

Food Matters

Annual Newsletter | November 2020



PROJECT FOOD

A helping hand to healthy eating

Welcome to Project Food's newsletter

Healthy children learn better. People with adequate nutrition are more productive and can create opportunities to gradually break the cycles of poverty and hunger.



Today the world faces a double burden of malnutrition that includes both undernutrition and overweight."

These words from the WHO will not be news to many of us, but policymakers over the last 20 years or so have largely ignored the evidence and so the problems of poor diet and obesity have increased. Much of

the ill health associated with the Western diet, such as type II diabetes and cardiovascular disease, is also linked to a higher susceptibility to serious coronavirus symptoms. We need to have a more consistent approach to improving diet in this country at all levels, and we need to understand what really stops people from eating well. This will enable us to make a difference and help people have better life chances.

We know that coronavirus has changed the eating habits of everyone, but in different ways. For some people, the lockdown has led to an increase in junk food consumption because of the monotony of feeding themselves every day and the difficulty of getting out to buy fresh food. For others, the lockdown was an opportunity to develop new skills and

try to make positive changes in their lifestyle so that they can be healthier in the future. A reduction in income has also prompted many people to think more about what they eat.

In response to all that has happened in the last eight months, Project Food is having a rethink. We stand firm in our desire to provide people with support and to give them the skills that they need in order to eat well. Could this pandemic not be a prompt for better support for people to eat more nutritious, unprocessed foods?

Over the next few months we plan to talk to people who struggle to eat a healthy diet, so that we can identify their barriers to eating more healthily and can then extend our support to provide what they tell us they need. We know it's possible for people to have better diets; and we know it's necessary: we just need to know how we can help more people to do it.

I hope you enjoy reading about what we have been able to do this year. We are enormously grateful to everyone who has made it possible.

Tiggy Parry, Founder of Project Food

Our response to Coronavirus

At the beginning of lockdown, all our face-to-face cooking sessions had to stop overnight. Our fruit and vegetable shop became busier than it had ever been, but we wanted to do more to help people improve their diet than simply sell them fresh groceries.

So we looked at what else we could do in the very short term and beyond, and we have been:

- working with the Monmouth Pantry, River Cottage and East Devon District Council (among others) to deliver free ready meals to people most in need;
- providing boxes of free fruit and vegetables with the free ready meals. The demand for this has

been huge, and we are pleased to have been able to support so many people so directly at this incredibly difficult time;

- running online cooking demonstrations through Zoom; and
- helping people to get online so that they can be better connected, and phoning hundreds of people regularly to check that they are eating well and remain connected; as well as
- own homemade ready meals (along with fruit, vegetables, milk and eggs) to scores of people in East Devon, South Somerset and West Dorset who are self-isolating and shielding.

Our response to lockdown

Simple steps with huge impact!

500 deliveries

Our volunteers travelled hundreds of miles, to some of the most remote homes, to make sure those in need received their food.



80 people a week

received free fruit and veg and ready meals from us to help them through some very difficult times.



630 free meals

provided by River Cottage and the Monmouth Pantry, these meals went to those most in need



100 free veg boxes

Given to families with young children and women escaping domestic violence



300 homemade meals

were made by our volunteers and delivered to people who struggle to cook



A huge thank you to all our volunteers, the Monmouth Pantry and River Cottage for helping us to help our community

An interview with Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall



Thank you for bringing us ready meals to distribute locally. Why have you decided to do this?

HFW: I think River Cottage and Project Food are a really good fit, we are doing versions of the same thing which is providing really good, locally sourced nutritious food for the community. We have worked with Project Food in various ways in the past, but now this is a really tough time and we all want to do our bit. Those of us in the food business, we don't want to stop cooking, we love cooking. And best of all we love cooking for local people. To be able to provide some meals for Project Food, and know they are going to get to the most needy and vulnerable, is really satisfying.

Why is it important that you do this through Project Food?

HFW: Well, ever since we first heard about Project Food, we thought, what a great organisation. Project Food is very

closely working with the community in and around Axminster, very good at identifying families that need their support, teaching people to cook which is very, very close to my heart. If you go into a family the way that Project Food does, and you teach them to cook sometimes really basic but really practical useful cooking skills, you give that whole family resilience and the sense of pride and satisfaction in being able to feed their family in a healthy way. Every family wants to be able to feed their kids and the rest of the family in a way that keeps them well. That is what Project Food's whole energy is directed towards. Finding people that need their help and giving it to them in a really practical way.

What are your hopes for the future of food production and how people eat and cook for themselves?

HFW: There is still huge uncertainty about what's going to happen in the future. That includes some uncertainty about food, not just how we will be able to eat out, but how we are going to buy food and cook at home and feed our families and friends. But I'm absolutely sure that the importance of having some reasonable cooking skills, and also being plugged into the food community, so you can buy a significant amount of food from local sources, will just become more and more important. This is what will give you the ability to look after your family, feed your kids, keep everybody healthy and well. That's just priceless. That's worth so much because it means that whatever else life throws at you, whatever uncertainties come your way, you can make nutritious meals from inexpensive ingredients, and look after your family. If you've got that covered, it goes a long way to helping you face an uncertain future.

Ann's story

Ann, who lives in East Devon, has suffered from mental health problems throughout her life. Her struggles with mental illness and other health conditions have made it impossible for her to work, so money is tight.

Since the Covid-19 crisis began, Project Food has been running online Zoom cooking groups instead of face-to-face sessions. These have been invaluable for maintaining social contact as well as giving people new cooking skills and knowledge.

Ann joined the online sessions a few months ago and finds them 'a form of therapy'. For her, the group provides an opportunity to learn basic recipes, to discover what she likes (and dislikes!), and to get advice about eating more healthily. At first Ann struggled with the technology but after a 1:1 session, tailored to her specific needs, she has begun to grow in confidence.

Project Food, with funding from the National Lottery Community Fund, has supplied Ann with a tablet, helped her set it up, and supported her with ongoing technical issues. Recording each week's Zoom demonstration has also meant that Ann can watch it more than once, enabling her to take things at her own pace and develop the skills she needs to cook healthy food for herself.

Ann says:

"Thank you for everything you have done for me. You have helped me to gain more independence by cooking for myself when I am mentally well, even though it takes a long time. I had lived on microwave meals for many years and currently have help from family members, but with Project Food's help I hope I will need them less and less. I have enjoyed trying things like garlic for the first time. It is a big learning-curve, but the tailored help has given me confidence"



Helping women at a local refuge

Two years ago, we started working with a local women's refuge, running cookery sessions with the women then resident, to introduce basic nutritional information and recipes. The women were very grateful for the course and asked for more recipes, more nutritional information, and more ideas for feeding themselves and their children.

However, for almost all of the women at the refuge – some of whom are dealing with complex court cases – their focus is on securing long term accommodation

and an income, and on maintaining stability for themselves and their children in extremely difficult circumstances. This means that nutrition and cooking skills are, understandably, less of a priority.

Nonetheless, during lockdown, we felt very strongly that we should do everything we could to support this very vulnerable group and so, every week for the last six months, we have been providing them with free homemade meals and boxes of fresh fruit and vegetables. In the summer, we also provided the refuge with some tomato plants for the residents to plant with their children.

“When people come to the refuge, they typically arrive with just the clothes they are wearing and often have little or no money and no means of income. They apply for benefits but there can be a delay...

We get some donations of tinned food and dried food but no fresh fruit or vegetables or meat. During lockdown,

even these donations dried up for a while.

The food we received from Project Food helped massively in settling new clients into the refuge and ensuring they had food to eat.

The fresh boxes were used for clients without any income, so contributed to ensuring they had balanced and healthy meals. The frozen homemade foods were distributed among residents and went a long way to making them feel “normal”. Growing their own tomatoes has also given our clients a sense of worth and achievement.

It's hard to put into words the difference that food donations make. Most of us can go to the supermarket and buy what we fancy to eat that day, but for many, including our clients, that's not possible.

Your input has been very much valued and has made a big difference to the well-being and recovery of our clients. Thanks again for the help you have provided.”

Refuge support worker

Our new Trustee

It was a pleasure to be asked by Project Food to introduce myself to you. As the newest trustee of Project Food, I am still getting to know the team and to learn how best to support them with their aspirations. Having joined the trustee board just as the global pandemic struck, I have had a trial by fire as we have all worked to develop and realise a vision of Project Food's place in the emerging new world order.

books being published every day, so it is easy to feel confused or to lose confidence in experts. Public health messages aimed at the general population aren't always relevant to individuals, particularly those living with chronic health conditions, those recovering from illnesses such as cancer, those having special nutritional needs e.g. due to frailty or malnutrition, or those struggling with eating disorders. As an NHS dietitian it is my job to help people make sense of the nutrition information that is relevant to them and to give some perspective to the mass of conflicting messages that they encounter.

What healthcare often fails to do, however, is to show people how to transform nutrition information into real-life decisions and actions about what to eat. As a dietitian, I can provide guidelines and structure but I don't

have the resources to support people with the practical, day-to-day skills that allow them to put a nutritious meal on the table. This is what attracted me to working with the team at Project Food. They have been supporting people with practical nutrition education, cooking and meal planning skills. They can provide ongoing advice that helps people to reinforce and practise what they have learned, with support from caring and knowledgeable helpers. They aim to build independence and resilience in people who need more confidence to look after their nutritional needs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made us all realise how important it is to look after our health and wellbeing, and Project Food has an important role to play in supporting people to do so.

Kathryn Cockerell,
Project Food Trustee.



I am sure you will agree that there is no shortage of information about food and health; and it seems that everyone has something to say on these topics. There are new diet

Cooking with isolated people who live alone



Paul struggles to cook as it's a skill he has never been taught, so he was very pleased to be invited to take part in Project Food's cookery classes and he's enjoying learning new skills at a pace he is comfortable with.

After his last cookery session with Project Food we agreed to try to recreate the recipe used in class (albeit in a slightly simpler version) and purchased the ingredients. The following day, as agreed, I went along to help him only to find that he had

already prepared the cauliflower and had it bubbling away in the pan. The meal he prepared for himself and his son was pronounced very tasty and Paul thinks it is something he may be able to cook again without any help at all.

“Thank you so much for giving Paul the opportunity to benefit from the cookery classes you're hosting with Project Food. He is delighted to be able to develop and share his newfound skills.”

Paul's support worker

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- Woodbury Park Hotel

You can give a one-off donation or set up a direct debit through local giving <https://localgiving.org/charity/projectfood/>
We will be enormously grateful for anything you can give.

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