



**Community cooking and healthy eating in Oxfordshire –
Best practice case studies**

TAKEN FROM GOOD FOOD OXFORDSHIRE'S REPORT

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Home-Start's Innovative Approach to Nurturing Families in High-Deprivation Areas

Home-Start delivers Growing Minds, a school readiness initiative targeting babies and toddlers in two Oxfordshire high-deprivation areas through group activities or personalised support. Operating in an urban food desert, with limited local access to nutritious foods, Home-Start faced engagement challenges during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic due to the lack of face-to-face contact with families. Leveraging local funding, accessed through GFO, they provided families with slow cookers and weekly recipe bags. The Project Lead, Lucy, recorded instructional videos, shared them with the group, and conducted weekly virtual meetings to discuss activities and share experiences.

The initiative gained local attention, attracting families interested in participating. Post-COVID-19, the slow cooker groups have continued successfully. Weekly gatherings involve joint ingredient preparation, discussions, and sharing outcomes via group chat after slow-cooking at home. To ensure group success, Lucy conducts interviews with potential participants, gauging their cooking skills and interest. Home-Start emphasises the interview stage's significance, not only for understanding participants' needs but also for creating a cohesive and complementary group dynamic crucial to the initiative's success.

Home-Start embodies the theme of 'building trusted relationships.' They have earned trust as a respected community group, a position achieved through time and consistent efforts. Additionally, on a one-to-one basis, they invest time in fostering engagement with individuals, ensuring that their priority people proactively commit to and engage with their initiative.



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Nourish and Flourish Programme in Didcot Emphasises Community Engagement

Nourish and Flourish is a SOFEA programme run in partnership with the Didcot Primary Care Network (PCN). The overall aim is to provide free nutritional support within the community for individuals to improve their health and wellbeing, and to generate opportunities for preventative support with young people in the wider community. The programme is being piloted in Didcot, and currently has three core elements:

Nutritional Therapy Clinic – provides one to one nutritional therapy support. Working in partnership with the Didcot PCN, patients can be referred directly by GPs, Diabetic nurses and Social Prescribers.

Nourish and Flourish School Programme – focuses on providing preventative support for young people. Nutrition has been integrated into the math, biology, geography and history primary curriculum (year 5). The teachers are provided with lesson plans, slide decks, activities and resources, provision of a cooking session using surplus food, food growing opportunities and exercise – as well as SOFEA whole system approach utilising Social Prescribers at parent engagement sessions.

Nourish and Flourish Kitchen – launched in autumn 2023. This upcycled, and bespoke designed professional kitchen serves as a teaching space for SOFEA young people, instilling lifelong cooking skills, provision of food for others, and improving their employability opportunities – and longer-term through the development of social enterprises. Additionally, the kitchen aims to provide the wider community with opportunities for learning cooking skills, and Kerry has set up a Community Cooking Coalition of partner organisations in South and Vale, to cross-deliver such opportunities in 2024. The programme also aims to provide nutritional therapy cooking sessions, including patients assisted by the Nutritional Therapy Clinic.

This programme exemplifies the theme ‘Taking time to build trust and engagement’, as Kerry, the Programme Manager, dedicated significant time connecting with the local community and stakeholders. Development started by engaging with the community at the SOFEA larder, exploring what nutritional support people would appreciate, trialing pop up cooking demos and nutritional support, and conducting a comprehensive survey sent to all 40,000 residents registered with the Didcot PCN. Through partnership with local professionals, initiatives and organisations like Social Prescribers, CAG Oxfordshire (Replenish), and You Move, Kerry gained insight into local concerns and developed a programme that extends beyond the traditional learning environment, offering additional support as needed.

The breadth and ambition of Nourish and Flourish is testament to Kerry’s leadership qualities, including her tenacity, resilience and energy. This leadership is bolstered by years of networking in Oxfordshire and supported by the resources of a larger organisation.



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Rose Hill Junior Youth Club's Holistic Approach to Youth Development

Rose Hill Junior Youth Club, thriving for 12 years, offers inclusive after-school sessions for children and young people aged 5-16 in the area. The sessions, which encompass various enrichment activities, including cooking, provide opportunities for skill development. If participants wish to recreate a dish at home, the group purchases the ingredients for them. Acknowledging local deprivation, the club ensures that every attending child receives a hot and nutritious meal.

During the pandemic, the club initiated an allotment project to address the need for outdoor activities. This project serves as a learning space for children to cultivate plants, explore nature, and craft practical objects from recycled materials like pallets. Beyond its success in fostering gardening skills and a connection with nature, the allotment project has become a safe space for the children to engage in meaningful conversations.

Rose Hill Junior Youth Club stands as a trusted and respected community group. The allotment project is a prime example of their adaptability to community needs. Originally designed to enhance gardening skills and access to nutritious food, it unexpectedly became a source of social connection. The project evolved into a space where children felt comfortable opening up about their worries and concerns, showcasing the club's multifaceted impact on community well-being.



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Chippy Larder's Evolution Beyond Food Provision

Chippy Larder, based in Chipping Norton, West Oxfordshire, serves both the town and the surrounding countryside. Originally set up to address the needs of individuals and families facing food, fuel, and educational deprivation in an affluent area, the Community Larder aimed to provide affordable food without stigmatising those in need. Rizvana, the founder, shares, 'I realized that it's much more than just the food that we're offering. So that's when I set up the warm spaces, and we have a space upstairs where before the Larder, we'd offer tea, coffee, and snacks and somewhere warm for people to come together.'

Over time, the initiative has adapted to address diverse community needs, introducing community lunches that promote a sense of togetherness. Chipping Larder serves as a compelling example of how food can unite a community, embodying the theme of 'Going beyond the learning environment.' By providing a safe space for individuals, Chippy Larder can offer additional support and services in a dignified manner, effectively responding to evolving and emerging community needs.

Moreover, Chippy Larder exemplifies the theme of 'being an influential leader.' Rizvana's early efforts in establishing the larder showcased energy, tenacity, and resilience, earning the group's trust within the community. Over time, the organisation has grown and evolved a supportive culture, enabling other individuals to take the lead on initiatives, fostering sustainability and resilience.



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Sustainable Wantage and Down to Earth Community Cafe: Synergising for Community Impact

Sustainable Wantage, an established community action group, focuses on environmental protection and community strengthening from The Mix, a central community space where they manage a community fridge and distribute surplus food. They also run a weekly Community Larder at another venue. The increasing demand for food over the last few years prompted the recognition of the need for cooking classes to boost kitchen skills and confidence, however, overcoming challenges like space constraints and the availability of knowledgeable facilitators became crucial for success.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Kate Farrington, founder of Down to Earth Cafe, identified the need for a food surplus cafe to address environmental, food, and social justice locally. Situated near the town centre, the cafe also organises community meals and warm spaces in response to the cost-of-living crisis, along with initiatives like Small Steps, providing children with a healthy breakfast, a homework club, and environmental activities.

Collaboration between the two organisations, with shared values and missions, has yielded significant benefits. Down to Earth's well-optimised, welcoming, space, particularly for cooking courses facilitated by Kate's expertise, has addressed The Mix's challenge of finding a suitable space for identified community initiatives. Down to Earth benefits by aligning initiatives with local needs and promoting them through The Mix, reaching priority people who may not respond to traditional advertising methods. Jo Harvey at Sustainable Wantage said "having Down to Earth Community Cafe now in town, run by somebody I know well has been a total game changer, because it's ... a much easier process now, and her having those facilities available has changed how we can think about what we might be able to offer."



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