



## **Cosy Crow Community Café**

### **Interim Report (Year 1)**

#### **Background**

As a charitable organisation, Gateshead Older People's Assembly supports older people (50+) across Gateshead in a number of ways. The projects undertaken by the Assembly and the services it provides are guided by the organisation's Strategic Delivery Plan, which was driven by the charity's trustees, themselves older people from Gateshead.

The Strategic Delivery Plan is underpinned by nine strategic objectives:

- 1. Increase older people's knowledge of issues affecting them**
- 2. Be the voice of older people in Gateshead**
- 3. Reduce loneliness and isolation for older people in Gateshead**
- 4. Increase opportunities for older people to live fuller lives**
- 5. Improve the health and wellbeing of older people in Gateshead**
- 6. Reduce the number of falls suffered by older people across Gateshead**
- 7. Build stronger networks to support older people across Gateshead**
- 8. Increase opportunities for older people to participate in wider society**
- 9. Increase community safety and awareness of safeguarding issues**

These objectives are not mutually exclusive and the Assembly's management aims to meet at least three of these objectives with every project it undertakes. The Cosy Crow community café project meets objectives 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8.

Statistics regarding loneliness and isolation in Gateshead demonstrate a clear need for projects designed to tackle social isolation, loneliness, and malnutrition amongst Gateshead's older population:

- ▶ Isolation can lead to malnutrition and health problems including depression and dementia
- ▶ Nearly 20% of Gateshead households were occupied by single older people in 2006
- ▶ 10% of the older population (65+) is lonely all or most of the time, equating to over 4000 people in Gateshead
- ▶ 5000 older people in Gateshead are malnourished or at risk

- ▶ 37% of older people admitted to hospital in 2014/15 were malnourished

To that end, Gateshead Older People's Assembly sought support from the Kellett Fund at the Community Foundation to develop a pay-what-you-can community café which would serve as a hub for social interaction, eating, education, and a range of wellness activities for older people. The funding contributed to the recruitment of a development worker, kitchen equipment, and staff and volunteer training.

## **Overview**

The Cosy Crow Community Café opened officially on 9 March 2016. The café seats 28 and is located in Deckham Village Hall on Split Crow Road in Gateshead.

There are no prices on the menu – every meal is offered on a pay what you can basis. A large portion of our ingredients come from FareShare, a charity that redistributes short-dated and surplus food from local supermarkets.

The Cosy Crow is open to the general public, is registered with Gateshead Council, and holds a food hygiene rating of 5.

The café was initially open two days per week from March 2016, and opened an additional day from September 2016 to cater the Assembly's weekly tea dances.

Since being established, the café has become an important part of the community. Healthy meals are offered at little (or no) cost to those who may be struggling financially. The café also provides a welcoming environment for those who are lonely or isolated and gives older people meaningful opportunities to volunteer and learn new skills.

All income from the café is reinvested in the café, paying for supplemental ingredients, cleaning supplies, and kitchen equipment.



## **The Café as a meeting venue**

The café serves as the venue for the Assembly's Art, Crafts, Reminiscence, and Book groups, all of which are scheduled at times to coincide with the café's opening, providing an opportunity for participants to enjoy lunch together before or after their group meets.

The café has also attracted customers who are not Assembly members. In fact, it is extremely rare to not see at least one new face every day the café is open. Cosy Crow customers have ranged in age from 3 to 95. We have customers struggling to overcome addiction who enjoy the routine of being held accountable for turning up for lunch every Wednesday and Thursday.

Customers are now bringing their friends and families along and it isn't at all unusual to see an 80-year-old sharing a table (and a colouring-in book!) with a 6-year-old. Many customers tend to linger long after finishing their meals, enjoying several cups of tea or coffee with new friends who were perfect strangers an hour or two before.

We have also witnessed the development of an informal men's group, made up of the café regulars. Six men attend the café nearly every day and, while they all found us separately, friendships have formed and they have recently started to travel to/from the café in pairs. We are actively encouraging this, as older men are our hardest-to-reach group.



## **Developing community partnerships**

Since opening, the café has established a reputation as an excellent venue for organisations to reach older people in order to offer them their advice, services, and support.

A benefits advisor from Gateshead Warm Zones visits the café every week, offering much-needed advice to customers, many of whom have gone on to claim a significant amount of benefit to which they are entitled.

LiveWell Gateshead holds a surgery in the café on the first Thursday of each month offering blood pressure and weight checks and general health advice.

The café is also a referral agency for Gateshead Food Bank.

Community Engagement Officers and our Neighbourhood Area Coordinator from Gateshead Council are regular visitors to the café and have established excellent relationships with customers.

The café has worked in partnership with Foundation Futures, a charity supporting young people at risk of exclusion. They visited the café to offer customers help with their mobile phones and tablets. This was a very popular session and we are investigating ways to continue offering technological support to our members.

Local care navigators signpost individuals who are lonely, isolated, or at risk of malnutrition to the café and the Assembly.

The café has also hosted visits from Northumbria Police, Gateshead Council's Youth Offending Team, and Groundworks Green Doctors.



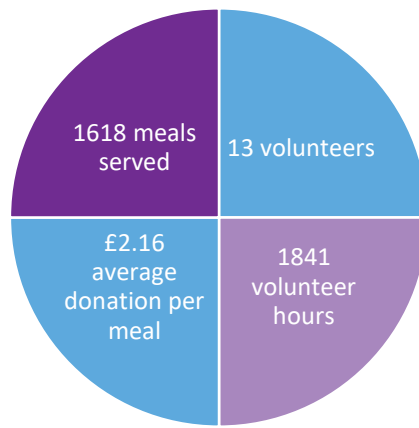
### **Volunteering opportunities**

To date, 13 volunteers have contributed to the running of our community café.

Of our 13 volunteers, 7 are over 50.

One volunteer (over 50) has moved into employment based on the training and reference she gained at the Cosy Crow.

Two Health and Social Care students from Gateshead College completed placements in the café.



## Customer Feedback

Cosy Crow customers are asked for feedback on our food and service on a regular basis. There are comment slips and a box in the café to encourage feedback.

Our current feedback averages are as follows:

**Cosy Crow Customer Feedback 2016/17**



*“How can you improve on perfection? The camaraderie is great, food superb, and I look forward to coming to see you all.”*

*“You don’t need to improve service. The service and staff are always great and friendly staff. Good food.”*

*“As always the food is superb and I enjoy being here every Thursday.”*

## Moving forward

The Cosy Crow community café has moved from strength to strength, attracting new customers regularly, generating enough income to sustain itself, and offering older people in Gateshead a welcoming environment in which to dine, learn, socialise, and volunteer.

We have achieved our goal of opening a third day per week and will be working toward opening a fourth day in fiscal year 2017/18.

Thanks to the Kellett Fund at the Community Foundation, Tyne & Wear and Northumberland for enabling this project.





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