

Cooking for your community

A guide to the practical steps for setting up community-based hot food provision

In collaboration with



Introduction

Food poverty has been on the rise for many years, and with the increasing costs of living and disproportionately low incomes, this is only bound to keep rising. Through a mapping exercise of free/low cost food provision in Birmingham we found there was a desperate need for more free or low cost hot food. At the same time we were coming across people who had the will and drive to create these spaces but didn't know where to start or how to do it.

This guide is intended to empower people to set up their own community-based hot food provision, covering some of the practical steps needed to consider and some examples of community meals in practice. It is not an exhaustive list of things to cover, and is largely based on our combined experiences of working in this area over many years. We hope you find this useful and encourages you to start your own community meals provision.

Note: underlined words are linked to useful resources!

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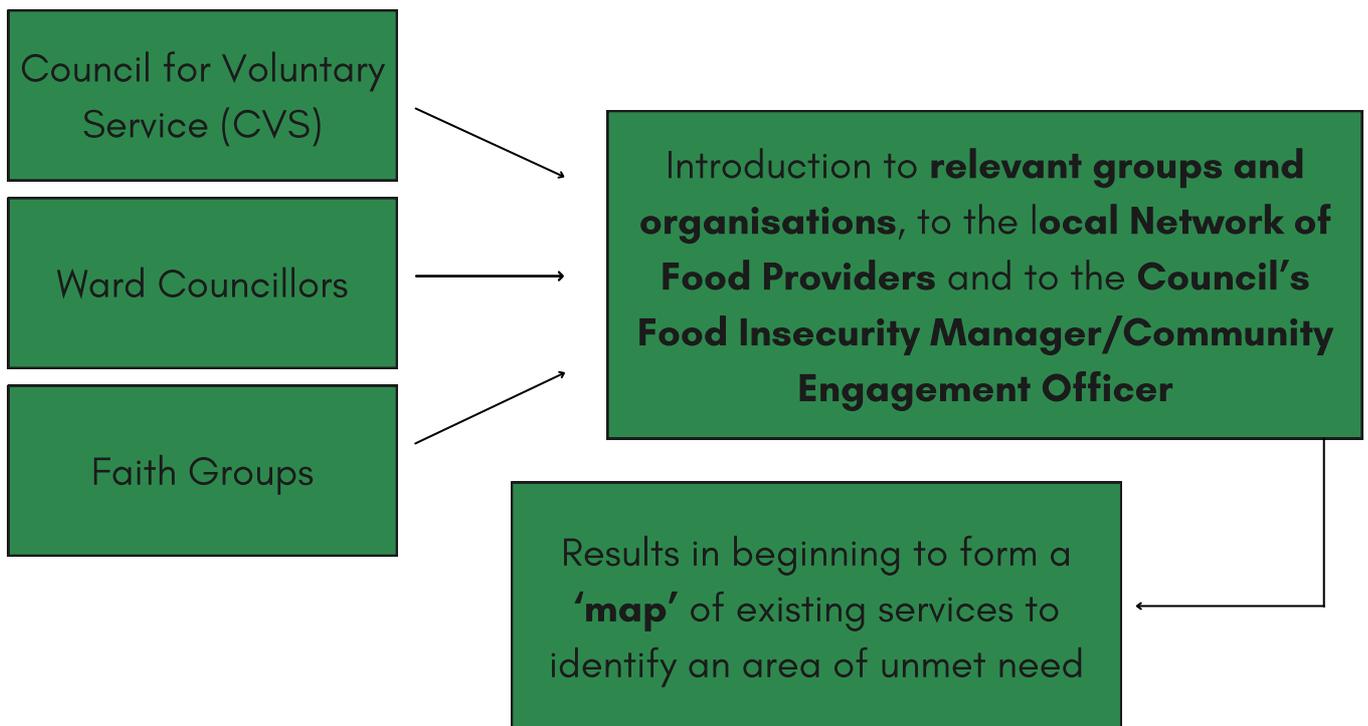
Identifying Areas Where You Can Make a Difference

It's important to make sure your service is not duplicating what is already happening as this will dilute local resources (finite surplus food available at a given time, volunteer pool, etc.) and will not add value.

There are two aspects to this:

1. Contacting and building relationships with relevant local groups and organisations
2. Area Research

Contacting and building relationships with relevant local groups and organisations



'Map' of existing provision answers:

- What is the current food provision?
- What type of provision is it?
- How often does it run and where from?

Area Research

It is useful to research your desired area to find out where your service would be best placed and who your guests are likely to be. This ensures you are setting up in the right location and you know how to reach your audience. Furthermore, if you are applying for funding, it is sometimes useful to evidence in your application an understanding of the level of need in the area and how your service will be adding value.

Initial questions to ask:

- **Where are the most deprived wards in the area?**
Using, for example, the [Indices of Multiple Deprivation](#) map.
- **Where are the key spots to consider for engaging those who are the most socially isolated and vulnerable to loneliness?**
Age UK have some great resources, including a [loneliness map](#).
- **Where and what is the existing provision to avoid duplication?**
Research this by checking Council websites, googling key terms, checking Facebook pages, local news articles, and talking to local connections.
- **Where is the optimum area for travel?**
Make sure the area is easily accessible for guests and volunteers. You can use google maps to check journey times and public transport links.
- **How well connected is the area for surplus food?**
Consider where you will source surplus food from. Use google maps to search for 'supermarkets' or 'grocery shops', and other relevant key words.

Who is your local community?

You can find demographic information about local areas on your council website or using [census data](#). This will help inform how to tailor your service to your local community. Consider:

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Nationality
- Religion
- Language
- Migration status (e.g. asylum seeker population)
- Household composition
- Health

Finding a Suitable Venue

Think about what you need in terms of a venue and equipment

- Semi-commercial kitchen?
- 6 hob cooker?
- Other appliances?
- Food storage (ambient/fresh)?
- Cooking equipment available?
- Dining space?
- Accessibility to the building?
- Tables/chairs?
- Storage for FOH items?
- Waste management?

It's also important to consider **costs** and **responsibilities**. Make sure you have these discussions early on and agree on who is responsible for what, who is contributing to which running costs and/or renting the space, and by how much.

Types of venues

Common venues include **community centres** and **faith groups** as they are in the heart of many communities and keen to have more free activities for their communities if there is a gap in their offer. You may also have suggestions from local connections you'll have made along the way. If in doubt, begin by checking local venues on Google Maps!

Potential hitches to look out for

- Some venues might have a preference for a voucher/referral scheme as opposed to an 'open door' policy
- Finite surplus food nearby
- Small pool of volunteers nearby
- Reassuring partners that you are not just parachuting in and ignoring the hard work already being carried out in the area

Advice from FoodCycle

- Volunteer in an appropriate not-for-profit service to get the gist of it, and build contacts
- Don't be afraid to ask for help or reassurance from any of your contacts

Food Safety

Anyone preparing food to give out to the public has to comply by certain regulations to ensure everyone's safety. Here we have included a list of things to consider and some resources that may help navigate this. Please note, this is not an exhaustive list, and regulations can change at any time. Always speak to your local **Environmental Health Office** to ensure you're doing everything you need to do correctly.

- ✔ **Register as a food business** with your local authority. You should do this at least 28 days before you start giving out food to the public.
- ✔ **FSA Guidance On Community Food Provision can be found at:**
<https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/providing-food-at-community-and-charity-events>
- ✔ **Safer Food, Better Business for Caterers** pack has been designed for small businesses and contain information on personal hygiene, pest control, cross-contamination, cleaning, chilling and cooking, among other areas. It also includes templates of records you need to keep to prove you're taking the necessary steps to ensure food is safe.
- ✔ At least the lead cook of each session needs to have **Level 3 Food Hygiene training**, and will be responsible for ensuring all others helping are sticking to food hygiene practices.
- ✔ **Allergen control** is important and you must have a list of allergen information available for anyone who is consuming the food. The FSA provides a FREE [online allergy training](#), it's recommended that all food handlers take this course. They also provide a [template allergen chart](#), and an online tool to help with [food labelling](#).
- ✔ **WRAP** have put together useful guidance for the labelling of surplus food for redistribution

Other Health and Safety essentials

- ✔ **Risk assessments** are important to work out how to deliver your session safely. You'll need one for the session, and the venue manager needs to provide one for the venue too. [Templates](#) and guidance are available from the Health and Safety Executive.
- ✔ Don't forget **Public Liability Insurance!**

The best advice is to see what all this means in practice!
For instance, to visit a community setting that is already doing something similar to what you want to do, so that you can see what this means in practice in terms of paperwork and monitoring. It can be overwhelming to read all the advice, but reassuring to see it in practice.

Funding

You may need funding to support the costs of running your project, so we've included some databases and ongoing funding pots. Many will have some eligibility requirements.

Funding Databases

- [My Funding Central](#) - for small organisations with an annual income of less than £1M (free to those with an annual income of less than £30K)
- [Charity Excellence](#) - free
- [Grants Online](#) - paid service
- Your local CVS might also have databases of funding opportunities available

Funding Pots:

- [Awards for All](#) - small pots of funding, quick turnaround
- [Veolia](#) - small grants available to improve community facilities
- [Asda foundation](#) - small grants available for grassroots orgs
- [Reaching Communities](#) - larger pots of funding £10K
- [Heart of England](#) - based in the West Midlands/Warwickshire

Food

Where you source food from, will depend on the amount of produce you can use and the sources local to you. We've included some ideas below.

Larger scale:

- [FareShare Community Food Membership](#) - regular supply of surplus food, intercepted at the source, before reaching a retailer. Fee to cover operational costs (depending on region)
- [FareShare Go](#) - app that provides direct access to surplus food from supermarkets. Free of charge.
- [Neighbourly](#) - collect surplus directly from partner supermarkets. Free of charge.

Smaller scale:

- [Lidl Waste Not boxes](#) - pick up a 5kg box of fruit and veg for £1.50
- [Company Shop](#) - membership based shops with highly discounted prices (paid)
- [Olio](#) - share with neighbours and others in your local area (free)
- [Too Good To Go](#) - rescue food from shops and restaurants (paid)
- Reach out to other local groups to share resources
- Reach out to local businesses to ask if they could donate surplus

Volunteers

Recruitment

Preparation:

- Have a clear vision and mission – why should people volunteer? Why is the cause important? What will the impact be?
- Have a clear role description – what will volunteers be doing? E.g chef, meet & greet, servers, kitchen assistant, befriender. Get to know your volunteers and their individual skill-sets and assign roles based on the individual. Keep this list updated as you progress
- Consider local demographic – working professionals/ students/ retired

How to find volunteers:

- Community groups (e.g., faith groups, social clubs)
- Schools/college/university newsletters
- Local council for voluntary service (CVS)
- Word of mouth
- Social media

Retaining

- Induction – include expectations, a tour of the building, introduction to other volunteers/staff, health and safety.
- Recognition of their unique set of skills, make sure their skills are utilised
- Have opportunities for training and developing new skills – accredited if/where possible
- Be consistent and reliable
- Be flexible
- Have more volunteers than you think you'll need, incase something comes up and somebody can't attend
- Keep it simple to start with, and progress from there
- Planning is key
- Choose a venue which is easy for your volunteers and customers to travel to and access
- Consider volunteers availability when deciding service and working times

Advice from Estelle, an experienced volunteer:

"Any offering is great; when you start up you can start with a soup offering. Don't put yourself under pressure straight away – start off small and feel your way through it, build your up confidence along with your experience. This will help everyone to enjoy being there – this is key – you want everyone to have fun! Having music or the radio on in the kitchen is a good example. There are so many positive aspects for people when volunteering, it can offer them new opportunities if they've not gotten out much recently, and is a great way for people to make new friends and socialise.

If people have been out of work, it can offer an opportunity to build confidence back up with meeting and talking to new people.

It's important to manage volunteers expectations, as it can take some time for a project to build up momentum. Keeping volunteers updated with a timeline and communicating how things are progressing is important. Keep them in the loop; they are an invaluable and it's their project too.

You want everybody on board and feeling like they are all part of the process."

Different Models of Food Provision

Pay As You Feel (PAYF)

Everyone is welcome and meals are free to all, but donations are welcomed in terms of skills, time or money.

PAYF venues welcome help with setting up or clearing down the cafe dining space, preparing meals in the kitchen alongside staff, or serving customers who visit the cafe.

Places of Welcome

A Place of Welcome offers your neighbourhood a place where everyone can go for a friendly face, a cup of tea and a conversation if and when they need it. Places of Welcome is a growing network of local community groups providing their neighbourhoods with places where all people feel safe to connect, belong and contribute.

Communal Dining and/or Communal Batch-cooking

YMCA North Staffordshire run hugely successful communal dining nights! They invite sponsors to cook and volunteer, whilst YMCA host. The Community Meals have a real diverse mix of diners, and everyone socialises together.

Youth-led Cafe

Youth-led projects can enable young people to participate and learn about the importance of community, develop skills, develop self-awareness, confidence by giving them a sense of responsibility. A youth-led cafe can be a great tool in encouraging young adults to become positive role models and leaders

The Bridge

The Bridge offer a Community Lunch every Wednesday, free to anyone who would like to come along.

From a weekly surplus food delivery from Fareshare, their head chef uses his culinary creativity to produce a tasty 2 course meal for the dining hall.



A word from Andrea, The Bridge:

"Our community lunch project started in 2018. A local area coordinator approached us because she was coming across a lot of people who she recognised were not eating properly, or not eating very much at all. She was aware of The Junk Food Project that was run in Hobbs Moat and wondered if we had thought about running something similar. We visited the project and saw what they were doing, and began to make enquiries with Fare share about what schemes were available.

The youth pastor at the church is also a qualified chef, so we put a proposal to our board of directors requesting some additional paid hours for him to run the Kitchen, and for them to provide initial start-up costs for us to be able to run a free lunch for those in the community once a week. We gathered a team of volunteers and contacted environmental health about getting our kitchen assessed, making sure that we had the right documentation in place along with the right food hygiene certificates for those involved in the kitchen.

Initially we put a few fliers out in the local community in a couple of supermarkets and on the park notice boards, and from the start had around 70 to 80 people coming each week. We are really blessed here to have a fantastic team of volunteers who have been essential to keeping this up and running along with also having good skills in the kitchen. We know from some of the people that visit us, that the lunch they get from us is the only hot meal they will have that week.

Our real heart in doing our community lunch is to see isolated people come together and build new friendships. Above all, the real joy has been in seeing friendships formed and people given the confidence to also go to other groups that we run in our building, such as groups for the elderly, for mothers and babies, and also our bereavement support group. I would encourage any group to run a community lunch if they can, we have seen such huge benefits from it. But it is important to have the right facilities, a good team of volunteers, and the right finance in place to help fund it. There are other charities and grant making organisations available who can help with this and we ourselves have been able to have funding over the last couple of years from different trusts including more recently the Heart of England Foundation for which we are really grateful."

The Birmingham Community Association (BCA)



The Birmingham Community Association provides tailored welfare activities, particularly for the African and Caribbean communities, in Small Heath and surrounding areas.

The BCA promotes and offers local community activities and events, including health & wellbeing initiatives.

Among their many offerings to the community are Easter & summer play schemes, day care & respite facilities for African Caribbean elders, specialised youth development programmes, mental health counselling support services, and a members social club, offering a weekly lunch club for the over 55s.

A word from Jacqui, BCA:

"The people of the Caribbean were invited to Britain initially to build back Britain. Some returned home, others settled in the UK. They had to rely on themselves to build their own community to help with the isolation and loneliness of home.

As they got older, health issues crept in and the amount they could travel back home was limited, so the BCA started a weekly lunch club for the over 55s to help tackle the isolation.

We apply for small pots of funding to be able to provide the food, and ask for small donations and gifts when the funding runs out to keep things going. When COVID struck the socializing stopped, but we were still able to visit the seniors with their lunches as we had some funding to help with this.

When BCA didn't have a qualified cook, a volunteer, who is a trained chef, reduced her work hours for 6 months so she could cook for the seniors.

You will always come up against barriers, and you will overcome them. You just need the right team members supporting you. The appreciation is overwhelming."

FoodCycle

FoodCycle's vision is to make food poverty, loneliness and food waste a thing of the past for every community. With community dining, week in, week out they feed the hungry and give company to the lonely in their communities; providing delicious meals and great conversation, and using food which would otherwise go to waste.



FoodCycle's Aims:

- Connect communities: Help strengthen and build resilient communities by bringing people together to share healthy, delicious meals.
- Support mental health, wellbeing and reduce loneliness: Enhance the health and mental wellbeing of all by creating welcoming spaces for people from all backgrounds and walks of life to have conversations together.
- Nourish the hungry: Improve nutrition and reduce hunger by cooking healthy meals for those in need, leading to improved food knowledge and changes in behaviour.
- Promote sustainability: Change attitudes to food and society's impact on the environment by cooking with surplus ingredients.
- Inspire change: Share the virtues of our community dining model and the voices of our guests to gain greater support and speed our expansion, enabling us to help more people and more communities.

A word from Pamela, FoodCycle:

"We're a national charity, which works to address food poverty and social isolation utilising surplus food. We provide delicious three course vegetarian meals, absolutely free, eaten communally, for anyone who would like one – food for the body and the mind.

And just to reassure you – it's the same process for setting up a community food offering, whether you're an individual, part of a small group or a national charity. Being locally based should give you an edge.

FoodCycle offers a weekly, free, communal meals' service, and everyone is warmly welcomed to enjoy our delicious vegetarian meals – there is no voucher system or referral mechanism. Our local volunteers utilise suitable Community kitchens to cook the fresh surplus food donated to us, producing healthy, hot, three course meals for anyone who would like one."

ChangeKitchen CIC

ChangeKitchen CIC is a social enterprise event catering business that supports people furthest from the labour market back to work whilst supplying high quality event food. Since March 2020, as a founding member of #Brumtogether and the Food Justice Network, we have been cooking nutritious meals from surplus for people in need, with the help of our team and lots of amazing volunteers; 60,000 meals to date, and counting.



ChangeKitchen
Cooking up change

A word from Birgit, ChangeKitchen CIC:

Ethical, locally sourced, organic food is at the heart of every dish we create. We think that's great news for our clients, for the environment and for local food producers and farmers. Good food is good for the soul and, here at ChangeKitchen, we believe it has the power to change lives.

We are a team that's passionate about cooking up change. Our full company name is ChangeKitchen CIC; CIC stands for Community Interest Company. We're a social enterprise, proud to be cooking up change for disadvantaged people in Birmingham, as well as delicious food.

The single biggest difference between ChangeKitchen and other event caterers is that we create and serve our food differently; we want our clients and customers to celebrate sharing a meal, as well as fuelling their bodies.

All of our food is fully vegetarian (always with vegan and gluten-free options), so everyone shares food from one table. Our food is designed to bring people together, rather than dividing them, we don't create individual platter sections for people from different ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds. We take pride in serving food which really celebrates diversity. Our dishes are inspired by cuisines from around the world: curries from South Asia, South East Asia and the Caribbean, as well as dishes from around the Mediterranean and the Americas and our own very popular versions of British traditional favourites.

The team enjoy picking up recipes from different cultures - and making them part of our repertoire by putting the ChangeKitchen stamp on them. We run five-a-day-on-a-budget cookery classes. We deliver them to community groups, housing associations, corporate teams and the general public - ChangeKitchen's mission is to be part of a revolution that turns access to healthy eating away from a privilege to a right for everyone.

Our goals are simple;

- To meet a demand for catering that is delicious, nutritious and which supports a healthy lifestyle
- To contribute to a local, sustainable and healthy food economy
- To provide training and work opportunities to people who face social exclusion, and to support them into mainstream employment and a more stable lifestyle

Who is involved in this guide

The Active Wellbeing Society (TAWs) is a community benefit society and cooperative working to develop healthy, happy communities living active and connected lives. We offer a range of free activities and services. This includes our community cafés project, **The Big Feed**, which brings people together over food, by providing a safe, welcoming space at our community cafés.



FoodCycle is a national charity, which works to address food poverty and social isolation, utilising surplus food. They offer a permanent, weekly, free communal meals' service, and everyone is warmly welcomed to enjoy our delicious vegetarian meals, prepared using donated surplus food. They have community meals all over the country!



Solihull Christian Fellowship run a weekly community lunch at **The Bridge**, in Shirley, since 2018. During the pandemic they continued to provide food parcels and hot meals. Besides the weekly lunch, the fellowship run regular group sessions throughout the week to reduce isolation and provide a space for people to meet others and build new friendships.



The Birmingham Community Association provides tailored welfare activities, particularly for the African and Caribbean communities, in Small Heath and surrounding areas. They host a weekly community lunch for the over 55s to help tackle isolation.



Who is involved in this guide continued

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Contributors

We would like to extend gratitude to all who contributed to this guide and the accompanying presentation which can be found [here](#).

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- Estelle Dukes, Experienced volunteer at The Bridge
- Andrea Lowndes, Associate Pastor, The Bridge
- Dr Birgit Kehrer, Director, ChangeKitchen CIC

Thankyou!