

Operation Farm

Community Cooking

Toolkit 2 - 2025

OPERATION FARM



Introduction

This community cooking tool kit is designed to help groups with all the essential knowledge they need to run their own cookery sessions and events. It will be useful for any community group, from a drop-in club thinking about using cookery as an educational message, to a church group thinking of setting up a community kitchen using donated produce. It is based on the experiences of community cooks running workshops & events for many years and describes how they have addressed some of the challenges when planning to set up and deliver sessions.

About the author

This guide has been written by founder member and Operation Farm food co-ordinator, Ali Shockledge. Ali has been active in community food for 17yrs, running community kitchens, cafes and events all over the Greater Manchester area. 'It's fair to say I'm obsessed with food and love sharing my knowledge and skills. I feel super proud when kids I've taught, share their dishes with me and know I inspired them just a little bit. Community food is both challenging and exhausting, it can be proper hard graft. But by the same token, it can be incredibly rewarding, and the kitchen vibe is like no other. I hope after reading this toolkit, you feel inspired to give community cooking a crack, trust me you won't regret it!'

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the Operation Farm Volunteers, especially Barbara Shockledge, George Hassall, & Kulwant Singh

Liz Hibbott, Senior Nutrition Advisor, Children's Nutrition Team, Tameside Hospital Foundation Trust; Kala Mandiviwala, Founder & Community Cooking Class Leader of Tameside Meal SEVA Group Members & the staff team at People First Tameside.

Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Published May 2025. This toolkit is one of a series of three authored by Operation Farm, others cover Community Growing and Community Apple Pressing activities.

Find out more by visiting www.operationfarm.org.uk



Community kitchens

Ali's top tip

I wrote an equipment list for a Farmer's Market stall I did in 2009, where we handed out free food tasters, recipes and promotional material about our forthcoming project. I still use that list to this day! Over the years, I've added items and tweaked it, making it relevant for the different sessions & events I've run. I love a good list and consider this one amongst the most precious!

A community kitchen is a shared space, where people gather to cook together, learn new skills, connect with others and build confidence. It can be a place for individuals on the start of their cooking journey, to those who are skilled in sharing their cultural dishes. Whatever the cooking reason, kitchens & food bring people together in a joyful way. Here's some helpful tips when thinking about setting up your community kitchen & sessions:

- First up and probably the most important, you'll need an experienced, trained caterer to run sessions, who will come with the experience of knowing how to run cooking activities, that are safe, practical and achievable. Alternatively, a co-ordinator can also oversee and book freelance cookery trainers, specialising in different food themes. Top tip - it's worth contacting freelance trainers to find out about their expertise, availability and details of the sessions they can deliver.
- Layout and space differs at every venue, this will determine the number of people that can safely work at different stations, which will then influence your booking numbers.
- Whilst commercial kitchens are great, they are designed for efficiency, speed and large-scale cooking, domestic type kitchen facilities may be more beneficial to participants, as they will be more familiar with the equipment and skills can be transferred to the home-setting.



Ali's community kitchen set-up

Back in 2014 after 4yrs of operating community cooking pop-ups in a local church with adults with learning disabilities, the landlord of People First Tameside's (www.facebook.com/peoplefirsttameside) HQ offered to convert the basement into a community kitchen. The large open-spaced basement, originally used to be a nightclub and the landlord pretty much kept it how it was to allow for flexibility, a 'moveable-feast' if you like. The kitchen design remained open-plan and very simple, adding 2 hobs, 2 ovens and focusing on plenty of kitchen preparation space, with the option of a reduced height area for those who use wheelchairs.

It was important that the kitchen had a domestic feel, and that equipment was familiar to what people used at home. Cupboards & drawers and all food safety signage are picture based, to make it accessible for members to work safely.

In terms of numbers, realistically eight is the maximum I'd work with in the kitchen. We often utilise the tables and chairs as workstations, in order to involve more people in food preparation. After 10+ memorable years and many workshops & events the kitchen is still going strong and remains one of the most popular activities run by the team.

Community kitchen checklist ✓

- Always do a site visit before planning any sessions. Write a list of any on-site equipment and check they work; there's nothing worse than trying to light a temperamental oven.
- Is the cookery area and kitchen equipment clean and in good repair?
- Does the kitchen have a sink with hot water for washing up and a separate wash hand basin? Are soap and hygienic hand drying facilities available? You may need to bring antibacterial soap and paper towels just in case.
- Are there tables and chairs for your participants to eat a shared meal? Can the tables be used for food preparation if worktop space is limited?
- Check crockery and cutlery for cook & eat sessions. Consider buying a range of biodegradable, compostable disposables for dining & taking food home.
- Are there any storage facilities for equipment and store cupboard ingredients - reducing the need to continually transport items?
- Is there any ancillary equipment you can use? Ensure you have enough equipment for all participants, including pots, pans, utensils, and safety gear. You will need lots of individual food preparation equipment, such as a chopping board per participant, whereas scales for example, are ok to share between two people.
- Presentation equipment, such as projector/TV, interactive smartboard or flipchart stand & paper for teaching and open discussions.
- Think about how far you will have to carry equipment/ingredients from your vehicle to the kitchen; is there nearby parking?
- Options such as having food ingredients delivered straight to your venue, will dramatically cut down on what you need to take yourself.
- Consider accessibility for participants - wheelchair users, a place to store prams, accessible toilets?
- Are there enough sockets for any electrical equipment you may use. Would you need an extension lead? Think about trailing wires as a trip hazard.
- Check any onsite electrical equipment, such as cookers. Are they PAT tested?
- What is the fire drill for the venue and where are the emergency exits and smoke alarms? Consult the building's fire risk assessment? Where is the fire safety equipment located?
- Refrigeration - is there space in a clean fridge so that chilled foods taken to the venue can be kept cold until required?
- Consider ventilation - are the windows covered or closed to reduce the risk of flying insects coming into the food preparation area?
- What are the refuse and recycling arrangements? Will you have to take rubbish home?

Community cookery courses, workshops & sessions



There's lots to consider when running a community cookery workshop from planning the menu, to thinking about the needs of your participants. The essential factors are that the workshop is safe, but enjoyable for everyone involved.

Here's some helpful tips:

- Session planning is essential. Use your preferred format to work out learning schedule & timing. Ask yourself is this manageable and achievable in the given time?
- Ensure workshops are accessible to all members of the community, regardless of age, ability, or cultural background. You might want to target specific groups; this is discussed later on in the toolkit.
- Select recipes that are easy to follow and cater to the group's dietary needs and preferences.
- If taking pictures/videos of the session, gain consent from participants. This may need to be made formal, especially when working with children and vulnerable adults.
- Recruit and train volunteers to assist with cooking, serving, and cleaning. Different participants will require higher levels of support e.g. working with children.
- Ensure there's a clear message in your introductory brief about proper food handling and storage procedures, including washing hands before cooking. Also include any housekeeping, such as fire procedures and location of toilets, etc.
- Identify and accommodate any allergies or special diets among participants. Clearly label ingredients & dishes and provide allergen information.
- Have a first aid kit readily available and ensure participants know who to contact in case of an emergency.
- Incorporate basic cookery techniques and recipes into your session, empowering participants to cook healthy meals at home.
- Continue to share information about healthy eating, food budgeting, sustainability and food safety. Discuss the nutritional value of different foods and their impact on health.
- Engage everyone to help clean up, stating that it is part of the session.
- Have plenty of recipes and handouts – digital or paper based to suit need.
- Gain feedback from participants to improve future workshops and potentially to gather data for funding bids.
- Ultimately, it's all about the 'banter', encourage interaction and social connection among participants through group activities and discussions.



Case Study: Kala Mandviwala

Founder & Community Cooking Class Leader of Tameside Meal SEVA Group



Kala has been working in community food for a number of years, working with groups to prepare, cook and distribute food all over Greater Manchester. Kala also works for Manchester based social enterprise, Cracking Good Food producing over 200 meals every week, which are distributed to homeless organisations and local community groups. Kala is currently involved in a pioneering trial project for Cracking Good Food (www.crackinggoodfood.org), where she cooks for people coming out of hospital, who don't have any care needs, to free up hospital beds and to aid recovery.

Kala champions waste and surplus produce, often sourcing her ingredients from organisations such as food redistributors, Fareshare (www.fareshare.org.uk). As with any food donation, Kala employs a considered approach, 'I generally take meat when available, fresh vegetables, (savoury) tinned food and then think about what I can make using my store cupboard ingredients. I'm not afraid to reject food, for example I wouldn't take tinned fruit, as I don't often do puddings, with my groups'. In addition, 'often if I've got hot food leftover from an event, I'll take it to a local hostel. They are open 24/7 and as long as allergens are identified and the date when it was made is clear on the label, they will gladly take it off your hands'.

Food hygiene and personal safety are at the heart of Kala's teaching; she recommends stating to participant, 'Don't be offended to address poor food hygiene practises. Include key messages in your brief and then gently explain when for example a person needs to rewash their hands. I've also had experience of turning up at a kitchen and it not being up to food hygiene standards, therefore had to do a deep clean before I start. For unfamiliar kitchens where I've been booked to work, I ask for pictures/videos in advance, it helps on so many levels, such as noticing it's an induction hob and therefore the need for specific pans.'

Kala has experience of working with people with different needs, 'I worked with Care Leavers, experiencing a range of health issues, such as ADHD and poor mental health. It was a cook & eat session, where they would choose the dish for the following week. I had to plan this on a very individual basis as some didn't like the texture, taste, colour. I'd say, 'taste it, try it'. Similarly, when working with a local Bengali group, where dishes are traditionally meat-heavy, I introduced the concept of a spicy veg hot pot with ingredients to suit their palate.'



Here's Kala's top tips when working with community groups:

- Think about your timings and know your process
- Make teaching fun; it's all about the little tips, that people can take away and use at home
- If you're relying on people turning up at your workshops, do your homework and always be thinking about advertising opportunities for the next session
- I might set my numbers for working with 10-12 people, but I always cater for 14, just in case.
- Supermarkets may try to limit the amount you can buy of affordable, single items, such as tinned tomatoes; establish a relationship with the staff, explain what you do and why. They are often very supportive and helpful.
- Always think about the logistics of getting from A to B, I spend a lot of time planning

One of the most important things for me has been networking. Being a sole-trader, speaking to third sector organisations via Action Together (www.actiontogether.org.uk) and being involved in local food partnership is really beneficial. Being part of a bigger network, has really paid off in the end.

Community events

Ali's top tip

Have a Plan B, by the end of the day, trust me, you'll be on Plan Z!!

Ali's top tip

Draw up a thorough equipment checklist and revise it after the event, so you can reuse it another day.

Co-ordination

As with any community food activity there's lots of planning to do before the event. From sourcing ingredients to volunteer co-ordination, risk assessments to equipment checklist. Having a good plan will help to make the event run smoothly and efficiently.

'Rocking up' at a community event requires a lot of planning. A site visit beforehand is well worth it, to help support your plans & risk assessment. Ask event organisers:

- What size is the pitch, where is it located?
- Have you got access to electric and water?
- Are you undercover?
- Is there protection from the weather?
- Do you need to bring your own gazebos, tables, chairs?
- What is the anticipated footfall?
- Have they advertised the event well? Have they included you in their advertising?
- When do you need to submit your risk assessment to event organisers?
- What are the recycling and general waste arrangements?
- How will you ensure you are meeting food hygiene & safety requirements, is there access to a clean fridge and wash hand basin?

Give yourself a few hours to set up; this allows for any issues, e.g. electrical problems, access to event. There are always the early-bird visitors, who are interested in what you're doing. Organise each section in a logical flow, to ensure volunteers know where they need to be and avoid them getting in each other's way. Check your signage, does your stall look enticing?

Ali's top tip

Think about how you will scale-up your food to cater for the anticipated numbers. An example here is when I've handed out soup at large events. I've worked out the volume in litres and then used 100ml biodegradable cups. This then gives me the amount of ingredients I need to scale-up my recipe.



The serious stuff

Ali's top tip

Using free, online templates for writing policies is really beneficial to ensure you have covered the essentials, but it's also important to 'make it real'. Think through the process, think about the people, think about the venue, think about the equipment. Policies don't have to be wordy and lengthy, just include the detail and make it relevant. You can also make policies accessible to your participants, by using simple language and include pictures.

Ali's top tip

You might want to consider a Lone Working Policy if you are running a group without volunteers or staff at the venue. Think about locking and unlocking safely, securing the building and yourself until people arrive. Who are you checking in with? This could be done via a text or phonecall.

Policies and procedures are essential in community kitchens to ensure safety, consistency, and accountability. They establish clear guidelines for participants and volunteers, promoting a fair and accessible environment for everyone.

The following list of documents are essential when running a community group:

- **Health and Safety Policy** – cooking is a high-risk activity. This policy outlines the group's approach to managing health and safety, including who is responsible and how they will manage it. This involves identifying, assessing, and mitigating potential risks associated with the group's activities. This and Risk Management are discussed in the next section
- **Safeguarding Policy** - If you intend to work with children and/or vulnerable adults, a safeguarding policy is crucial, outlining procedures for protecting them and yourself from harm and allegations.
- **Data Protection Policy** - The group must have a data protection policy in place, complying with GDPR, which includes how personal data is collected, used, and stored.
- **Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy** - this outlines your commitment to equality and inclusion for participants & volunteers and addresses anti-discrimination and harassment.
- **Financial Procedures** – if you are a constituted group this policy covers how you will manage the finances, including budgeting, accounting, and financial reporting.
- **Code of Conduct** - This outlines the expected standards of behaviour for all of the group, including participants and volunteers.
- **Conflict of Interest Policy** - this policy addresses situations where there may be a conflict between a member's personal interests and the group's interests.
- **Grievance Procedure** - this outlines how to handle complaints or grievances from participants or volunteers.
- **Whistleblowing Procedure** - this outlines how to report concerns about wrongdoing or unethical behaviour.
- **Voluntary Work Policies** - if the group relies on volunteers, it will need policies related to their recruitment, training, and management.
- **Environmental Policy** - this policy outlines the group's commitment to environmental sustainability.
- **Complaints Procedure** - This outlines how complaints should be handled.



Food hygiene & safety

Ali's top tip

At People First Tameside I produced a 6-page accessible 'food handling guide' to use with members. The pictorial guide contains easy-read, essential information, such as the need for blue plasters in a kitchen. The document is part of an interactive brief at the beginning of every new cooking session.

Ali's top tip

Struggling with access to hot water for hand washing at external venues? Consider purchasing a portable hand-wash. I filled ours with really hot water at base and took to events, where it remained hot for a number of hours. Always remember to take antibacterial soap and plenty of paper towels.

Fire safety

Fire, one of the biggest risks in a kitchen; therefore, a fire safety policy for a community cookery group should outline procedures for preventing fires, responding to fire alarms, and ensuring safe evacuation during a fire. Key elements include regular fire risk assessments, training for all participants, clear evacuation plans, and designated fire safety responsibilities. There should also be a fire risk assessment covering the whole building which you can tap into.

Food hygiene

Following food and personal hygiene & safety rules is crucial, to prevent food poisoning, protect public health, and ensure a safe and healthy environment for everyone. Safe working practices help to minimise the risk of contamination, prevent harmful bacteria and viruses from spreading and reduce the risk of ill health and accidents.

To be legally compliant, consult the food safety management procedure, Safer Food Better Business Food (www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/safer-food-better-business-sfbb) by the Food Standards Agency. Whilst lengthy, it's a fairly simple document and spoon feeds you through the safe food management process

Training

Level 2 food safety training is crucial for ensuring safe food handling practices in community cooking sessions. It's best practice for all those involved in running sessions and to have refresher training every 3 years.

The Food Standards Agency have produced free allergen training (<https://allergytraining.food.gov.uk>) highlighting common allergens, the risks of cross-contamination, and how to provide accurate allergen information to participants.

Risk Assessments

For all cooking activities, conduct a thorough risk assessment to identify potential hazards and implement safety measures. There are lots of great templates online, but you need to make it real, and dynamic and it needs to be relevant to your organisation, the needs of your participants and the activities.

Consider:

- Summarise key messages as part of your introduction, identifying high-risk environmental issues relevant to the building or activity.
- The risks around knives. Risks will vary between venue and group, e.g. working with young children. Issues to consider are transportation, do they need to be in a locked box, risks of injury, possible theft.
- What controls can be put in place to reduce risks, e.g. poor handling of food taken home?
- What high-risk foods will you prepare? Do you know how to reduce the risks associated with these foods?
- Do you have procedures in place to ensure that you know about, and can take appropriate action, if any of the participants have colds, flu, sickness or diarrhoea? This can be part of your introductory brief.
- Are any of the participants allergic to any particular foodstuff? This could be identified beforehand in your booking information.
- Do participants understand and can demonstrate food safety procedures, such as:
 - When and how to wash hands (using anti-bacterial soap).
 - Wearing a clean apron.
 - Using clean cutlery each time they taste food
 - Using separate equipment for raw and high-risk food.
 - When to clean kitchen implements, such as knives or chopping boards, during the cookery session.
 - How to cool down hot food quickly, if they plan to take it home with them.
 - Asking participants to remove jewellery, tie up or cover their hair, and remove nail varnish to further reduce food safety risks and to wear a clean apron.

Surplus and waste food

Ali talks about

"Local not for profit initiative, Power of Resilience set up a simple wooden hatch-style box in their front yard for the local community to access. With surplus food from supermarkets such as Aldi and M&S and individual donations the popular scheme has proved quite a hit. The Christmas Eve donation offer with surplus, festive vegetables was pretty special."

Ali talks about

"Operation Farm ran a 'Waste Not Want Not' Project addressing food waste. Hundreds of local fruit trees were picked, pressed & pasteurised. There was cider, jam and chutney workshops. Fruit and vegetables grown on the community plot was redistributed. The project ended with a huge celebration event at our annual Harvest Festival."



Community cooking workshops that utilise surplus and waste food offer valuable opportunities for skill-building and reducing food waste. They empower participants to prepare delicious and nutritious, low-cost meals while minimising waste. Integrate sustainable food practices into your cooking workshop; have informal discussions about being creative with local ingredients, food gluts and reduced priced food.

A few handy tips:

- Many supermarkets have reduced food sections and 'good to go' boxes – you never know what is going to be on offer. It creates a 'Ready Steady Cook' opportunity!
- People like to donate food, from individuals to organisations, you will be surprised at their generosity. You could also contact local farmers and food producers and ask for any surplus.
- Use your socials to ask for specific ingredients for your cookery workshops and large-scale events. Don't be afraid to say 'no' to food you don't want or need.
- Surplus food from the food industry, supermarkets and catering establishments can be accessed through:
 - **FareShare:** www.fareshare.org.uk
 - **Neighbourly:** www.neighbourly.com
 - **Company Shop Group:** www.companysgroup.co.uk
 - **Too Good to Go:** www.toogoodtogo.co.uk
 - **Olio:** www.olioapp.com
- Throughout the growing seasons there's always surplus and gluts of vegetables. Get in touch with allotment co-ordinators, put up signage & boxes in community plots to ask for donations and run your whole session focused on that donated veg.
- Waste food workshops are very popular, you could write & deliver a whole course on the subject. Themes include:
 - Championing the less 'sexy veg' – for example, swede. It grows abundantly in the UK, it's cheap and bulks out lots of dishes.
 - How to use air fryers and slow cookers to keep costs down and utilise surplus food.
 - Fake aways are a quirky way to deliver your food waste message. Homemade versions of your favourite take away, are often cheaper than ordering in, allowing for control over ingredients and portion sizes, and potentially offering a healthier alternative. Ask participants to vote for their favourite take away and recreate it in future sessions. You can even be creative and make fake packaging.

Models for sharing surplus food locally

- **Community Fridges** (<https://www.hubhub.org.uk/the-community-fridge>) are public fridges or freezers, where individuals can donate surplus food and/or take what they need, often for free. They aim to address food insecurity, reduce food waste, and foster community spirit by facilitating food sharing.
- Food banks are community organisations that provide emergency food and sometimes other essential supplies to individuals and families struggling to afford basic necessities. They are a vital part of the safety net for people facing food insecurity, often partnering with social workers and other support services to connect people with resources. Check out **Bread & Butter Thing:** www.breadandbutterthing.org

Different strokes for different folks

Ali's top tips

1. It's all in the detail – teach the small things and the big things will follow. For example, demonstrate how to open a tube of tomato puree, by reversing & twisting the cap to pierce the foil seal. This is a real example, when I observed and stopped a child from attempting to use the tip of a sharp knife to open the tube!

2. Running themed sessions where people share their food stories, memories and treasured recipes are truly heartwarming. One of my favourite memories is of a lady who shared her mum's 'neck end broth' dish. The Potluck concept of bringing a shared dish is also a fabulous way of wrapping up a project.

Whilst some fundamental things remain the same, working with diverse groups requires clear communication, respect, and flexible teaching methods to accommodate different needs and abilities.

Here's some things to consider:

- When running kids' cookery sessions, spend plenty of time on safe use of equipment, especially knives. Worksheets and demonstrations need to include how to pass, how to use, how to wash and how to walk with a knife around the kitchen. Consider buying anti-slip mats for chopping boards. There's some great online media demonstrating safe knife skills; check out the 'claw & bridge' technique on BBC Bitesize.
- For people with additional learning & physical needs, there's a whole range of adapted equipment, such as angled knives, super grip utensils and kettle tippers. Ensure information is clear, easy-read, large print and accessible, with pictures to support text. Having additional volunteers would be beneficial to offer participants 1-1 support where necessary. Alternatively consider asking people to bring their own support to help them fully participate in the session.
- When planning community cooking courses for different ethnic communities, it's important to be culturally sensitive, inclusive, and aware of the diversity within groups. Sharing food stories that celebrate their food heritage offers a unique experience, whilst acknowledging potential language barriers and food preferences. This builds trust and collaboration.
- There are lots of reasons to run sessions with whole families – low income, improve bonding, parenting skills. Insist that parents supervise and work with their children and offer subtle tips & hints that they can use at home.



Volunteer co-ordination



Volunteers are just as important as ingredients to any community cooking session. Advertise for help, allocate clear tasks and co-ordinate an army of volunteers to help run your workshops & events. Ensure good levels of welfare, look after them with plenty of cake, regular breaks and lots of tea!

If your project grows in size, you may want to consider a job role, 'volunteer co-ordinator', making volunteer recruitment more formal. This will ensure volunteers are trained, have access to your policies and procedures, are safety checked, but most of all feel valued. And always incorporate a formal acknowledgement at your celebration events.

One of the most positive outcomes of volunteering is how it brings folk together; from observation people love cooking and helping others and they absolutely love talking!



George's story

I've always loved gardening and cooking and when my mum started Operation Farm with some friends back in 2010, I got involved too. I was only 5yrs old then, but I have such fond memories of the Harvest Festivals, where I'd do apple pressing, I loved it and still do.

All the outdoor events, where we've cooked and served food have been pretty epic. SoupShare was one of the most memorable, due to the fast-paced kitchen environment and being able to take on a job accurate role. In fact, all the workshops involving Young Operation Farmers evoke fond memories, due to the strong friendships formed, that still continue to this day.

The main reason I enjoyed the cooking activities was being able to work in a team and in a functioning kitchen, with different equipment and facilities to carry out service. I mainly enjoyed these because of the company and the friendly atmosphere found there.

I've learnt loads of vital and transferable skills that will enable me to have a good baseline knowledge for the future. It has also given me a boost of confidence to work in a team, where previously I might not have been able to speak up. And of course, the friends I've made along the way are invaluable.

Operation Farm has been like several chapters in my life, it's what I grew up with. It's allowed me to grow and prosper into a more confident individual and for that I'll always be grateful.



Barbara's story

I've been involved with Operation Farm since their very first Harvest Festival back in 2010, where I ran a French-themed food stall. Since then, I've taken part in a number of events all of which I enjoyed as each had its own qualities and attractions.

SoupShare days at the kitchen were always popular and well attended. We made lots of soup and soda bread and were kept so busy. I was always absolutely shattered by the end of the day but also had that sense of satisfaction, which made it all worthwhile.

Events in Hyde Park were also very popular. We have handed out more soup, pancakes, apple cake than I care to remember! It wasn't just about the day itself, we always made the food at the kitchen beforehand, so they were long days, but you became invested and felt part of the team and the bigger picture.

There were group sessions, where I helped a team of ladies to prepare different salads with new and unusual recipes and ingredients, which always generates lots of conversation. On other times we have made preserves with seasonal vegetables and included ketchup and brown sauce, which were delicious, and I still make all these years on. On occasions we were able to prepare dishes using produce from the allotment – so we certainly know the provenance of the goods.

Good times were shared with the Young Operation Farmers; over the years we watched 8+ year olds grow and mature into young adults as they became very adapt in the kitchen as they learned a few basic skills and produced delightful pizzas, light snacks and bread. Being a bit of a foodie myself, I really enjoyed being part of helping people learn about food and cooking, it was always very rewarding.

Social media & marketing

Ali's top tip

There are lots of free online design tools, where you can access thousands of templates in different formats. Canva is a creative, graphic design tool, which is easy to use for designing social media graphics, flyers, postcards, promotional merchandise and websites.

Advertising a community cooking workshop/event is crucial to ensure plenty of folk turn up! Publicity provides vital information about the event, builds excitement and anticipation, and ultimately contributes to a successful session/gathering. Various marketing methods can be used to advertise your community cooking event:

- Use engaging content across all social media sites, with lots of pictures, videos and relevant hashtags. Create an event post on socials such as Facebook and build momentum with regular posts.
- Write a regular blog and establish a mailing list, sending event updates and details.
- Collaborate with local community organisations or groups to promote the event through their networks. Is your cooking activity part of a larger community event? Make sure your activity information is part of their event marketing.
- Design, publish, print and distribute flyers and posters and display in community settings; this helps advertise to people who don't use social media.
- Reach out to local newspapers, radio stations, or community newsletters for potential coverage or advertising opportunities.

Canva

Partnerships



Collaborating with local food organisations, social enterprises, and individuals helps to build a strong community cooking network. There may be a community food network in your area, responsible for mapping community food activities, it's worth checking out.

Third sector organisations may be able to help you with a list of providers in your local area. There are also lots of national organisations offering free resources to support community cookery groups.

It's worthwhile contacting your local NHS Health Improvement Team, Dietetic Department or Health Promotion workers to find out about cooking courses or trainers in your area. I spoke to Liz Hibbott, Senior Nutrition Advisor, on the Children's Nutrition Team at Tameside Hospital Foundation Trust. This is their local offer:

Jumps 4 Life – a 10-week course for children aged 4-16 years who are above a healthy weight. Families learn about food, nutrition and are able to take part in a variety of fun activity sessions.

Nutrition and healthy eating training and award schemes for venues catering for children.

Working closely with local schools, children's centres, nurseries and other venues to promote healthy eating and active lifestyles.

Cook 4 Life - A practical cooking programme, run over several weeks, to encourage healthy meal changes. The courses are generally run in schools or community venues with children and their families

Train the trainer – a 3-week course on how to run a cookery club, including lots of nutritional advice

Costs and fundraising

Ali's top tip

Consider asking for a small contribution towards costs or leave a sign and container with a 'suggested donation' amount. This will help fund future courses or equipment.

Ali's top tip

There are lots of funding pots available to fund community cookery workshops. Visit your local third sector organisation or search online and seek help around local and national funding streams.

The costs of setting up and running cookery sessions depends on your plans for the group and what resources and facilities you need to fund. Grant funded, commissioned or ran as a social enterprise you will need to determine the costs for:

- Administration and food educators/co-ordinators
- Transport
- Volunteer expenses
- Venue hire
- Participant paperwork – induction forms, worksheets, recipes, certificates
- Ingredients
- Tupperware & disposables
- Cleaning materials
- Insurance (public liability, employer liability, car/van insurance)
- Cost of a DBS check (Disclosure and Barring Service) for yourself and any volunteers

Event & workshop inspiration from Ali



After running community cooking workshops & events for over 15 years, there's not much I haven't tried and tested. Here's just a few memorable ones:

- One of my proudest projects is the work I've done with the Young Operation Farmers (www.facebook.com/YoungOperationFarmers). I've known some of the kids since they were about 4yrs old and it's been a pleasure to watch how they've grown into young adults, listen to their aspirations and be part of their career journey. Working around their exams and school holidays, we've enjoyed all sorts of fun & exciting events together
- At parties and celebration events where we've had lots of different activities, decorating cupcakes & biscuits. At these events, it's great to discover their other talents too, such as playing a musical instrument.
- Kids love baking (and making a mess!) a quick soda bread, carrot cake and buttermilk scones are amongst my favourite 'go-to' recipes.
- Then there's the serious stuff, teaching life skills, which will equip young people as they move off to study or work. We've made jacket spuds & fillings, soup and the essential basics of egg/cheese/beans on toast. I've always said, 'if you can make egg on toast, you'll always survive!'
- We've always been influenced by events that are happening nationally. For example, we had a big event in a local park celebrating the Queen's Jubilee, it was a 'right, royal' affair!
- And afterwards we always meet up and celebrate – social events in free, community spaces are great for a debrief.

My background is working with adults with learning disabilities and autistic people, and I've had a whole career of hosting creative cookery workshops:

- SoupShare was an RHS Campaign for School Gardening initiative aimed at celebrating the harvest and bringing people together and we just made it our own! We tend to organise our SoupShare's in the autumn & winter months, when seasonal veg is cheap and at its best for soup. We can work with large groups at these events and everyone has a job.
- I've done a lot of Farmer's Markets, where we've given away free soup, cake and salads. We also handed out 'Soup in a bag', where all the ingredients and recipes are in a brown Kraft bag. Again, a great activity for people with learning disabilities to assemble bags of ingredients, many of which were donated.
- We've made food and delivered it elsewhere, including a homeless charity.
- And we love to follow a TV cookery programme format, such as The Great British Bake Off.

Other projects with groups have included:

- Food sustainability projects, using low-cost ingredients, reducing fuel use, tackling food waste and what to do with 'unsexy veg!'
- StewShare very similar to the SoupShare concept.
- Summer salads, where I'm challenged to make a buffet with the allotment harvest.
- There's a vast array of jam, chutney & smoothie examples
- A focus on fresh herbs, is a fragrant delight.
- And for really large events, I'm talking 5000+, my go-to activity is fruit kebabs.

Most importantly, we always have get togethers to celebrate the end of projects and to thank our volunteers; you can attract funding for one-off celebration events. And don't forget to thank your funders too!



OPERATION FARM



Produced by **Operation Farm**
with funding from **The National Lottery Community Fund**.
Printed on recycled paper.