



Annual Report 2017-18

This report covers the fourth year of our operation, from April 2017 to the end of March 2018. Over the course of the 12 months, the Trustees have met on three occasions to discuss and agree on decisions about the income and expenditure of the charity, to plan activities and to review progress to date. The intention had been to meet four times a year and to plan these dates in advance to ensure they were regular but there was a slight complication early in the year when the Treasurer deciding to stand down which slightly disrupted the planned pattern of meetings whilst a new trustee was identified. All trustee meetings were presented with up-to-date accounts by the Treasurer and a written record maintained.

Trustees

With the retirement of Campbell Grant, two new people were approached to join the Board as it was felt that it would be good to increase the size of the Board to four or five people; we were also very conscious of the fact that all the Trustees were men. Unfortunately a very well qualified and experienced woman we approached felt that she had too many existing commitments but we were delighted to welcome Phil Conn who works for OasisAquila Housing as a Trustee for the October meeting and are currently in discussion with another potential candidate who we hope will join us in the next year. Ollie Batchelor took on the role of treasurer and it may be that the role of chair can be rotated in the future.

Activities

The Charity has continued with its approach of both funding other people to carry on their own work which fits with our charitable objects and initiating activities of our own, creating Soul Food Spaces in new locations. The main commitment this year has been the continued funding of the ***Bensham Community Food Co-op***. We pay for and deliver fresh vegetables every two weeks and we also pay for a delivery of FareShare food which though variable in quality, does provide good value for money over the course of the year. The awareness of and support for the Co-op has grown this year, particularly from people wanting to donate and support it – St Chads Church and St Helens Church are two big supporters but several other churches, a local charity, several schools and a lot of individuals donate food, clothes and toys which supplement the basis we provide. Peace of Mind have taken over provision of the herbs and spices. Tesco have provided a lot of bread on an almost weekly basis which has been an enormous help with a great variety and choice of bread types which really works well with our model of members selecting the things they want. The vegetables we provide include staples such as onions, carrots, potatoes, cabbage and garlic, with a whole variety of seasonal produce over the course of the year including leeks,

peppers, squash, courgettes, beetroot, swede, red cabbage, sprouts, parsnips, pumpkin, beans, broccoli and cauliflower.

At year end we have completed our second year of operation and welcomed a further 181 new members which is slightly fewer than in year 1, however average attendance each week has gone up from 46 in year 1 to 54 in year 2 and the number of people fed has increased from 4743 to 6357. Pleasingly, we now have a group of 8-13 people who have lived all their lives in Bensham who are experiencing a number of health and social problems meaning they are regular users of the Co-op. The mixing of refugees and asylum seekers and indigenous British works well – all are entitled and all welcomed to the Co-op. A seating and refreshments area was created during the course of this year with tea and coffee and biscuits appreciated by many of the members, especially the locals. Throughout the winter months, soup has been prepared and given out which has gone down well.

Clothing and household goods have continued to be donated and given out and the flow of volunteer members has continued to work well, with some of the early volunteers now given leave to remain in the UK and in settled housing and employment. Some occasionally come back to visit when working hours permit. During the course of the year, Gateshead Public Health funded an academic evaluation of the Food Co-op by Newcastle University. It was very positive about the work but there was nothing in the final report about which we were not already aware. Soul Food Spaces remains committed to continuing to provide core funding for the Bensham Community Food Co-op, for as long as it operates or requires some core finance to provide the fresh food we require in appropriately large quantities.

Once again we have been measured in our spending elsewhere, partly because funding the Co-op accounts for most of our income but also because it is not always easy finding the sort of work going on to which our relatively small amounts of money can make a difference. We were pleased to be able to support a very good community-based initiative run by a local church in Sunderland which addresses holiday hunger in an enjoyable and inclusive way for all the family.

We have explored a number of other options through the year. In order to try to improve our reach to know about other activities going on and areas where our funding may be of help, we are looking to have a number of Soul Food Associates who will keep us informed about good work they see going on and to be able to suggest projects who might benefit from some funding. We have discussed the idea of awards for places we know who capture the principles we see as important to have a Soul Food space and also for individuals who espouse this – Soul Food Champions. This is an idea which we will be continuing to pursue in the next year.

Finance

The Financial Accounts for 2017-18 show the incomings and outgoings of the charity. Once again we have not sought external grant funding and have relied upon a number of private donations to maintain the charity. We received donations amounting to £2633 and a one Gift Aid payment from HM Revenue and Customs amounting to £487 giving us in-year income of nearly £3120. We gave grants and supported activities

totalling £3630, almost exactly the same as last year with a closing balance of £5137. With income roughly covering the cost of the Food Co-op, we will need to increase income over the longer term if we are to increase our activities and grant making elsewhere. We do not have a set amount of reserves agreed and will look to develop this in the year ahead. Whilst it is important to be able to fulfil our agreed funding commitments we do not want to be guilty of holding too much money in reserve when times are so hard for many groups and the needs of people and communities for food are increasing too.

Partnerships

The partnership with Peace of Mind and Corpus Christi to deliver the food Co-op continues and we have developed or maintained good working relationships with other organisations such as Food Nation, Bensham and Saltwell Alive, Edberts House and the Network for Independent Food Aid Providers. We recognise that partnership is not just a better way of making our very small resources go further but a healthier and more positive way of working with others to make a real difference in feeding people in body, mind and spirit.

Communications

We are not a charity which seeks publicity for itself or its work however we do want to draw attention to need and positive stories of how people can be fed. As such we continue to have a website, though it is looking a little tired and needs refreshing in the forthcoming year; our social media activity, principally twitter is sporadic and as such does not really promote our work or work to best advantage. This needs to be reviewed in the next year.

The Future

This year we have managed to consolidate the work of the charity with changes in the trustees and new ideas of how we might extend our reach. As we move into our next year of operation we are mindful of the need to sustain the credible work of the Food Co-op and to further develop links and opportunities to support the things other people are doing to feed the hungry and to see gaps and opening where we might set up other new ventures. Funding things which are primarily about food and physical needs is just part of our charitable object and we need to both raise awareness of and increase our funding for activities which tackle emotional hunger and those which address spiritual hunger. These require more creative solutions but are close to our hearts and something we hope to better respond to next year.

Thanks to all those who have donated their money, time, skills and energy to enable Soul Food Spaces to continue to do so many of the things that we set out to achieve. Thanks too for the continued interest and good will extended towards our work. Our progress is slow and our reach is limited but we believe that in life it is the little things which people do that make all the difference and we are happy to be a part of that.