

# Food Matters

Annual Newsletter | November 2021



**PROJECT FOOD**

An appetite for health

## Welcome to our latest newsletter



Recently I went on a swimming holiday. Inspired by some of my fellow swimmers who swim for an hour a day before work, I felt sure that I could become more like them and get into the water regularly after I came home. But, within three days of my return, I realised it was going to be impossible for me to fit regular swimming into my life – the demands of work and

children, and the travelling involved in getting to the pool or the sea, makes it just too difficult for me.

My relationship with swimming is very similar to many other people's relationship with food – they know they should be eating better, to an extent they know what they should be eating, and often they really want to eat better – but translating their knowledge and resolve into everyday action is very hard.

To make the situation worse, the whole food system has evolved in a way that makes it extremely challenging to eat well – particularly for people on low incomes. The underlying belief in society is that people get fat and ill because they are too lazy to exercise and too ignorant to have a healthy diet.

But this totally ignores the nature of the cheapest foods on the market and the tactics that junk food manufacturers use to increase their sales – not to mention the different ways in which individuals tolerate food.

The 2021 National Food Strategy, which was published in July this year, sets out the many obstacles that prevent people from eating a good diet. As well as a lack of affordable nutritious food, there is also a skills gap: as the Food Strategy says, 'it is true that a little can be made to go a long way provided you know where to buy cheap ingredients ... and you are skilled enough to turn raw ingredients into something appetising ... Culinary skills and knowledge have diminished across every social class since convenience food became widely available and are still diminishing.'

That is why Project Food exists. We need to support people to overcome the barriers that stop them from eating well. People who use food banks have told us that they desperately want to eat more fresh fruit and vegetables and other nutritious food, but struggle to afford them and lack the confidence to prepare them. So, we will be redoubling our efforts to help everybody have access to a nutritious diet – no matter what their income.

**Tiggy Parry, Founder of Project Food**

## Wonderful new premises in Axminster Hospital

In February 2021 Project Food relocated to its new premises in Axminster Hospital, thanks to superb work carried out by NHS Property Services. The most exciting part of the move is our brilliant new kitchen space. Our volunteers come daily to cook "Real Meals" (our healthy and delicious homemade ready meals) which we send out with food boxes, and over the summer we ran our children's holiday hunger activities here. We have also started to hold one-to-one and group support sessions.

We are aiming to reach more young parents, children with special educational needs, and people with mental health problems (amongst others). We will also be setting up a new gardening space in the grounds of the hospital. This will enable us to run cooking and growing sessions alongside each other, helping people to build their confidence and develop essential food skills.

We would love to hear from anyone who could volunteer in the garden or kitchens. If you are interested, then please get in touch by emailing [info@project-food.org.uk](mailto:info@project-food.org.uk).



A young volunteer packing holiday boxes



# Food mapping project



At the start of the year, Project Food was commissioned by Devon Community Foundation (on behalf of Devon County Council) to map the free food support available in East Devon. We contacted hundreds of individuals and organisations including schools,

people who need free food, and people who refer others to free food providers. We wanted to understand what was working well in East Devon and what could be improved. We were particularly interested in talking to families with young children, as the impact of a poor diet on child development is well documented and so it is essential to address the needs of this group. They told us:

- Many of the people who receive free food have mental health problems and often cannot manage to cook even when they are given the ingredients to do so.
- People do not just rely on food banks for a few weeks while they get back on their feet – the pandemic has increased the number of people needing long term free food support.

- Generally, the nutritional content of free food is not a very high priority for most providers, because they rely on donations and have little control over the quality of their food. This means that those who need free food – the most disadvantaged in our society – are even further disadvantaged by their poor diet.

Project Food fundamentally believes that no matter what your income, you should be able to access a good diet. We would, therefore, like to see a change in emphasis from providing any food to providing nutritious food. This is why we have been offering free fruit and vegetable boxes and free home-made nutritious meals to the people who are directly referred to us. But we also want to help people to improve their resilience, which means supporting them to develop the skills and confidence to prepare nutritious food for themselves in the future.

## “Why I support Project Food”

*“I’ve been volunteering with Project Food for about two years now – I cook ‘Real Meals’, and I love it. Healthy food and cooking are two of my passions and it has been a pleasure to work with the team at Project Food because they feel the same, and they understand the importance of food and cooking for a healthy, happy life. I have learnt so much from the team and it has been great to discover new recipes.*

*I come in every week and seem to have become the ‘fish pie lady’, but I also cook lots of other delicious meals too. We source as many ingredients locally*

*as we can, and it is wonderful to work in the big kitchens at to Axminster Hospital which are so well equipped.*

*Volunteering with Project Food through the last 12 months has been incredibly important to me. It has been a privilege to give my time to the charity that has done so much to support those who have struggled to provide for themselves and their families during this extremely challenging period. It has also given me the chance to get out of the house to help others, which has been of enormous benefit to me too.”*

**Sue Cockayne, volunteer**



## Increasing food resilience for people with mental health problems

Over the last year we have worked closely with local NHS services, including East Devon Community Mental Health Team, to provide some of their most vulnerable clients with food support.

*“It’s so important for our clients to eat healthily – or even eat at all – to aid their recovery. They often feel too low and mentally exhausted to bother, but receiving warming home-cooked food gives some of our clients the energy to prepare other meals in that week.*

*Not only the food deliveries themselves, but the kindness and compassion you and your staff have offered when dropping off the food, are hugely appreciated. It’s been a very challenging and isolating time for us all, especially our clients, who along with me and my colleagues are extremely grateful for all your support. You have taken on referrals promptly, and persevered with*

*some of our difficult-to-engage clients who often don’t answer the door, but you have all put yourselves out to make sure they are fed.*

*Some of our clients have also enjoyed attending the online cookery classes earlier this year, and I know they got a great deal out of it – not only from learning new skills but also from having that interaction with people.*

*Thank you from all of the Community Mental Health Team in Honiton.”*

Those who have needed most help have received deliveries of our range of ‘Real Meals’ and a box of fruit – food that requires minimum effort but delivers comfort as well as nutrition.

Those people who are feeling more able to cook for themselves receive a delivery of vegetables too, along with a weekly

recipe. This enables people to not only eat more healthily the week we deliver but also to eat a better diet in the future. A recent beneficiary of our boxes said:

*“I feel I’m at a stage where I can now support myself (through new employment), and I am eating much better with a decent meal plan (inspired by your boxes). Thank you so much for all you guys have done and to Chris for delivering it. You’ve really been a great help to me over the last few months.”*



Project Food's Jo about to take an online cooking group

## Holiday hunger

Since March Project Food has been running holiday clubs for children who receive free school meals. Every day each group cooks a full meal, and the children sit down to eat it together after they have done a variety of other exciting activities. They work with a range of foods and learn new practical skills to make healthy cooking fun.

*‘It was a great week, and absolutely fantastic as I was working full-time from home during the week. The staff were brilliant, and the kids came home talking about what they had done and how they had been helped!’* Mother

During the May and October half terms and over the summer holidays we also provided more than 180 free recipe boxes to families



Apple crumble cooked by a family at home with ingredients from a Project Food box

with children on free school meals in the Axminster area. The boxes contained all the ingredients needed for a family of four to make three different delicious and nutritious meals. Simple straightforward recipes accompanied each one, alongside nutritional information and healthy eating tips.

*‘We all cooked together and we really enjoyed the team bonding.’*

The feedback we received showed that parents not only valued the food and learning how to cook it, but also particularly appreciated the opportunity to do something with their children. Many of the families cannot afford to pay for activities, and struggle to occupy their children's time constructively.

*‘It was great to spend a few hours with my children in an educational but fun way, whilst giving them essential life skills. The recipes were fantastic, and we also made our own recipe book with inspiration from the ingredients.’*

We are looking forward to running further children's cooking clubs and providing recipe boxes during the Christmas holidays.

These activities were funded by the Department for Education via Devon County Council, as part of its Holiday Activity and Food programme.



## Support from River Cottage



Guests enjoying the gardens and dinner



In September we were thrilled to be able to hold our annual fundraising dinner at River Cottage HQ, having cancelled it twice due to Covid restrictions. As always, the evening was a great success with delicious food and a wonderful atmosphere. We were delighted to be welcomed by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall himself, who gave a short talk expressing his support for Project Food and the work we have been doing.

All the proceeds went to our projects for people struggling with their mental health and for children living in food poverty.

The event was a perfect complement to the ongoing support that River Cottage gives us. We are looking forward to working alongside the River Cottage team in the coming months when they will be sending their chefs to help with our in-person and online cooking sessions.

## Thank you...

- Acorn Gift Shop
- Axminster Tool Centre
- Beviss and Beckingsale
- Bolts Hair and Body
- California Health & Fitness
- Comic Relief
- Complete Meats
- Co-op
- Dalwood Vineyard
- Devon Community Foundation
- Devon County Council
- East Devon District Council
- Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
- Groundwork UK
- J B Wheaton & Sons Ltd
- Land Rover Experience West Country
- Laurel Farm Glamping
- Liz Wall Art
- Lou La Belle
- LUNA & me
- Lyme Bay Auctions
- Melanie Brown Hair and Beauty
- Not Just Veg
- Reflections Hair and Beauty
- River Cottage
- Rotary Club of Chard
- Sir John & Lady Amory's Charitable Trust
- Smart Fitness
- The Anchor Inn, Sidmouth
- The Farm Marketing
- The Norman Family Charitable Trust
- The Valentine Charitable Trust
- The Woodlands Hotel
- Waitrose

## How to give to Project Food

You can give a one-off donation or set up a direct debit through local giving <https://localgiving.org/charity/projectfood/> or you can send a cheque to our address below or pay by BACS.

Account Name: PROJECT FOOD R/C 1173120 Sort Code: 08-92-99 Account Number: 65853674

**£10 will provide two free fruit & veg boxes to those most in need**

**£25 will provide food for a group cooking session for people with serious mental health problems**

**£100 will help four families receive fruit & veg boxes and support for a month.**

*We will be enormously grateful for anything you can give*

**Project Food** Axminster Hospital, Chard Road, Axminster EX13 5DU  
Registered Charity 1173120

01297 631782 [www.project-food.org.uk](http://www.project-food.org.uk) [info@project-food.org.uk](mailto:info@project-food.org.uk)

## A year in numbers

What Project Food has been doing in the last 12 months:



**5880 newsletters**

were sent to people isolated and living alone, providing them with useful hints on staying physically and mentally healthy when self-isolating.

**1389 meals**

were given away to people who cannot cook for themselves, mostly due to reasons of mental or physical health, or a lack of skills



**960 phone calls**

were made to people really struggling through Covid

**776 free fruit & veg boxes**

were given to people in desperate need including women at a local refuge



**180 recipe boxes**

were given to families who receive free school meals

**47 Zoom cooking demos**

were held for people living alone, carers and people with mental health problems



**15 children**

attended holiday hunger cooking activities



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