

Hello!

Welcome to the twenty-second newsletter from the Lambeth GP Food Co-operative. There's plenty of exciting news and updates from our latest activities, as well as some personal reflections and a chance to get to know our team.

We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter. If you have any ideas for future stories or want any more information please get in touch with us by email gpfoodcoop@gmail.com, and don't forget to keep up-to-date with our activities through Twitter [@gpfoodcoop](https://twitter.com/gpfoodcoop) and our website <http://lambeth.gpfoodcoop.org.uk/>



Reflections on the last nine years

Nine years ago a local resident called Ed Rosen got in touch with Lambeth Council to say that he had an idea for a new co-operative in borough. At the time I was working in the Chief Executive's Office in the council on the policy of encouraging a more co-operative borough. So I was asked to meet Ed and find out more about his plans. Little did I know that meeting Ed would mean I would get involved with the Lambeth GP Food Co-op (LGPFC) and still be involved nine years later!

It has been astounding to see how the LGPFC has grown and evolved over time. I remember the early discussions with a small group of keen supporters, often at Lambeth Town Hall, where Ed would talk enthusiastically about an extra GP practice who were thinking of coming on board. The council provided some funding for the first couple of years to help get things going, including the support of the late Ivor Picardo. During that time Ed, as the Project Director, and other colleagues were able to source new gardens and new partners who wanted to help and contribute.

Ed has always been adept at building relationships with organisations that might be able to help the LGPFC. I remember meeting Duncan Selbie, at the time the new Chief Executive of Public Health England, at Lambeth Walk Surgery. How such a small community organisation managed to get such a high-ranking civil servant along to hear about the work they were doing was solely due to Ed and his tenacity in wanting to show people what the LGPFC could achieve.

Over the years I've had the opportunity to come along to various events that LGPFC have hosted such as AGMs and the launch of new gardens. It's been great to meet some many of the gardeners and supporters who make the LGPFC such a warm and friendly organisation. There are so many welcoming faces at any event you attend; it's easy to see why people get involved.

One of the highlights for me was the visit by HRH Duchess of Cornwall in February 2019. It was wonderful to have such recognition of all the hard work and effort which has gone in to making the LGPFC a success.

After 11 years with Lambeth Council, I'm moving on to a new role in another borough which is going to be incredibly strange. But if Ed and colleagues want to start branching out into Lewisham, I'm sure they'll let me know! I hope I'll still be able to put together the newsletter as it's a great way to stay in touch with what is happening. And even better, perhaps we'll all be able to get together in one of the gardens again soon.

John Bennett

LGPFC member (and newsletter editor)

Update from Ed

As I write this briefing, I am watching the snow melt away as quickly as it arrived. Its quick disappearance is a seasonal reminder that winter is slowly moving on and Spring is lumbering into sight. But Covid remains as a permanent reminder that despite the months flying by, some of our lives are pinched by its incessant embrace. The pandemic has brought its own sense of urgency, it has forced us to rethink our purposes and our intentions as we begin to prepare for new life in our gardens. But first there is the accounting for the situation we all find ourselves in as we pause to take stock, to listen and to learn on our way towards an exit from this painful present.

To help deepen our understanding of the fatal impact of the pandemic on us, Michael Marmot's team at the Institute of Health Equity, University College London recently published their report on the impact of Covid on our communities by further illuminating the unacceptable health inequalities in our society which have contributed to how our most vulnerable communities have suffered disproportionately over the last year. The report urges us to take action to remedy the situation and I hope Lambeth GP Food Co-op will answer Professor Marmot's call to "build back fairer".

The pandemic has brought us many challenges in its wake with the emergence of "Long Covid" being recognised as a new long-term condition amongst many people who have experienced Coronavirus and are living with its impact on their lives. The recently published "National Institute of Clinical Excellence Covid-19 Rapid Guideline: Managing the Long Term effects of Covid-19" deepens our understanding of the personal experience of people who are beginning to learn how to manage the effects of coronavirus on their lives and how we might create ways in which we might support them.

Our gardening at home scheme is a modest initiative which is designed to support Lambeth patients to grow their own vegetables at home. As many people in the borough don't have access to a private garden we have thought about how we might support people turn their balconies or kitchens into small gardens. We think that even some very limited growing activity at home might help alleviate feelings of being cut off from what remains of our social networks and this may be especially valuable for people who are self-isolating. To help people garden successfully at home we have recruited a small group of gardening buddies who provide telephone and email support to a growing number of patients managing long Covid or related long-term conditions. To the Government message of "Stay at Home" we would only add "Stay at home and garden"

Gardening at home could not happen without a team of people who support it in one way or another. These include Gavin and his team at Sutton Seeds who have provided free seeds for the scheme (see article below) and the Covid-19 Community Organisations Recovery Scheme who provided seed funding (no pun intended!). Thanks also to Lambeth Council who helped us find volunteer garden buddies from amongst our Lambeth Community. And thanks to Hilda, Kiu, Chrissy from Lambeth GP Food Co-op for their support and enthusiasm for the scheme.

Finally, I want to say thank you to John Bennett who is moving to a new senior post with Lewisham Council this month. Way back in early 2012 I met John at Lambeth Council to discuss the idea of what was to become the Lambeth GP Food Co-op and I can honestly say that without John's good advice, skilled navigation through Council funding procedures and bountiful help there would not have been a Lambeth GP Food Co-op. John was an early member of the co-operative and has worked behind the scenes to edit the newsletter along with being our living connection to the Council. Words cannot express my sincere thanks to John for his support and good humour over the past 8 years. Thank you.

Lambeth GP Food Co-op is at its heart a network of people from across the Borough who all contribute to making it work. I would also like to say thank you to Rosemary Smart, Brixton Hill's Practice Manager who has led the gardening project for her patients at the Katakata garden where the vegetable garden is located. Rosemary is moving to a new senior post in Southwark and we wish her all the best.

This issue includes a piece from Dr Kattya Chilton who has recently become a member of the co-op. Welcome Kattya. A piece from Kate Whittle is a reflection on a recent zoom-based training session which Kate delivered to our new members. Thank you Kate.

And thank you readers for your continued interest in our work

Ed Rosen, Project Director, Lambeth GP Food Co-op

Suttons is pleased to continue to support this fabulous initiative with a further donation of vegetable seed this year to give support to those most vulnerable and living in self isolation. We hope this enables them to continue to take pleasure in gardening from the safety of their homes. The seed we have donated this year, Cress, Lettuce Mix and Chilli Apache are a mix of quick and slow easy to grow varieties which can be grown in a small space, perfect on a balcony or patio. Planting just a few seeds can be hugely rewarding and beneficial, when those first shoots start to appear it's a great feeling as well as providing some healthy fresh food from a space as small as a garden pot.



Tackling malnutrition

In 2016 the LAMP Research Team was a pilot site for the Malnutrition task force in collaboration with Lambeth Age UK. As a research dietitian I led 3 LAMP projects, working closely in one with community and voluntary groups supporting older adults, vulnerable adults and patient groups diagnosed with dementia. I was able to help form links to groups with resources or support for their work, which was invaluable for reducing malnutrition, isolation and enhancing quality of life for these patient groups. At this time, I met Dr Raj Mitra and Ed Rosen from the Lambeth GP Food Coop (LGPFC), and Bruno Lacey from the Urban Growth. I introduced Ed to Richard Wilson at KCH, Marianne from KCL, Scott Pendleton, Lynne Hubbard and Liz Weekes from GSTT which led to linking students with LGPFC.

Malnutrition is a significant and growing threat to health. In 2016 it was estimated that 3 million people in the UK (5 % population) were at risk of malnutrition, of which 1.1 million were over 65 years (400,000 in London, with 120,000 over 65s). By 2019 this estimate rose to an estimated 1.3 million over 65s, with the vast majority (93%) living in the community.

In 2020, COVID-19 was described as a “perfect storm” for malnutrition. COVID-19 exacerbates risks not only in older adults, but also people with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, people on low income, and men. COVID-19 has created new cases in otherwise well-nourished populations.

As COVID-19 heightens nutritional needs, LGPFC and their 'gardening buddy' scheme brings a ray of sunshine into the lives of many vulnerable adults in Lambeth. Gardening is a powerful way to involve people of all skill levels, grow food together, encourage mobility, promote positive mental health and reduce isolation.

The WHO says “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” As a dietitian this encompasses healthy nutrition, food, physical mobility, mental health and social habits (like gardening).

Together with my colleague Ana Etxeberria MSc, RD from “Dietetic Help” freelance services (dietetichelp.co.uk), we have supported community charities and groups in helping reduce malnutrition and isolation of vulnerable adults: our criteria are those who offer lunches to the elderly and vulnerable adults (Blackfriars Settlement), people living with dementia (Healthy Living Club Lunches) or food growing schemes (Lambeth GP Food Coop). In future work with LGPFC I hope we can generate ideas linking nutrition to food growing schemes.

LGPFC is finding new ways to navigate the changing NHS landscape. And we are all adapting to the new world with COVID.

I continue to support the development of clinical practice guidelines for DEBRA International in supporting people living with the rare condition Epidermolysis bullosa. But most recently I moved from working virtually with “Dietetic Help”, going back to the wards at Mildmay Mission Hospital with complex HIV related conditions, step-down care for Homeless patients across London and COVID-Care beds for homeless people.

Kattya Mayre-Chilton PhD, RD

Specialist dietitian at Mildmay Mission Hospital (<https://mildmay.org/>) & Clinical practice guideline coordinator at DEBRA International (<https://www.debra-international.org/>)

Working co-operatively

During the winter when it's not easy to get out into our gardens LGPFC decided to run a programme of workshops focusing on the nature of LGPFC as a co-operative and its relationships with the NHS.

However due to Covid19 the only way to reach members was to run the workshops using an online platform called Zoom. I expect many members will have used Zoom to speak to distant friends and relatives during the pandemic, but it's also a useful learning tool.



However not everyone is familiar with using Zoom, so one of the aims of the first workshop was to familiarise people, and we had fun playing around with it at the start. I think it's important that everyone feels comfortable with these new ways of communicating, which will help achieve our learning goals.

The aims of the programme are:

- to deepen members' understanding of their role in the organisation
- to provide members with knowledge and understanding of the role and purposes of LGPFC
- to help members improve the performance of LGPFC

We hoped that participants would come away from this first workshop with an improved understanding of:

- what is a co-operative, history and ways of working
- what it means to be a member

We started with two short videos – first was co-op members saying what co-operation means to them, such as: **“Co-operative Principles run through co-operatives like Blackpool through a stick of rock”**

The second was a graphic cartoon summary of the history of co-operation in the UK.

Kiu has links to both of these videos, so they could be shown to other members – and especially new members – at any convenient moment.

Our first discussion centred on the question “What is a co-op & what does it mean to be a member?” and included a definition and an overview of Co-operative principles. These can be found on the ICA website at <https://www.ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity>

We talked about co-op history – why the 1844 Rochdale model was so successful when people had been co-operating for thousands of years.

The second part of the workshop discussed what it means to be a co-operative member, including member rights and responsibilities.

Asked “*What do you bring?*” “*What support do you need?*” and “*What unanswered questions do you have?*” One participant answered: “*knowledge, networking and catalyst*” “*more connecting with the members to feel more part of it*” and “*how to make time*”. A good question!

Feedback included: “*I liked check-in at beginning*” “*Introduction was great and videos were very clear*”, “*time was fine, good group size to discuss well*”, “*Continue to network and build*”.

I look forward to a follow on workshop, later in the Spring, when we will review some of these basics for anyone not able to attend in December, as well as going into more depth regarding the role of LGPFC, and Co-operative values - how they align with NHS values. We will again start with familiarisation of Zoom for anyone new to it.

Kate Whittle

www.cooperantics.coop