

WHOF: Food and the Voluntary Sector

Round-up from the first Wellbeing and Health Open Forum on food and the voluntary sector

On 9 May, we hosted the first of three Wellbeing and Health Open Forums in 2019 for organisations working in Newcastle and Gateshead. The theme was food and the voluntary sector and we invited a panel of three guest speakers to talk about their experiences of food and the voluntary sector. This was followed by networking, sampling food from the three speaker's local projects, and a group exercise reflecting how delegates use food in their projects, what they might do in the future, and any challenges they have faced.

Newcastle CVS's Sally Young and Jack Summerside introduced the afternoon talking about food as a mechanism for sharing and bringing people together, and how food can be used to combat isolation, improve health and wellbeing and offer people new life skills. Sally reflected on how many funders exclude provision of food from their funding criteria, but how emphasising that the food is the hook and central to the social aims of a project, and not just a nice optional extra, has proved successful for a number of organisations Newcastle CVS has supported recently

Nasir Khan from Gateshead Family Church Hub talked about the impact of their breakfast club, ladies club, men's breakfast club and summer barbeque. Simply providing



food has brought more people to their events and sparked new projects, including a kids clothing bank, working with refugees and providing English language classes. Like many organisations seeking to address food poverty, the Hub began as part of the social action that the congregation of a Christian faith group established in response to local need.

Andy Haddon from Shieldfield Community Bakery

presented their short zombie film – Dawn of the Bread. You can view the trailer here https://vimeo.com/325926362?utm_sq=g1iujnoner, which they had created as the hook to their Spacehive crowdfunding <https://www.spacehive.com/shieldfield-community-bakery>. It’s fun but carries serious messages about healthy food and making artisan food affordable and available to everyone. Andy also talked about their new projects using spent grains and waste foods and how they are seeking new partners to help them grow.

Roweena Russell from Byker Community Centre

talked about food needs and food as a social mechanism. They have a range of activities and services with a connection to food, but with wider social aims than simply addressing food poverty. Many people use their ‘pay as you feel’ supermarket which highlights a need for better access and connection to food, to reduce food waste, to grow food and reduce food poverty and social isolation. Projects include Pasta Lass – pasta-making workshops with a focus on supporting people with tackling mental ill-health, Costa del Byker -selling food that’s healthy and nutritious, culture café which offers visitors a chance to learn another language and try food from different cultures, and the Magic Hat Café with whom they share resources.

Our panel of three speakers then answered questions and offered useful advice from their first hand experiences. Here are some of the key thoughts and tips they shared:

- Handling allergens can be a challenge for a small bakery but it can also be a major selling point because using a satellite model of specialist bakeries means they can have nut free and gluten free spaces. Shieldfield Community Bakery follows their existing success in this model after their pizza base bakery in Felling.
- Food poverty is everyone’s responsibility and there are different ways that people can support these local projects
 - Everyone can and should use the pay as you feel supermarket, not just those on a low income, as it democratises and destigmatises using it. Everyone is encouraged to understand it operates on a “take what you need and pay what you can” basis. To limit access would involve some form of means-testing, which goes against the spirit behind the project
 - Shieldfield Community Bakery offers workshops and corporate days, and encourages third sector organisations to consider using them, or other third sector agencies, when catering for events
 - Anyone can access the services offered by Gateshead Family Church Hub, there is no requirement to have a Christian faith, nor is there any requirement to engage actively with evangelism to use their services
 - Both The Gateshead Family Church Hub and Shieldfield Community Bakery had used crowdfunding approaches recently, and both had learned valuable

lessons on how they would approach it differently in future

WHOF is just one of several networking events that we offer. If you are interested to know about upcoming events, visit our Training and Events page at: www.cvsnewcastle.org.uk/our-services/training-and-events

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