

Case study Leamington and Warwick Food co-ops



Summary

Leamington and Warwick Food co-ops are a group of five food co-ops set up in partnership with Leamington Children's Centres. The first co-op was started at the request of a local parents support group. The main aims are to supply affordable fresh fruit and vegetables to families local to the co-ops and to get more people eating, cooking and talking about fresh fruit and vegetables.

Planning

The food co-ops originally started out at Lillington in 2005 and the Children's Centres requested a food co-op in each centre, starting in August 2009. The fifth co-op opened in May 2010. A questionnaire with a prize of a free veg bag was distributed in each area initially in order to get people interested.

People

Lillington Co-op has a steering group with reps such as community dieticians, community development workers, and children's centre representatives taking part. They aim to have a steering group that covers all the co-ops. Apart from the paid worker, each food co-op has a volunteer who co-ordinates things – collating orders, keeping records and then a number of volunteers at each co-op pack and help on the day.

Volunteer tasks may include:

- Taking vegetable bag orders over the phone or face to face.
- Organising and packing vegetable bags
- Recycling cardboard
- Producing publicity leaflets and posters for the food co-ops
- Maintaining membership lists of current members
- Informing suppliers of purchase orders for that week
- Labelling egg boxes
- Helping to produce information/recipe sheets
- Processing Healthy Start vouchers
- Attending Steering Group meetings
- Helping out at community food events like Winter Veg Day, or Pumpkin Day

Produce

Vegetables are local where possible, or British and in season. Sometimes the food co-op buys vegetables from Europe if they are scarce here. As there is not so much British fruit available throughout the year they buy more of this from abroad.

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Procedures

The food co-ops run with a typical bag scheme model. The bags cost £3.50 (or £2 for a smaller bag) and contain six vegetables and two fruits, with some potatoes, carrots and onions every week. Each week the food co-op buys the food in bulk and volunteers pack it up for the members. There's also a recipe sheet with suggestions of tasty things to cook with the food in the bag. The food co-ops take Healthy Start Vouchers and they also sell eggs.

In order to buy from the food co-ops customers just need to:

- 1) Go along to one of the food co-ops
- 2) Fill in a membership form and pay for their first bag
- 3) Continue to order and pay for the bags a week in advance.
- 4) Pick up their food bag from their chosen co-op and enjoy!

Practical Resources

The group have one paid part-time co-ordinator. They only need a few resources: scales, stationery, spare bags and egg boxes, and some venues require cash. In order to pay salaries and purchase these resources the food co-ops rely on funding and a 20p levy on each bag

Promotion

The group use flyers, posters and local press to publicise and market its activities and they also attend local fairs and events

Progress

There are now five co-ops and volunteers pack over 150 bags a week. The group monitor the numbers of bags and keep a check on where the food is coming from. They have issued a questionnaire most years to assess support from our customers, although the new co-ops haven't done this yet. Their plans for the future of the project include finding a grower who grows for the co-ops really locally and continuing development.

The most successful things about running the food co-ops have been the contribution of the volunteers and the reports of every bag being like a Christmas parcel. The main issues have low numbers during the holidays and more local food needed (as they can't offer locally produced food as much as they would like). There is also an on-going requirement of presenting financial records.

Contact details

Judy Steele
South Warwickshire Local Food cic
93 Rugby Road, Cubbington, Leamington Spa CV32 7JH
judy@dmac.co.uk
07786137770