

Healthy Food for All

2006 – 2016: A Legacy to Address Food Poverty in Ireland



The VPSJ recently completed a study on behalf of Safe Food – an all Ireland agency - to establish the expenditure needed for a low cost but nutritious diet for household types in the North of Ireland. In the course of the work it was clear that many low income households, while wanting to provide nutritious food for their families cannot afford the costs. They do not have a sufficient weekly income. As was in the case of the Republic of Ireland study the food budget can be neglected when parents are faced with competing demands on their limited resources. Meeting the cost of the rent, household energy, travel to work and unexpected expenditure etc often results in ‘what is left’ determining the amount and type of food which the family will eat.

This edition of Just.Now focuses on the legacy of a small charity to address food poverty in Ireland. Because of a lack of funding, Healthy Food for All had to close its doors in March 2016 after 10 years of work. Sinéad Keenan, Director of Healthy Food for All, outlines the legacy of a small, creative and effective organisation to address food poverty. The VPSJ congratulates Sinéad and her colleagues on their significant achievements.

Healthy Food for All

Healthy Food for All (HFfA) was an all-island charity addressing food poverty by promoting access, availability and affordability of healthy food for low-income groups. Recognising the need to address the issue at both local and national level, HFfA designed a model of Community and School Food Initiatives to support low-income families to address their own food needs. We also raised awareness about the challenges that limit people’s food choices. We made connections between food poverty and other policy concerns such as health inequalities, welfare adequacy, educational disadvantage, food production and distribution, retail planning and food safety. Our body of work remains accessible at www.healthyfoodforall.com

The Vincentian Partnership for Social Justice consists of

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, The Vincentian Congregation, The Daughters of Charity and The Sisters of the Holy Faith. *Working for social and economic change, tackling poverty and social exclusion*

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The Issue: Food Poverty

Food poverty is defined as the inability to have an adequate and nutritious diet due to issues of the affordability of and access to food.

- One in eight people in Ireland are living in food poverty (Department of Social Protection 2015).
- One in five children go to school or to bed hungry because there is not enough food in the home (Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children 2015).

Research shows that socially disadvantaged households consume less nutritionally-balanced diets and suffer from higher rates of diet-related diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, obesity and certain cancers. Food poverty is a form of social exclusion and social injustice. People's food choices are limited by the amount of money they have to spend on food, where they live in relation to a supermarket, the type of food that is available to them and their skills and confidence around preparing food.

What We Achieved

Through its advocacy and awareness raising, Healthy Food for All succeeded in placing the issue firmly on the national policy agenda. We undertook research on food poverty and made policy recommendations to government departments on how to support low-income households access a healthy diet. HFfA was instrumental in encouraging other NGOs to incorporate a food poverty focus in their work and a number of national organisations have taken up this issue.

Community Food Initiatives

Healthy Food for All developed the Community Food Initiative model to help increase access to safe, sustainable and nutritious food. We published [A Good Practice Guide for Community Food Initiatives](#) which was a practical resource for community groups setting up a food project. We established 17 Community Food Initiatives across the island of Ireland. Through these projects tens of thousands of people living in disadvantaged

communities engaged in growing, cooking and nutrition courses. These projects had a substantial impact on the local community, often creating a beautiful garden, accessible to the whole community, in spaces that had previously been a site of anti-social behaviour. We also ran a series of regional training events for community groups to help them address local food needs.

School Food Initiatives

HFfA identified schools as an ideal setting to address food poverty among children. Good food and nutrition is essential in childhood and adolescence and important for future health. We published two Good Practice Guides for [School Food Initiatives](#) and [Breakfast Clubs](#). We established a Pilot Programme of Breakfast Clubs in north Dublin which was attended by 120 children daily. We also undertook a research project on schools' support needs in setting up a breakfast club. This study was the first of its kind in Ireland and made recommendations to expand the School Meals Programme, improve school infrastructure and provide training support for school staff. HFfA successfully advocated for increases in the budget for the School Meals Programme which increased from €4 million to €42 million between 2006 and 2016.



Community Garden

Call to Action

The election of the 32nd Dáil, the new programme for government and the centenary celebration of 1916 give us an opportunity for a new vision for the period ahead. Over the next five years, Healthy Food for All is asking advocates to build on our work over the last 10 years by highlighting the link between food and the obesity crisis, mental health issues, access to education, income adequacy and the creation of healthy environments. We are asking advocates and policy makers to commit to the following five actions over the next five years:

1. National Food and Nutrition Strategy

We need a national food and nutrition strategy that ensures the affordability, accessibility and availability of healthy food to all people in Ireland. Such a strategy must involve all the relevant Government Departments and be developed in partnership with the food and farming industries, consumer groups, the community and voluntary sector, business and the public.

2. Maintain and highlight trends in Food Poverty annually

Healthy Food for All was involved in the development of the first headline food poverty indicator, published in 2012 showing that 450,000 people in Ireland were experiencing food poverty at that time. This figure increased to 600,000 in 2015. The Department of Social Protection includes this data in its annual Social Inclusion Monitor. This indicator can help us monitor progress on tackling food poverty as well as hold the government accountable for measures it takes to address this issue. This data needs to be investigated in the context of the implementation of national policies on planning, health, education and income adequacy.

3. Develop and deliver on a National Food in Schools Strategy

While the budget for the School Meals Programme has increased there is a need for greater policy coherence across the five government departments involved in school food provision.

Our research shows that schools still need additional support in terms of capital funding costs and training for staff. Measures to address food poverty among children need to be rights-based and underpinned by the State's international legal obligations to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights.

4. Develop a funding stream for community food-related projects

A five-year investment of €2.5 million from Government in Community Food Initiatives is needed so there is at least one such Initiative in every county. Community Food Initiatives improve the availability and accessibility of healthy food for low income groups at local level through community gardens, cookery/nutrition classes, community cafes, supermarket tours and budgeting courses.

5. Planning at national and local government level includes requirements for a range of healthy food outlets

National and local authorities should include provision for access to healthy food in relevant planning decisions. In addition they should implement a No Fry Zone and safeguard our school children from future exposure to fast food outlets. *Sinéad Keenan*



Summer Time Reflections

Caring for Creation

Most High, good Lord,
You revealed to St. Francis
that You are Father of all creation and
that all creatures are related as brothers and
sisters.

Praised be You, my Lord,
with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun who is the day,
and through whom You give us light.

Praised be You, my Lord,
through Sister Moon and the stars,
Brother Wind,
Sister Water
and Brother Fire.

And praised be You, my Lord,
through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and produces varied fruit
with coloured flowers and herbs.

Grant us, Lord,
the grace to see Your beauty and likeness
in created things
that we may follow St. Francis
in showing care for creation.
Amen

adapted by Br. Cathal Duddy ofm from "*The Canticle
of the Creatures*" by St. Francis of Assisi
www.franciscans.ie

This world

Your creation
Rolled into a sphere
Packaged in sunshine
Gift-wrapped in love
Given to us
Thank you

www.faihandworship.com

Christ within us,
Light above us,
Earth beneath us,
Love surrounds us.

from
EcoCongregation Ireland

Creator God

who breathed this world into being,
who is discernible within
the harmony of nature,
the perfection of a butterfly's wing,
the grandeur of a mountain range,
the soaring eagle and humming bird,
thank you for this world
which you have created.
Thank you for summer sun,
which reminds us
that your creative breath
is still alive and active.
Thank you for the warmth of your love,
sustaining this world,
your garden

www.faihandworship.com

That we can glimpse you within creation
is a beautiful thought,
but also tells us that you desire to be seen,
to be found and known.
Open our eyes, Lord,
as we walk through this world,
feel the wind and sunshine,
see the majesty of creation
unfolding before our eyes.
Help us to see you

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