

Good Food Stories: Woodlands Veg Box



Woodlands Community Development Trust began work in 2010 as a community garden. They have now served the Woodlands community for over a decade, often with delicious, sustainable, healthy food.

For the first of our Good Food Stories, which aim to showcase inspiring examples of Good Food work happening in Glasgow, we spoke to Woodlands manager Tim Cowen about their veg box scheme.

In response to 2020 pandemic restrictions, Woodlands began supplying veg boxes as a socially-distanced way to encourage people to eat in a more climate-friendly way. Before the pandemic, Woodlands ran a community meal which served around 80 people a week. As covid-19 restrictions closed community meals and restaurants alike, wholesale suppliers found themselves with their usual fruit and vegetables but no customers. Tim explained how at Woodlands they “had an existing relationship with a wholesale veg supplier because they donated stuff to us in the past, and they were very keen to work with us because they'd been impacted by the pandemic in that they supply a lot to the hospitality trade.”

This created the perfect opportunity to launch their veg box scheme, ordering veg wholesale from a local supplier based on how many people registered, putting it all together in veg bags, and offering the bags on a pay-what-you-can basis. Going beyond initial pandemic adaptations, Woodlands have continued the scheme: “it started initially as a 3 month pilot really to see how it went, and then because of its popularity, or because of the good feedback, we've continued to invest in that over the last 2 years.”

The veg boxes are available to collect on alternate Wednesdays between 10am and 5pm. The box is available to those living in or close to Woodlands, and people who wish to order the box can register online or over the phone. The aim is to promote climate-friendly food, so “the fruit and veg we buy is focused on what is in season. Within the veg box we give out a seasonal cooking guide, or kind of simple recipe tips.” So even if you're unfamiliar with an ingredient in the box, advice is included. Or, if you prefer one vegetable over another, Tim advised that extras are available to make swaps and switches possible.



What makes the veg box scheme so inspiring is that while being efficient and simple, it has a wealth of benefits. Tim told us that: “it's got benefits in terms of supporting smaller and local, rather than necessarily relying on supermarkets. It's increasing people's access to healthy food [...] it has also over time changed the way that some people eat, it's increased the number of people who maybe go vegetarian or vegan, or cut down on the amount of meat so it has health and environmental impacts, and it also tackles poverty - it's offered on a pay what you can afford basis. So when we surveyed people 86% of them said that the veg box has stopped them from going hungry.” Tim also highlighted how those coming to collect their veg box might become aware of other activities that are run at Woodlands, and this helps to introduce new people to their work.

As demand for their veg boxes increases, Woodlands have introduced a pay-it-forward system. “People who like what we do, but don't necessarily live locally or live locally but don't necessarily need the veg box could buy a veg box forward for someone in need. So if somebody donated a tenner then that would pretty much enable us to put give out two veg boxes to people.” If you would like to sponsor a veg box, you can do so at woodlandscommunity.org.uk/vegbox, and Tim confirms that it's “probably the most practical way that people could help.”

Building on the success of Woodlands' work combining responses to food poverty and the climate crisis, we asked Tim what his wish for changing the food system would be: “I think we need to address poverty and the climate crisis together. I suppose my wish would be - there's a lot of very good food work being done at a grassroots level but it is very insecurely funded, it's very small scale and if we're taking the climate crisis seriously we need to scale up the response. We're running out of time and we actually need to invest in alternatives rapidly. It's not just the cost of what you need to pay, but the benefits for people's health and people's communities makes that an investment really worthwhile.”

If you'd like to learn more about Woodlands Community Development Trust and all of their projects to improve the Woodlands Community, integrating social wellbeing and the environment, you can go to woodlandscommunity.org.uk. The evaluation of the veg box scheme which centres on how they have integrated anti-poverty and climate breakdown work is also available on the website.

