

Workshop Guardian Column

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Bassetlaw Food Insecurity Network

A Local Solution to a National Problem



Stephanie Henry, Bassetlaw Food Insecurity Network coordinator.



The rising cost of living is having a major impact on families and communities in Bassetlaw - as seen across the UK - and the voluntary and community sector is often at the front line in providing advice and support for local people. Bassetlaw Community Voluntary Service has been part of the Nottinghamshire wide Food Insecurity Network for some time and identified the need for a Bassetlaw Food Insecurity Network to support members to work together to address local gaps resulting in increased support for local people. With support and funding from Nottinghamshire County Council, the Bassetlaw Food Insecurity Network (BFIN) was established in February 2022 and I'm delighted to say that I was successful in securing the role of Bassetlaw Food Insecurity Network Coordinator.

With a background in Education and an acute awareness of the impact of food poverty on local children I'm passionate about making a difference for our communities in Bassetlaw.

In less than four months, the network has already made a big difference locally, both for the Bassetlaw charities we support and with the local people that BFIN members exist to serve.

Regular meetings take place between local food support groups, including Bassetlaw Food Bank, Rhubarb Farm, Oasis Community Centre, The School of Artisan Food, ABL Health, Hope for The Homeless, The Crossing Church and Centre, Nottinghamshire YMCA, Now Church Langold and many more. BFIN members share ideas and work together to address increasing need around food insecurity. The priorities of growing and social eating seek to address wider health and wellbeing in order to create sustainable and long-term changes to improve health and wellbeing in addition to the immediate issues around access to food. Due to the cost of living increase, which includes not only the rise in food costs but also the recent hikes in fuel and energy costs, more people than ever are affected by food insecurity.

A recent success of the BFIN is the introduction of community food hubs, which are being rolled out within local schools and community spaces across Bassetlaw.

The first have recently been launched in Carlton-in-Lindrick at Kingston Park Primary School and Limetree Nursery and have both been a huge success. The parents/carers of pupils at both settings that attended were able to fill a bag of food for £3 and take advantage of food donated by national charity FairShare that would otherwise end up in landfill. This model is a great example of how the BFIN has created opportunities for local charities and food insecurity providers to work together to create real change and action. The hubs can be held at schools, nurseries and community spaces. Rhubarb Farm, a charity based in Langwith, have been organising and supporting the delivery from FairShare until the hubs are able to become self-sufficient and manage the operation independently. Rhubarb Farm is keen to support the initial delivery of more hubs across Bassetlaw. As BFIN Coordinator it's been a privilege to help to join the dots to help to develop a stronger response to local food insecurity.

Melanie Richardson, Food Champion, Rhubarb Farm said “We are proud to be working with BCVS to help alleviate the extra stresses that people are facing at this time to make ends meet. We approached many organisations to try to put food hubs into local communities but to no avail. Stephanie Henry, from BFIN, identified schools as a great place to get a lot of people to a hub at a certain time and liaised with the schools to get this off the ground. Kingston Academy was the pilot for this project, and it has had a tremendous response from the parents using this service. It is great to see people choosing the food that their family requires each week and listening to the chatter around how that food is going to be used. We are introducing 2 more hubs in the coming weeks and we are looking forward to helping more hubs to set up and take the project forward in a way that is suited to each community. With funding from Feeding Britain we will be able to extend the amount of hubs in the Bassetlaw area and create 2 more jobs.”

Andrew Forsey, National Director of Feeding Britain, added ‘Key to the effectiveness of the Bassetlaw Food Insecurity Network are its shared priorities, infrastructure, and organisational abilities which bind a wide range of community-led projects together. These qualities are resulting in decent food being made much more affordable and accessible to households, thereby easing at least some of the strain on food banks.’

As well as the community food hubs, the BFIN is also developing some slow cooker sessions in partnership with ABL.

Georgia Smart, Community Engagement Officer at Your Health Notts added; “We are currently working with the BFIN around providing both theory-based courses to children and their families as well as practical slow cooker courses for families to take part in. This has highlighted a problem that intervention services like YourHealthYourWay have in ensuring all families have access to and sufficient education around food and health. The slow cooker courses are scheduled to go ahead from the summer and more details on these can be found on the BFIN web page via www.bcvs.org.uk”

Just four months since formation, the BFIN is already a highly valued community provision that is doing amazing work to ensure the people of Bassetlaw know what help and support is available to them - as well as ensuring the charities and groups that serve them are working collaboratively to achieve the best possible local solution to a national problem.

For more information about the BFIN, or to enquire about community food hubs please email Stephanie Henry on stephanie.henry@bcvs.org.uk or visit the BFIN web page here – www.bcvs.org.uk/bfin