



Setting Up and Running a *Community Café*

A guide to establishing and operating a sustainable Community Café as a Social Enterprise.



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FOREWORD – Minister for Rural and Community Development

I am delighted to lead the Department which has responsibility for Social Enterprise. The Government recognises the tremendous potential for Social Enterprise to contribute to Ireland's economic and social development. It was my great pleasure to launch Ireland's first ever National Social Enterprise Policy (2019-2022) in July of this year. The implementation of this policy will support Social Enterprise to grow in scale and impact.

Social Enterprises are businesses whose core objective is to achieve a social, societal or environmental impact. They trade on an ongoing basis in goods or services which support disadvantaged groups, or address wider societal issues such as food poverty, social housing, or environmental matters. Profits are reinvested to maximise the impact. This is what distinguishes social enterprises from commercial business.

Community Cafés are a great example of the Social Enterprise model in Ireland. They can provide jobs to those who may have otherwise have difficulty gaining employment. The cafés are central to the life of the communities they serve. They provide a meeting point, a democratic space and can often be the conduit through which a range of services are accessed. Any profits they generate enables enhanced services to the communities they support.

I commend PAUL Partnership on this set of practical guidelines which will provide huge assistance to any group considering setting up a Community Café. Running a business presents a range of challenges and these guidelines can help would-be Social Enterprises to find their feet and realise their vision. The booklet covers areas from financial management, through to stock control, HR and customer service. As we face many challenges in the coming years, strong community remains the heart of a healthy nation. Social Enterprises such as Community Cafés can play an important role in supporting communities and helping them to function in a sustainable way.



Michael Ring
Michael Ring TD,

Minister for Rural and Community Development

1

Introduction





1. Introduction

This guide is intended as an openly shared resource for anyone involved in the establishment and/or operation of a Community Café. Community Cafés have played a strong role in providing affordable, healthy food to communities at risk from food poverty. Often located within a community centre or similar facility, Community Cafés are usually established to complement a range of services being offered by an organisation to the local community. A café offers customers a place to meet, socialise and network and can be the first contact between members of the local community and a wide range of community services. Community Cafés face a number of challenges, some unique to the community sector, but many of them common to the wider catering industry. It is hoped that this guide will be of assistance to volunteers, staff, managers and boards of management currently involved in the operation of a café. It can also provide those considering establishing a Community Café with some insight into the sector.

This guide has been developed by PAUL Partnership Limerick's Social Enterprise' initiative, under the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and in collaboration with the Community Cafés based in Limerick City. The need for the guide was identified through the meetings of the Limerick City Social Enterprise Discussion Group, where members identified the need for support and training focused on their Community Cafés, many of whom face similar challenges. These cafés have been delivering quality food at the lowest possible price to disadvantaged communities for many years and many of the points made in this document have been arrived at through real world experience and hard work undertaken in these cafés. The Community Cafes' management and staff also engaged in a number of focused workshops on topics such as 'Plating and Presentation', 'Customer Service' and 'Product Costing and Pricing' and the guide reflects some of the learning arising from this training. Every effort has been made to ensure that the guide is practical, realistic, clear and useful and we hope we have developed a guide that 'keeps it real'.

The community organisations that contributed to the development of the guide were:

- Moyross Community Hub
- Northside Family Resource Centre
- Our Lady of Lourdes Community Services Group
- St. Mary's A.I.D.
- St Munchin's Community Centre
- Southill Hub
- Tait House Community Enterprise
- Learning Hub Limerick

By providing their communities with affordable, quality food in a convivial atmosphere, Community Cafés serve a function that can be both clear and quantifiable, but also subtle and more difficult to measure. Community Cafés bring people together over food and in most cases have become a focus for activities within their host communities. While some Community Cafés are profitable and provide their host communities with a cash stream that can support some of their other activities, most are focused on providing quality food at the lowest possible price, leaving very little room for error. Striking the balance can be tricky and requires a carefully considered approach on behalf of management and staff. It is intended that the information contained in this guide will be of help to Community Cafés in providing a valuable service to the community, while operating a sustainable social enterprise.

¹ A Social Enterprise is an enterprise whose objective is to achieve a social, societal or environmental impact, rather than maximising profit for its owners or shareholders. It pursues its objectives by trading on an ongoing basis through the provision of goods and/or services, and by reinvesting surpluses into achieving social objectives. It is governed in a fully accountable and transparent manner and is independent of the public sector. If dissolved, it should transfer its assets to another organisation with a similar mission (Department of Rural and Community Affairs – National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019 - 2022)



2

Planning Your Community Café





2. Planning Your Community Café

Community Cafés respond to needs in their host communities. Addressing food poverty is the most common and obvious of those. The majority of Community Cafés operating in Ireland today have been established as part of a wider community organisation and are physically located within a community facility or community enterprise centre, where there is already a considerable amount of footfall generated by other projects on site. This provides the café with a ‘captive audience’ of service users, e.g. parents of children in a Community Crèche, people attending training, staff from the various other organisations on site, etc. However, to achieve sustainability, it is often necessary for cafés to attract customers from outside their immediate target groups/area. It can be an interesting challenge for many Community Cafés to service their core target group as a not-for-profit social enterprise, while also serving a wider customer base in order to generate an operating surplus which can be reinvested into other aspects of their social programme.

2.1 Setting up a New Community Café

For the majority of communities, the establishment of a café to meet their needs is a 100% good news story. However, promoters need to be careful that they are not displacing other business in the area. This may include private enterprises and/or other Community Cafés already operating in the area (this is a particularly relevant consideration in an urban setting). If, having considered all this, your organisation finds itself in the position of starting a café from scratch; here are a few general pointers:

- **Location, Location, Location.** An old one but a true one. A café located 20 meters in the wrong place can have a huge impact on its success. Consider the following:
 - The visibility of the location.
 - Does it face onto the street (i.e. is there a ‘shop front’)?
 - Can it be seen by passing traffic?
 - Is the space accessible (wheelchair, older people, proximity to existing reception areas)?
 - Is there a large footfall at or near the location? If not, consider signage.

- **Equipment and Infrastructure** - Food industry grade facilities and equipment can carry a considerable initial cost but quality equipment will save you money in the long run. Carefully consider the design and layout of the kitchen and how it will interact with other elements of the location. Also consider the range of uses intended for the café:
 - Is it for teas, coffees and cakes only?
 - Will you be serving full hot meals; breakfast, lunch and dinner?
 - Will it include baking or making desserts in house or buying in?
 - Will there be meals-on-wheels or contract catering? What volume of customers is anticipated? Productive capacity is not only a practical consideration, it is a key food safety consideration also.
- **Staffing** – At least one qualified chef will be required if doing a full meal service. Appropriately trained floor and kitchen staff will also be needed. Whether employed commercially or as part of a Labour Market Activation Scheme, each staff member should have a job description.
- **Insurance** – Operating a Community Café will carry with it an increased insurance risk and associated cost. Depending on the exact nature of your café’s operation, you may need to consider insurance under the following headings: Fire and Peril; Consequential Losses; Employer Liability; Public Liability and Product Liability.
- **Competition/‘Coop-etition’** – Go and visit other Community Cafés, see what you like about them and what you don’t like. If there is overlap between your proposed facility and an existing café, consider adjusting your offering so that you complement each other rather than compete (‘Coop-etition’). Look at pricing and food selection as a guide, but don’t copy (see section 7). Most importantly, talk to the manager/chef in another café, you’d be surprised how willing they are to share information and help.
- **Plan** – A good quality, well thought out business plan, will not only help you think your project through, it will allow you to set targets and measure the success of the project in the medium to long term.

These are just some general pointers for an individual/group starting with a blank canvas or the idea of a Community Café. It is envisaged that the rest of this guide will be of benefit to businesses in the start-up phase, as well as those already established.

2.2 Reviewing an Existing Community Café's Operations

Whether setting up a new Community Café or reviewing the operations of an existing one, a large number of similar issues can arise. Existing cafés however, will have a lot of relevant information that they can draw from. Key areas for review would potentially include: the existing range of services provided; the building/location of the café; current pricing structures; existing staff etc. If a review is to be undertaken and any changes or new developments are going to be considered, an established Community Café has a range of resources from which to draw:

- **Past Financial Records** – It obviously depends on the quality of the records being kept, but financial records will highlight the financial situation of the café and may help to identify areas of waste or overspend. Knowing the financial health of the project is key information in determining the need for change.
- **Current Customers** – A customer survey can provide café management with a much clearer picture of how the café is perceived. It is particularly important that this information be gathered anonymously and that negative as well as positive feedback is gathered.
- **Staff and Management** – Those working on the front-line of the Community Café can see opportunities and weaknesses in the café's operations that may be hidden from management. A team meeting or an informal conversation with staff members could provide valuable insight on their views.
- **Mystery Diner** – It can be very informative to get someone unknown to the café to go and eat at the café and feed back on their experience. With many people dedicated and invested in the café, it can be useful to get objective feedback on the customer's experience.

Existing Community Cafés will be more restricted as to what they can do to change their current situation. Where the need for change has been identified, particularly around pricing, portion sizing etc., these changes should be introduced incrementally to avoid kickback from customers.

3

Operating a Community Café





3. Operating a Community Café

3.1 Setting a Menu

In broad terms, the maxim 'less is more' should apply to menu setting in a Community Café. While the temptation is always there to offer as many options as possible, each additional element adds to the complexity around pricing, stock management, cooking, service etc. The following are key considerations for a Community Café menu:

- An experienced chef will provide guidance in the menu setting process.
- Three main course options should be enough. Try to offer a traditional option, a healthy option and a modern option on your menu. This will allow you to cover older, health conscious and younger customers.
- Create a template that can be changed daily. Consider using menu holders that can be easily changed.
- Consider using unusual cuts that are much better value and can be tastier (and trendier) than many of the 'prime cuts'.

3.2 Stock Control and Purchasing

Whether it is fresh produce, ambient food, cleaning supplies or other consumables, having an effective system for stock control and purchasing will help your organisation avoid having large amounts of funds and valuable storage space tied up in stock. There are a number of examples of organisations that apply the 'just in time' principle to stock. This involves keeping the absolute minimum of stock and ordering only enough for that day's production. While this minimises the need for many of the stock control measures outlined below, this approach may not be appropriate in many circumstances. However, ensuring that you have the right amount of the most appropriate products in stock not only involves good in house management, but also that you have a good relationship with the right suppliers.

3.2.1 Choosing a Supplier

The right supplier will provide²:

- **Reliability** - If they let you down, you'll let your customers down.
- **Quality** - Of product and service, if your supplier is using low grade raw materials or is inconsistent in their production methods, their resulting output may vary in quality.
- **Value for Money** – Particularly relevant in a Community Café setting, it is up to you to ensure that you are getting the best quality at the keenest price. It is also important that your supplier provides you with a price change notice in advance of any increases.
- **Service and Communication** – a good supplier will keep you informed of changes and get to understand your needs and provide a service accordingly. Try to establish a business partnership with your supplier.
- **Financial Security** – Will they be there next week? A supplier that has a track record may be preferable. Check with others that have dealt with the supplier before.
- **Food Safety and Environmental Compliance** – Ensure that your supplier is registered and (if appropriate) licensed with the appropriate authority. Details of this will be available through the Local HSE Environmental Health Office.
- **Local Supplier** – A good relationship can be quickly built with a local supplier which may be slightly more expensive initially but will stand to you in the long run when you need a last minute delivery. Once the relationship is established, prices can be renegotiated.

² Based on the Fáilte Ireland guide to purchasing and stock control available on www.failteireland.ie

3.2.2 Advantages of Effective Stock Control

While the implementation of an effective stock control system will require some planning and time on an ongoing basis, it will have the following advantages:

- Reduce the cost of holding stock.
- Avoid breaks in service due to out of stock items.
- Ensure that stocks are used within their shelf life.
- Allow you to set maximum and minimum levels of stock to trigger/cease ordering.
- Allow you to identify wastage and/or pilfering of stocks.

3.2.3 Pointers for Effective Stock Control

- The following paperwork will be critical for effective stock control:
 - Supplier delivery dockets and notes;
 - Purchase orders, receipts and credit notes;
 - Goods returned notes; and
 - Requisitions and issue notes for outgoing goods.
- Prepare a stock control sheet/checklist that reflects the layout of your storage area and can be updated easily to reflect new products.
- Marry your stock control list with up-to-date orders and purchases to ensure that double ordering does not take place.
- Consider doing a stock take as frequently as possible . Regular stock taking helps to identify and address issues early.
- Keep the storeroom and premises tidy and keep stock items clearly segregated so that stocks are easy to find.
- Count stock at the close of business and when stocks may be low.
- Count only usable stock, anything damaged or out of date should be returned/disposed of.

- Establish a stock control procedure and train all staff in its use and implementation, with particular focus on:
 - Stock rotation/labelling/use by dates
 - Prevention of waste
 - Identifying excessive stock

Stock control templates are widely available online. However, if you have anyone in-house with knowledge of Microsoft Excel, it would be better to develop your own template focused on your own needs, using online templates as an initial guide.

3.3 Food Plating, Presentation and Portion Control

While there is no one way of plating and presenting food, there clearly is a need to present food well and to make it appealing to the customer, without over complicating it. Knowing how a plate of food should look also gives you better control over portions and, as we can see from the pricing section of the guide, Community Cafés have less latitude to give oversized portions, given the tight margins they operate under.

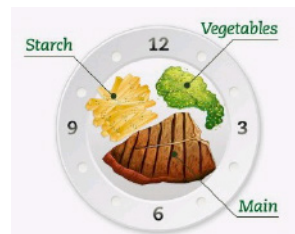
3.3.1 Plating and Presentation

While it is possible to go to extremes with plating and presentation, some basic principles apply to the plating and presentation of food whatever the setting:

The Basics

Choose a plate that is the appropriate size for the intended purpose. It should be neither too big nor too crowded. Once chosen, consider your empty plate as a clock³:

- The main **Protein** goes between 3 and 9 o'clock;
- The **Starch** element goes between 9 and 12 o'clock; and
- The **Vegetables** goes between 12 and 3 o'clock.



Standard plate layout for a typical main course.

Finer Points

The following are some additional considerations:

- **Emphases** - The main ingredient of the dish should take up the most space and attract the eye.
- **Balance** - There shouldn't be too much weight to one side or to the other side of your plate.
- **Contrast** - Place contrasting colours and shapes beside each other for visual impact.
- **Texture** - Texture is a strong taste trigger, try to make contrasting textures visible on the plate.
- **Simplicity** - Too many elements in any one plate can be difficult to organise.

Extras

These extra elements are not core elements of the dish but can add character and a bit of flair when added:

- **Garnish** – A garnish is an edible accent that can add colour and texture to a plate of food.
- **Sauces** – Sauces can be added underneath the main protein, drizzled across the dish or added in spots.
- **Shape** – Some elements of your dish can be shaped or sculpted to add definition or volume to the plate.

3.3.2 Portion Control

With food cost representing up to 80% of the price of food in a Community Café setting, poor portion control will directly affect the sustainability of your Community Café. Portion control is often conflated with 'just being mean', where most people's natural impulse is to be 'flaithiúil' or generous, it is important that staff and customers know the broader implications of poor portion control. Community Cafés face a number of particular issues regarding portion control, these include:

- **Familiarity of staff with the customer** – This can often make it hard to refuse requests for extra/larger portions, etc.

- **Tight margins** – The prices charged in many Community Cafés barely cover the cost of ingredients. Extra portions in a conventional restaurant affect the profit margin, whereas extra portions in a Community Café can be loss making.
- **Dependence on the café** – Local research has shown that many customers of Community Cafés eat there on a daily basis. Habits develop that can be hard to break and any change can have a big impact for customers.
- **Eyeballing** – Serving staff will often estimate the amounts on a plate and can be as much as 50% out from the budgeted amount.

While no one wants to be mean, poor portion control can affect the sustainability of any food business, and particularly a Community Café. Some strategies can be employed to ensure good portion control, these include:

- **Use of Scales** – Figure out how much everything on the plate should weigh. Identify how many portions you should get from a set amount of product and design your plate around that.
- **Review Your Serving Utensils** – Match your serving utensils to the desired serving size.
- **Use Shapes and Forms** – Shaping the food in certain ways can give the appearance of abundance without actually increasing the portion size.
- **Use of Containers** – Many restaurants serve side orders such as chips in a container, which effectively controls the portion without having to measure.
- **Consistency** – Try not to vary too much with your portion sizes. People will notice a little bit less much more clearly than a little bit more.
- **Regular Training** – Whenever there is a new item on the menu, a demonstration plate should be made up and shown to all staff. This will remind them of the importance of portion control.

Where possible, you should ask your suppliers to provide weight measures for meat, fish etc. as this will help you to control portions and cost and, in turn, help streamline your stock control and purchasing.

³ From the Unilever Food Solutions Website: <https://www.unileverfoodsolutions.com.sg/en/chefinspiration/chef-lifestyle-tips/food-plating-101-mastering-the-basics.html> (accessed on 21/06/19).

4

Financial Management





4. Financial Management

Financial Management is an area that many enterprises (not to mention Social Enterprises) struggle with. While conventional cafés and restaurants focus is on generating a profit (generally a minimum of 1/3 of the turnover as a rule of thumb); the focus for most Community Cafés is to achieve a sustainable break even point. The motivation is to provide quality nutritious food at the lowest cost possible to their target area/group. However, this focus can leave very little room for error when it comes to costs, overheads and pricing. Management and staff alike need to be aware of how tight the margins are and good financial management will provide you with the information you need to strike the balance between income and expenditure.

4.1 Financial Management Systems

Financial management tools available to the catering sector vary widely in terms of complexity, user friendliness and cost. From bespoke, cloud based accounting packages to the six-inch nail on the counter for receipts, any of these systems are only as good as the information that they are receiving. Whatever system is put in place, all employees should be trained to use it correctly and the figures should be reviewed (at least monthly) by management. This regular review ensures that issues and/or errors are caught and rectified early.

The Community Café may have people in house, who can develop a package and manage and review the financial data being generated by the café. It is important that this information is accessible and understandable to other staff and management who need to input/review data. While a myriad of templates are available on the internet and from various software companies; someone with a reasonable grasp of Microsoft Excel should be able to develop the basic templates required to get started. An income and expenditure log and a profit and loss table would be the minimum information required.



4.2 Pricing

Pricing can be a particularly difficult area for Community Cafés. As the main function of these businesses is to provide affordable food to its target community, there is an implicit pressure to keep prices as low as possible. Therefore, there is a constant balance to be struck between setting the lowest price possible, while covering the cost of operating the café, along with some small margin for repair, renewal (equipment and facilities depreciation) and general reinvestment in the café.

Prices being charged in other Community Cafés can be used as a starting point and a guide, but these should not be used to set your final price. Another organisation may be subsidising the operations of the café from another income source or have access to staff paid for by a labour/employment scheme that you do not. Table 1 provides an example of a pricing for a Chicken and Rice main course in a Community Café. This is a relatively basic example for demonstration purposes. The greater the complexity of the café's range of services and activities, the greater the complexity of the pricing exercise. For example, you may have to spread the cost of overheads across breakfast, lunch, dinner, Meals-on-Wheels, external catering, etc. The important point to note is that the overall costs of operating the café are included in the pricing of each meal or service provided.

In the conventional/commercial food sector, food cost would typically represent between 20-30% of the income from sales. All the other overhead costs and the business profit are taken from the remaining 70-80%. In a Community Café setting however, there is no 'profit' as such, and any margin above the food cost is used to fund operational costs.



Table 1. Pricing Structure for Main Course: Stir Fry Chicken and Rice (100 portions in a café producing 500 main courses each week)

Item	Logic	Cost pp
Food Cost	<p>Calculated by taking the wholesale cost of food per Kg and dividing by the number of portions available. E.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chicken costing €5/kg will yield 5x200g portions: €1 pp - Vegetables costing €2/kg yielding 10x100g portions: €0.20 pp - Sauce costing €4/litre yielding 20x50ml portions: €0.20 pp - Rice €1/kg yielding 10x100g portions: €0.10 pp <p style="text-align: right;">TOTAL FOOD COST €1.50</p>	€1.50
Consumables	<p>Napkins, condiments, cleaning etc.</p> <p>Total annual cost €3,000 divided by 52 weeks and divided by 500 meals: €0.11</p>	€0.11
Utilities	<p>ESB, Gas, Heating etc.</p> <p>Total weekly cost of €300 divided by 500 meals: €0.60</p>	€0.60
Wages	<p>1 Chef and 1 floor staff @ €900 per week. Divided by 500 meals: €1.80</p>	€1.80
Depreciation	<p>Repair and replacement cost of kitchen equipment and facilities calculated at 10% annually. 10% of €50,000 = €5,000 divided by 52 weeks = €96/week and divided by 500 meals: €0.19</p>	€0.19
TOTAL (minimum sustainable price for this main course)		€4.20

In a Community Café, it is imperative that all of the fixed and variable costs are accounted for when setting the price of the food to be provided. Unlike the conventional catering sector, it is not about profit, but rather about providing your client base with the best product possible at the lowest price. If the price is set too low, the future of the café will be jeopardised.

The purchase price of the food ingredients is the largest proportion of the cost and probably the most variable and volatile aspect of your input costs. Therefore, it is critical to review the relationship between your purchase price and your customer price. And, while it might not be practical to continually change the pricing in a café to account for these changes, it is important that your customer price does not get bypassed by your purchase price in general.

4.3 Handling Money

The cash generated by a Community Café can be a great resource and opportunity for a community, but can also create an opportunity for the wrong people as well. Having strong transparent systems for handling cash will give everyone involved in the café some peace of mind in this area. Here are some useful tips:

- Ensure that each staff member has their own login for use of the cash register.
- Each shift should have its own float which is cleared and counted (tallied) after the shift.
- Use dedicated sealable bags for moving and handling money pre and post till (these are reusable bags available from most retail suppliers).
- An on-site safe will be necessary for storage of money.
- Generally, the fewer people involved with handling cash, the better. Indeed, not all staff may be comfortable with handling cash.
- Consider installing a cash scanner for large notes.

Card transactions have become increasingly popular among all food service outlets and your Community Café may wish to install a payment terminal. These terminals come at a cost and depending on the vendor, there may be a flat rate, a charge based on a percentage of the transaction amount or a mix of both. In any case you will need to account for these charges in your pricing. Community Cafés involved in Meals on Wheels or outside/contract catering will have to be able to facilitate payment by cash, cheque, Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT), PayPal or other similar mechanisms.

5

Environmental Management





5. Environmental Management

Environmental Management is a term used to describe the reduction of waste and environmental impact from a businesses' perspective. Measurement is the first key step in any environmental management programme. If you know how much waste your business generates and how much energy it consumes, you will be able to measure the impact of any changes you make to address it. There are several simple measures Community Cafés can take to reduce their costs and their impact on the environment:

- Have a **dedicated bin for food waste** and review and weigh it at the end of every shift. What food is coming back on the plates and is there anything you are cooking that is regularly not being ordered? This indicates what products are in low demand/surplus and could be re-portioned, discontinued or replaced with something else.
- Check if bain-maries, ovens, etc. are being **turned on too soon or being left on too long?**
- Explore the installation of **timers and motion sensors** to ensure lighting and equipment are in use no more than is necessary.
- **Replace old lights with LEDs.** You probably won't need as many, as LEDs are usually much brighter than conventional lights.
- Consider **replacing older, undersized or oversized equipment.** Cost will be offset by the increased energy efficiency, especially on equipment you use regularly. Suppliers will provide you with an energy rating that you can compare with your existing equipment.
- Discontinue the use of **single use plastics/disposable cutlery** where possible. Many bio-degradable/compostable alternatives are now available that may not have been available a few years ago and with government policy and public sentiment now frowning on single use plastic, Community Cafés should be leading the move away from these.
- Minimizing waste can also be facilitated by encouraging (and incentivising) customers to **bring their own containers** for takeaways. Offering a discount for using reusable coffee mugs and providing a free water refill station are also ways to reduce waste.

Again, measuring your energy consumption and waste generation is the key to having a good environmental policy. Knowing how much you will save in the long run will be the best way of justifying the upfront investment required to make the necessary changes to become a 'Green Community Café'.

6

People Management





6. People Management

Many Community Cafés are not in a position to pay full-time staff solely from the income generated from sales. Therefore, most are staffed by a mixture of directly paid staff, staff from various active labour market programmes (CE, TÚS, etc.), people on work experience or training and volunteers. Staff recruitment and retention is a challenge facing all food services at present and this situation is no different (many would say it is heightened) in the Community Café environment. There are a range of challenges and opportunities unique to this kind of enterprise.

6.1 Job Descriptions

Community Cafés often operate with the bare minimum of staff and it is important that staff retain some flexibility in order to cover roles that may arise on a day to day basis. In general, each staff member should have capacity to cover at least one other role in the café. This is essential to cover holiday time, illness or other unexpected absences of staff. This flexibility should be clearly pointed to in the job description and has implications for Kitchen Rotas and Staff Training.

6.1.1 The Chef

An experienced and/or professionally trained chef is the key person in any kitchen. To be the chef in a Community Café requires a skill-set that might not apply in a conventional kitchen setting. It is a job that can be challenging and rewarding in equal measure:

- **Family Friendly Hours** – While the majority of the positions available in the catering sector can have anti-social hours, most Community Café chef's hours occur between the hours of 8am and 3pm.
- **Social Function** – The role of chef in a Community Café serves a critical social function within the community. This can be an important factor for people interested in having meaningful employment.

- **Budgeting** – As outlined above, the chef in a Community Café needs to be able to produce quality, nutritious food on a tight budget.
- **Staff Management** – Commercial kitchens have a reputation for being tough places to work. The boss in a community run kitchen will need to have good people skills and deal with issues arising more sympathetically than might be the industry convention.
- **Mentoring** – The chef in a Community Café will generally need to play a strong mentoring role as many staff, whether on schemes, work experience or otherwise new to the sector, will require ongoing training and assistance. Many community kitchens play the vital role of career stepping stone for members of the community, which can result in high staff turnover.

6.1.2 Kitchen Rotas

A kitchen rota is a key tool for a manager to ensure that all jobs are being covered while staff get to experience as many different roles within the café as possible. As Community Cafés tend not to have surplus staff, it is important that individuals do not become too narrow in their abilities/focus. When a staff shortage arises in any area, it is imperative that someone is able to cover the job required (this should also be reflected in the job description). Management also need to have regular check-ins with staff. Meeting and talking with the chef, kitchen and floor service staff regularly could help to address any issues that may exist before any bigger problems emerge.

6.2 Training and Development

Whether a Community Café is offering formal qualifications in conjunction with a local college or university or is providing informal ‘on-the-job training’, it is important that everyone involved recognises that they have a responsibility to the learner to provide the best training possible. However, in the busy environment of the Community Café, training often disappears from the agenda and ends up being an aspiration rather than a reality. Each Community Café will have to make a concerted effort to schedule staff training, which will pay dividends in terms of staff morale and customer satisfaction almost immediately.

When providing training to front-line staff, it is important to remember that sessions should be focused, practical and to the point. Most staff will be attending training as well as continuing with their café duties, therefore it is not practical or fair to expect them to sit through hours of lectures. While it is expected that staff working in a food environment would already be trained in the fundamentals of food safety, etc. every staff member would benefit from refresher training covering the following topics as a minimum:

- Food Safety and Hygiene (including HACCP)
- Health and Safety
- Customer Service
- Portion Control

Some staff may wish to further their training in the area of food service. While facilitating this may ultimately lead to the café losing a valuable staff member, there is an obligation on the organisation to facilitate that training and development.

6.3 Volunteer Management

Volunteers can take many forms. They may be local residents that recognise the value of the café to their community, people from the corporate sector performing their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) duties or young people getting work experience. Whatever the case, volunteering is a two way partnership between the volunteer and the host organisation. Each party will come to the arrangement with certain expectations and knowing each others' expectations is the key to making the partnership work. Volunteer Ireland has a 'Charter for Effective Volunteering' that can act as a good guide for anyone working with volunteers (see <https://volunteer.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/CharterForEffectiveVolunteering1.2.pdf>).

6.4 Food Hygiene

Good hygiene forms the baseline that any food business cannot fall below and it is the legal responsibility of the Food Business Operator (FBO) to ensure safe food. The Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI) is the body that ensures that food produced in Ireland is safe. Given that legislation is updated and changed frequently, we would recommend that FBOs visit their website (www.fsai.ie) to keep up to date with food safety. The FSAI also has the 'Safe Catering Pack' which is a tool to help food businesses manage food safety and comply with food hygiene legislation. This can be ordered from the FSAI directly.



6.4.1 Registration and Inspections

In the case of cafés and restaurants, it is the Local Environmental Health Office of the HSE that has the authority to oversee and inspect their compliance with food safety legislation. A full list of contact details for Environmental Health Offices is available at: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/environ/contact.html>.

6.4.2 Staff Training

It is recommended that an induction pack be developed and given to all kitchen and floor staff upon arrival. Staff involved in the production of food are legally required to have completed the 'appropriate' level of training. The FSAI website provides a template for various levels of training:

- **Level 1** provides information on basic food safety skills that staff should be able to demonstrate within the first month of employment.
- **Level 2** provides information on the additional food safety skills that staff should be able to demonstrate within 3-12 months of commencing employment in your food business.
- **Level 3** provides information on the food safety skills that should be demonstrated by managers and supervisors in food operations.

Food safety training is available from a wide range of sources and in a number of formats. Again, the FSAI website is the best source of information for food safety training.

6.4.3 HACCP

HACCP stands for Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point. Put simply, each food business operator (FBO) has a legal responsibility to identify the specific hazards associated with the kind of food production they are involved with and to identify measures through which to address these hazards. A HACCP plan may be drawn up by the FBO themselves or by a suitably qualified consultant. However, it is critical that the staff involved in production know and understand what is in the plan and how to implement it. Again, visit the FSAI website (www.fsai.ie), for guidance in this area.



7

Customer Service



7. Customer Service

There are a number of maxims one could apply here: 'The customer is King', 'The customer is always right', etc. But what does this mean in practice and what are the practical steps a Community Café can take to ensure that the customer leaves your café fully satisfied?

7.1 Etiquette

Whether you are running a burger van, a pizzeria, a Community Café or a Michelin starred restaurant, the same basic principles apply to customer service:

- **Personal Appearance** – All staff should be well turned out. Uniforms, branded aprons and/or colour coordinated clothes, all neatly pressed, help to create a professional appearance. Good personal hygiene is critical. Excessive jewellery and/or fragrances should be avoided.
- **Politeness** – Greet all customers when they arrive. Be well versed in your menu, listen to what people say and don't interrupt. Repeat their order to ensure you have it right. Use polite phrases like 'Would you like...' rather than 'Do you want...' for example.
- **Promptness** – Try not to make your customers wait too long for their food. If a delay is unavoidable, say it! If your customer is annoyed by a long wait, it won't matter how good the food is when it does arrive.
- **Fix Problems Immediately** – With the best will in the world, things will still occasionally go wrong. If a customer is unhappy, don't ignore it. Listen to what they have to say and take ownership of the problem. Apologise and offer some reasonable recompense (a free coffee or dessert often works well). Watch what you say and your body language, particularly if the customer is being unreasonable. Remember others will be observing how you respond to criticism and your job is to resolve the problem with the minimum of drama.



Each Community Café should invest some time in providing their staff with customer service training. This is much more desirable than dealing with issues on a one-to-one basis with staff, which can take the appearance of direct, personal criticism if not carefully managed.

7.2 Customer Feedback

All customer feedback whether good, bad or indifferent is a valuable resource. Providing your customers with an opportunity to submit feedback indicates that you value them and their opinions and allows you to make changes and improvements based on their feedback. Feedback from your customers allows you to see what you are doing from their perspective and there are a number of approaches you can take to achieve this:

- Customer surveys conducted at regular intervals.
- Customer comment cards available in the café on an ongoing basis.
- Encourage staff to talk to the customers and ask for their feedback.
- Look at the plates coming back and what does not sell.

Because of their location (often within community facilities/in tight knit communities), Community Cafés have a unique opportunity to interact with their customers in other settings. It is particularly informative to find out why some people have stopped coming to the café, as most people ‘vote with their feet’ and out of politeness, you may be the last person to be told if there is an issue.

8

Branding, Marketing and Sales





8. Branding, Marketing and Sales

Community Cafés are coming from a very strong position from a branding and marketing point of view. 'Telling your story' is a strong element of any marketing campaign and every Community Café has a compelling reason for its existence. However, not all Community Cafés have been good at taking advantage of their strong position within the community.

8.1 Branding

Community Cafés can be regarded as a brand in itself, and it is a brand that has strong local and global recognition, so it is a very positive start. The starting point for a brand is your logo and tag line and it should consist of something clear and 'snappy' which reflects the essence and priorities of your Community Café and should resonate with your local community. The brand you develop/choose should also be easily reproducible and clear, therefore using a graphic designer would be advisable.

Here are some examples:



In many instances, a Community Café will keep it simple and simply call itself after the community or project in which it is located. The opportunity to be creative comes with the development of a logo. A striking building or other feature in the community can be used in the imagery or a characteristic word or phrase commonly used by the local community could be incorporated into the tag line. Having a strong brand also gives the café the opportunity to develop consistent merchandising across signage, menus, flyers, newsletters etc.

8.2 Marketing

The marketing of a Community Café presents a number of opportunities and challenges unique to the sector. As mentioned earlier, there is a strong recognition of the role of Community Cafés generally and the scope and nature of the marketing activity will depend on the focus of the café and the priorities of those operating it. Having a strong brand and merchandising can be a help in terms of recognition, but every Community Café should consider drawing up a marketing strategy, which sets out what they want to achieve, what steps are to be taken and who is taking responsibility for doing it.

8.2.1 Technology and Social Media

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. can provide an excellent opportunity for customers to provide feedback and otherwise engage with their Community Café. At least one staff member should have the capacity to stay on top of the café's Social Media. Enquiries, comments and posts should be responded to promptly.

8.2.2 Flyers and Newsletters

These may be seen as a more 'traditional' way of promoting your project, but it is important to remember that not everyone has access to, or is comfortable with IT. Particularly, where a Community Café has a specific geographical focus, these can be an effective way of promoting the café, running competitions and special offers to your target community.

8.2.3 Word-of-Mouth and Referrals

This is dependant on the quality of the product delivered, but word-of-mouth is the single best marketing tool that a Community Café has. If you can turn even a small number of your customers into advocates for the café, they will do a large amount of your marketing for you. However, this also works the other way: If customers have a negative experience, word of that experience will spread with greater vigour than that of a good experience.

If your café is involved in outside or event catering, referrals are critical. The Café will need to be clear on what they offer and what they do not offer. Pricing, menus and the range of services on offer also need to be clearly set out so that, when a referral does come, it can be dealt with clearly and efficiently.

8.3 Sales

In a conventional café setting, staff are encouraged to 'up-sell' on every possible occasion. Getting customers to have that cup of coffee or dessert and increasing the total amount of money spent by each customer, to increase the overall turnover and therefore the profit, is common practice in the commercial sector. In a Community Café however, staff need to be more conscious of the circumstances of their customers. In many cases, your customer will have the price only of the item they have ordered and you might be causing them embarrassment by trying the 'hard up-sell'. Having a good quality, consistent, reasonably (and sustainably) priced product and excellent customer service are the most appropriate sales techniques in a Community Café.

Some cafés target sales to the wider public as a way of subsidising the provision of food to their target community. In such cases, conventional sales techniques and strategies can be deployed with a clear conscience. It can, however, be difficult to delineate the product for sale to the target group and to the wider public. When providing event/outside catering, for example, it may be possible to create bands of charges for different groups which might include a Community Band, a Private Function Band and a Corporate Band at different levels.

9

Measuring the Impact of a Community Café





9. Measuring the Impact of a Community Café

Many Community Cafés have become hubs of activity for the areas in which they are located. They serve food and provide nutrition and sustenance to their customers, but also provide a range of other functions that are not as easily quantified. However, setting up and operating a Community Café requires much work, funding and planning. It is crucial that the café measures the impact it is having or indeed hopes to have. This provides crucial information for all of the stakeholders in the café, including funders, supporting organisations and agencies, staff and board members and the wider community.

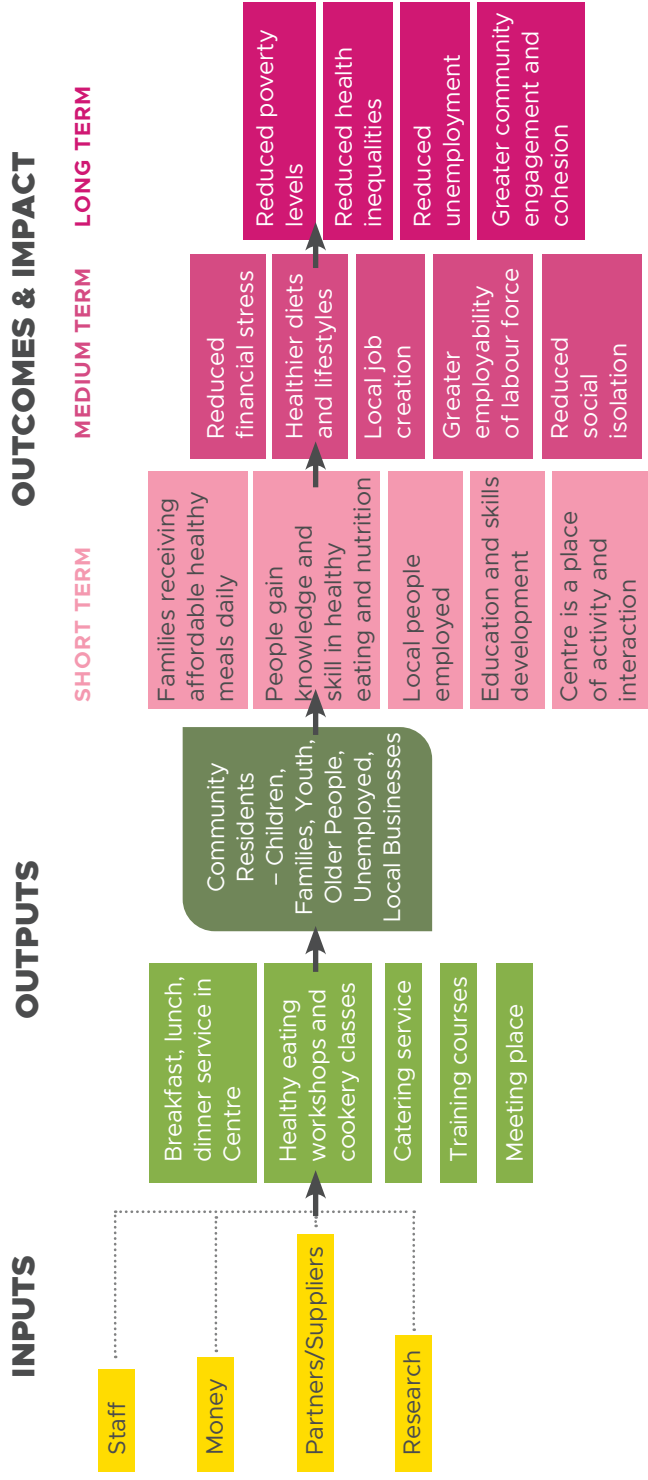
The ability to measure the impact of the Community Café also provides the organisation with a key promotional tool to attract customers, events and general goodwill towards the project. Community Cafés often find that other organisations and businesses in their area are keen to support them, whether motivated by general goodwill or specific Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) requirements.

See page 41 for an example of a 'Logic Model' for a Community Café. The model provides the community organisation with a structure through which to visualise the impact of their project and to directly link and explain how different inputs and activities are linked to direct outputs. It shows how the outputs lead to short, medium and long term outcomes for the target community of the project. One of the advantages of the Logic Model approach is that it allows the promoters to record both quantifiable (e.g. dinners served, people employed) and non-quantifiable (e.g. new social space created) impacts. The 'Logic Model' can be utilised to help everyone involved in the café to visualise 'why' the café does what it does by linking the day to day tasks and the practical inputs to the 'bigger picture'.



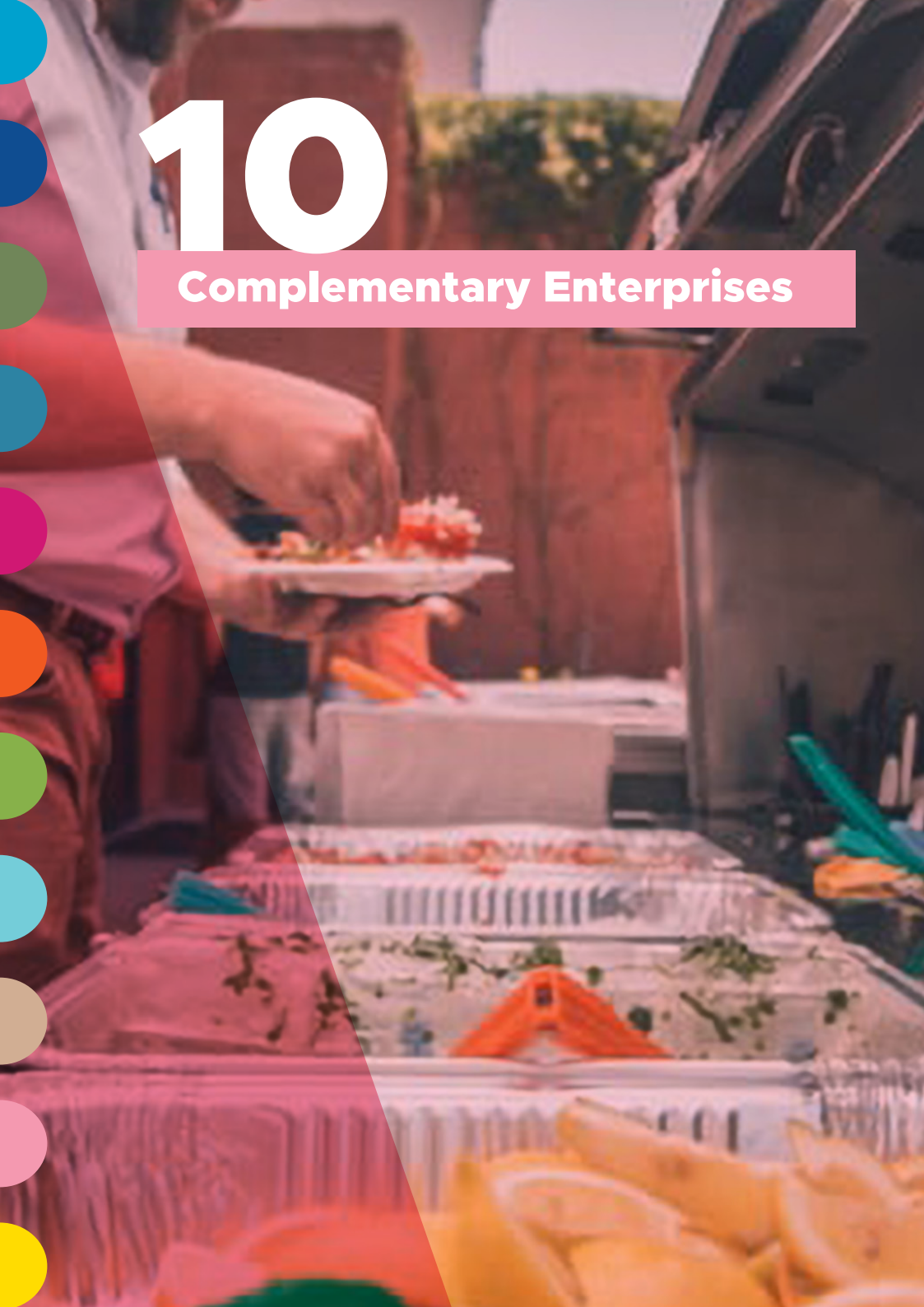
Example of a Logic Model for a Community Café

Situation Statement: High unemployment; lack of job creation opportunities; high levels of deprivation; health inequalities; low level of nutrition literacy; few spaces for social interaction.



10

Complementary Enterprises





10. Complementary Enterprises

While the term 'Community Café' invokes an image of a particular type of enterprise, a review of the sector reveals that there are a range of compatible/sympathetic food related social enterprises that work well and are commonly operated in conjunction with many Community Cafés. As Community Cafés often have capacities in terms of trained staff, facilities, community knowledge and integration, the following activities are often a 'good fit'. Some cafés will have to decide whether they want to provide these services from a separate kitchen or expand their existing facility.

10.1 Meals on Wheels

Many Community Cafés offer a 'Meals on Wheels' service or may even have evolved into a café from originally offering 'Meals on Wheels' to older people in their community. The first step is to conduct a needs analysis for the service in the community. There may already be a Meals on Wheels service available in the area that your proposed service would negatively impact. This would be regarded as displacement and would be unlikely to receive statutory funding or support on that basis. If gaps have been identified in an existing service, it may be more appropriate to collaborate with the existing service provider rather than do something independently and/or in competition.

10.2 Event, Contract and Outside Catering

Event catering can offer a Community Café an opportunity to maximise the use of the facilities and equipment available. In the age of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), many companies may be interested in contracting part or all of their outside catering to a Community Café. In many cases, client or partner organisations may also be interested in contracting catering from a Community Café and this can provide a regular repeat order for the café. People from the community may also be interested in contracting the café to provide catering for parties and events. In such cases, a café could potentially charge more 'commercial' rates.

Both the preparation and the serving of the food can involve a big time commitment, often out of normal hours. Any organisation undertaking event catering would need to have flexible staff and these staff will also need to be paid for their time, so it is possible that you could incur a large overtime bill. One strategy may be to offer staff Time off in Lieu (TOIL), where they could work up holidays that can be taken at quieter times of the year.

10.3 Crèche/School Lunches

Given the proximity that often occurs between Community Cafés and crèches and schools, it may be an option for the café to provide lunches on a contract basis. While there are limitations on what can be charged for this service, it can provide the café with a regular, dependable income during the school year. In 2019, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection announced the expansion of the Hot School Meals Scheme and Community Cafés are best placed in many communities to deliver this.

10.4 Facilities Hire

Many Community Cafés have facilities and equipment that are idle for large periods of time, typically at weekends and in the afternoon/evenings. A number of Community Cafés have made their facilities available for hire to, for example, start-up food businesses in their area. This can provide the café with an additional (if limited) income stream, while allowing the food business to develop their product offering without the expense involved in setting up, buying or renting a full time food production facility.

If this is being considered, the café management should consider the following points:

- A time slot is agreed and that the client does not stray significantly from it. This is particularly important when dealing with more than one user.
- The client (or any of their employees) using the kitchen has the appropriate level of food safety training.
- The client should be trained in the proper use of any equipment they may be using in production.

- The facility is returned to its original state of cleanliness by the client.
- The client's level production/output remain within the safe limitations of the facility.
- The client only uses ingredients that have been pre-approved by the café management and that those ingredients are compatible with the café's current operations.
- The client and the café's insurance reflect this new use of the café facilities.

The use of the café in this manner should be subject to a written agreement/contract.

10.5 Cookery Classes

Most Community Centres will have access to ETB tutor hours and can provide cookery classes in the evening when the kitchen is not in use. This will only generate a minimal amount of income but will also provide a complementary service to the local residents and is free advertising to people who may not be aware of your café facility.

The use of a Community Café for additional/complementary enterprise should be given careful consideration in terms of inputs, time management, staff and management resources. While the temptation to generate additional funds will be strong in most Community Cafés, the business and social case for the enterprise should be fully thought out prior to making any commitment.

CONCLUSION



During the development of this guide, the Community Cafés in Limerick contributed their practical experience and knowledge and participated in a range of training and development. The experience has given everyone involved an insight into the benefits of collaboration and networking. By working together, the Community Cafés in Limerick have addressed a number of key development and sustainability issues and it is intended that this work will continue for everyone's benefit into the future.

We hope that this guide will prove a useful reference both for those currently running a Community Café and for those exploring the establishment of a new café in their community. Coming together over food is one of the great pleasures of social society. The benefits of having a well run Community Café are clear, but it takes a lot of hard work and ongoing management to do it right and it's not a task to undertake lightly. However, if you talk to the people already involved in the sector you will find them full of helpful information. With that, and the help of this guide, no issue should be insurmountable.





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This guide has been developed with the assistance of the following organisations:

