the project; the environmental approach used to reduce stigma is effective. The ethos is further emphasised with online and paper recipes and encouraging sustainable food practices.

Next steps

As the country starts to reopen, the next step is supporting clients moving into community based EcoShops, providing greater independence and choice of food to meet needs, as well as improving access to services.

This activity was assisted by financial support and other advice from Food Power.
www.foodpower.org.uk



"This project is making a real impact to support residents in Middlesbrough through the pandemic. It has only been possible through the flexibility and commitment of staff and our funders." Dr Mark Fishpool, Director, Middlesbrough Environment City

"This service has been the most important thing as there are people shielding within the household." Local resident

Outcomes

- Successful piloting of different ways to reduce stigma and a **96%** self-referral rate
- **5.5** tons of food redistributed and **13,560** meals provided by **1,400** deliveries and **over 1,500** recipes provided (online and paper)

