



# Beyond Smoothies:

## developing cooking and healthy eating activities for young people

This short report shows what 20 groups and agencies learnt and gained from running practical healthy eating activities and taking part in a six-hour accredited nutrition training course - the Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland (REHIS) Elementary Food and Health course.



## Background

In 2009, Community Food and Health (Scotland) awarded funding to 24 groups working with young people. They all:

- received up to £1000 to put groups through a nutrition course - the six-hour REHIS accredited Elementary Food and Health course;
- received up to £1000 to run practical food activities to put what they had learned into practice; and
- involved young people from low-income communities.

Around half involved vulnerable groups such as those who had experienced homelessness, had drug or alcohol issues, were offenders, or young carers. Some supported young parents.

This report shows what 20 of these groups learnt and gained.

## Why carry out healthy eating activities?

In 2009, almost 30% of children in Scotland were overweight or obese. In recent years, the Scottish Government has aimed to address this and other food and health issues affecting young people within a range of policies:

1. Scotland's 'National Performance Framework' is the basis for single outcome agreements between the Scottish Government and Community Planning Partnerships. Within this, national targets and indicators include an aim to reduce the number of children who are outwith their healthy weight range.
2. The 'Curriculum for Excellence' includes food and health within the health and wellbeing curriculum area.
3. The 'Healthy Eating, Active Living' action plan reinforces the messages that those working on food and health need to address the barriers to healthy eating, such as access, affordability, culture and skills.

As well as the work reported here, other groups have been successful at making healthy changes within youth clubs.

West Glasgow Community Health and Care Partnership aimed to improve the availability of healthier foods in youth club tuck shops in their area. Although youth leaders were keen to make these changes, the Partnership also consulted with young people to ensure they would accept any changes to food served in youth club tuck shops. Its consultation included discussion and learning about healthier eating, and as a result the young people were keen to have access to healthier options.



## How the groups made healthy eating interesting, useful and relevant

The groups combined learning about healthy eating with practical activities. Most ran hands-on cooking or food preparation activities, with many using ideas from TV shows, such as *Come Dine with Me* and *Ready Steady Cook!* to make these sessions more fun. Some incorporated budgeting, menu planning and food shopping to build independent living skills. Many also enjoyed a shared meal at the end of each cookery session.

**The Disability Community** found that telling young people the cookery sessions would focus on healthy eating put them off; they thought this would be boring. By discussing fast foods and looking at some of the ingredients listed in some of the groups' favourite snack foods, they regained their interest. By including tasting, and exploring the texture and smell of foods within the hands-on cooking sessions, they also encouraged the young people to be more adventurous with their food choices and gave them the confidence to try new foods.

**Fife Young Carers** delivered cookery workshops to its ten support groups in Fife. It also took some young people food shopping and asked them to choose healthy snacks. They assessed the foods they had chosen by reading food labels and comparing them for levels of fat, salt and sugar. The worker reported that the group were initially reluctant to go food shopping, as their fortnightly meeting is usually their chance to 'chill out'. However, turning the shopping trip into a game held their interest. They now include 'shopping basket' and 'food poker' games at their groups. The games are a useful way to find out what the young carers know about nutrition, as well as a teaching tool.

**Healthy Valleys**, a community-led health improvement initiative in South Lanarkshire, put together a six-week healthy eating course for teenagers. Eight young people were involved in designing and piloting it. The course includes activities around comparing fat, salt, sugar and calorie levels of popular take-away meals and includes discussion topics on alcohol and calories, as this is what the group were interested in. It is based on practical cookery sessions as young people preferred the hands-on activities.

## Encouraging young people to taste or try healthier foods

Several groups mentioned that they had difficulties encouraging young people to taste new foods. Here is how a few overcame this problem:

**Hillhouse Youth Club**, delivered by Universal Connections, ran cooking clubs alongside the regular youth club; around six young people completed each course. The worker reported that encouraging young people to taste new foods had been the biggest challenge. However, because the tasting sessions were part of a whole programme on food and nutrition that the young people were part of, they were more likely to try new foods before deciding if they liked them or not. Other groups found that tasting new foods is more likely to be acceptable if this is part of a hands-on cooking activity.

*“Some youngsters thought they didn't like certain foods, e.g. onions, but when used as part of a recipe (especially if blended in soup!) find it adds to the flavour. They are more likely to try something new in these circumstances.”*

**Volunteers at Bonar Bridge Community Hall**

## What benefits did the young people get from the healthy food activities?

All 20 groups agreed that both the nutrition theory course and the practical activities had increased awareness of basic nutrition in the young people they work with. Nineteen of the groups agreed that young people had developed their food preparation or cooking skills as a result of the practical food activities, skills that they could use to provide healthier meals for themselves in the future.

Fourteen groups said they had **improved the availability of healthier foods** within their organisation.

**Milton Rovers football club** was able to put a greater emphasis on healthy eating after volunteers attended the REHIS Elementary Food and Health course. It now has a greater range of healthy options available on the 'Milton match day menu' and healthy eating is promoted during football training. The club has noticed that young people take more fruit and fewer sweets to the away matches. After running some successful food activities, **Fife Young Carers** will continue to encourage young carers to try new snack foods provided at each of its ten groups across Fife and will continue to grow vegetables at the group's allotment.

Two groups aimed to **build the cooking and nutrition skills of young parents** and both reported positive outcomes. **Aberlour's Young Womens' Service** ran a cooking group for young mothers. Everyone in the group reported that they tried to involve their children in cooking activities after attending the group. One mother's children said they enjoyed learning to bake bread with their mum once she had learned to make soup and bread.

**Renfrewshire Council Youth Services** delivered a peer-education and food project for 12 young people, including young parents, whose children will also benefit from what their parents learnt. This was evident when a worker was told by a grandmother that her daughter was now much more confident about feeding her grandchild; the daughter had also invited her family round to her house for a meal for the first time.

*"... this course has also greatly increased the young people's confidence and enthusiasm for cooking healthy meals, with several of the young people voicing their surprise that the meals could be both healthy and tasty ... they would experiment with further healthy meals in the future."*

**Fairbridge in Edinburgh**

## What other benefits were there?

Groups found that the practical activities had additional benefits for the young people and the organisation, some of which were unexpected.

These included:

- improved budgeting skills;
- improved life skills;
- improved confidence and self-esteem;
- social benefits and improved team building skills;
- some applying for, or attending, further education or community classes;
- young parents learning an activity to help them bond with their children;
- development of gardening skills;
- development of skills of staff and volunteers;
- improved partnership working between agencies working with young people;
- working with a local community farm improved relations between the local community and young people; and
- many of the groups found that cooking became a useful, enjoyable and popular activity on top of their regular programmes.

## Making healthy changes within an organisation

Some groups looked for other opportunities to develop food work throughout their organisation or with partners.

**Loretto Care** at Garry Place in Grangemouth works with 15 young people in supported accommodation, many of whom have experienced homelessness. After attending the nutrition training, they now run weekly food groups within the young people's shared flats. The young people are involved in choosing menus and recipes, budgeting, shopping and cooking. As a result of these activities, Loretto Care has changed the way it assesses the young people's ability to live independently. Previously, they were considered able to live independently if they could use kitchen equipment safely and heat a ready-made meal. Now, the assessment of food skills has much more emphasis on being able to cook a meal using basic ingredients and knowledge around choosing a healthy balanced diet.

**Biggar Youth Project** developed a range of healthy foods at its lunchtime café, which is attended by around 120 young people every day. It also encouraged the range of partners it works with to undertake food activities, including a young carers' group that uses its premises. Biggar Youth Project purchased equipment that enabled the group to deliver healthy eating activities, making use of the project's range of healthy food, equipment and premises.

*"We have now got into the habit of looking at all of our activities and delivering them in the healthiest way possible."*



## Did completing accredited nutrition training make a difference?

All 20 groups agreed that completing the REHIS Elementary Food and Health course made a difference to their food and health work with young people. In total, 168 young people, staff, volunteers and others completed the course.

Feedback included:

- Staff and volunteers are now more confident and informed about providing information or activities around food and health (nine groups).
- Participants would use information from the course to help them choose foods by reading labels on food packaging (three groups).
- Staff will use the Food Standards Agency 'eatwell plate' to help them teach young people to choose a healthy balanced diet (two groups).
- Feeling more confident about teaching healthy eating 'beyond the 5-a-day' fruit and vegetable message (one group).

## Experiences of the nutrition training

Nearly all the groups provided the course to mixed groups, comprising staff, volunteers and young people. Mixed groups were mostly seen as positive.

One group found that young people particularly enjoyed learning on an equal basis with their support workers.

Another group had difficulties encouraging young people to complete the course because it was delivered over several sessions.

Some groups found that young people preferred the practical activities to the theory of nutrition.

Many groups highlighted the sense of achievement that both young people and staff gained from successfully passing an exam and receiving accreditation.

## Where can you get help to get started?

It is worth contacting NHS Health Improvement Teams and Local Authorities to find out if you can get hands-on help, resources (such as leaflets and games) or advice to help you with healthy food activities.

There is a range of resources available free of charge online:

### Developing cooking skills

'Get Cooking!' is a resource pack from the Food Standards Agency for those working with young people. [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk)

NHS Ayrshire and Arran recently produced 'Healthy Cooking in the Community', a manual for those developing cooking skills, and 'Munch Crunch 2', a recipe book. Both are available on the CFHS website

[www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk](http://www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk)

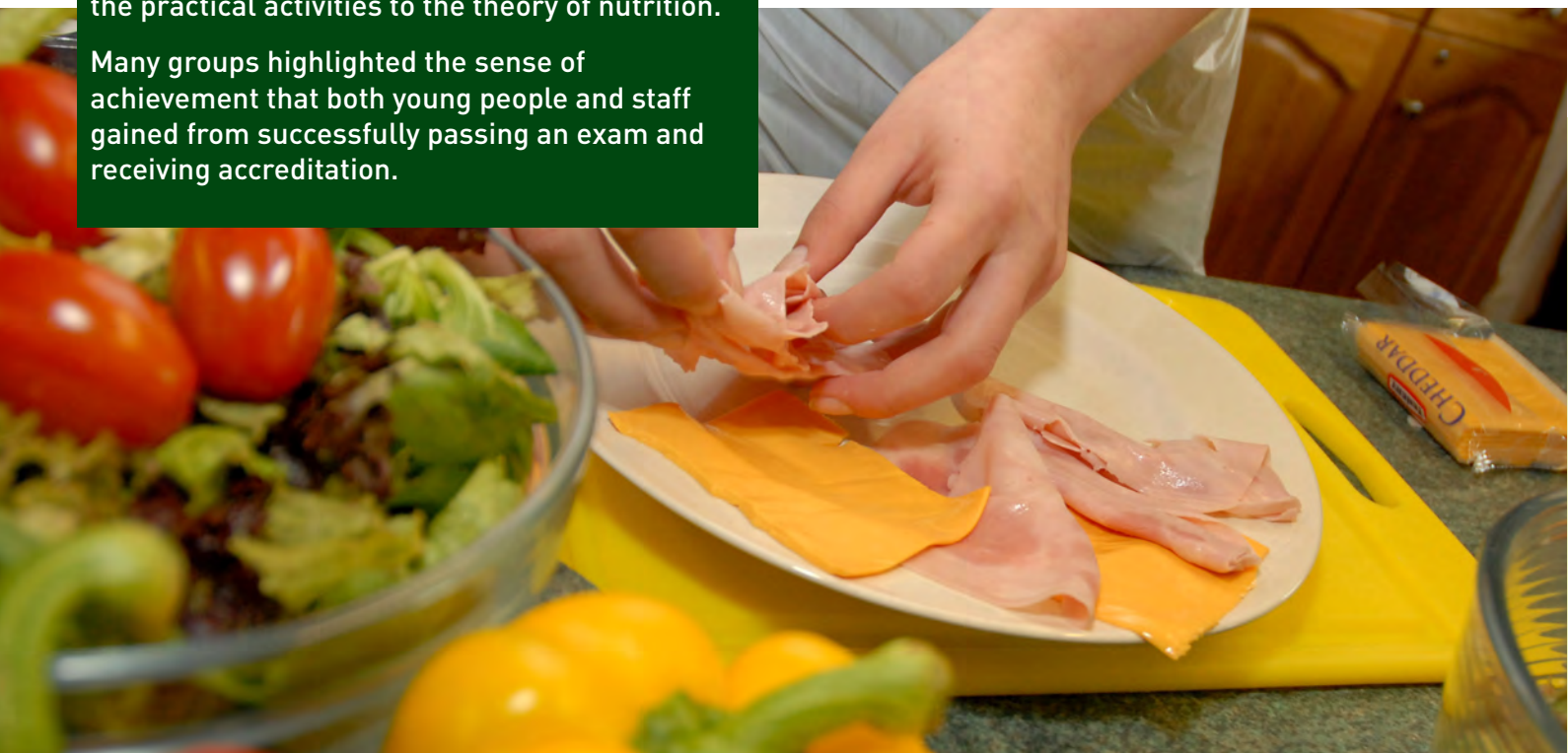
Community Food and Health (Scotland)'s publication 'A taste for independence' has examples of cookery work with young people [www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk](http://www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk)

### REHIS Elementary Food and Health course and Food Hygiene courses

Information about these courses, including where you can find a tutor. [www.rehis.org](http://www.rehis.org)

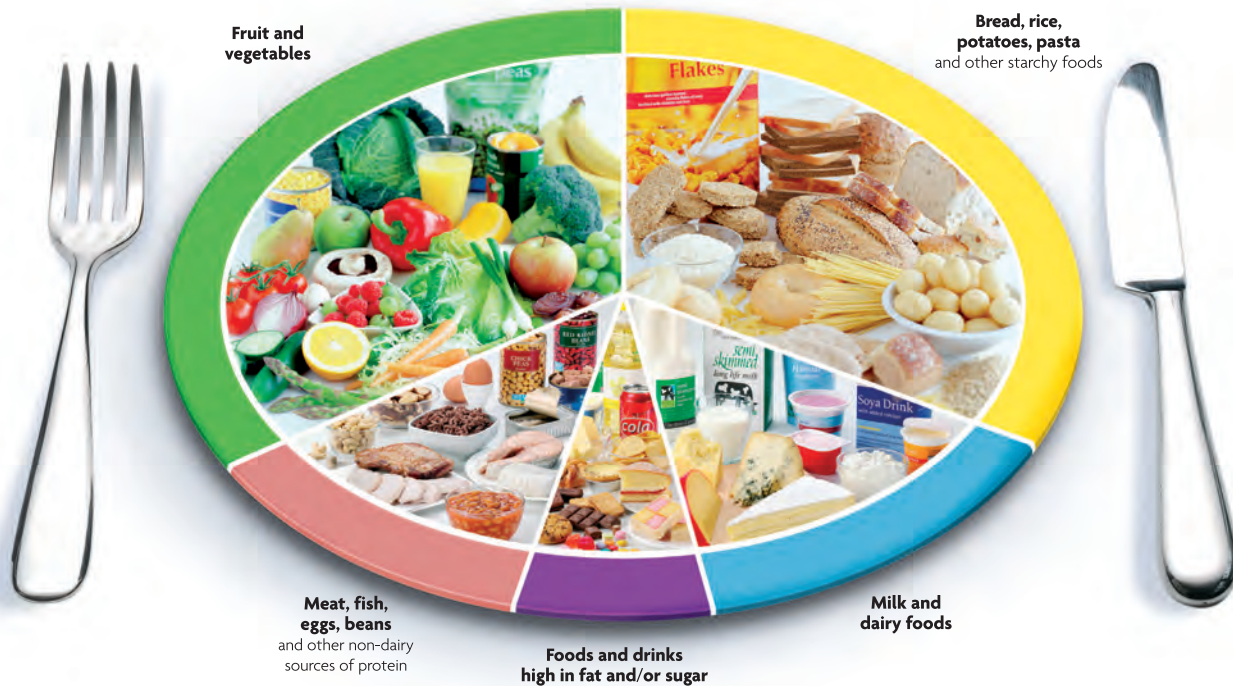
### Policies

Information on the National Performance Framework, Healthy Eating, Active Living, and Curriculum for Excellence is available from [www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)



# The eatwell plate

Use the eatwell plate to help you get the balance right. It shows how much of what you eat should come from each food group.



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## Healthy eating information

The Food Standards Agency's nutrition website has information on the 'eatwell plate', and quizzes and games. [www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk)

The Government's 'take life on' website has information on healthy eating, including recipes. [www.takelifeon.co.uk](http://www.takelifeon.co.uk)

The Comic Company has a range of materials available to purchase aimed at young people. [www.comiccompany.co.uk](http://www.comiccompany.co.uk)

Young Scot has information on healthy eating in the 'Health: Feeling Good' section of its website. [www.youngscot.org](http://www.youngscot.org)

## Healthier options in tuck shops

West Glasgow CHCP Child and Youth team's healthier tuck shop toolkit is not available online, however you can contact them for a copy. [westchildyouthhealth@ggc.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:westchildyouthhealth@ggc.scot.nhs.uk)

## Thanks

We would like to thank all the groups that sent in their evaluation reports. We would also like to thank NHS Health Scotland and Youth Scotland for their help.

## About us:

Community Food and Health (Scotland) was set up as a result of recommendations in the 'Scottish Diet Action Plan'. Our overall aim is to improve Scotland's food and health by supporting work with and within low income communities that improves access to, and take-up of, a healthy diet.

We are funded by the Scottish Government and based within Consumer Focus Scotland.

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