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NEIGHBOURHOODS

INSIDE

Creating a healthy
food environment

Starting good
habits early

Meet some of our
Community food stars

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A massive thank you to all our community and professional partners who contributed content for this report

Photo credit: Jim Stephenson

A Letter From The Editor

Welcome to the 2025-26 Director of Public Health Annual report. This year I have chosen to focus on access to healthy, affordable food. The report includes contributions from a range of community partners and professionals.

Eating a healthy, balanced diet and maintaining a healthy weight is essential for good health. It impacts life expectancy, energy levels, sleep quality, immunity from diseases and is essential for the health of the body (including muscles, bones, skin, teeth and eyes). It can also prevent a range of diseases, including heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer.

Eating a healthy diet is often framed as an individual choice, but these choices are influenced by much bigger forces at play in the environment in which we live, work, study and play. Families on low incomes have

very limited choices about the food they put on the table, and food manufacturers don't help by creating products that make people want to eat more, in the search of bigger profits, with little consideration for their customers' health. What's more, these unhealthy foods are often much cheaper to buy and more convenient than healthier alternatives.

Stress and low mood also influence the type and quantity of food that people eat, for example through so-called 'comfort eating'. And while weight loss jabs are revolutionising obesity treatment for those living with obesity-related health conditions, they do not address the cause of an unhealthy diet for the vast majority of us. They are also hugely costly for the taxpayer.

The first feature of this publication is a reminder of why access to affordable healthy food matters and the challenges to achieving this. More detail is available in a 'healthy weight needs assessment' report we produced at the end of 2024. ⁽¹⁾

Many of the featured projects and programmes highlight the importance of food in bringing people together, helping to overcome social isolation and loneliness and build strong community connections. In this way, improving access to affordable healthy food helps not only to improve our physical health, but can also help build social capital - the subject of my last annual report in 2025/26.

I wanted to focus my annual report this year on the inspiring work that is going on locally through our network of amazing community partners.



The report goes on to discuss some of the environmental factors that influence food choice and availability, such as food placement in stores, advertising and availability of healthier options. This topic is very important, as not only does it have a significant impact on what people eat but it is something that local authorities have some powers to improve.

In the following pages, we feature a sample of local community projects that are supporting residents who struggle the most to afford a healthy nutritious diet for themselves and their families.

This includes food banks and pantries, community lunch projects, as well as education and awareness raising efforts. We also explore some of the work taking place in children's centres, schools and with families to ensure that the next generation are well-nourished now and have the skills and knowledge to maintain this in the future.

We go on to consider what more we need to do, taking on board your feedback and answering some of your questions about how we can ensure that everyone living in the City and Hackney is able to

achieve a healthy diet. There are actions here for all of us. We must not shy away from the work that needs to be done.

And to end, a bit of fun. The final pages contain a number of puzzles to challenge your knowledge and skills, as well as some recipes recommended by local people - I will certainly be trying some of these!

Dr Sandra Husbands
Director of Public Health
City of London & London
Borough of Hackney

You will see that throughout the report we refer to a range of services, community assets and sources of information. For details on how to access these, a directory is included on the back and inside cover page.

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Why Access to Affordable, Healthy Food Matters in City and Hackney

Jennifer Millmore, City and Hackney Public Health

What is Healthy Eating and Why is it Important?

Eating well and keeping to a healthy weight is the best way to stay in good shape. It can help you live longer, give you more energy, make you sleep better, and protect you from getting ill. It also keeps your muscles, bones, skin, teeth, and eyes strong and healthy. Plus, it can stop you from getting serious illnesses like heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer.

Eating healthily involves eating a wide variety of foods, in the right quantities and proportions. Food and drinks high in fat (especially saturated fat), salt and sugar should be consumed in small amounts. However, these foods are often some of the most easily and cheaply available. It is therefore unsurprising that most people in the UK eat and drink too many calories, too much saturated fat, sugar and salt and not enough fruit, vegetables, oily fish or fibre. ⁽²⁾

Additionally, in the UK, over half of calories are now consumed from so-called 'ultra-processed foods' (foods that have undergone industrial processing, often involving the addition of preservatives, additives and other artificial ingredients). In a typical



For most people a balanced diet should include:

- ✓ at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day
- ✓ higher fibre starchy foods like potatoes, bread, rice or pasta
- ✓ some dairy or dairy alternatives (such as soya drinks)
- ✓ some beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other protein
- ✓ plenty of unsweetened, low sugar fluids (at least 6 to 8 glasses a day) ⁽²⁾

school lunch, over 70% of calories eaten are ultra-processed, whether prepared by the school or at home. High consumption

of ultra-processed foods is consistently associated with an increased risk of a number of health problems. ⁽³⁾

Food Availability and Affordability

Despite the importance of healthy eating, healthier foods are on average more than twice as expensive per calorie than less healthy foods and this gap is increasing. The Food Foundation estimates that the average household would need to spend £9 per person per day to eat what the government recommends for a healthy diet (based on 2024 costs). For the lowest income households this would be at least 45% of their disposable income, rising to 70% for those with children. Government data shows that the poorest 10% of households actually only spent £4.04 per person per day on food and drink in 2021/22 (the most recent data available). For many, following the recommendations on healthy eating is not affordable. ⁽⁴⁾

In addition to being more expensive, healthier options are also often less available and harder to cook and store. Many poorer areas are considered 'food deserts', where affordable fresh fruit and vegetables are at least a bus ride away. Preparing healthy meals from scratch also often requires more fuel, equipment and time to cook. Storing perishable foods can also be a challenge, especially as many households do not have a freezer. The extra time needed to shop for and cook healthy food can be especially challenging for low-income households who may have multiple jobs, unpredictable work hours and significant caring responsibilities on top of work. ⁽⁴⁾

'Food insecurity' is defined as having limited or uncertain access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food for a healthy life, not just hunger itself. Food insecurity currently affects 14% of UK households. It is even higher among groups such as disabled people and those with mental health conditions. ⁽⁴⁾ With food prices rising about 30% on average since 2022, for the average basket, this issue is becoming even more serious. ⁽⁵⁾



The Local Health Challenge

Many residents in City and Hackney report that they find eating a healthy diet or maintaining a healthy weight difficult and the numbers back this up.

Adults: In 2023, over half of adults in City and Hackney were classed as being either overweight or obese, with a quarter being obese or severely obese ^(A). Levels of obesity were higher than average among: ⁽⁴⁾

- ✓ people living in areas of higher deprivation
- ✓ women, pregnant people and those aged 40-84
- ✓ some global majority communities
- ✓ adults with learning disabilities and severe mental illness.

Children: In 2022/23, one in five reception children (aged 4-5) in City and Hackney state-maintained schools were above a healthy weight ^(B), with one in ten being obese or severely obese. For year 6 children (aged 10-11), two in five were above a healthy weight, with a quarter being obese or severely obese. Obesity rates are higher in year 6 boys compared to girls and in some ethnicity groups. In local Orthodox Jewish independent schools, the proportion of children above a healthy weight is much lower. ⁽⁴⁾

Related to diet and sugar consumption, oral health is a serious concern in the City and Hackney. Tooth decay and extractions is the number one reason that children visit Accident and Emergency at the Homerton Hospital. Tooth decay is preventable and causes missed school days, unnecessary pain and avoidable pressure on the NHS. It disproportionately impacts children living in the most deprived areas.

More information about healthy eating and overweight and obesity is available in the Healthy Weight Needs Assessment for City and Hackney. ⁽⁴⁾

A number of engagement events have taken place in the City and Hackney with residents, community partners and wider stakeholders to try and better understand some of the challenges residents are facing. Cost, time, knowledge, access to the right equipment and additional health or social needs (such as neurodiversity and being a carer) were all frequently raised as barriers to a healthier diet.



Challenges to eating a healthy diet illustration captured at a City and Hackney Healthy Diet Conversation event in November 2025

Sustain, an alliance of organisations and communities working together for a better system of food and farming, produces an annual report tracking council action on food in London. In the recent report Hackney was scored 79% for 'showing leadership on a whole-systems approach to food' and 82% for 'leading the way in addressing root causes of food poverty.' This places Hackney in the top half of the league table of London Councils but with room for improvement compared to the top performers. Data was unavailable for the City of London. ⁽⁶⁾

A. Adults with a BMI of 25 to 29.9 are classed as overweight, 30 to 39.9 as obese and 40 or above as severely obese (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/obesity/>).
B. In England, the British 1990 growth reference/dataset (UK90) for BMI is commonly used to determine children's weight status, which takes account of the child's age and sex. After BMI is calculated for a child, it is expressed as a 'centile', to show how their BMI compares to children who took part in national surveys. The cut offs for measuring weight in children are: overweight: 85th centile for population monitoring, (91st centile for individual clinical assessment), obesity: 95th centile for population monitoring (98th centile for individual clinical assessment), severe obesity: 99.6th centile.

The Cost of a Plate

Krista Brown, CoCreate Hackney

Krista Brown from CoCreate got together a few Hackney residents to share what a typical day of food really looks like for them and some of the challenges they face. CoCreate is a resident-led social enterprise providing free support, advice, and community-led programmes across Hackney.

Natalie – Natalie cooks for two children and her dad, so meals need to stretch further. Lunch might be something quick like egg sandwiches, while dinner includes meat, vegetables and carbohydrates. Like many parents, she sometimes eats last after everyone else. She has about £10 a day to feed a family of four.

Malhi – Malhi makes most of his meals at home and shops mainly at Aldi, Lidl and Iceland. Eggs, rice, chicken and vegetables are staples. He lives in insecure housing with very limited cooking facilities, which rules out some cheaper foods. Late evenings can be the hardest time, when quick meals become the easiest option after a long day.



Steve – Steven is a pensioner and his meals are simple and practical. Breakfast might be cereal and tea, lunch is often noodles or a sandwich and dinner could be lamb, rice and peas. Shopping mainly at Tesco or Iceland helps keep costs down, but Steven says he still wishes he could afford to buy some more expensive items.

Zey – Zey is a single mum feeding three children, so food choices often revolve around what they will eat. Coffee starts the day, followed by a quick sandwich at lunch. Dinner is shaped by the children's tastes and whatever is affordable that week. Zey only has £6-7 per day to feed all of them.

Tracey – Tracey is almost a pensioner and a special guardian to her 10 year old granddaughter. She keeps meals straightforward and filling. Tea and toast might start the day,

followed by a ham and cheese sandwich for lunch. Dinner could be spaghetti bolognese or rice with vegetables. Time and cost both shape what ends up on the plate and she spends about £8 per day between them.

Diane – Diane is a single woman in her early 60s, with complex mobility and medical needs, which limits what she can cook. She usually starts the day with toast or porridge and keeps lunch simple with sandwiches or jacket potatoes. Shopping mainly at Lidl and Tesco helps manage costs, though she says she would love to buy higher quality food more often.

Shan – Shan is a single mum, balancing pregnancy, a five year old, work and family life, so meals need to be quick and practical. Breakfast might be toast or fruit, lunch a meal deal. Dinner is something simple with meat, vegetables and carbohydrates.

Building a Healthier Food Environment

Jennifer Millmore and Donna Doherty-Kelly, City and Hackney Public Health



For decades, healthy eating was framed as a matter of individual willpower. However, evidence clearly shows that our food choices are strongly impacted by our physical, economic and social environment - the 'food environment'. While still difficult to change, local authorities have some levers available to them to help create an environment that makes it easier for people to buy and eat healthier options.

When it comes to food, people naturally tend to choose whatever is easiest, cheapest and most familiar. So grabbing a takeaway on the way home may be much more appealing than doing a food shop at a big supermarket 20 minutes walk away, then having to cook the food afterwards. This is especially true after a busy and stressful day.

How food shops lay out their products, as well as in-store advertising and promotions, can have a big impact on people's

purchasing decisions. For example, unhealthy food, such as crisps and sweets, placed at the end of aisles or at eye level, with big coloured labels, sell better than items on the bottom of a standard shelf with no promotion. Recently steps have been taken to address some of these issues and this is discussed in the 'Trading Places' article on page 11.

Social and cultural 'norms' can also play a role in decision making. For example, the types of food typically served at celebratory events (in the workplace or the community) are often not very healthy. In these cases the barriers to healthy eating are also social.

The good news is, both Hackney Council and the City of London Corporation are using their regulatory powers and local influence to make it easier for local people to choose healthier options. A few examples of this work are covered in this feature.



Limiting Unhealthy Food Near Schools

In Hackney, new hot food takeaway planning applications are refused if they are within 400 meters of a school or community college. Similarly, in the City of London, there is an emphasis on creating healthier food environments, as well as restricting hot food takeaways near schools.

Healthier Advertising

Exposure to adverts for less healthy food (specifically for high fat, salt, and sugar products) can affect what and when people eat and shape their food preferences. Hackney Council has a healthy advertising policy for Council owned advertising sites, which supports the Council's commitment to promoting healthy eating. It provides guidance for the Council's provider on restrictions of unhealthy advertising of food and drink products.



Making Healthier Catering Commitments

Annie Rawlings, Hackney Environmental Health and
Jennifer Millmore, City and Hackney Public Health

Out of home food is any food or drink purchased and consumed away from home, including restaurant dining, cafes, takeaways and food-on-the-go (like meal deals). On average, out of home meals contain significantly more calories than home cooked meals and make up around 20-25% of all calories consumed. ⁽²⁾

Both the City of London Corporation and Hackney Council participate in the Healthier Catering Commitment, a scheme run by London local authorities, with support from the Mayor of London and the Association of Environmental Health Managers. The scheme recognises businesses in London that demonstrate a commitment to reducing the levels of saturated fat, salt and sugar in the food sold in their premises and to make smaller portions available.

In the City and Hackney, environmental health officers work with food businesses to assess how they can make their products healthier while still being affordable. In Hackney over 100 food businesses are already signed up and eight in the City of London. In Hackney there are 2,653 food businesses in total and 1,854 in the City of London, so there is a lot more potential too. However, not all these food businesses are currently eligible, due to having a minimum food hygiene rating below 3 (a requirement of the award).

Hoxton Beach Cafe

In order to meet the requirements of the Healthier Catering Commitment, Hoxton Beach Cafe has removed some of the least healthy items from their menu, including pizzas. They have also added some new healthy options too, including fresh juices and some high protein options. Customers love their salads and can choose between two portion sizes.

Overall the changes have been well received. Sometimes people ask why items are no longer available, but usually understand when staff explain about the Healthier Catering Commitment.



A couple of examples of businesses participating in the Healthier Catering Commitment are highlighted below.

Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia Association

The Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia Association made a number of changes to their menu as a result of their participation in the scheme, including reducing the amount of refined sugar and unhealthy snacks. These have been replaced with healthier snacks like fruit. Most of the food is locally sourced, including from Ridley Road market. They don't sell soft drinks but green tea is a popular drink.

Different portion sizes are offered, all dishes have vegetarian options and all of the meals are adaptable to people's preferences. In Vietnamese culture, there is a strong emphasis on not wasting food, so everything is made to order. While a traditional Vietnamese sticky rice dessert is sometimes served, it is homemade, so the amount of sugar can be reduced and it isn't available all the time, rather as a special treat!

Working towards a sustainable future



Trading Places

Robin Jones, Hackney Trading Standards and
Jennifer Millmore, City and Hackney Public Health

Traditionally, supermarkets would often place unhealthy treats near checkouts, in order to encourage impulse purchases. However, in 2021, regulations around foods high in fat, sugar and salt were introduced in England for businesses with over 50 employees and with certain floor space dimensions.

The new rules require that 'less healthy foods' must not be displayed at store entrances, close to, or within two metres from the cashier, including behind the cashier or at the end of aisles, and volume-based price promotions should not be used. Hackney Trading standards, on the request of

Public Health and Environmental Health, conducted inspections in all qualifying stores, to check the level of compliance. On first inspection, many stores were not complying with the new regulations. However, there were significant improvements following the visits from Trading Standards Officers.

Since the work was carried out, awareness of the new regulations has increased and adherence is generally high. However, the team continues to monitor compliance and advise stores where issues are identified. For example, they recently found digital screens displaying adverts at the end of aisles, which is prohibited under the new regulations.

Making New Developments Healthier

Donna Doherty-Kelly, City and
Hackney Public Health

In Hackney, for any major new developments, such as a new block of flats, the developers have to submit a 'Health Impact Assessment', which is reviewed by public health and planning officers. They use this to demonstrate how the design of the new development will ensure new growth and promote good physical and mental wellbeing including healthy food environments!. The City of London is developing a similar tool, which will encourage having areas for food growing and the creation of more resilient, inclusive spaces.

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Low-Carbon Lunches: Linking Hackney's Food and Climate Goals

Stephanie Li, Climate, Sustainability and Environmental Services



Hackney Council's climate team is reshaping the food that's served in schools, workplaces and civic spaces. They are using food as a powerful lever, not only to make meals healthier and more affordable, but to reduce negative impacts on the environment too.

More than 20 schools and nurseries now take part in the ProVeg UK School Plates Awards, which helps to increase children's intake of plant-rich foods. ProVeg's hands-on training helps kitchen teams to create plant-based meals that children recognise and enjoy. A recent workshop at Gainsborough Primary School brought together cooks from seven local schools and a nursery. They experimented with plant-based recipes, explored new ingredients and talked about how to introduce them in a positive way.

Inside Hackney Council, plant-based tasting events have helped staff to make changes to their everyday eating. Around 400 officers were invited to sample plant-based dishes, swap recipes and reflect on how food choices at work can support their own health, as well as the borough's climate ambitions. Many described the food as "surprising" and "indulgent", challenging assumptions that healthier, lower-carbon options must feel like a compromise.

As co-lead of London Councils' One World Living food work, Hackney has also helped design and champion the London Food Purchasing Commitment. Through this commitment, the council has used its own contracts – including with eight children's centres – to support organisations to serve more healthy meals, including more plant-based meals and less (but better quality) meat.

Newsflash: Right to Grow

On 4th March 2026 Hackney Council passed the 'Right to Grow' motion, the second council in London to do so. The motion opens up unused land for residents to grow food. The aim is to promote healthy food, wellbeing and biodiversity across the borough, while increasing food resilience and directly confronting climate change.

Hackney's residents face some of the highest levels of food poverty across Britain and many have little space to grow. Opening up more land for growing food is a step to help residents grow and access fresh fruit and veg whilst also investing in sustainable food production.

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Building Community Knowledge and Skills

Donna Doherty-Kelly, City and Hackney Public Health



While there are significant challenges in the City and Hackney around access to healthy and affordable food, the local community, including a wide range of individuals, community organisations and local businesses are rising to meet these. What is more, in addition to supporting local people to access healthy and affordable food, food plays an important role in bringing people together and building social capital.

The Hackney Food Network is a coalition of over 40 voluntary and community organisations working to tackle food insecurity and improve food resilience across the borough. These groups

include food banks, food pantries, community supermarkets and social enterprises. Many groups and organisations in this network are set up by local residents. Partners meet monthly to share resources, coordinate food supply chains and share reflections on local work. Hackney CVS provides the administrative backbone and links the network to funding, training opportunities, and support.

While there is not structured food network in the City, there are many organisations providing food support to residents.

Here we feature just a few of these remarkable individuals and organisations who are making a difference to so many of our residents' lives.

We Connect in Shoreditch and the City

Issy Branagan, Shoreditch Trust and Karina Rice, City and Hackney Public Health

For 25 years, Shoreditch Trust has operated on a simple, powerful belief: food brings people together and strengthens communities. From the beginning, their work has focused on the idea that sharing good food can build connections, improve health, and support wellbeing.

On Wednesdays at St Anne's, Hemsworth Street and Fridays at the Aldgate Centre, this mission comes to life through We Connect in Shoreditch and the City, a programme of creative and wellbeing activities for adults and young families residing in the Hackney and City area.

The We Connect in Shoreditch and the City programme involves a series of activities that connect people to good quality food essential for health and wellbeing. Check out some of these activities below.

Community Table

Shoreditch Trust believes nutritious food should be available to everyone, without barriers. Every Wednesday (St Anne's) and Friday (the Aldgate Centre), from 12pm to 2pm, a free vegetarian meal is available, open to all. Beyond a delicious meal, guests can access support from staff and volunteers, find helpful information about local services, and connect with others in their community.

Recipes of Life Sessions

Food is a vessel through which we can reflect on our lives, stories, and cultures. Their Recipes of Life sessions use a narrative 'storytelling' approach to help residents share dishes that connect them to their heritage and values.





Made In Hackney

Sappho Lauder, Love Hackney

"I feel nourished not only by the food, but also by this community," says vegan chef Jordan Bourzig, who is delivering today's free community cooking class at Made In Hackney.

Made In Hackney is a plant-based cookery school and charity. The service provides free weekly community cooking classes, which include a shared meal (eat what you cook!) and time for socialising. Separately, it also delivers about 10,000 free nutritious, plant-based cooked meals to those most in need per year.

Volunteer Peter explains: "Many people come here because they want to learn plant-based cooking or they want to change their diet. Some of them might be lonely and be at home all day – so they come here to socialise."



The above is based on a longer article from Love Hackney. For details please see: www.lovehackney.uk/news/made-in-hackney

Participant Francisca is here for the health benefits of cooking vegan food. She says: "It has already helped me because my husband is a dialysis patient and eating plant-based food has helped with his health."

Chef Jordan teaches the assembled group how to cook a whole roasted cauliflower, with a side salad of peas and broad beans. He explains: "We use only five ingredients for these recipes". For example, "we roasted a whole cauliflower with yoghurt and harissa and added some pomegranates and dukkah on top".

Made In Hackney's courses include family baking classes, northern Indian cuisine and anti-inflammatory seasonal cooking. The meals are cheap and easy to cook and participants are given a recipe card to take home. It also has paid-for 'masterclasses' that usually run on weekends.



Colleen Krenzer, City and Hackney Community Health Champion Programme

We Are The Champions!

Earlier this year, a group of 10 friends from the Turkish community gathered in a home in Hackney. The day, hosted by Nilay Erdem, had food, games, laughter and friendship. All components of a good party.

Nilay, a member of the City and Hackney Community Health Champion programme, created this day to show that a balanced diet doesn't have to be expensive, time-consuming, or overwhelming.

Community Health Champions are trusted representatives of local communities who share insights about barriers to health and services from local people and provide information and advice to them. They participate in training, peer support sessions and forums on health-related topics and use this learning to share tailored health information with their communities.

Nilay used training she previously had attended on diet, nutrition and food poverty to inform the day's activities. She prepared three dishes and explained how they were nutritionally balanced.

Guests then prepared their own plates, based on what they had learned. The day also included a short presentation on balanced eating, a fun interactive food quiz and sample recipes.

While most people understood the ideas around balanced eating, Nilay knew it was important for people to put them into action and to practise making healthy plates of food.

"Many people said, 'Oh, these are so easy to make.' It took the mystery out of how to cook. Afterwards, people kept asking for more recipes."



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City and Hackney talking therapy



Eat Club is a youth food charity running weekly cooking and food education sessions for young people across London, led by professional chefs. Alongside building practical cooking skills, sessions use food as a tool to improve health, reduce social isolation and support employability.

With support from Hackney Council, Eat Club has been delivering family cooking courses in Hackney's family hubs and schools, helping local families build confidence and cooking skills in the kitchen. Rene, Head Teacher at a participating school, said, "We want families to eat fresh, healthy food and this course shows them how to... It builds community spirit, promotes healthy eating and benefits both children and adults."

Families consistently report positive changes at home. Children become more open to trying vegetables, take pride in preparing meals and influence healthier eating habits across the household. Parents describe cooking as a family more often, discovering new foods and reducing waste by using ingredients more creatively. As one young participant put it, "At the cooking club, we often use a mix of vegetables that at first don't look very appetising. But once you try the meals, they taste amazing and you wonder why you ever doubted them."

Eat Club has also delivered courses with Young Hackney's Young Carers service, supporting young people aged 6 to 19 who care for a family member. Daviña, Senior Youth Support and Development Worker, said the sessions help young carers

"choose healthier food within their budget instead of cheaper, less healthy options", while also "building their confidence" through learning new skills.

The sessions also provide valuable time for young carers to focus on their own interests, build independence and connect with others facing similar challenges.



Eat Club: A Recipe for Success

Liza Konash, Eat Club



These case studies, highlighting the experiences of young carers and participating families, are featured in full in Eat Club's impact report: <https://canva.link/1fhj6zxgt9m6fcn>

Seed-To-Spoon Cooking and Learning

Zoe McIntyre, Hackney School of Food



Hackney School of Food is an award-winning food education hub in Lower Clapton. It offers a range of free and low-cost educational programmes for schools, families and local community groups to teach them how to improve their health and wellbeing through hands-on food growing and cooking.

Working in partnership with four Hackney primary schools (Kingsmead, Mandeville, Gayhurst and Grasmere) and the charity 'Chefs in Schools', Hackney School of Food transformed a former caretaker's house into a teaching kitchen in 2020. Where there was once tarmac, there is now a thriving garden filled with vegetable beds, fruit trees, flowers, chickens and bees.

The classes at School of Food offer a 'seed-to-spoon' learning experience, where participants

grow, cook and eat food together. There are a range of classes and programmes for residents to get involved in, including curriculum-linked school workshops, after-school and holiday provision, garden-based volunteering and community classes for adults. A family cooking programme was also introduced to help parents struggling with increasing food costs.

In the last year alone, Hackney School of Food had 11,060 visits, mostly from Hackney residents. They currently work with 37 schools and nine community partners.

One recent six-month programme for 50 parents and children, offered hands-on cooking sessions, with



take-home ingredient boxes. Recipes focused on affordable ingredients. One participant said: "I get these ingredients at the food bank. It's nice to know how to put these together."

Families also spoke about how the programme rekindled their confidence in cooking from scratch: "Seeing how much my girls enjoyed it... it's re-inspired me to cook." After the programme, 75% of parents said they intended to cook the recipes again at home.

It's programmes like these that show how practical, joyful food education can help families build lasting confidence, skills and healthy habits around food.



Katie Graves, Welcome Hackney

Flavours and Tastes of Home



Flavours and Taste of Home are funded by Welcome Hackney and delivered by Shoreditch Trust and Manor House Development Trust. They support people seeking asylum in Hackney to access healthy and affordable food through regular community cooking sessions. These sessions provide opportunities for participants to access culturally appropriate ingredients and prepare, enjoy and share meals of their choice in a welcoming and supportive environment.

"I missed traditional dishes I used to get back home that I don't get in the hotel. Here I can eat foods I hadn't in a year"

"I am part of a community and can cook my own food. I want to thank you all so much for this opportunity"

People living in asylum accommodation in Hackney often have no access to cooking facilities, are prohibited from working and receive very limited financial support (£9.95 per week). This makes accessing fresh, nutritious food extremely difficult. The 'Flavours of Home' and 'Taste of Home' projects therefore provide a vital space where participants have the agency to cook meals that reflect their cultural traditions and dietary preferences.

Beyond increasing access to healthy food, the sessions utilise

food as a powerful tool to bring people together. Participants develop cooking and language skills, build confidence and form social connections, which help reduce isolation and support both mental and physical wellbeing. Many participants go on to volunteer with the Community Kitchens projects, further enhancing their skills, confidence and sense of belonging.

By combining practical support with opportunities for social connection, the projects not only address barriers to healthy and affordable food but also foster community cohesion. They also contribute to Hackney's commitment as a Borough of Sanctuary, ensuring sanctuary-seekers in the borough can feel safe, belong and thrive in Hackney.

Ensuring Access to Food for All

From Surplus to Solidarity: How The Felix Project is Rescuing Food and Building Better Communities

Jennifer Millmore, City and Hackney Public Health

The Felix Project rescues good, surplus food from the food industry that cannot be sold and would otherwise go to waste. It is then delivered to hundreds of food banks, charities, primary schools and holiday programmes in London, including 50 across the City and Hackney. The Felix Project's vision is that good food is never wasted and no-one goes hungry.

The food that The Felix Project distributes is high-quality and nutritious, with the majority being fresh fruit and vegetables. Food is collected or received from hundreds of suppliers, including supermarkets, wholesalers, farms and restaurants. Through a new service, Felix Multibank, non-food items such as toiletries, baby products, cleaning goods and bedding can also be collected by community organisations and distributed within their local communities.



Photo credit: Big T

In 2025 in City and Hackney, The Felix Project delivered 846 tonnes of food, enough for over 2 million meals. About 22,000 City and Hackney residents were supported by the project each week, saving residents an estimated £3.35 million over the course of the year. About a third of the food went to food banks, with another third to community meal projects. Other community beneficiaries included lunch clubs, food pantries and soup kitchens.

On top of the financial savings for residents, improved diet and environmental benefits, many of the projects supported by the Felix Project also have an important role in improving social connections and reducing loneliness. Most signpost or refer people to support and advice, which can improve residents' health, wellbeing and financial resilience more broadly.

Many of the other projects covered In this feature are supported by The Felix Project.



Inside the City FOOD Club by Family Action

Karina Rice, City and Hackney Public Health



Did you know there is a hidden gem tucked inside the Artizan Street Library?

The City FOOD Club is transforming how we think about grocery shopping and community support. For just £5 per visit, members can select roughly £15 worth of groceries such as fresh meat, fresh fruit and vegetables, canned goods and cereals.

With friendly staff always ready to help you pick the best of the day's haul (and the occasional translated recipe pack to inspire your next meal) it's a simple way to stretch the household budget while reducing food waste.

Since August 2025, the club has added Friday evening slots in addition to the Thursday 1pm sessions, making it perfect for anyone who lives, works, or studies in the City of London.

But the food is just the beginning. The City FOOD Club provides a wrap-around service.

- ✓ The FOOD Club team work closely with another Family Action service Fuel Your Finances, who have recently been giving out free slow cookers, blankets and carbon monoxide detectors, alongside advice and information on topics like gas, budgeting, using your slow cooker and the Priority Services Register.
- ✓ You can also get housing advice or occasionally chat with guest experts like the Green Doctors and the Gloji Smokefree City and Hackney service.
- ✓ Even the kids are looked after—during half-term, there's an arts and crafts table with snacks to keep them busy while you shop.

As the City FOOD Club Coordinator says, "We are here to listen and signpost if needed".



WANT TO VOLUNTEER?

The City FOOD Club welcomes new corporate and community volunteers. Through Family Action, volunteers gain access to training and an opportunity to build their CV's. (See Directory for contact information)



City and Hackney Community Wellbeing Team

Jennifer Millmore, City and Hackney Public Health

One frequent public health challenge is that people who need support the most can be less likely to come forward to seek help. Reasons can include a lack of trust, lack of awareness and complex lives, that make it hard to keep scheduled appointments.

Louis Miller and his City and Hackney Community Wellbeing team, along with their mobile support van, are tackling this challenge head on. They go directly to communities across the City and Hackney, targeting areas that experience high levels of deprivation and offer a range of health and holistic support.

All residents are welcome, but especially those people experiencing homelessness, struggling with alcohol and substance use, asylum seekers, sex workers, members of the Gypsy Roma Traveller community and those in contact with the justice system.

The team provides healthy free food five days a week, distributing over 100 portions of freshly made meals and other food items from The Felix Project, along with hot drinks and a friendly chat.

Food is given to anyone in need without question, even if an individual chooses not to engage with any of the other services

offered. However, often, the offer of food helps the team engage with some of City and Hackney's most excluded residents.

Louis says: "Offering food to residents has been a great incentive to encourage people to sit down and chat with the team. Somebody can come to the van and ask for help from one service, then get a warm meal while they're waiting to be seen and it gives them time to chat to other services. Also, there are people who don't come for support but may be in need, or have a neighbour who is struggling. These people can also take them some healthy food, no questions asked".

Hackney's Supporting Transition and Empowering People Service (STEPS), offers support to people that struggle to engage with mainstream services.

➔ Hackney [Hackney STEPS to find out more](#)

If you're struggling with:

- Mental ill-health
- Substance use
- Homelessness
- Criminal justice involvement

It's a Party at Morningside Community Centre Pantry

Jennifer Millmore, City and Hackney Public Health

The sun is shining, music is booming and people are gathering with anticipation. Bill and Ryan are at the door, waiting to sign people in. It is Thursday, the time is five minutes before 1pm, at the Morningside Community Centre. The food pantry is just about to open.

At the food pantry, which runs every Thursday, local residents come, pay £5 and they can choose a selection of food items. Once a month toiletries are also available for £3. Nicolette, who started the initiative with Richard, stocks the pantry with food from local supermarkets, using these funds, alongside a subsidy from government funding. This allows residents to buy great value food.

Nicolette is an expert at knowing how to pick the best value food, something she notes some residents find difficult. She also comments that it is important that everyone pays something, as this makes them value it more.

Alongside the pantry is a foodbank, supplied by The Felix Project, which residents can register for following an assessment. However, nobody in need is ever turned away and if a resident has not been assessed yet, staff will make up a food package at the end with food that has not been taken.

The community spirit is palpable. Elvina, a volunteer, talks about how the community centre, the food pantry and food bank have a real family feel. Staff know



clients by name and everyone is friendly and chatty. Shopping trolleys are provided, so people get the real shopping experience. For some residents who live alone, the opportunity to socialise is as important as the food and crucial for their mental wellbeing.

While there is a wide range of fruit and vegetables available, staff tell us that often residents give away their vegetables to others, as many do not have the equipment to prepare or cook them.

The youth club, which runs every night, was the catalyst for the food projects to get started. During the holidays the young people will often volunteer at the pantry, giving them great insight into the challenges many people face around food. It also allows them to start giving back to their community from an early age, which they seem to really enjoy. Previously, Nicolette has taken the young people to supermarkets to help teach them how to choose affordable food, for example frozen chicken instead of fresh.

The youth club provides many opportunities to get active, including tennis and wheelchair basketball, with the rackets and wheelchairs provided. The community centre also hosts box fit and chair based exercise classes, with all activities run by volunteers from the local community. Nicolette says it is all about "the community supporting the community". She describes how "people in social housing are often overlooked and underestimated".

Nourishing the Local Community at Woodberry Aid Community Food Shop

Karina Rice, City and Hackney Public Health

In the heart of one of London's most diverse neighbourhoods, Woodberry Aid is redefining what a food bank can be. Founded by Euphemia in 2020 at the height of the pandemic, this community food shop has evolved from a crisis response into a vital lifeline for Turkish, Caribbean, African and Asian residents.

Woodberry Aid prioritises culturally appropriate nutrition. For a flat £10 fee each time they visit, members access a bounty of fresh produce—from scotch bonnets and green bananas to long Turkish peppers and bok choy.

"It's more than a community food shop; it's a culturally appropriate community food shop," Euphemia explains. "If people don't recognise the food, they won't eat it. We want to provide what they actually use in their kitchens." By sourcing through partners like Streetbox and the Felix Project, Woodberry

Aid provides £40–£50 worth of groceries for the £10 fee.

The shop's real secret ingredient, however, is its volunteers. Many were once beneficiaries who stepped up when post-lockdown volunteer numbers dwindled.

"It's like family," says one volunteer. "We're not just about food, we're more than that."

For volunteers like 87-year-old Sandra, the shop offers a sense of purpose. Euphemia uses the shop as a training ground, giving members responsibilities—like operations management—to build confidence and skills that lead to employment. "People with mental health struggles who didn't talk now have a reason to get out of bed," Euphemia notes. "They feel empowered."

Despite facing challenges like constant relocation and a need for more funding, the spirit at the



Woodberry Aid Community Food Shop remains unshakable. Rain, hail or shine, Woodberry Aid Community Food Shop proves that while food fills the stomach, community fills the heart.





How Three Lunch Hubs are Feeding the Soul of Hackney Wick

Karina Rice, City and Hackney Public Health

In the heart of Hackney Wick, the air fills with the aroma of home cooking and the hum of neighbourly chatter every week. Thanks to Wick Award, three dedicated community lunch hubs have become the neighbourhood's beating heart, serving up 130 hot meals weekly to anyone coming through their doors.

These hubs are powered by the people, for the people. Local volunteers from Gascoyne One Tenancy and Resident Association, Gascoyne Two Community Centre Over 50s Club and St Mary of Eton church lead the charge, turning surplus food from The Felix Project into nutritious plates of comfort.

Located in fully accessible halls on or near local estates, the hubs prioritise reaching those in high-need areas. But the invitation is universal. Widely promoted through friends at Age UK, Hackney Migrant Centre and Citizens Advice, the hubs ensure there is a seat at the table for everyone.

At these hubs, the support doesn't stop when the plate is cleared. They host a range of activities to benefit residents by sharing key information and advice, including: connecting with social prescribers, smoking cessation sessions, access to NHS Talking Therapies, debt advice, energy advice and support, and healthy cooking sessions.

Perhaps the most inspiring element of these lunches is their role as an 'incubator' for local action. These hubs have evolved into a vital platform for community voices.

Sharon from From Gascoyne 2 told us "People come for the chat, to make new friends and to find out what's going on. There's nothing better than welcoming people with a good dinner".

Jim says "I get my three dinners a week and rely on the lunch clubs to eat well, as well as taking home the scraps for my dog".

The Pantry at Stamford Hill

Jennifer Millmore, City and Hackney Public Health

In a drizzly morning, my colleague Karina and I visited The Pantry. Tucked away in the Stamford Hill

Estate Community Centre, The Pantry, run by St Giles Trust, offers healthy, sustainable food to local people experiencing poverty and food insecurity. Excess food is donated by The Felix Project and other suppliers, then sold at a low cost to residents.

Arriving at the community centre, we were greeted by warm, friendly staff and a colourful array of food, toiletries, pet food and household supplies. Rebecca, who has worked at The Pantry since 2023 explained that they never know what or how much is going to arrive, but there is always a good selection, including lots of fresh fruit and vegetables.

The Felix Project also uses ingredients to make some pre-prepared meals, which Rebecca tells us are always very popular.



They are especially helpful to residents who may not have facilities or time to cook from scratch. Being located in the community also means that The Pantry is very convenient for local people.

Residents pay a subscription of £4.50 per week and a simple sticker system is used to communicate how many of each item residents can take. High value or scarce items are often limited to one per person,

to ensure there is enough for everyone. For perishable and plentiful items, residents are encouraged to take more of these to prevent food waste.

Rebecca is also able to discuss affordable recipe ideas with customers and provides wider advice and support where possible. For example, she has helped with some residents' applications for a new fridge/freezer and signposts to other local resources.

Note: after this article was written, the Stamford Hill pantry unfortunately had to close. At the time of writing they were looking for a new venue.

SESSIONS FOR SENIORS

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BETTER

Hackney

FROM £2.45 PER SESSION

Food Bank Demand Up 300%

Jenna Fansa, Fundraiser Hackney Foodbanks



Photo credit: Big T

Hackney Foodbank has been at the forefront of alleviating hunger in the community for the past 13 years.

Our charity, which provides emergency food for an average of 680 people a week, has six food distribution centres and a mobile food bank. During the school holidays, we provide supermarket vouchers to families, so children don't go hungry.

Two years ago, Hackney Foodbank launched a caseworker service. We help visitors with benefits and grants and refer them to an expert debt advisor. The aim is to help people on to better situations – ultimately ending the need for food banks.

Demand for our food bank is 300% higher than it was before the pandemic, as people in Hackney grapple with high rents, a lack of affordable housing,

stagnating wages, rising food and fuel costs and a benefits system that has failed to keep up with inflation.

Two thirds of children and over half of older people in our borough live in income-deprived homes. That's the second highest level in all of England. We regularly meet parents who go hungry so their children can eat. Yet we're determined not to be a sticking plaster. Our caseworkers are changing people's lives, ensuring they're accessing all the support they need. Around half of the people the caseworkers support never need to return to us.

In an average week in Hackney, almost two thirds of emergency food goes to families with children. In 2025 the food bank supported over 7,200 people, providing the equivalent of 302,571 emergency meals (compared with 75,330 meals in 2019).



Photo credit: Big T

Britannia Leisure and The Felix Project Partnership

Allie Nelkon, Better Leisure Services

In 2025, Hackney's Britannia Leisure Centre in Shoreditch Park partnered with The Felix Project and has been hosting monthly 'Felix Fresh' events since. The Felix Project brings 12 pallets of food to the leisure centre for each event, including lots of fresh fruit and vegetables. Over 200 families have collected food at every event so far. Local volunteers and leisure centre staff help unload deliveries and distribute food.

While the high attendance figures are positive, this also reflects the scale of local demand for healthy, affordable food. Given their success, Britannia Leisure Centre plans to continue to host these events on a monthly basis.



Idia's Community Kitchen Sappho Lauder, Love Hackney

On a relentlessly cold and wet day, a long queue of people snakes its way outside Fellows Court Community Centre, E2, where trestle tables have been set up. The tables are piled high with fresh fruit and vegetables, cereals, bread, tins of food and delicious home cooked dishes for people to take away.

The dishes are made by Aina from Idia's Community Kitchen, a Hackney charity that provides free food to about 800 vulnerable people every week. Food is available every single day from 10:00 to 11am at Fellows Court Community Centre, including during the holidays.

The team also prepare and distribute food in four community locations throughout the week, using a converted van, generously donated by the Irish Traveller community. The charity's aim is to reduce food waste and tackle poverty in the community.

Aina explains: "I do this because my background is all about giving. In Nigeria my mum would cook big pots of food because she said when you sit together to eat as a community, you never hate". She says how the "van is such a gift. There's a proper cooker, two microwaves, a fridge, a freezer and a sink".

As well as offering food, Idia's Community Kitchen has provided essential items to hundreds of people experiencing homelessness, poverty, or isolation and signposts people to organisations that can support them.

The charity, which has now been running for seven years, was set up in memory of Aina's daughter who tragically passed away at the age of 10. She and her mum used to take warm drinks and snacks to homeless people together, befriending many of them, so to name the charity after her was very fitting.



A Humdinger of a Soup Kitchen

Jennifer Millmore, City and Hackney Public Health

Humdingers is more than just a catering business, it's a community built around good food and looking after people. At its heart, it's a business with a purpose: to help end hunger in London.

Based in Hoxton, Humdingers runs a soup kitchen that has become a steady source of support for many in the local area. Open Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons, the team serves hot, nourishing meals to anyone who needs one - no questions asked. What started during the early days of the pandemic has grown into something much bigger, with the kitchen now serving over 1,000 meals each week.

Founder Robert launched the soup kitchen in March 2020 in response to the growing need for accessible food support.



His work during this time was recognised with a British Empire Medal for services supporting the National Health Service and the wider community during COVID-19, which he received from Queen Elizabeth II.

Alongside the soup kitchen, Humdingers also operates a number of cafés across London. A large part of the profits from these cafés

goes directly back into funding the soup kitchen, helping ensure it can continue running and supporting those who rely on it.

At its core, Humdingers is about creating a space where everyone feels welcome. As Robert puts it, "Everyone is welcome - our aim is to feed as many people as we can who need a hot meal."



Market Value

Jennifer Millmore, City and Hackney Public Health

Hackney has a number of thriving markets, which are a hugely valued local resource and also reflect some of the rich and diverse local culture. I sat down with **Louise Kamara, Markets Festival and Events Manager** to find out more.

What do you think makes Hackney's markets so special?

Each market has its own distinct 'accent' and unique selling points. Ridley Road, for example, has a strong Afro-Caribbean focus, offering items like large Caribbean avocados that you simply can't find in standard supermarkets. Hoxton Street is a very traditional market and Broadway Market sells crafts and hot food. During the week, we have lunch markets around Clifton Street and they cater for office crowds. Each market has a strong sense of community.

Do you think markets make it easier for families to shop for healthy food compared to traditional supermarkets?

Absolutely. Markets are highly accessible just by being right there on the street. The produce is visually appealing, which inherently draws people

to healthy options. Some people might prefer traditional supermarkets for their sanitised environment and standardised sizing. However, there is absolutely nothing wrong with these unusually sized fruits and vegetables and that's exactly why people can shop so cheaply at the market.

Are there any specific barriers that prevent people from buying fresh produce?

Cost is less of a barrier here because the food is so affordable. However, a lack of cooking skills or equipment can be a barrier when it comes to vegetables. At Ridley Road, there are some ingredients like yam and okra, where you need to know what to do with them. So I feel some of the ingredients available might make it appear as a bit of a 'cook's market'. But there's plenty of non-specialist produce too.

I also worry that the younger generation don't cook as much. It would seem that way looking at the market, which is sad. We are making an effort to keep our markets attractive to younger generations, such as our markets for traders under 25.

If a customer at Ridley Road market had £5 and wanted to make a healthy, filling meal for their family, what ingredients would you recommend?

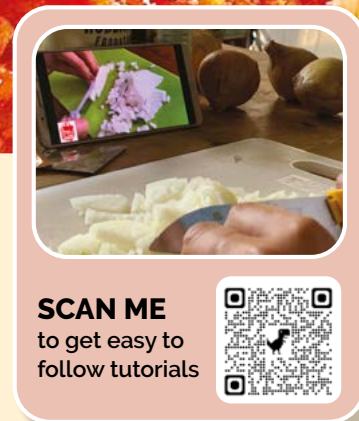
I'd recommend the ingredients for a mixed vegetable stew. Carrots and potatoes are incredibly cheap and nutritious and almost everyone loves them. I'd suggest tomatoes for the base, along with garlic, onions and sweet potatoes. If they have any money left over, they could add beans, fish or meat for protein - also cheaply available. You can get a lot of vegetables for £5 at the market.

Finally, beyond physical health, what else do markets bring to the community?

There are massive mental health benefits. Markets encourage people to get outside and connect with the real world. The direct, personal interaction with regular sellers is vital, especially for people who might be isolated. To build on this engagement, we're currently developing interactive, skills-based games and crafting stations with 'phones off, hands on' banners to get people active and increase the time they spend enjoying the market.

Why Bags of Taste is Different

Alicia Weston, Bags of Taste



Are you finding your food bills spiralling out of control? Would you like to eat tastier food that is better for you without breaking the bank? Are you on income related benefits?



The problem often isn't 'learning to cook' (many of us can already do that!). The real problem is everything else that gets in the way – like expensive ingredients, not having the right kit, or being unable to get to the shops.

Bags of Taste is a cooking course that makes home-cooked food a reality, not a dream. Here's how it works:

- **Everything delivered to your door:** We'll send you the ingredients and the equipment you need to make three filling, delicious meals, along with the instructions for FREE.
- **Support in your own home:** We help you over the phone or WhatsApp. We'll answer questions and send you little videos to show you what to do. You can cook at a time that suits you and your family can join in too.

- **True low costs and habits that stick:** The meals you'll make cost about £1 a portion, so you can make them again and again. We even tell you exactly where to buy the cheapest ingredients in your local area.
- **A course for everyone:** whether you are a confident cook who wants to slash your food bills, or a beginner who wants to start from scratch - we have a course for you.

One year after our course, most participants are eating fewer takeaways, feel healthier and are saving almost £1,000 a year. We are here to help you take control of your health and your budget, one meal at a time.

Nourishing the Next Generation

Sherine Addai, Early Years, Early Help and Wellbeing and Karina Rice, City and Hackney Public Health

Building Healthy Habits from the Very Beginning

In Hackney's diverse and vibrant community, too many families with young children are feeling the pressure of rising food costs, which is having a real impact on nutrition during the most critical years of a child's life. Good food in the first five years shapes how children grow and arrive at school ready to learn.

Getting the right support to families early is essential to ensure children have a healthy start before they begin school. Good nutrition in the early years plays an important role in children's growth, development and readiness to learn, but many families are facing increasing pressure from the rising cost of food.

That's where **Sherine Addai, Hackney's Healthy Early Years Coordinator**, comes in. Working across a busy network of early years settings, childminders, Children & Family Hubs and

public health partners, Sherine connects professionals and families with trusted guidance and practical resources to promote healthy eating, good nutrition and access to affordable food. Her reach is significant. Through fortnightly bulletins, alongside meetings, forums, and health promotion events, she ensures the information is current, evidence-based and accessible.

Through the Healthy Early Years London (HEYL) programme, Sherine helps providers to incorporate health and wellbeing into everyday practice. This includes working with HENRY (see page 33) on menu reviews and nutrition advice, and promoting access to Healthy Start vitamins and Alexandra Rose food vouchers to help eligible families access healthy food, including fresh fruit and vegetables. She also signposts early years settings and childminders to Veg Power's



Photo Credit: James O. Jenkins, GLA

Love Your Lunchbox resources for healthy and affordable packed lunch choices, and First Steps Nutrition, another tool which provides comprehensive guidance on eating well in the early years.

To ensure no family is left behind, Sherine manages the Our Journey Birth to Five website, a go-to guide for parents and carers covering every step of their child's health and development from pregnancy to school age, including breastfeeding, introducing food, healthy snacks, mealtimes, growth, learning, and play. She also shares updates through social media, and is planning community stalls to reach families directly with the information and support they need.

Sherine's role bridges the gap between health, education, and family support, ensuring every child in Hackney builds healthy habits and lays the foundation to grow, learn, and thrive.



Photo Credit: James O. Jenkins, GLA

Everything's Coming Up Roses



Jennifer Millmore, City and Hackney Public Health

The Alexandra Rose charity is transforming the way Hackney's residents eat, 'one Rose Voucher at a time!' The charity provides Rose Vouchers to families on low incomes with young children. The vouchers can be spent on fresh fruit and vegetables sold by approved market traders and independent grocers. They are distributed via local children's centres.

Fresh fruit and vegetables are essential for good health but can be some of the most expensive foods per calorie. The Rose vouchers ensure that families never have to cut out fruit and vegetables from their weekly shop. The vouchers also allow residents to choose their own quality, culturally appropriate fruit and

vegetables. Additionally, every Rose Voucher spent puts money back into the local food economy.

One participant describes how "Rose Vouchers just make life a little bit easier" and even when money is very tight "I can get through and make some simple meals for my kids". Another told us "I shop with my vouchers at Dalston Market. I can get what I need to make the fresh Turkish meals".

The programme started in Hackney in 2014. Since then, it has worked with 1,196 local families and 2,093 children, enabling £420,382 to be

spent on fresh fruit and vegetables. Of the vouchers given out, 95% are spent, indicating that the vouchers are needed and appreciated by families.

Evidence suggests that the model increases fruit and vegetable intake by around three portions per day. The percentage of children eating 'five-a-day' rose from 7% before they received the vouchers to 64% after getting them. Most families report reduced stress and anxiety around money and improvements to health.



A Visit to the HENRY Starting Solids Workshop

Karina Rice, City and Hackney Public Health



On a sunny Tuesday afternoon, I visited Daubeney Children and Family Hub to observe a HENRY

Starting Solids workshop in action. Through their 'Best Start with HENRY' service in the City and Hackney, the team empowers local communities by supporting families of children aged 0-5 with expert-led programmes and workshops.

The room was buzzing with 14 parents, carers and their 4-6 month-old babies. They were ready for a two-hour session to equip them with knowledge and confidence to transition their

little ones to solid food. The session started with a simple prompt: 'Pair up and share how you feel about starting solids.'

The air immediately filled with honest conversation. Emotions ranged from excitement for those first messy milestones to the worries about choking or 'getting it wrong.' This exercise quickly transformed the hub into a safe, judgement-free space where parents and carers felt comfortable asking the tough questions.

A major focus for the expert facilitators was cutting through the social media misinformation.

They focused on evidence-based 'when and why' essentials, teaching parents and carers how to identify true developmental signs of readiness versus the myths that often lead to starting too early.

It was clear that initiatives like HENRY are vital for equipping new parents and carers with the information and reassurance they need to give their child a healthy start in life.



Get help to buy healthy food and milk with NHS Healthy Start

Apply online at www.healthystart.nhs.uk





Feeding the Future in City and Hackney's Schools

Jennifer Millmore, City and Hackney Public Health

With the rising cost of living, schools can be important hubs for ensuring children have access to healthy, affordable food. From ensuring school meals are nutritious, to integrating food education into the curriculum, local educators are proving that the school environment can be a powerful tool for health.

For this feature, I met with **Kay Richardson, Healthy Schools Coordinator**, who told me about some of the amazing work happening in local schools to overcome the challenges young people are facing in accessing healthy and



affordable food. Kay described how "incredible City and Hackney's schools are, how well they understand the local need and how responsive they are".

Kay's role is to work with all of City and Hackney's schools to improve the health and wellbeing outcomes of children, staff and families. She hosts

regular meetings with schools to share good practice and resources that are available - such as ProVeg, a charity that supports schools to adopt healthier, more sustainable, plant-based menus.

Catering Challenges

Kay described some of the challenges schools face in providing school meals, for example around catering contracts. In Hackney, the local authority does not hold the contracts for school food catering. Instead, individual schools or federations hold these. This can present challenges when schools are locked into long contracts, but caterers are not meeting food nutrition and quality requirements. Holding all school catering contracts would give Hackney Council more power to hold catering companies to account and enforce contractual requirements, as well as giving them better purchasing power due to economies of scale.

Where concerns are identified, Kay and her public health colleagues meet with the caterers to address these. Kay has also added questions into the Healthy Schools London awards to help her understand what actions schools are taking around school catering standards.



New national school food standards are also under consultation, which include measures to increase fruit and vegetable availability and limit highly processed foods. This will be supported by improved monitoring of compliance.

Another challenge is that some local schools only have 30 minutes for lunch. This creates a significant logistical challenge and there is huge pressure to physically get all the children through in such a tight window between lessons. The traditional, noisy dining hall can also be overwhelming for some children. For some students, especially for those who are neurodiverse, the noisy and chaotic environment can make them uncomfortable and reluctant to try new foods.



Interventions

Healthy Schools London awards

The Healthy Schools London awards recognise the achievements of schools in supporting the health and wellbeing of their pupils, for example, through healthy eating and physical activity initiatives. There are three levels of awards that schools can earn: bronze, silver and gold. This tiered structure helps schools to progressively build on their policies and practices over time. Part of Kay's role is to support schools with this work.



In City and Hackney: seven schools have achieved a bronze award, Seven silver and six gold, with 36 in progress. City Academy Secondary School in Hackney is in process of submitting their bronze award and will be the first Secondary school in City and Hackney to achieve this since the awards relaunched in September. For some schools, the awards are a way to recognise the excellent work they are already doing. For others it provides guidance on what they can start to implement.

The awards framework also provides a mechanism to collate and share evidence of local good practice and effective interventions between schools and can be used to demonstrate good practice to Ofsted.



Free school meals

Free school meals are aimed at reducing food insecurity and improving children's nutrition. Evidence suggests that free school meal interventions do indeed improve nutrition as well as academic performance.

Nationally, children whose parents receive specific benefits receive free school meals. In Hackney, 45% of all pupils meet these criteria for free school meals and in the City of London it is 23%. This is compared to the London average of 26%.⁽⁶⁾

However, thanks to additional funding from the Mayor of London, free school meals have been made available for all children in London primary schools, in full-time education, no matter their financial situation.

This school meal can be very important and is the only warm, nutritious meal some children receive each day. As Kay notes, "the goal is to make every school meal as optimal as possible by reducing sugar, fat and salt, ensuring that for every child, the one opportunity for a warm, healthy meal is a high-quality one".

Breakfast clubs

A new, funded breakfast club initiative began for 10 Hackney schools in April. It is part of the government's Best Start Free Breakfast Clubs programme, where children are provided with a free, nutritious breakfast before school. It will complement existing school-led breakfast clubs.

Early evidence from the Best Start Free Breakfast Clubs programme found improved attendance, attainment and behaviour, while annually parents saved £450 and were able to put in an extra 95 hours of work on average.

While some school breakfast clubs target the families who need it most, the Best Start breakfast clubs are free for everyone. One advantage of free-to-all clubs is that they help break down the stigma attached to accessing free meals.

Some schools also run sports clubs and activities before their breakfast clubs, which can improve attendance and increase children's physical activity levels (another important driver of positive health and wellbeing).

TastEd

TastEd offers teachers support, training and resources to deliver a range of simple taste education lessons, tailored to the English National Curriculum. Some Hackney primary schools have adopted this approach and are carrying out their own lessons. In a typical TastEd lesson, children are given vegetables or fruits and asked about what they see, smell, touch, hear and taste. This encourages them to use their senses to explore food.

Milfield School has dedicated three days per school year to these TastEd sessions. Teachers use thoughtful language, such as asking if a child has a "brave mouth", to encourage curiosity and create a low-pressure environment where children are excited to try new things. When tasting raw ginger, one reception child described it as tasting "like a volcano".

Milfield School also integrated TastEd techniques into a Year 5 history lesson, focusing on wartime recipes. They used the sensory exploration method to identify ingredients such as swede and parsley. The students learned about the history of food during the Second World War and ultimately learned how to cook a soup from that time period.

Working towards a school food policy

Gainsborough Primary School is aiming to be the first school in Hackney to create its own whole school integrated healthy food policy informed by their staffing team. This policy will set out how they will incorporate food and healthy eating across the school and in all its subjects.

The school has its own poly tunnels, which they use to teach food growing on-site, as well as a source of fruit and vegetables. They use a 'community kitchen' to teach every child from reception to year six how to cook, ensuring they leave school with confidence and expanded food vocabulary. The school has held celebration food events, where children cook for their families as a means of family engagement and pride. All school staff are also trained in the TastEd method described earlier.

Food challenges for Children with special educational needs

There is a growing concern regarding the increasing number of children who are neurodiverse or have special educational needs and the impact this can have on their diets. Some schools report that children only want to eat familiar, and often plain, foods like pasta or rice without sauce.

One special school, Stormant House, reduces reluctance to eat certain foods through a whole-school approach. They have their own chef, who cooks from scratch and understands the children's needs. Staff also model healthy eating, with senior leadership sitting at lunch tables with children, to encourage them to eat a variety of foods. The school does not allow packed lunches, instead promoting the school meal offer. Children refusing to eat foods, especially those that are new or not very plain, is now much less common.

Bite Back

Bite Back is a charity that is helping to put power into the hands of students and in City and Hackney schools. It provides £500 grants to secondary schools, empowering students to become advocates for better school food environments.

They work with students to find out what food-related issues are impacting their school and support them to lead a campaign to improve these, for example, helping students challenge catering companies around the quality of their offer.



Hoxton Garden: Going for Gold

Kay Richardson, Hackney Education



Hoxton Garden Primary School has already achieved a silver Healthy Schools London Award and is well on its way towards the gold award, focusing on improving pupils' diets and supporting healthy weight. The school serves a relatively deprived community, which creates particular challenges for achieving a healthy diet.

The school aims to instil positive eating habits within the school environment. Year 6 children are trained to help at lunch and do so on a rota system. They support younger children to try new foods, eat a few more mouthfuls, drink water, use the salad bars and raise their hands before clearing their plates. This role helps give children a sense of

belonging and supports them to give back to the school community.

The school also routinely encourages good table manners, believing that the dining hall is another part of the learning environment. James, who leads the Healthy schools work at Hoxton Garden Primary School, explained how it began. "We made lunches a main focus after noticing that many families lacked the space for a dining table. During school meal times, children were using either a spoon or their hands to eat, not sitting on seats, but wandering around at lunchtimes".

The project has had a hugely positive effect. Teachers report that children are now more willing to try new foods, and transitions from lunchtimes back



to the classroom are calmer. Children surveyed say this has improved their learning and knowledge about healthy eating.

Hoxton Garden Primary School also works with 'Grow Your Own Playground' to help embed food education into classes. Through this programme, children learn how to grow food on site with the school gardener, linking food education to the curriculum.

Gainsborough Primary School's Collaboration with Low Carbon Chinatown

Stephanie Li, Climate, Sustainability & Environmental Services



very start. Children explored where their food comes from, what makes a 'low carbon' meal and how traditional dishes can be adapted without losing their character. Out in the school's food-growing polytunnels, pupils helped grow vegetables such as tomatoes and cucumbers. These were then harvested and brought to the kitchen to make pickles, sauces and simple side dishes.

The project ended with two Low Carbon Children's Banquets. One for 100 residents and partners and another at the school with 60 children, staff, council officers and Ling. The banquets included the dishes that the children had grown and made, and the recipes were added to a Low Carbon Digital Cookbook.

The meal became a space to listen as well as to talk about favourite flavours, family traditions and small, everyday food choices that can support healthier lives and a more sustainable future.

Created with artist Ling Tan, Low Carbon Chinatown is an award-winning environmental art initiative. They create interactive installations, food growing workshops and low-carbon Chinese banquets to address the climate crisis. East and South-East Asian food traditions have become a starting point for conversations about diet, identity and climate, showing that

climate-friendly food can also be deeply rooted and celebratory.

Gainsborough Primary School has become central to Hackney's Low Carbon Chinatown project, showing how climate action can grow from the classroom upwards.

Working alongside Ling Tan, Hackney Council's climate team invited teachers and pupils into the creative process from the

POWER UP!

A new 12-week programme for children, young people and their families.

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Rising to the Challenge

What's Next - Suggestions from the Community

Jennifer Millmore, City and Hackney Public Health



From codesign workshops to visiting community projects in action, City and Hackney Public Health team has undertaken a wide range of engagement activities over the past 12 months. We have listened to residents, partners and wider stakeholders and have summarised some of the key themes below. For many of these, work has already begun to address them. Hearing the community perspective shows how important it is that we continue building and strengthening that work. At the end of this article, Donna Doherty-Kelly, Principal Public Health Specialist leading on healthy weight, responds to this feedback.

- Information and education for residents**
Community members requested centralised and easy to understand information on local food banks and pantries, as well as healthy eating advice and resources. There is also a lot of interest in a local recipe sharing hub.

Residents requested opportunities to increase their cooking skills and knowledge. Chef training was suggested for people running lunch clubs, to support them to cook healthy food for their communities.
- Community infrastructure and social connection**
As the previous pages have clearly shown, there are many fantastic projects taking place

- locally that bring people together around food, but there is both a need and demand for more. Suggestions include, more opportunities for free or subsidised community meals, a food pantry in every community centre, and public events to encourage interest in healthy food. The importance of having culturally appropriate food at food banks, pantries and community events also came up frequently.

Residents also want more 'grow-your-own' opportunities, such as community garden schemes and making use of unused council growing beds or space.
- Food distribution**
While initiatives such as the Felix Project have a huge impact locally in redistributing surplus food, partners believe there is still a lot of untapped potential. They call for more businesses to share their surplus food and for improved transportation and logistics to get the food to the community hubs, where residents can collect it.

Suggestions also include a messaging group to broadcast when ad hoc surplus food is available to supply to residents.

Ensuring that all food distributor staff and volunteers are trained in signposting and basic advice could also support these community assets to be even more beneficial to attendees.

- Businesses**
Community representatives suggest that some local food-related businesses could do more, especially the larger ones. This includes improving the availability and affordability of healthier options in food-related businesses and expanding voucher schemes for affordable healthy food items.

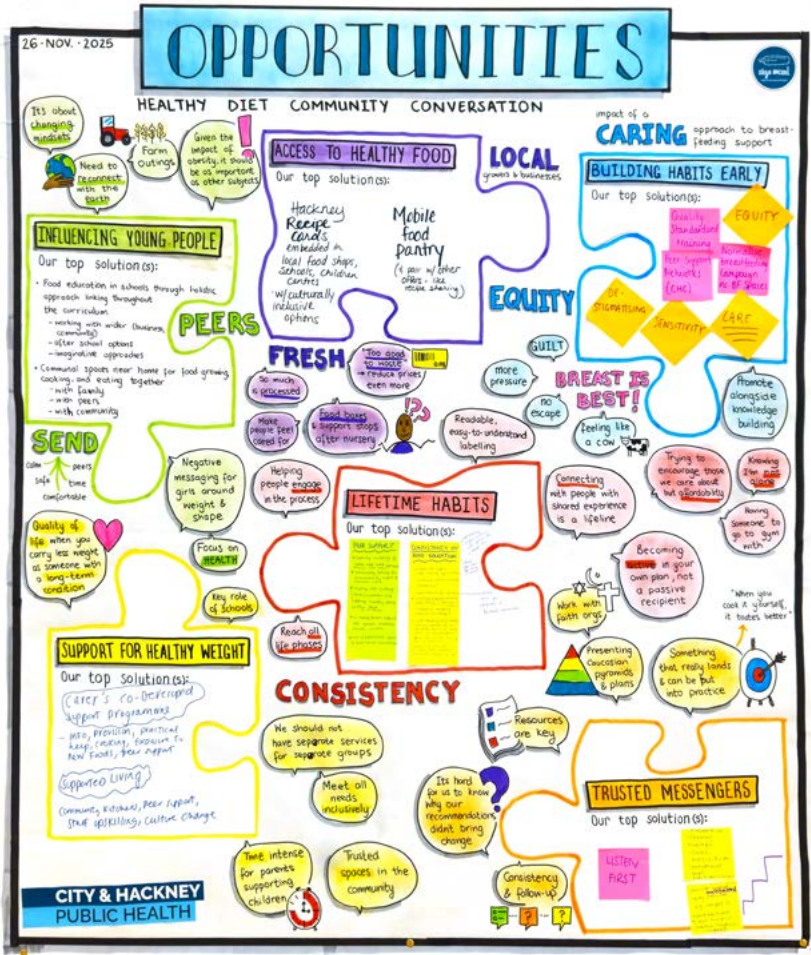
In addition, events to link food businesses with local community organisations could facilitate partnerships, as many such businesses want to contribute but are not sure how.
- Regulation and policies**
Hackney Council and City of London Corporation could make more use of the regulatory and policy levers available to them to improve the local food environment. This includes using licensing and planning powers to prevent unhealthy out-of-home food businesses from opening in the first place (especially near schools and in more deprived neighbourhoods), and increasing sign up to programmes such as the Healthy Catering Commitment.
- Schools**
While some schools are already leading the way, there have been calls for all schools to have hands-on growing and cooking lessons, ideally involving families too.

One resident said: "If my child comes home excited about a vegetable they grew at school, I am 100% more likely to buy it and cook". The lessons and information need to be tailored to all children, including those who are neurodivergent or who have learning differences.

- More oversight of school catering contracts, reducing the number of unhealthy food businesses close to schools and increasing support available to schools to make positive changes to their food offer are all suggestions shared by local communities.
- Wider factors**
Many local people and community partners stressed the need to address wider factors that impact on people's dietary behaviours and how easily they can access healthy and affordable food. For example, the connection between diet and mental wellbeing is well established. Anxiety and depression may contribute to 'comfort eating', and eating disorders (such as binge eating disorder) can directly cause people to eat too much.

Cultural influences also impact people's diet, with some 'traditional' cooking styles and foods being high in sugar and/or fat, and community celebrations can encourage over-consumption of unhealthy food and drink.

Wider cost of living pressures (such as housing and energy) can also limit how much people can spend on food. Strengthening support to build residents' financial resilience by increasing income and savings and cutting costs of essentials is a key part of being able to eat well.



During a 'City and Hackney Healthy Diet Community Conversation' engagement event in November 2025, participants explored opportunities for increasing access to healthy affordable food.

Public Health Response

We know how hard residents are working to keep their families healthy. Across the City and Hackney, we see the reality every day: food prices are climbing, and for too many of our residents, a nutritious meal feels like a luxury, rather than a right. Over the past year, we've had hundreds of conversations with people living and working locally. What we heard wasn't an ask for help, but a fierce passion to bring healthy, affordable and culturally diverse food back into the heart of our neighbourhoods.

Knowing how to cook a healthy meal is vital, but we know that information alone doesn't put nutritious food on the table and can feel disconnected from the reality of our busy, stressful lives. We believe that food education must be wrapped in a wider offer of support - linking nutrition advice with welfare support, improved food access, life skills, and mental and physical wellbeing.

However, this does not start with the individual. There are so many bigger influences at play, like what food is available in our neighbourhoods. In City and Hackney, we hope to further strengthen our planning policies to curb the rise of unhealthy food outlets near schools and youth hubs. And through our Healthy Catering Commitment, we are partnering with local food businesses to ensure that 'grabbing a bite' doesn't have to mean compromising your health.

I am particularly inspired by Hackney's Right to Grow initiative. This isn't just about gardening; it's about power. Over the next few years, I will be excited to see empowered residents reclaim Council land, turning underused spaces into oases of fresh produce. We want to see City and Hackney's estates and streets blooming with food grown by the people, for the people.



Donna Doherty-Kelly, City and Hackney Public Health

Public Health is launching a two-year programme to test new ways of securing healthy food access and increasing healthy diet support across the City and Hackney. Critically, these solutions weren't designed behind closed doors in a council office, they were developed by and with our local communities. In the City and Hackney, there is a strong ambition to move

We believe that a local food revolution is possible. We know you want to see change, and we are committed to making it happen.

away from the emergency model of tackling food poverty and toward a more resilient local food system, supporting our local markets, growers, and partners to create a system where everyone has the dignity of choice.

Change needs to start early. From preconception through to those first vital years, we want to integrate nutrition education and support into our maternity and health services. We want to support mothers who choose to breastfeed and help parents build sustainable habits from the very first bite during weaning, right through to when they become young adults and start making their own food choices.

A call to our local partners
We cannot do this alone. We call on our local businesses: if you have surplus food, don't let it go to waste. Connect with local community organisations where support of different kinds can go a long way. Become part of the growing Hackney Food Partnership to shape our local food system. Join us in feeding the community that supports you.

We are also calling for the creation of a central food distribution hub to streamline the supply of surplus food across City and Hackney, making it easier for local partners to get food to where it's needed most.

Our schools and Family Hubs should be at the frontline of this mission, acting as surplus food distributors, promoting Healthy Start and Alexandra Rose vouchers, and ensuring every child's food environment makes the healthy choice the easy choice for parents.

Tips on Eating on a Budget from Residents

Krista Brown, CoCreate Hackney



With food prices rising, many households are finding it harder to stretch their weekly shop. Some local residents were given the challenge of how to do a weekly shop with a £25 budget, something a lot of our residents have to do. All the participants told us they sometimes skipped meals to save money and all of them rely on benefits in some capacity or entirely, so making sure they eat well everyday is always a challenge.

The residents shared ideas on their top tips, what they would buy and some simple home-cooked meals they might make.

Some of their top tips include:
"Plan meals before shopping so you only buy what you need is so key! Making a simple weekly meal plan can help reduce food waste and stop impulse spending."

"Buy supermarket own-brand products and frozen vegetables. They might not look fancy, but are often cheaper, still nutritious and last just as long!"

"Batch cooking saves me! Cook larger meals and freeze extra portions. This saves money, reduces waste and makes busy days easier."

Residents told us some of their favourite more affordable foods:

- | | |
|-------------------|----------------|
| Bananas | Potatoes |
| Apples | Pasta |
| Onions | Rice |
| Carrots | Bread |
| Lentils | Wraps |
| Tinned beans | Milk |
| Tinned tomatoes | Yogurt |
| Frozen vegetables | Eggs |
| | Chicken thighs |
| | Lean mince |

They also suggested some quick and easy meals that can be made from these ingredients:
Spaghetti Bolognese
Veggie Pasta
Chicken or Egg fried Rice
Chicken and Rice
Lentil Soup or Stew
Jacket Potatoes
Soups
Omelettes
Stir-frys
Tray Bakes

Stepping Up to the Plate

Jayne Taylor, Public Health Consultant, City and Hackney Public Health

Improving access to affordable, healthy food is an absolute priority for me. While there is much we can do locally, and the many stories shared in this publication are evidence of that, the biggest shifts can only be achieved when national government takes action. This includes using tax levers to change the relative price of healthy vs unhealthy options on supermarket shelves (going beyond the 'sugar tax'), as well as policy shifts to improve early years nutrition across the board and make free school meals available to all children. In this respect, the recently announced new school food standards are a positive step in the right direction.

We are not alone in calling for bolder national action. Over two thirds of people in a national poll said that the UK Government should be doing more to ensure that everyone can afford and access healthy food, and there are growing calls for a national 'Good Food Bill' to be introduced (from businesses, charities and health organisations alike). In the context of global insecurity affecting energy supply and food prices, this is more important than ever.



Your Questions Answered

From residents to local businesses, we answer your questions on the topic of access to healthy and affordable food. Links to resources and contact details mentioned are in the directory at the back of this publication

From residents

I have heard food vouchers are available in the City and Hackney. Please can you tell me how I would qualify and get these?

Rose Vouchers are available for parents in Hackney with young children and distributed at nine children's centres across Hackney and can be used to buy fresh fruit and vegetables locally. Speak to staff at your local children's centre - they should be able to help you. If you're more than 10 weeks pregnant or have a child under 4, you may be entitled to get help to buy healthy food and milk, via the national Healthy Start scheme. Find out if you are eligible on their website.



I struggle with knowing where to get healthy food and what healthy but cheap options are. Where can I find advice?

It can be hard to understand what is healthy and what is not. A good starting point is looking at the EatWell Plate. The Eatwell Plate shows how much of what we eat overall should come from each food group to achieve a healthy, balanced diet. Then, if you have a smart phone we recommend downloading the NHS Food Scanner app. Just scan the barcodes of your family's favourite foods, swipe to see the healthier options available, and make a swap next time you shop! Going to your local outdoor food market might also be a good starting point, if you have one nearby.



I live in Hackney and sometimes find it difficult to afford healthy food for my family. How can I find out about my nearest food bank or pantry?

While there is not currently a single place where this information is held, this report highlights a number of food banks and pantries that are available locally. The Council's Here to Help support is also there to help you with financial struggles or benefits advice.

I live in the City of London and am looking for recipes that are easy, healthy, affordable and culturally appropriate - where can I find some?

You can find a number of recipes on Shoreditch Trust's website, who work in the City of London. There's lots of inspiration on the 'Eat Like a Londoner' website and you might want to check out Better Health family recipes. You could also try asking friends, neighbours and colleagues for their favourite recommendation.

From businesses and professionals

I run a food business in Hackney and sometimes have to throw away surplus food. How can I arrange for this to be given to those who need it? What can support organisations accept? Can somebody collect it?

You can offer safe surplus food to local people by linking up with nearby food banks, community kitchens, or food-sharing apps like OLIO and Too Good To Go, many of which can accept a range of surplus foods and may be able to collect directly from your business. Get in touch with the Hackney Food Network, which has an active WhatsApp group to redistribute food to local community food projects.



I am a teacher. How can my school improve access to healthy food?

You can get in touch with City and Hackney's Healthy Schools Coordinator who can visit you to discuss your options. School Food Matters also offer free practical resources to improve school food, with examples of school food policies and how to get started on a new school food contract.

You can also ensure that your catering contractor provides healthy, nutritious food, and introduce 'water only school', 'whole school healthy food' or healthy 'packed lunch policies'. Why not deliver healthy eating sessions during your assemblies? School nurses and our local Power Up! service can also provide 1:1 support to any students and families struggling to eat a healthy diet, if they are above a healthy weight.

I own a (non-food related) business in the City, what can I do to promote healthy eating for my staff and how can we support the local community with healthy eating?

If any food is available through your business (e.g. vending machines, a canteen, catering for events etc.), you can swap out some of the more

unhealthy options for foods that are lower in sugar, fat and salt. Ensure drinking water is easily available and promote healthy eating information through staff wellbeing programmes, such as using the NHS pages on eating a balanced diet. Avoid having salt and sugar freely available around the workplace, and you could consider offering free fruit and vegetables to staff, for example.

I own a corporate business in the City of London. How can I support local community initiatives that are increasing access to food for people who need it most?

You could become a donor for a local charity, such as those featured in this report, or become a Corporate Partner of The Felix Project, a charity that redistributes surplus food to those who need it most. Corporate partners have access to fundraising events for staff and client engagement and opportunities for staff to volunteer in groups.

I run a cafe in Hackney, how can I sign up to the Healthier Catering Commitment?

Please get in contact with Annie Rawlings (annie.rawlings@hackney.gov.uk) and/or visit the Healthier Catering Commitment pages on the Hackney Council website.

Working towards a sustainable future



PUZZLES SECTION

HEALTHY, AFFORDABLE EATING WORD SEARCH

Grab a pen! Hidden in the grid below are 20 essential words related to stocking up on affordable, healthy foods. Words can be found horizontally and vertically (and they might even share a letter!).

Find these 20 words:

- APPLES
BEANS
BUDGET
BULK
EGGS
FIBRE
FROZEN
GREENS
LENTILS
LOCAL
- OATS
PANTRY
PLANNING
PRODUCE
RICE
SEASONAL
SPICES
STAPLES
TINNED
WATER

S E A S O N A L K M O A T S B
P V T I N N E D W Q X C Z Y U
L M X H J S T A P L E S R I L
A D C V B N M F R O Z E N J K
N K J H G F D S A Q W P L M X
N P R O D U C E L K J A X A B
I U Y T R E W Q E A S N D P U
N M R I C E V C N B N T M P D
G F D L O C A L T Y U R I L G
O W A T E R P O I K J Y H E E
Z B E A N S L K L M N B V S T
X E G G S M N B S V C X Z A Q
Y T R E W Q S P I C E S L K J
M N G R E E N S O I U Y T R E
A S D F G H J K F I B R E W Q

Quiz: The 'Eat Well, Spend Less' Trivia Challenge!

Think eating healthy has to drain your wallet? Take our quick quiz to test your knowledge on how to pack your plate with nutrition without breaking the bank.

1. Let's talk protein. Which of the following is considered one of the most budget-friendly, protein-packed foods you can buy?
- A) Pre-cooked grilled chicken strips
B) Dried lentils or beans
C) Grass-fed mince beef
D) Imported quinoa

2. True or False: Frozen vegetables are significantly less nutritious than fresh vegetables.
- A) True – the freezing process destroys all the vitamins!
B) False – they are often just as healthy, if not more!

3. You're making a chilli and want to 'stretch' the meat to feed more people (or save leftovers for tomorrow). What is the healthiest, most affordable ingredient to mix in?

- A) Extra cheese and sour cream
B) Chopped mushrooms or black beans
C) A second portion of meat
D) Store-bought tortilla chips

4. Why is buying fruits and vegetables 'in season' a superpower for your grocery budget?
- A) Farmers have an abundance of them, which drives prices down.
B) They usually have to travel less distance, lowering shipping costs.
C) They are at their absolute peak of flavour and nutrition.
D) All of the above!

Mixed-Up Meals (Anagrams)

Healthy eating on a budget doesn't have to be confusing, but these words certainly are! Unscramble the letters to reveal five brilliant money-saving ingredients or cooking habits.

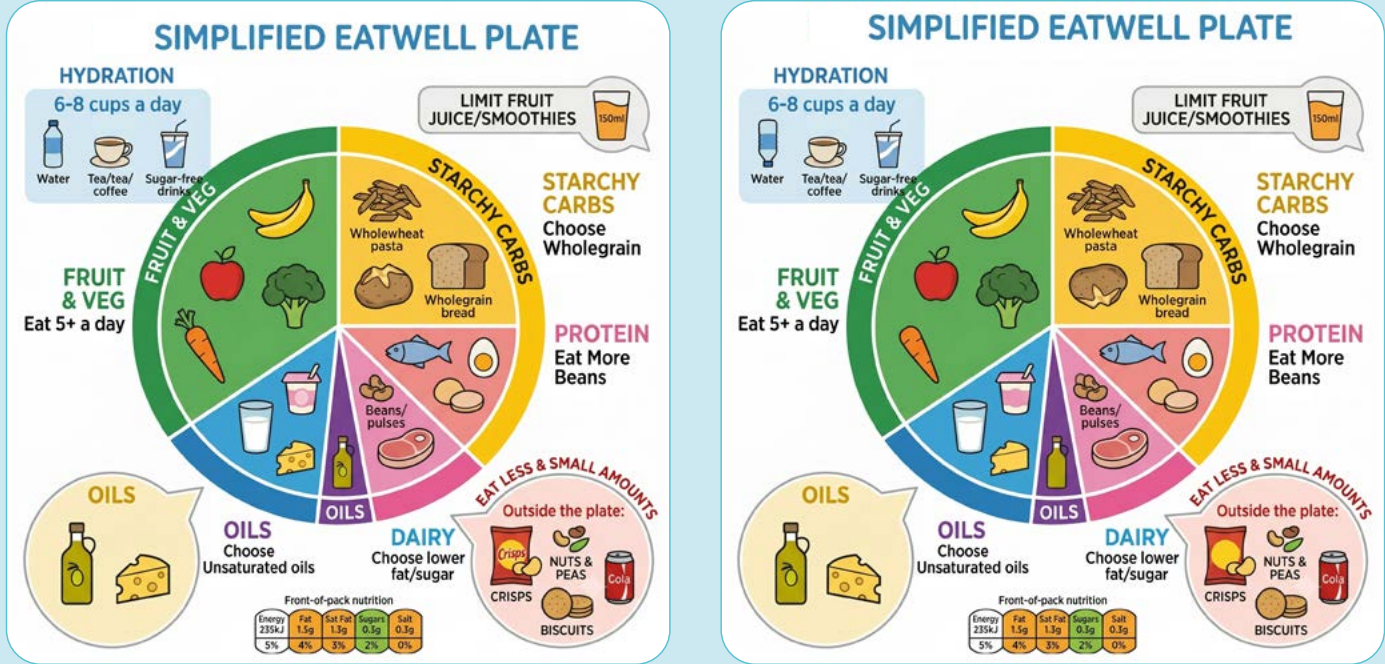
1. SILTENL
(Hint: A tiny, cheap pulse that bulks out a bolognese brilliantly.)
Answer: _____
2. COBOTACHK
(Hint: Making your meals in advance to save time, energy and money.)
Answer: _____
3. MOTEDNINASTOET
(Hint: The 40p pantry base for thousands of healthy pasta sauces and curries.)
Answer: _____
4. PEZRONSAEF
(Hint: Green gems that are cheap, lock in nutrients and require zero prep.)
Answer: _____
5. VELASONAGES
(Hint: Buying this ensures your produce is at its cheapest and most flavourful.)
Answer: _____

ANSWERS: Check all the answers by scanning the QR code



Spot the difference

Use the Eatwell Guide to help you get a balance of healthier and more sustainable food. It shows how much of what you eat overall should come from each food group.



There are 11 differences between the left and right images. See if you can spot them all

Images based on the eatwell guide. Source: www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-eatwell-guide

MINI 'FOOD-OKU'

If you love numbers but have food on the brain, try this tasty twist on Sudoku!

The Rules: Instead of numbers 1 to 4, use four budget-friendly staples: OATS, RICE, EGGS and BEANS. Fill the grid so that every row across, every column down and each of the four 2x2 boxes contains one of each ingredient without any repeats.

The Budget Shopping Logic Puzzle



Four savvy shoppers just finished their supermarket shop. Each had a strict budget and bought ingredients to batch-cook a different healthy family meal. Using the clues below, can you match each shopper to their total spend and their signature dish?

The Shoppers: Aisha, Ben, Chloe, Dan
The Budgets: £8, £10, £12, £14
The Meals: Veggie Chilli, Lentil Shepherd's Pie, Chickpea Curry, Vegetable Stew.

- The Clues:
1. The shopper who made the Veggie Chilli spent exactly £2 more than Aisha, but £2 less than Ben.
2. Dan had the strictest budget of the group and managed to batch-cook his meals for just £8. dan.
3. The Lentil Shepherd's Pie was made by the person with the £8 budget.
4. Aisha did not make the Chickpea Curry.

Use a scrap of paper to work out the logic.

Some residents tell us that it can be hard to know what to cook when you need something easy, healthy and affordable. Below are three such recipes that have been tried and tested by local people.

Recipes

Shoreditch Trust

Naveen's SHAKSHUKA, A Taste of Childhood

“Shakshuka is one of my favourite recipes because it represents a connection to my family and the traditions passed down through generations. My mother used to make it for my sister and me, especially during times when we were feeling picky or just did not feel like eating anything. The simplicity and comfort of the dish would always bring us together, nourishing us not just physically but emotionally as well. This recipe carries with it memories of care and love and is a reminder of how food can be a source of support and healing across different stages of life. Sharing it now continues that legacy and reinforces the importance of family traditions in shaping our personal narratives.” — Naveen.



Ingredients:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Olive oil. | 6 medium tomatoes, chopped. |
| 2 large yellow onions, chopped. | 8 large eggs. |
| 2 garlic cloves, chopped. | 2 bell peppers (red or orange), chopped. |
| 2 teaspoons ground coriander. | 1½ cup chopped fresh parsley. |
| 1½ teaspoon ground cumin. | 1½ cup chopped fresh mint. |
| Pinch red pepper flakes. | |
| Salt and black pepper. | |

Method:

- Heat 3 tablespoons of olive oil in a large pan. Add the onions, garlic, ground spices, bell peppers, pepper flakes and a pinch of salt and black pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables have softened.
- Add the chopped tomatoes.
- Using a wooden spoon, make 8 indentations in the mixture of vegetables and spices. Gently crack an egg into each indentation.
- Cook on a low heat until the egg whites are set. Sprinkle over the fresh parsley and mint and serve.



Marea's QUINOA SALAD, a Memory of Friendship

“My favourite recipe is quinoa salad, a dish I love for its taste and health benefits. I first learned it from my best friend, who made it for me when I became ill and needed to adjust my diet due to my health condition. For me, this recipe is much more than just a healthy meal; it represents the deep bond I share with my best friend, who supported me through a difficult time. Every time I make or enjoy quinoa salad, it reminds me of that caring gesture and the strength of our friendship.” — Marea

Ingredients:

- 200g quinoa.
1 onion, finely chopped.
1½ cucumber, lightly peeled and diced.
100g feta cheese, crumbled.
6 spring onions, thinly sliced.
Zest and juice of 1 orange.
1 teaspoon olive oil.
1 tablespoon red or white wine vinegar.

Method:

- Cook the quinoa in a large pan of boiling water for 10-15 minutes until tender, drain well, then set aside to cool.
- Meanwhile, put all the chopped, diced and sliced vegetables in a bowl.
- Add the cooled quinoa to the bowl.
- Add the crumbled feta cheese.
- Add the orange zest, juice, olive oil and vinegar.
6. Toss well together and chill until ready to serve.



Angela's RESTORATION SOUP, Minestrone with Orzo

Angela shared a recipe that holds deep personal significance, as it was the first dish she prepared after contracting COVID-19 four years ago. “I discovered this recipe in New French Table by Emily & Giselle Roux. I have a collection of about 500 cookbooks and this one stood out for its focus on nutrient rich ingredients. During COVID, it was essential for my family and me to prioritise nourishing, health-focused meals.” For Angela, this

dish, affectionately named 'Restoration soup', is a comforting reminder of resilience and recovery during a challenging time. Angela described the method she follows, emphasising the importance of preparation and order, reminiscent of her mother's cooking style. Angela's focus on nutrition and detail demonstrates how cooking can bring a new appreciation of how cooking can bring comfort and a sense of ritual, especially during challenging times.

Ingredients:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 2 tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for serving. | 100g french beans, quartered. |
| 1 red onion, finely sliced. | 450ml vegetable stock. |
| 1 garlic clove, crushed. | 200g chopped tomatoes. |
| 1 carrot, diced into 1cm cubes. | 50g orzo. |
| 1 celery stalk, finely sliced. | 40g baby watercress. |
| 4 baby courgettes, diced into 1cm cubes. | 1 handful fresh parsley, roughly chopped. |
| Thyme | Salt & freshly ground black pepper. |

Method:

- Heat the olive oil in a large pan over medium heat.
- Add the onion, garlic, carrot, celery, courgettes, french beans and thyme. Stir continuously for 5 minutes.
- Add stock, chopped tomatoes and bring to a boil, then reduce the heat.
- Add the orzo and simmer for 10 minutes.
- Serve topped with watercress, parsley and a drizzle of olive oil.

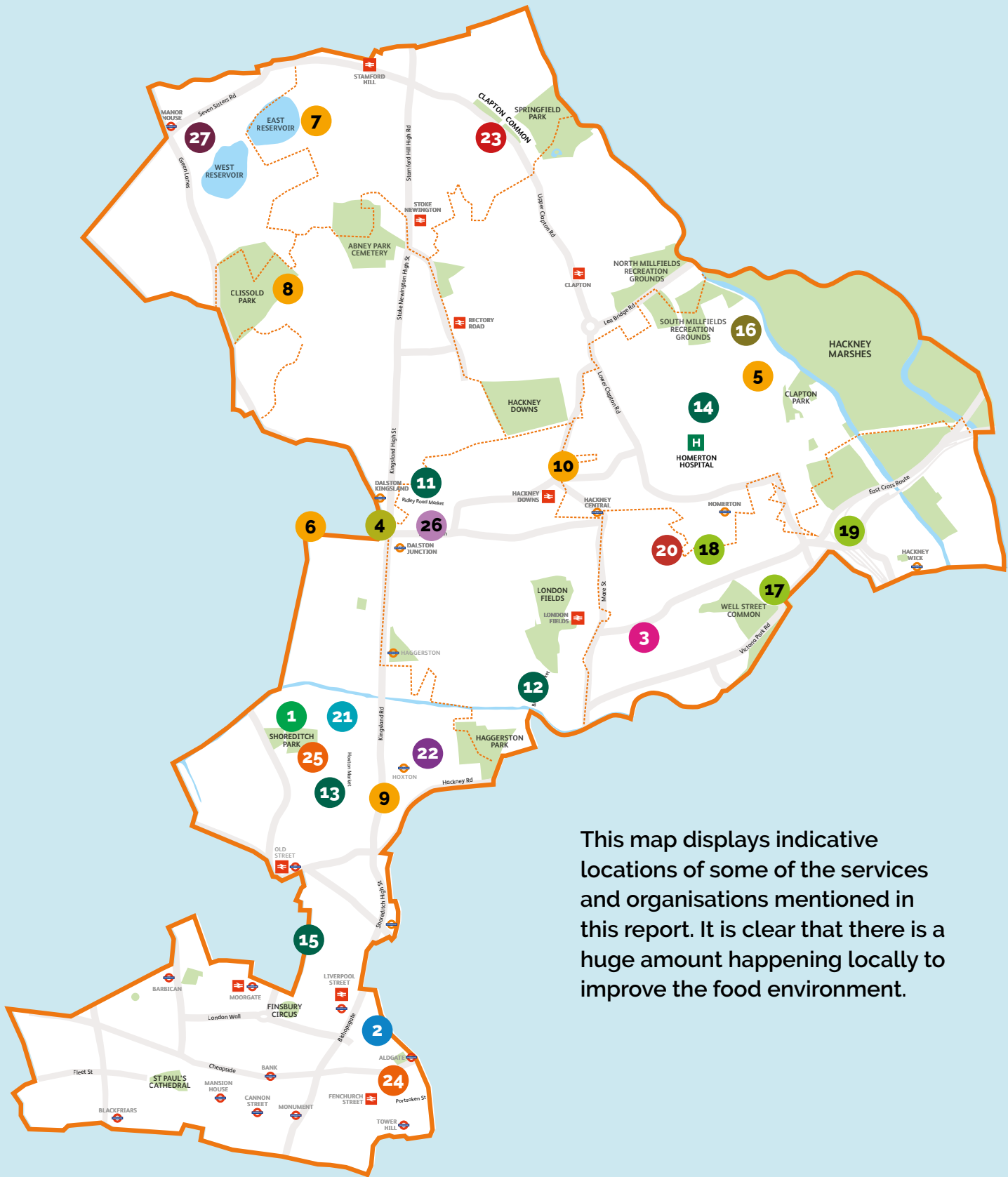
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Londoner

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A combination of recipes, hacks, tips and tricks – from experts and locals alike – for anyone who wants to plan, cook, or save food like a Londoner.

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Nourished Neighbourhoods Healthy Eating Map



This map displays indicative locations of some of the services and organisations mentioned in this report. It is clear that there is a huge amount happening locally to improve the food environment.

Directory

1) Britannia Leisure Centre,
Pitfield St, N1 5FT
Upcoming events: better.org.uk/leisure-centre/london/hackney/britannia-leisure-centre/news

2) City FOOD Club,
Artizan Library, 1 Artizan Street, E1 7AF
Open: Thurs 1-3pm and Fri 5-7pm
Budget friendly recipes and tips: family-action.org.uk/get-support/family-recipes/ and <https://family-action.org.uk/self-help/feeding-your-family-on-a-budget-during-the-summer-holidays/>

3) Cocreate,
New Kingshold Community Centre, Ainsworth Road, Eg 7LP,
Open: Mon-Fri: 10am-4pm
cohuhackney.co.uk

4) Eat Club,
Bootstrap, 18 Ashwin St. E8 3DL
eat-club.org

5-10) Hackney Food Banks
Homerton Food Bank Centre, 4A Gilpin Road, E5 0HL
Open: Mon 6pm -7.30pm
Dalston Food Bank Centre, 100a Balls Pond Road, N1 4AG
Open: Tues 11am - 1pm
Upper Clapton Food Bank Centre, 106 Bethune Rd, N16 5DU
Open: Weds 5pm - 6.45pm
Stoke Newington Food Bank Centre, St Mary's Church, N16 9ES
Open: Thurs 12 noon - 2pm
Hoxton Food Bank Centre, Museum of the Home, E2 8EA
Open: Fri 10am - 12pm
Pembury Community Centre, 1 Atkins Square, E8 1FA
Open: Sat 11am - 1pm11

11-15) Hackney Markets
Ridley Road Market, E8 2NP
Broadway Market, E8 4PH.
Hoxton Street Market, N1 6SH
Chatsworth Road Market E5 0LH
Clifton Street, EC2A 4EY

16) Hackney School of Food
Hackney School of Food, E5 0BT
Email: hello@hackneyschooloffood.com
www.hackneyschooloffood.com

17-19) Hackney Wick lunch clubs
Gascoyne 1 Community Centre, Eg 7FA
Open: Tues 1pm onwards
Gascoyne 2 Community Hall, 2 Wick Road, Eg 5AY
Open: Weds 12 noon onwards
St Mary of Eton Church, Eastway, Eg 5JA
Open: Fri 12 noon onwards

20) H.O.P.E Morningside,
Morningside Community Centre, Cresset Road, Eg 6SJ
Open: Thurs. Register and book your slot in advance. Food pantry: 1-3pm, Foodbank:3-5pm.

21) Humdingers,
238 Hoxton Street, N1 5LX
Open: Mon-Weds and Fri, 5-7pm

22) Idia's Community Kitchen
Fellows Court Community Centre, E2 8LJ:
Open: everyday 10:00 to 11am
Fellows Community Centre, E2 8LR:
Open: Tues 7pm to 8pm
Bootstrap 18-22 Ashwin Street, E8 3DL:
Open: Weds 7pm to 8pm,
Kingsland Road in front of Crisis charity shop:
Open: Fri 7pm to 8pm,
Stoke Newington Baptist Church, N16 8BU:
Open: Sun 2pm to 3pm

23) Made in Hackney,
Liberty Hall, 128 Clapton Common, E5 9AA.
madeinhackney.org/

24/25) Shoreditch Trust Free Community Lunch:
12pm to 2pm
(Weds - St Anne's Church, N1 5LF
Fri - The Aldgate Centre, EC3N 1AB)
Tel: 020 7033 8500 / Email: connect@shoreditchtrust.org.uk

Recipes for Life booklet: shoreditchtrust.org.uk/assets/Uploads/RecipesOfLife-with-ShoreditchTrustHackneyQuest-Final.pdf

26) Welcome Hackney,
Dalston CLR James Library, E8 3BwwQ

Weekly drop-in:
Thurs 1:30-4:30pm
hackney.gov.uk/community-safety-and-environment/welcome-hackney-refugee-migrant-and-asylum-seeker-service

27) Woodberry Aid Community Food Shop,
7 Woodberry Grove, N4 1SN
Open: Fri, 12 PM - 2 PM
Tel: 07549158050 / Email: info@woodberryaid.org
woodberryaid.org

Resources

Alexandra Rose Vouchers: Find out more from your local early years setting. alexandrarose.org.uk/

Bags of Taste: Applicants should be on income related benefits and eligibility will be confirmed on registration. Register at: bagsoftaste.org

Better Health recipes
nhs.uk/healthier-families/recipes/

Bite Back: biteback2030.com/

City and Hackney Community Wellbeing Team:
A timetable of the van's locations and services available is available here: hackney.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/outreach-services-community-wellbeing-space

City of London Libraries:
cityoflondon.gov.uk/services/libraries

Community Health Champions:
vchackney.org/services/communitychampions/

Eat Like A Londoner: eatlikealondoner.com/

Eating a balanced diet: nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/how-to-eat-a-balanced-diet/eating-a-balanced-diet/

EatWell Plate: nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/

First Steps Nutrition: firststepsnutrition.org/

Hackney Food Network WhatsApp group:
contact - rachel@hcv.org.uk

Hackney Food Partnership:
contact - hackneyfoodpartnership@gmail.com

Hackney Libraries: hackney.gov.uk/libraries-parks-and-leisure/libraries

Healthier Catering Commitment: Food business owner wanting to participate - contact annie.rawlings@hackney.gov.uk for Hackney and Jessica. Tabois@cityoflondon.gov.uk for the City of London. hackney.gov.uk/business-and-licensing/food-safety/healthier-catering-commitment

Healthy Schools London Awards: schools can contact kay.richardson@hackney.gov.uk, london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/education-and-youth/healthy-early-years-london-and-healthy-schools-london/healthy-schools-london

Healthy Start: healthystart.nhs.uk/

HENRY: henry.org.uk/city-and-hackney.
Contact - 07519 109876/hcsupport@henry.org.uk

Low Carbon Chinatown: lowcarbon.lingql.com/chinatown

NHS Food Scanner app: nhs.uk/healthier-families/food-facts/nhs-food-scanner-app/

Our Journey Birth to Five: education.hackney.gov.uk/content/your-childs-journey-birth-five

Power up! homerton.nhs.uk/powerup. Contact - 020 7014 7066/huh-tr.powerupcandh@nhs.net

TastEd: tasteeducation.com/

The Felix Project: thefelixproject.org/

Trading Standards: For any concerns, contact: Citizens Advice on 0808 223 1133

Veg Power: vegpower.org.uk/loveyourlunchbox/

Sources of Information

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