



MADE IN HACKNEY

Poverty and poor nutrition often go hand in hand. It is a common thought that healthier, local and organic food is expensive and only affordable for those with a higher income. But Made in Hackney (MIH), a southeast London not-for-profit, is working to change that.

A project of the organisation AMURT, the international humanitarian relief charity, MIH teaches local people how to forage, source and cook healthy food that is not only affordable, but is also locally produced, reducing pressure both on the wallet and the environment.

The four key principles of MIH are:

- *Local.* Produce that is grown, processed and packed close to where it is eaten. This can include the home and back garden and the country you live in.
- *Organic.* Food that is grown without using harsh chemicals such as pesticides, herbicides and fertilisers.

- *Seasonal.* Not buying fresh produce flown in from far-flung lands, but waiting for when locally grown fruit or vegetables are naturally ready to be harvested.
- *Plant based.* Plant based food means all food items derived directly from plants, e.g. vegetables, fruits, pulses, nuts, seeds, grains and berries.

MIH is the only community kitchen in the UK that has a food policy structured around organic, local and plant based foods. Co-founder Sarah Bentley feels that providing cookery lessons with these foods encourages everyone, even those on low incomes, that mindful eating is possible.

One way for people to be more mindful is to eat less meat. In the UK each year, “approximately 2.8 million cattle, 8.5 million pigs, 15 million sheep and lambs, 80 million fish and 950 million birds are slaughtered for human consumption.”†

Rozie Apps describes a food project that is teaching local people how to source and cook healthy, affordable food

“Currently, the majority of people’s diets are 75% meat and 25% plant based, but I feel it is important, for the environment and our health, to be 75% plant based,” Sarah explains. Eating organic and local food also encourages people to grow their own if they can’t afford the shop prices. MIH work with local organisation, Growing Communities, who provide them with fresh, organic produce.

Sarah is keen to show that organic food is not just for the middle classes. MIH works with a wide mix of people, different age groups, religions, cultures and backgrounds. They also work with a range of charities, organisations, schools and community groups.

Being a charity, it receives little funding and so must maintain itself. A three tiered course structure ensures those who lack funds do not miss out.

The three courses are: community classes that are based on donations; flagship courses; and masterclasses.

Masterclasses

The masterclasses are open to anyone wanting to learn interesting new skills, such as fermenting, preserving, Japanese cooking and medicinals. These are led by experts and the money raised from these classes goes towards funding the free and pay-by-donation programmes for low income and marginalised community groups.

Flagship Courses

The flagship courses run over six week periods, teaching groups of people from care homes, people with mental health conditions and those from poorer backgrounds a wide range of skills. Participants learn how to feed themselves from locally sourced foods, whilst also learning about wider issues of reducing waste, food poverty, food's environmental impact and global inequality. Each class ends in a shared meal and although they are often taught in MIH's eco-kitchen, classes can also be taken out to schools and community centres. Nearly 5,000 people have benefited from this work, learning healthy baking, herbalism, how to turn foraged food into meals, and how to cook on a budget.

Patrick Harte is a regular participant on the International Cuisine course held at the Redmond Community Centre. Patrick is 83 and after his wife died last year, found himself needing to cook for himself, with no experience. "I had never done any cooking before as my wife had banned me from the kitchen. When I was growing up in Ireland, it was the women who cooked while the men worked on the farm. So I'd previously had no interest in cooking and have had to adjust to learning to do a little bit, not much though, just a little bit." He has now been to over 30 sessions. "I enjoy the great atmosphere, team spirit and harmony – and the teachers are very understanding. I have cataracts and can't read so well, but there is always somebody willing to help me.

"After the meal is prepared, I appreciate having the opportunity to sit and eat with the group and tasting the food that I've helped to prepare. It's very relaxing and a good





opportunity to chat. I've found meeting new people very interesting, finding out about where they come from and their traditions. It broadens the mind – it's not just about cooking alone. I've also had the opportunity to try new foods."

Patrick has learnt many new skills from the sessions, from peeling a pumpkin to baking bread. His view on food has also changed. "I do still buy ready meals from time to time, but they are not often sustaining enough and don't contain enough veg. You need your greens and there's not a lot in ready meals, so I have been cooking my own potatoes and veg to supplement the ready meals."



"I enjoy the great atmosphere, team spirit and harmony – and the teachers are very understanding."

Community Classes

The community classes are held on alternate Sundays, offering two and a half hour long workshops led by local, talented and enthusiastic volunteer teachers. The teachers can range from bloggers and supper club hosts to stall holders and home cooks, bringing a multitude of experience, with classes from homemade cosmetics and vegan baking, to making preserves and lactic fermenting. They are offered on a donation basis with a suggested minimum of £5, but no one is turned away due to lack of funds. Over 1,000 cooking and learning experiences have currently been given through this programme.

The North London Muslim Cultural Centre is one of many groups who benefit from the classes. They attend the Cooking For Life six week course programme. Youth worker Iraah-Khairah Samatar explains, "The course has blown me away. We've cooked so much and I've learnt so much about new fruits and vegetables. I used to think organic was expensive but the workshops have shown me how it can be accessible. The girls have had a great time, they're really proud of all the food they cooked – they talk about the sessions all week afterwards."

Groups that benefit range from: local food growers, such as London Orchard Project and Growing Communities; adult rehabilitation programmes (Lee House); vulnerable

young people (Action for Children and Catch 22); TRA and housing associations; and parent and children groups. This diversity of groups means that healthy and sustainable living is reaching everyone.

Volunteers


As well as teaching local people how to provide for themselves, MIH also educates and 'skills' their volunteers. Volunteers are vital to the running of MIH and there are various roles they take. Volunteers help on the masterclasses, courses and community classes as 'hosts', where they support the teacher and help learners feel engaged and enjoy the class. In doing so they learn about health and safety, communicating and management, as well as learning more about organic food. Speaking to Nynke, the volunteer organiser, she explains how several of the volunteer teachers have gone on to become paid masterclass teachers, as well as adding a list of skills to their CVs and helping them establish their careers. Nynke explains how

professional chef Ian Ballantyne started off as a volunteer host and eventually became a masterclass and course teacher at MIH. They also offer apprenticeships for volunteers, where they help with the day-to-day running of the organisation.

Former apprentice Nicola shares her experience. "My experience at MIH has resulted in getting a job at The Food Chain, a charity which provides nutritional support for people living with HIV. The interviewers told me that my ability to use social media was incredibly important and my knowledge and experience of different cooking programmes is something they believe I can use to help develop the charity's own programmes. I was also delighted I was asked to use my teaching and training experience to develop teaching aids to be used in the classes at MIH. There was also a great deal of variety in the role which I hadn't expected."

In January 2013, over 3,000 hours were given in volunteer time,

showing how important volunteers are to the running of this charity.

Made in Hackney is a great example of community care whilst teaching about global issues. It is of great value to local residents, charities, schools and community groups, providing a positive future for all involved 

To see the full programme of courses visit www.madeinhackney.org

If you are interested in volunteering, attending a class, donating or fundraising for MIH contact them on [info\(@\)madeinhackney.org](mailto:info(@)madeinhackney.org) or visit the website for more information.

For more information on Growing Communities visit www.growingcommunities.org

† *Vegan Book of Permaculture*; Graham Burnett; Permanent Publications; p.9.

Rozie Apps is assistant editor and social media guru at PM.

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This course has changed my eating habits for life
- Seema

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Made In Hackney is a project of charity AMURT UK 327216

