
Developing the Food Train Nationally - Evaluation

Final Report

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Executive Summary

Background and Evaluation Aim

The Food Train was launched in 1995 in Dumfries as a charity providing shopping deliveries to elderly people. Between 2002 and 2006, the service was rolled out across the Dumfries and Galloway region and in 2010 a branch was opened in West Lothian.

An evaluation was commissioned with the aim: *"to provide a report demonstrating the learning and impact of developing a new Food Train in West Lothian"*. Evaluation methods comprised a documentation review, interviews with Food Train staff and key partners, surveys of customers and volunteers, and observations/work shadowing of volunteers through shopping and delivery tasks (including contact with customers).

Development in West Lothian

The Food Train in West Lothian was funded by the Scottish Government (50%) and West Lothian Council (50%). A steering group was established which comprised representatives of West Lothian Council (Social Policy), West Lothian Community Health Care Partnership (Community Health) and West Lothian Voluntary Sector Gateway. The Food Train became operational in West Lothian in September 2010, operating with two members of staff, office premises in Bathgate, a van for grocery deliveries and a team of volunteers.

There was a high demand for the service and it grew rapidly. By October 2010 the service had around 40 customers and 25 volunteers. By February 2011, the service had 76 customers and 38 active volunteers (and more in training). The service began operating with one partner supermarket, but in January 2011, a second supermarket came on board which allowed The Food Train to offer its customers more choice. The service has reached near-capacity for its one van, and a second van will soon be introduced.

The development of the service in West Lothian has encountered challenges including some difficulties establishing and implementing operational procedures within the first supermarket, problems caused by the severe winter weather, and early 'teething problems' where errors were made with shopping lists. Nonetheless, the service has addressed and overcome these early challenges and the service has successfully flourished.

Key Partners' Views

Overall, all parties agreed that partnership working had been very effective throughout the development, implementation and operational phases. Partners felt the endorsement by the Senior People's Forum and the enthusiastic uptake and rapid growth of the service have demonstrated the high demand for the service and illustrated its transferability from Dumfries and Galloway. Key stakeholders and partners enthused at the rate at which The Food Train service has developed and grown in the first few months of operation. Overall, it was felt that the Council's investment in The Food Train had been justified and that it had successfully addressed numerous priority policy areas.

Volunteers' and Customers' Views on the Service to Date

Volunteers were positive about the recruitment, training and support received. Overall, volunteers highly praised The Food Train for the value of the service to its customers, the way it operates and is managed. Customers enthused about the Food Train service

and the customer survey found that all customers who answered viewed the volunteer staff, reliability of the service and the helpfulness of the service positively.

West Lothian Food Train within a National Structure

The West Lothian Branch has independently developed ways of operating to address local need, but remain faithful to the overall model developed in Dumfries and Galloway.

Early Impacts on Customers and Volunteers

For customers, there were many clear benefits of using the service, including:

- **Access to Grocery Deliveries** for those who found it difficult to reach shops and/or carry groceries;
- **Social Contact:** volunteer visits were a hugely welcome form of social contact for customers;
- **Healthy Eating:** some customers are eating more healthily as a result of using The Food Train;
- **Relief for Carers and Increased Independence:** The Food Train service has allowed some customers to feel more independent and has also reduced the burden on carers to provide shopping.
- **Help and Advice:** Customers benefit from informal advice and help during short visits by volunteers, including signposting to other services.
- **Relationships with Customers:** The regular contact offered by The Food Train service allows customers to be regularly checked on and staff can alert the appropriate agencies to any concern.

For volunteers, benefits were:

- **Social Contact:** the work provides valuable social interaction for volunteers as well as customers.
- **Personal Satisfaction:** The key motivation for volunteering is the satisfaction of knowing that the work is worthwhile and that the service is hugely appreciated by customers.
- **New Skills and Employability:** A number of volunteers felt that the work has given them new skills and some felt this would help them gain employment.
- **Active Lifestyles:** Volunteering tasks have proved to be physically demanding.

Key Learning Points

The evaluation has shown that The Food Train service has been very successfully implemented in West Lothian and has demonstrated the transferability of the service from rural Dumfries and Galloway to the more urban and compact area of West Lothian. The evaluation has highlighted some key learning points from the development, implementation and early operation of The Food Train service in West Lothian, including:

- **Partnership Working:** It is clear that the level of enthusiasm and support from West Lothian Council and other key partners have been instrumental to the

success of the development of the service. Support has been provided in numerous ways including: directing the service to community groups and referral sources, providing publicity including a high profile launch of the service, and continuing practical support such as ensuring roads are cleared of snow.

- **Relationship with Supermarkets:** The key operational challenge in West Lothian has been building an effective and efficient working relationship with local supermarkets. Overall, the experiences in West Lothian highlight the importance of building effective working relationships with supermarkets from the outset and establishing clear procedures for shopping. It also appears to be beneficial to begin operating with only one supermarket during the early stages to ensure that adequate staff resources are available to deal with early problems emerging.
- **Contingency Planning:** The extreme and severe winter weather highlighted the need for early contingency planning. In West Lothian it proved impossible to arrange to hire a four-wheel drive vehicle until a volunteer came forward. A formal request has now been made for an agreement for assistance when needed from the Territorial Army. Although the heavy snow very early in the winter season was quite unexpected, this highlights the necessity to have contingency arrangement in place from the outset of a new branch operating, including identifying sources of four wheel drive vehicles, having an agreement in place with the Territorial Army if possible, and ensuring that the access roads to the local Food Train office are identified as a priority for the Council to clear and grit.
- **Pace of Growth:** The fast pace of the growth of the service in West Lothian has been logistically challenging. Nonetheless, the service coped admirably with the logistical demands, and has always been in the position to accommodate new customers. The rate of growth of volunteer numbers has been appropriate for the rate of growth of customer numbers, although it is recognised that this can be difficult to achieve as any publicity to attract volunteers will also reach potential customers. The experience of West Lothian would appear to substantiate the Chief Executive's advice of starting small and allowing natural growth without any extensive customer recruitment activity in the early days.
- **The Balance Between Regional Independence and 'Corporate Identity':** The West Lothian Food Train appears to have successfully achieved the nationally desired balance with a somewhat independent service which can flexibly adapt to local need, while at the same time adhering to the core service function and values of the wider Food Train organisation. It may be beneficial, particularly if further national expansion is to take place, to formally set out the key values and principles and the 'essential elements' of a Food Train service and to develop a universally consistent Food Train logo to ensure that some corporate identity is established and is consistent throughout Food Train branches.

Concluding Comments

The evaluation has shown that The Food Train service has been very successfully implemented and developed in West Lothian, that the service has grown rapidly and has fulfilled previously unmet needs for the local elderly population. Local partnership working has been instrumental to its success to date and a wide range of benefits for both customers and volunteers have been identified.

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1 Background, Evaluation Objectives and Methods

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 The Food Train was first established in Dumfries following a community based survey in 1993 conducted by the Galloway Elderly Forum. The survey identified a need among elderly people in the area for assistance with grocery shopping. The Food Train was launched in 1995 as a company limited by guarantee. It was a registered charity, thus allowing the company to apply for funds, but it was also a social enterprise and intended to charge a small fee for the service it provided. The service ensured that elderly clients who were frail, disabled or in ill health were able to receive weekly supplies of fresh groceries.
- 1.1.2 The service started with a small amount of funding from the Solway Community Development Trust and some local donations. The entirely volunteer-led operation was initially run from a volunteer's kitchen, with a small team of volunteers and a van to make deliveries. Subsequently, the local Council of Voluntary Service provided office accommodation, a telephone line and support around areas such as developing their constitution and their accounting systems. Until 2002, The Food Train remained staffed entirely by volunteers. Funding came from the Scottish Community Diet Project (as it was named at the time), and other charitable funding as well as small grants from the NHS and the Council. There were increasing demands from the service for further geographic coverage which was beyond the capacity of the small team of elderly volunteers.
- 1.1.3 In 2002 Dumfries and Galloway Council awarded The Food Train funding from their Better Neighbourhood Services Fund to allow the service to expand from Dumfries to the whole of the Dumfries and Galloway region. A Chief Executive was appointed to roll-out this service, and five new Food Train offices were opened in the region, ensuring that all 2,500 square miles were covered by 2006. Each branch had its own boundaries and worked with its own client base and volunteers.
- 1.1.4 After this period of substantial geographic growth, the service also grew in scope. A 'Food Train Extra' service was offered to clients which provided those already receiving the grocery delivery service with additional help with household tasks such as changing light bulbs, defrosting the freezer, turning mattresses, cleaning inside windows, etc. A further additional befriending service was also established which provides telephone calls, home visiting and trips out for older people.
- 1.1.5 As the service continued to grow in Dumfries and Galloway, The Food Train began to be approached for help and advice from other areas. This included providing information and advice for a volunteer group in Midlothian funded by the Community Health Partnership which provided a similar service and, although independent to The Food Train, called themselves the 'Midlothian Food Train'. However, the Midlothian service did not flourish and was short-lived.
- 1.1.6 With Government funding, The Food Train established a National Development Officer post and sought to engage partnership with other local authorities to establish The Food Train service nationally across Scotland. A communication was sent to every local authority in Scotland to establish which areas were interested, and the National Development Officer spent about a year (2009-2010) meeting with local authorities who had expressed an interest. Two local authorities were initially very interested and undertook significant ground work to establish the service but withdrew due to issues around internal challenges and funding issues. A further local authority, West Lothian, was attracted to the service, established

interest in the service from their Senior People's Forum, and committed to establishing a partnership with The Food Train.

1.2 The Evaluation

1.2.1 This document provides the findings from an evaluation of the Food Train in West Lothian. The aim of the evaluation was:

"to provide a report demonstrating the learning and impact of developing a new Food Train in West Lothian".

1.2.2 It is intended that the evaluation findings and lessons learned from the development and implementation in West Lothian will influence the ongoing national development plans for The Food Train.

1.2.3 The objectives of the evaluation are set out below.

Evaluation Objectives

1. To assess the effectiveness of the practical and strategic processes used to develop the West Lothian Food Train (e.g. volunteer recruitment, customer recruitment, service development and delivery) and consider their relevance in the development of future Food Train branches (as well as the continued development of West Lothian services).
2. To evaluate the impact of partnership working and engagement in West Lothian (e.g. with public, private and voluntary sector partners, such as West Lothian Council, NHS partners, local supermarkets, local older people's groups and forums) and consider the relevance of a similar relationship model in future Food Train branches (as well as in the continued development of West Lothian services).
3. To assess the Food Train's success in embedding the new West Lothian branch into the new national organisational structure and national Board and consider any lessons for future growth.
4. To assess the early impact of the West Lothian grocery delivery service on customers and volunteers and consider this in terms of potential future growth for West Lothian services.

1.3 Methods

1.3.1 Research methods employed on the evaluation, comprised:

- Review of documentation;
- Interviews with:
 - Food Train Chief Executive;
 - Food Train Chair
 - Food Train Staff in West Lothian;
 - Link Officer at West Lothian Council;
 - Manager, Voluntary Sector Gateway;
 - West Lothian Councillor and Chair of West Lothian Senior People's Forum

- Representative of West Lothian Community Health Care Partnership
- Managers at two supermarkets;
- Survey of customers (19 responses);
- Survey of volunteers (10 responses);
- Three days shadowing volunteers, including contact with customers and supermarket staff.

2 The Development of the Service in West Lothian

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 This chapter describes the processes that have been employed to establish and deliver the Food Train in West Lothian and the views of the development from key partners, volunteers and customers.

2.2 The West Lothian Context

2.2.1 Before the Food Train was established in West Lothian, the Council were already providing a shopping service in partnership with Scotmid stores. This involved Scotmid providing a van and Council staff assisting with deliveries. Although this service was going some way to meeting the needs of some older people who could not do their own shopping, the feedback to the Council was that customers were dissatisfied that they did not have any choice in where they got their shopping from. Another difficulty with this service was the level of dependency on Scotmid to provide the transport and drivers and it was felt that the shop was leading the service rather than the Council. The Council also provided a service which delivered prepared frozen meals to elderly people.

2.2.2 The Council were keen to bring the Food Train service to West Lothian as it was felt it would provide an opportunity to augment existing service provision for elderly people in West Lothian:

*"I suppose the premise for bringing it in was to increase **choice** and make it accessible as well. Although we have pockets of urban areas like Livingston, when you look at the outlying areas there's not a lot of choice for them for where they get their shopping. This sort of service could bring healthy food choices to a much wider range of older people. It helps with social isolation as well because they get regular one-to-one contact with volunteers. We are very keen on capacity building and we felt this service is going to support community capacity building".*

Link Officer, West Lothian Council

2.3 Funding

2.3.1 The projected cost for the first year of the Food Train in West Lothian was £80,000. This was funded through the Scottish Government (50%) and match funding from West Lothian Council from their 'Challenge Fund', which was money set aside to promote the development of services or opportunities that would improve older people's health and wellbeing. A key area for Challenge Fund allocation was stimulating capacity building.

2.4 Steering Group

2.4.1 The Link Officer for the Food Train within West Lothian Council was a Service Development Officer in Social Policy who had a particular role in developing services for older people. A steering group was established which comprised representatives of:

- West Lothian Council (Social Policy);
- West Lothian Community Health Care Partnership (Community Health);
- West Lothian Voluntary Sector Gateway.

- 2.4.2 The steering group met three times leading up to the service becoming operational (in April, May and July 2010), attended by the Food Train's Chief Executive and National Development Officer. The steering group was able to offer The Food Train staff advice on local geography, existing services and key local groups and agencies which would be useful to liaise with regarding publicity, recruitment of volunteers, and sources of customer referrals. Although a date had been set for another meeting after the service had become operational, it was decided by all parties that there was no need for further steering group meetings.

"When we set out the terms of reference for these steering group meetings, we didn't want them to take on a life of their own. We saw them as time-limited, really just to support The Food Train to get established. A lot of it was just about signposting and support where they needed it. But we were quite clear from the word go – this is your service; it will be a purchaser/provider relationship so we don't intend to interfere in the running of it, but we're here to support you".

Link Officer, West Lothian Council.

- 2.4.3 Although steering group meetings ceased in early July 2010, channels of communication remained open for The Food Train staff to contact any of the steering group members for advice or information at any time.

2.5 The 'Key Ingredients'

- 2.5.1 The Food Train Chief Executive built on her experience of opening five new Food Train branches in Dumfries and Galloway, and considered the best approach was to systematically work through the 'key ingredients' required to develop a new Food Train branch. The 'key ingredients' being:

- Premises
- Staff
- Shops
- Vehicle
- Volunteers
- Customers

- 2.5.2 The approach to each of these 'key ingredients' in West Lothian are described in turn below.

Premises

- 2.5.3 The steering group provided advice and guidance on the location of the office premises. It was felt that Bathgate was strategically a beneficial location because it was accessible and fairly central in the region, but also because it deviated from the trend of providing all services from Livingston (the administrative centre of West Lothian).
- 2.5.4 A specific office building was chosen which offered good value for money, adequate office space with a separate meeting room, and adequate parking for the Food Train van and for volunteers.
- 2.5.5 The Food Train staff who were employed in West Lothian were very satisfied with the premises and felt that it was fit for purpose. However, they felt that it may have been more beneficial to be in Livingston where the main supermarkets are located.

Staff

- 2.5.6 Learning from Dumfries and Galloway, it was clear to the Chief Executive that the West Lothian branch would require a full time regional manager and a part time administrative assistant. The Regional Manager vacancy was advertised first to ensure that the Regional Manager would be involved in the recruitment of the administrative assistant.
- 2.5.7 The Chief Executive felt that key attributes for a successful Food Train regional manager included:
- Excellent communication skills, being able to communicate with a wide range of people;
 - A practical 'can do' approach;
 - Skills in operational management;
 - Financial knowledge;
 - Marketing knowledge.
- 2.5.8 In April 2010 interviews were held in the Council's Civic Centre, and conducted by the Chief Executive and members of The Food Train Board. All were unanimous in their choice of Regional Manager who was already working as a manager in a voluntary sector organisation in West Lothian.
- 2.5.9 The selected candidate had to give two months notice, so she was not able to contribute to the early developments of establishing the service in West Lothian; the Chief Executive and the National Development Officer continued to build local partnerships and make arrangements until the Regional Manager was able to take up the position in early July 2010 (although she was able to attend the launch in May). The Regional Manager received induction training in Dumfries and Galloway. This included office-based training on the background of the organisation, policy documentation, and a day spent with volunteers on The Food Train van collecting shopping, making deliveries and speaking to customers. She considered this very valuable in providing insight into how the service works in practice.
- 2.5.10 The administrative assistant was interviewed and recruited in early August 2010. The Regional Manager was involved in short-listing and interviewing applicants, together with the Chief Executive and the National Development Manager. The successful applicant also received induction training in Dumfries for two days. The induction for the administrative assistant included her spending time with both the Chief Executive and her administrative counterpart in the Dumfries office as well as some time on the delivery van and the cash processes at the end of the day.

Shops

- 2.5.11 Before the Regional Manager was in post, the National Development Manager had made approaches and had initial discussions with local supermarkets. The Chief Executive recognised from her experience in Dumfries and Galloway that forming an effective working partnership with shops was one of the most crucial early tasks. She strongly advocates building relationships with shops at a local level rather than making approaches to head office. The Regional Manager, once in

post, also recognised the importance of concentrating on establishing a relationship with local shops as a priority.

- 2.5.12 The Regional Manager began approaching supermarkets that the National Development Manager had not yet made contact with while the National Development Manager continued to build on the contacts she had already made. The process of establishing contact and reaching agreement with shops appears to have been somewhat arduous. Although a number of shops had seemed to be on the point of forming an agreement, only 'Supermarket A' (a contact made by the Regional Manager) eventually agreed to become a partner.
- 2.5.13 Once contact had been made with 'Supermarket A', they were quick to express an interest and the Regional Manager met the 'Supermarket A' store's Food Manager who was very interested. After the initial approach in writing, the Food Manager at 'Supermarket A' had researched The Food Train on-line, and also he had family members in Dumfries in Galloway who used the service, so he was convinced that it was a worthy service, and was therefore keen to become involved. It took six to eight weeks to agree the internal process within 'Supermarket A' and during that time there were still ongoing discussions with other shops but they did not come to fruition. One local Co-Op store did agree to work with the Food Train on a trial basis at the time when the service started, but in practice customers all preferred to use 'Supermarket A'.

Vehicle

- 2.5.14 A second-hand van was purchased to enable shopping collection and deliveries. This was equipped with a small cool box for transporting frozen goods.

Volunteers

- 2.5.15 The Council funded a high profile project launch in May 2010 – some months before the service would be operational – which gained valuable publicity for the service, not least with a full page article in the Council's newspaper which called for volunteers to come forward, and a number did so. Also, at the planning stage, the Council had put the proposal for The Food Train to the Senior People's Forum for approval, and a number of members of the Senior People's Forum put themselves forward as volunteers at this early stage.
- 2.5.16 Once the Regional Manager was in post, further recruitment of volunteers became her responsibility. The local Volunteer Centre had volunteering opportunities on their website and leaflets available. Further publicity was achieved through the local press. The Regional Manager ensured articles about the service released to the local press all included a call for volunteers. All publicity generated has had a 'two-pronged' approach to attract both customers and volunteers.
- 2.5.17 Potential volunteers were interviewed by the Regional Manager on a one-to-one basis – although the administrative assistant gradually became more involved in the interview process. Initial interviews give prospective volunteers information about the background to The Food Train and how it operates and an indication of the types of volunteer roles available. The approach to recruiting, interviewing and training volunteers has been developed and refined in the early months of the service (see below).

Customers

- 2.5.18 In addition to press articles, the Regional Manager also undertook numerous networking activities including speaking to groups of older people (e.g. in sheltered housing, lunch groups etc) to raise awareness of the service and attract customers. Flyers about the service (based on those already developed in Dumfries and Galloway) were made available at community venues, health centres, libraries etc throughout the area.

2.6 Operation and Growth

Summary of Operation in West Lothian (as of January 2011)

Shopping lists are issued to customers – separate list templates are provided for either 'SUPERMARKET A' or 'Supermarket B' according to the customer's preference. These provide categories for groceries together with in-store aisle numbers to help shoppers. Customers provide a description, brand and quantity for each item they require.

On Mondays, most customers receive a visit from two Food Train volunteers (driver and helper) who collect completed shopping lists, go over the list with customers to ascertain exact requirements, and leave another blank list for their next shop. However, some customers prefer to provide their list by telephone to the Food Train office.

Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays are delivery days, with three separate areas of West Lothian receiving deliveries on a particular day. Volunteer shoppers are allocated in the two supermarkets to obtain the shopping for the relevant lists. Shopping is sourced and stored in separate boxes for each customer and stored in a designated area of the store. Each box is subsequently verified against shopping lists. All shopping is then taken to a checkout where each individual order receives a subtotal receipt which is attached to the shopping list. A cheque payment is made to the shop for the total order. Boxes are loaded onto the van. Deliveries are collected from 'Supermarket B' first, and then 'SUPERMARKET A'.

A driver and helper make deliveries of groceries. Each item is checked with the customer as it is removed from the box. If the customer requires, items are also put away. The customer pays the value of the shopping plus a £2 delivery charge.

- 2.6.1 The service became operational in West Lothian on 20th September 2010. The Chief Executive urged caution in terms of the scale of the operation to begin with:

"Logistically it's complicated in the first few weeks because everybody's learning. You want to keep numbers fairly minimal to start with".

Food Train Chief Executive

- 2.6.2 Despite this advice to keep numbers to around six customers and 10-12 volunteers on a rota basis to begin with, the publicity around the service generated a high demand early on and this continued to grow rapidly during the early months of operation. By October 2010 the service had around 40 customers and 25 volunteers. By February 2011, the service had 76 customers and 38 active volunteers (and more in training). Many, but not all, customers receive weekly shopping deliveries; some prefer a fortnightly service and some use the service intermittently. The workload of volunteers will vary according to individuals' availability or preferences and on their role. However, on average a volunteer may

- do around 1.5 to 2.5 hours work per week if they are a shopper – more if they are involved in deliveries or shopping list collections which tend to be full-day assignments. Volunteers have also been employed in The Food Train office with tasks such as taking shopping list orders by telephone.
- 2.6.3 The high demand and rapid growth of the service did prove logistically very challenging for The Food Train staff. The service started by having one day in the week for collecting shopping lists from customers and one day for making deliveries. This very quickly changed to one day for collecting lists and three days for deliveries to cope with demand. Customers are assigned a particular delivery day depending on the area they live, although the geographic profile of customers constantly changes as the service continues to grow, and the logistics of delivery routes etc are constantly reviewed and updated.
- 2.6.4 Volunteer and customer numbers grew rapidly, and the profile of the service continued to be raised through articles in the press, the Council and CHCP websites, leaflets distributed throughout the community and the continued involvement of Voluntary Sector Gateway who signposted potential volunteers to the service. 'Supermarket A' were also a key partner and provided advertising for the service and displayed leaflets which have had to be replaced three times as customers take them away. The large workforce in 'Supermarket A' have also been useful in promoting the service, and have referred people who they know would benefit. One member of staff from the supermarket has also offered to volunteer for their service. The Food Train's profile has also grown through word of mouth and customers have been recommending the service to their friends.
- 2.6.5 A key source of customers has also been referral from health services and particularly social work. From a manual review of customer records, it was evident that, although not all records contained a referral source or information about how the customer heard about the service, of 60 records with such information, 22 customers had been referred from Social Work – by far the most common source. Other sources of referral included the Pension Income Maximisation Service, Occupational Therapy and the local Advice Shop.
- 2.6.6 In January 2011, a second supermarket – 'Supermarket B' – came on board on a four-week trial basis. The manager wished to review the impact on staff resources etc before committing to the service, although he indicated when interviewed that he was pleased with the way the service was operating and was pleased to continue the partnership with The Food Train. The addition of the partnership with 'Supermarket B' has allowed The Food Train to offer its customers a choice of where they would like their groceries from.
- 2.6.7 The service has reached near-capacity for its one van (which is scheduled to be off the road one day a week for maintenance/cleaning etc), and a second van will soon be introduced, with funding from the national Food Train budget.
- 2.6.8 The Food Train staff felt that as both volunteer and customer numbers have grown, the rate of growth for both has been well-matched, with an adequate number of volunteers to service the customer base. However, at the time of interviewing the Food Train staff in January, they were making plans for the introduction of the second van and therefore recruiting new volunteers in order to raise the capacity for future growth in customers. The recent move to having two supermarkets has also put higher demand on volunteer shoppers.

2.6.9 As the service has developed, it has sought to be flexible and adaptive to customer needs. Some exceptions have been made to the standard operating practices (see summary box above). These included changing the delivery day for a specific customer who attended hospital on the day deliveries were made in her area (resulting in a significant detour for the van), and allowing customers time to pay when they did not have sufficient cash for their groceries – this was a considerable issue during the severe weather when customers had been unable to collect pensions or reach the bank.

Refinements to the Processes of Volunteer Recruitment and Training

2.6.10 The Regional Manager has made some adaptations to the processes of recruiting and training volunteers as the service has evolved in West Lothian in the early months. Since recruiting volunteers at the beginning of the project, The Regional Manager has developed:

- An information pack with background information about The Food Train and brief job descriptions of each volunteer job, how to claim expenses, health and safety, etc.
- A training pack which provides information on the procedures involved – e.g. for volunteer shoppers: where to go in the supermarket, how to sign in, where to collect crates, etc.

2.6.11 These packs have been developed independently of The Food Train in Dumfries and Galloway where there are no standard information or training packs for volunteers. Dumfries and Galloway use 'customer pathway' and 'volunteer pathway' summary information, and the Regional Manager in West Lothian used these as a starting point for developing the information and training packs for volunteers and providing more comprehensive information and bespoke relevant information for West Lothian.

2.6.12 Early learning from the volunteer recruitment process has led the staff to ensure that volunteers are encouraged to find out about the service and the volunteer roles before committing to take on voluntary work. After giving potential volunteers relevant information, the Regional Manager has encouraged them to take the information away to think about it and come back if they are interested. Those who are interested are given an initial group training session in the office focusing on the processes involved in relevant jobs. Again, this is a training process not employed in Dumfries and Galloway, but the Regional Manager felt that this was useful for new volunteers to meet each other and talk through the processes. Subsequent to the in-office training, volunteers then go out in the van or into the supermarket to shadow existing volunteers, and then they would be asked to decide whether they wanted to take up the volunteering role. Once they have completed shadowing duties (on at least one day, but more if they wished), and confirmed their interest, they are issued with a Food Train uniform and an Enhanced Disclosure application is made. (Any work undertaken before Disclosure is obtained involves them being accompanied at all times by someone who is Disclosure checked and they are considered purely an observer). The Regional Manager felt that although in the early days of the service volunteers were recruited without any training, the need for training became apparent. The costs involved in providing a uniform and making a Disclosure application mean that there are sound financial reasons for ensuring that applicants are confident about their commitment to the work before enlisting as a volunteer.

2.6.13 In addition to the induction training, every volunteer is encouraged to undergo Adult Protection Training organised by West Lothian Council. Many volunteers have been offered and undertaken Dementia Awareness Training and first aid training and training on nutrition for the elderly are also planned.

2.7 Challenges

Operational Difficulties in 'Supermarket A'

2.7.1 In Dumfries and Galloway, partner supermarkets initially provided staff to do the Food Train shopping from customer lists. Some still provide this service, although as the volume of shopping has grown in Dumfries and Galloway, some shopping tasks are supplemented by Food Train volunteers conducting shopping within the supermarkets. The assumption in West Lothian was that supermarkets would provide staff for shopping but 'Supermarket A' was unable to provide staff for this. Thus volunteers were deployed in the supermarket to fulfil shopping lists. Although discussions with the supermarket were very positive, the operational procedures at 'Supermarket A' proved to be particularly difficult to agree and implement. Some difficulties included:

- The key staff contact at 'Supermarket A' initially established the in-store procedures but then left and was not replaced;
- Procedures agreed with management were not always disseminated across the workforce;
- Despite agreement that there would be dedicated staff to help at the checkout, The Food Train found that on each visit a different member of staff would be assigned to the checkout and each new member of staff was unaware of the procedures for dealing with The Food Train's shopping;
- It took a considerable amount of time to establish an account which would allow The Food Train to pay by cheque. The 'Supermarket A' Food Manager explained that it had been difficult to set up an account because 'Supermarket A' as a business had stopped taking on new accounts. Once the account and cheque process had been set up, The Food Train found that staff often did not know how to process cheques;
- It proved to be difficult to establish an effective system of producing sub-total receipts for each individual customer and an overall total for the Food Train to pay. In the first few weeks, offers such as 'buy one get one free' were not applied to individual customers receipts;
- 'Supermarket A' provided a designated area for volunteers to check shopping and store crates. However, they were subsequently moved from this area and different areas, including corridors, were provided on an ad-hoc basis;
- The Food Train provided their own shopping crates and were stored at 'Supermarket A', but these were moved and lost by the store. There has also been confusion in store regarding where to store crates and who is responsible for ensuring that crates are available.

2.7.2 These numerous difficulties at 'Supermarket A' meant that both the Regional Manager and the administrative assistant spent virtually every shopping day in the

store assisting volunteers and liaising with store staff to ensure that the shopping was complete. This meant that other office, promotional and marketing duties could not be adequately attended to.

- 2.7.3 The Food Train staff reported that some volunteers became disgruntled due to the operational difficulties at 'Supermarket A' and threatened to give up volunteering. However, the staff brought them to the office for a one-to-one discussion and encouraged them to stay and work through the difficult learning/adjustment period.

"The 'Supermarket A' situation has been very frustrating for a lot of the volunteers, but they've been really loyal".

Administrative Assistant

- 2.7.4 Over time, however, supervisors within 'Supermarket A' became familiar with The Food Train and the required processes and they allocated check-outs and members of staff to deal with shopping at each visit. Difficulties have also been overcome by The Food Train staff spending more one-to-one time with the operational staff in the store (rather than relying on management to disseminate information regarding The Food Train), and the feeling among the Food Train staff was that difficulties were beginning to "smooth out", and they were able to spend more time away from the store.

- 2.7.5 Despite these difficulties, the Food Train staff and volunteers praised the operational staff at 'Supermarket A' for their helpfulness and co-operation throughout the process of ironing out all the operational difficulties.

- 2.7.6 In retrospect, given the difficulties encountered at 'Supermarket A', the Food Train staff were grateful that there were no other partner supermarket in the early months.

"Quite frankly, we had a lot of difficult situations at 'Supermarket A' and the last thing I wanted was to be dealing with another shop where we could be having the same problems while we were not managing to get 'Supermarket A' to work with us properly. We had one huge shop where we could get everybody's shopping, and we needed to get them sorted before we could take on any others".

Regional Manager

- 2.7.7 When 'Supermarket B' came on-board in January 2011, the Food Train staff felt that they were more prepared for the potential difficulties and pitfalls. Nonetheless, the operational procedures in 'Supermarket B' have been more smoothly implemented. This was helped by the fact that 'Supermarket B' are partners with the Food Train in Dumfries and Galloway, and therefore the store systems were known to the organisation. The provision of the same dedicated check out, crate storage and checking area for each visit at 'Supermarket B' has also helped the Food Train have a regular and straight-forward system for volunteers. However, like 'Supermarket A', 'Supermarket B' have not provided staff to carry out the shopping tasks, but rather volunteers carry out all shopping. Nonetheless, like 'Supermarket A', supermarket staff are very co-operative and helpful when volunteers require assistance finding items and staff are provided for the check-outs.

- 2.7.8 Overall, the experience in West Lothian has highlighted the significant amount of work needed to establish successful working practices within a supermarket that

was a new Food Train partner, and the relatively smoother integration of a local branch of a supermarket which had an existing relationship with The Food Train in another area. The implication is that any future partnership between The Food Train and 'Supermarket A' is likely to benefit from the protocols established in West Lothian.

Severe Winter Weather

2.7.9 The heavy snow in late November/early December caused many problems across Scotland proved to be a particular challenge to The Food Train in West Lothian. The roads were impassable for the van, and the customers were at their most isolated and vulnerable. The service made a request from the Territorial Army for assistance, but the systems were not in place to deal with this request and it proved impossible to source a four wheel drive vehicle for hire. Nonetheless, the service was able to operate by:

- Contacting the Council and ensuring that the roads were cleared and gritted at the Food Train office allowing access to vehicles;
- A volunteer providing their own four-by-four vehicle for deliveries;
- Shopping being limited to essential items only;
- The Regional Manager personally undertaking shopping and delivery tasks.

2.7.10 Although some customers were dissatisfied with the service being reduced to essential items, most were particularly grateful of the efforts made to ensure that they had supplies of groceries.

2.7.11 The unexpected challenge of the severe winter weather soon after the service had begun operating impacted on the Food Train staff's capacity to focus on the ongoing development of the service.

"I haven't been able to do any promotional work because my time has been concentrated on actually getting out there and doing deliveries in the snow. December was lost – I didn't do any promotional work in December. You have to deal with the existing customers first – get their food – and then the luxury is being able to take time out to recruit new customers and new volunteers".

Regional Manager

2.7.12 The service received very positive publicity in the local press regarding their efforts to meet their customers' needs during the adverse weather. This publicity directly resulted in more volunteers contacting the service.

Shopping Errors

2.7.13 A recurrent difficulty during the early months of operation has been mistakes made with shopping where the wrong item is bought or items are missing from an order. This has led to some complaints from customers. The Food Train offer to make replacements or return visits in the case of essential items such as bread or milk to ensure that customers are not left without these items. The customer can return any other items for which the wrong product is supplied, and will not be charged for the item. In these cases the volunteers will return the item to the shop for a refund.

2.7.14 In many instances where customers have not received the item they expected this has been due to the customer providing an ambiguous or inaccurate description on their shopping list. It is recognised that completing shopping lists is not easy for some customers, particularly those who have not been able to visit the supermarkets and are therefore unaware of the products available. Volunteer shoppers have also found their work challenging and have had some difficulty in finding and identifying the correct products. However, as the service has evolved, measures taken which have successfully reduced the number of errors have been:

- The volunteer driver collecting shopping lists has thoroughly read over each list with the customer and has made additional notes for shoppers to clarify any ambiguities;
- Once crates of shopping orders have been completed by volunteer shoppers, each order has been systematically checked by volunteers for omissions or inaccuracies;
- Growing familiarity with individual customer preferences have allowed more experienced volunteers to accurately select the desired items;
- Customers being more aware of the required information needed on a shopping list.

2.7.15 During the observations/shadowing conducted during the evaluation process it was noted that a small number of mistakes were made in the selection of shopping, but that in most cases customers were pleased to accept what was provided (e.g. where two items had been purchased instead of one or where a different item had been provided instead of the stated one). Only one case resulted in an item being returned unwanted (plums bought instead of plum tomatoes). It was noted, however, that the process of volunteers checking shopping in-store at times involved the same volunteer checking orders that they had personally shopped for.

2.7.16 The Food Train in West Lothian have held monthly volunteer meetings to update volunteers on developments with the service and raise any relevant issues. The issue of incorrect shopping orders has been raised, but the concept of somehow assigning 'blame' for incorrect orders is contentious. For example, there is no record of who shopped for each list nor who was responsible for checking the order. This means that direct feedback can not be given to individual volunteer shoppers regarding a mistake - only generic advice to all shoppers about the types of mistakes and the need for accuracy can be given.

2.7.17 One volunteer driver suggested that it may benefit volunteer shoppers to spend at least one day on the van during delivery rounds in order to meet customers. He felt that this would allow them to understand more about the customer, their needs and their preferences and this may help to improve the accuracy of shopping.

2.8 Continued Partnership Working

2.8.1 The Regional Manager has continued to meet with the Lead Officer at West Lothian Council, although the original plan for meeting every six weeks has been replaced by a plan to meet every six months as the Council are satisfied that the service is progressing well and little support is needed. Regular progress reports have also

been submitted to ensure the Council are aware of progress made in terms of customer and volunteer numbers, partner shops, etc.

- 2.8.2 Early dialogue and promotional work with key contacts in Social Work and other local agencies has resulted a significant number of customer referrals to The Food Train. The Regional Manager recognises that more promotional work and networking is required with some of the local statutory organisations departments. This includes housing departments (where contact has been made, but from whom no referrals have been made) and health centres (where the Regional Manager has found it difficult to arrange meetings).
- 2.8.3 Overall, all parties agreed that partnership working had been very effective throughout the development, implementation and operational phases:

"I feel that we've got a good working relationship with them. The outcomes that we're seeking are the same, so we're all on the same side".

Link Officer, West Lothian Council

- 2.8.4 The Service Development Officer (Community Health) within the CHCP Health Improvement Team, however, felt that she would have benefited from more information about the progress of the service. She was unaware of the level of growth or the scale of the service. Although she was aware that progress reports were made to the Link Officer at West Lothian Council (as agreed by the steering group), she suggested that it would be helpful if those who had been involved in the steering group had been kept up-to-date with progress (although it is noted that no request was made to The Food Train or the Link Officer for progress updates by the CHCP). Nonetheless, communication channels remained open between The Food Train and the CHCP and they have liaised with regards to articles in the Food Train newsletter, volunteer training opportunities, etc.
- 2.8.5 Voluntary Sector Gateway West Lothian have a remit to develop volunteering, build capacity for the voluntary sector, develop social enterprise and develop relationships with community planning partners. During the set-up phase they have been a valuable partner in directing potential volunteers to the service.

2.9 Key Partners' and Staff's Views of the Service to Date

- 2.9.1 Some key partners, including the CHCP representative and the manager of Voluntary Sector Gateway indicated that they had some reservations at the outset of the transferability of the service which had been operating in Dumfries and Galloway to West Lothian (which was viewed as less isolated), and the need for the service was questioned. It was also noted that, unlike in Dumfries and Galloway, on-line supermarket deliveries were available to the whole of West Lothian.

"I have to be honest and say that I wasn't convinced that the Food Train would work in West Lothian. I thought the service in Dumfries and Galloway where they're very successful might not work in West Lothian. We're a much more compact area and there isn't the isolation. And I did some research and all the supermarkets deliver even to our more rural parts - although I realise you need a computer to do that".

Service Development Officer (Community Health), West Lothian CHCP

- 2.9.2 Nonetheless, the endorsement by the Senior People's Forum and the enthusiastic uptake and rapid growth of the service have demonstrated the high demand for

the service. Key stakeholders and partners enthused at the rate at which The Food Train service has developed and grown in the first few months of operation.

"I think it's gone very well. There has been rapid growth, and the amount of support that they've got in terms of volunteers – I think these two things speak volumes. If the service wasn't deemed to be beneficial to local people, they wouldn't support it".

Link Officer, West Lothian Council

- 2.9.3 Despite initial concerns that the service model may not readily transfer from the rural environment in Dumfries and Galloway, the manager at Voluntary Sector gateway was very pleased with the progress made and the rate of growth and he reported that the elected members at West Lothian Council were also very satisfied with the progress made. Indeed, a recent report to the Social Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel at West Lothian Council concluded:

"The response to the development of the Food Train within West Lothian has been remarkable on a number of levels. In addition to its rapid growth and the benefits it has already brought both to the volunteers and those who use the service the Food Train is making a substantial contribution to the creation of a strong foundation upon which to build community capacity".

(Extract from Report by Head of Social Policy to the West Lothian Council Social Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel, 13 January 2011).

- 2.9.4 A number of partners also pointed to the success and extra-ordinary efforts of the service to overcome the severe winter weather to reach customers in the most difficult of conditions.
- 2.9.5 Although the manager at Voluntary Sector Gateway praised the service overall for its operation and its ability to address a real local need, he questioned the purpose and necessity of charging customers a delivery fee and advocated a free service. Although delivery charges are levied in Dumfries and Galloway, he was of the opinion that it was less easy to justify the charge in a less rural area, and he felt that as a principle a voluntary organisation should deliver its services without charge. This was the only key partner who expressed this opinion. On the part of The Food Train, they had a clear ethos of continuing the social enterprise element that had been central to the organisation as it developed in Dumfries and Galloway, and the £2 delivery charge was not felt to have been prohibitive to customers or potential customers either in Dumfries and Galloway or in West Lothian. The Chief Executive asserted that in Dumfries and Galloway customers frequently reported a desire to pay for the service and that this was an important aspect of the service contributing to their feeling of independence rather than dependence on charity. In West Lothian, the Regional Manager reported that there had been no negative reaction to the delivery charge during her promotional activities with groups of elderly people, and in fact the service was considered good value. Indeed, it was noted during observations/shadowing that customers frequently gave additional donations when paying for their shopping deliveries.
- 2.9.6 Overall, it was felt that the Council's investment in the Food Train had been justified and that it had successfully addressed numerous priority policy areas:

"We're meant to look at outcome based provision, we're meant to look at supporting people in the community, volunteering, tackling social isolation,

every one talks about diet – this literally ticks all the boxes. We’ve seen it as an investment in a lot of areas”.

Link Officer, West Lothian Council

2.10 Volunteers’ and Customers’ Views on the Service to Date

2.10.1 The table below shows that volunteers surveyed were positive about the recruitment, training and support received, although some gave only ‘fair’ ratings. It is noted, however, that the West Lothian staff have developed a more structured and comprehensive training programme and information packs since the first group of volunteers were recruited, and some less positive views may have come from earlier recruits who were not subject to this training/induction process.

Table 2.1: Volunteer Views of Recruitment, Training and Support

	Number of Volunteers (from 10)		
	Excellent	Good	Fair
Information received about The Food Train prior to deciding to volunteer	5	5	0
The recruitment process	3	6	1
Training and advice received prior to beginning voluntary work	3	5	2
Support from Food Train staff since beginning voluntary work	5	4	1

2.10.2 Overall, volunteers highly praised The Food Train for the value of the service to its customers, the way it operates and is managed:

“It’s a brilliant idea and it’s well organised. The Bathgate staff deserve a big pat on the back for the way it is running”.

Volunteer (comment on questionnaire).

2.10.3 Customers enthused about the Food Train service. Typical comments were:

“I can not imagine how one can be more grateful for such a well organised and efficient service”.

Customer (comment on questionnaire).

“Thank you so much. Your service is excellent and your workers are very courteous and always very helpful”.

Customer (comment on questionnaire).

2.10.4 The customer survey found that all customers who answered viewed the volunteer staff, reliability of the service and the helpfulness of the service positively (either excellent or good), as shown in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Customer Views of The Food Train Service

	Number of customers		
	Excellent	Good	Total responses
Volunteer staff	15	1	16
Reliability of the service	14	1	15
Helpfulness of the service	12	3	15

2.10.5 The impact of the service on customers and volunteers is discussed in Chapter 4.

3 West Lothian Food Train within a National Structure

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 This chapter discusses some of the issues around the establishment of the new West Lothian Food Train branch within a national structure.

3.2 Operational Differences

3.2.1 In a number of ways, the West Lothian Branch has developed ways of operating which differ from those employed in Dumfries and Galloway.

"It works out that we're doing things differently to the way they're done in Dumfries. But (the Chief Executive) had always given me the freedom to be able to do that – she'd never said that we had to do things this way. It is very much that we are an independent branch. We make changes that we feel are right for West Lothian".

3.2.2 One way in which West Lothian has differed from Dumfries and Galloway is having all shopping tasks conducted by volunteer shoppers rather than supermarket staff. The Regional Manager assessed local circumstances and implemented systems and procedures which were informed by (but not identical to) the practices established in the early days of the Dumfries and Galloway branches. These included:

- The development of an information pack and training pack for new volunteers;
- An in-office induction training session for new volunteers;
- Developing a process for checking shopping orders within the supermarkets before they are dispatched for delivery;
- Holding regular monthly volunteer meetings;
- Spending some time with the customers during shopping list collection and grocery deliveries – although typically only a few minutes per visit.

3.3 'Corporate Identity' versus Autonomy for Local Branches

3.3.1 As The Food Train opens new branches, the issue of establishing and maintaining a 'corporate brand' is relevant but somewhat complex. The view of The Food Train Chair is that throughout all Food Train branches there should be a core 'shared vision' and stated values and that key elements such as the name and logo should be used throughout all branches. However, he feels that it is important also to 'allow a local flavour to come through'.

3.3.2 This appears to have been successfully achieved in the West Lothian branch. The Chief Executive was keen to stress that the West Lothian branch had been given freedom to develop their own methods of working. The West Lothian branch has greatly benefited from the learning obtained during the development of new branches in Dumfries and Galloway, and the staff in West Lothian felt supported rather than controlled by Head Office and they felt that they had a large degree of independence. Despite some operational differences highlighted above, it appears that the West Lothian branch indeed shares the values and all the 'essential elements' of the service in Dumfries and Galloway.

- 3.3.3 Although the staff in West Lothian were pleased to have some independence, they also appreciated that they were very much a part of the wider organisation, and in no way felt that the West Lothian branch was viewed as peripheral to the organisation as a whole. The West Lothian staff are involved in staff meetings and share access to the Food Train server, which keeps them as connected as any of the branches in Dumfries and Galloway.

"They keep us very involved. They are always there for information or help. Because they've been doing it for years, they know a lot of the pitfalls so it's good to have that".

Administrative Assistant

- 3.3.4 On the issue of corporate identity and branding, it was noted that the logos used on letter heading and flyers and those used on the Food Train vans and uniforms were different, and it was recognised by the Chief Executive that work was needed at a national level to ensure a consistent branded logo is used. Some key partners expressed concern that the logo used in letter heads, advertisements etc for The Food Train depicts a train carrying some unhealthy foods such as cakes, burgers and pizzas. The Chief Executive recognised that the development of the logo was rooted in the Food Train's history when there was less emphasis on healthy eating messages. She has investigated making changes to the logo to reflect healthy choices, but as it is a registered trade mark, this is a complex process. The Food Train name is also legally protected, and thus no other service providing grocery deliveries can call themselves The Food Train.

3.4 The Food Train Board

- 3.4.1 The Food Train Board originally comprised Food Train volunteers together with one or two independent members, and the Board was not originally strategic in nature. However, once the service was at the point of expanding throughout Dumfries and Galloway, skilled members were recruited to join the Board and replace volunteer members. Board members have been recruited with varied backgrounds and skill sets, allowing a strategic approach to developing the organisation. Board members have included those with skills and experience in law, human resources, business, charities and health. A vacancy exists on the Board for a representative from West Lothian. Board composition may continue to evolve with further national expansion (see Chapter 5).

4 Early Impacts on Customers and Volunteers

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The Food Train service is at a very early stage in West Lothian and it is therefore not yet possible to explore long term impacts. Nonetheless, the evaluation has gathered anecdotal and illustrative data which highlight the nature of some clear early impacts of the service for both customers and volunteers.

4.2 Early Impacts on Customers

4.2.1 Comments made in the customer survey and during informal contact with customers highly praised the service. *"The best thing since sliced bread"* was a typical comment. For customers, there were many clear benefits and these are described below.

Access to Grocery Deliveries

4.2.2 A key benefit of the service for customers is access to regular grocery shopping for those who would otherwise find it difficult to reach shops and/or carry shopping home. Customers also benefit from being able to choose from a much wider selection of goods available at two large supermarkets rather than only the closest or more accessible shop.

4.2.3 Of the 19 customers surveyed, 10 previously visited the shops themselves for at least some of their grocery shopping prior to using The Food Train, although some made additional comments that indicated that they had previously found shopping difficult (e.g. *"I'm disabled, it was a nightmare"*). Friends and family were also common means of obtaining groceries prior to using the Food Train, as shown in Table 4.1. It is also noteworthy that three of the 19 customers previously had groceries delivered via on-line supermarket shopping, suggesting that The Food Train offered a favourably distinct service that was preferred by these customers.

Table 4.1: Methods of obtaining grocery shopping prior to The Food Train

Method	Number of Customers (from 19)
Visited shops myself	10
Family member brought shopping	9
Friend/neighbour brought shopping	5
Groceries were delivered by supermarket	3
Home help/professional carer brought shopping	2
Visited shops with help from family member	1
Council-run service	1

Note: More than one method could be specified per customer

4.2.4 Customers who were consulted frequently praised the service for allowing them to access groceries easily and frequently where previously they had found this very difficult:

"The Food Train takes away the horror of trying to get out".

Customer (comment on questionnaire)

Social Contact

4.2.5 'Friendly social contact' was the most frequently mentioned impact in the customer survey. Of the 13 customers who answered the question 12 said that the service

had definitely given them friendly social contact. From shadowing the volunteers who visited customers to collect shopping lists and deliver groceries, it was very much evident that volunteer visits were a hugely welcome form of social contact for customers and that fond relationships existed between customers and volunteers.

Healthy Eating

4.2.6 Although the service may provide customers with more *opportunity* to enjoy a healthy, balanced and varied diet, both the Chief Executive and the West Lothian staff had a clear ethos of providing personal choice and avoiding 'preaching' healthy eating messages. A small number customers request only tinned goods, cigarettes and alcohol and these are provided without comment. Nonetheless, some more subtle ways in which the service may influence healthy eating choices are:

- The inclusion of healthy recipes in the Food Train newsletter. The first quarterly newsletter was issued in December 2010 and had a focus on home safety, but included a healthy recipe. It is intended that a future issue may have a focus on healthy eating, and the content of the newsletter offers potential for partnership working with the CHCP Health Improvement team who could provide information for articles.
- Customers who telephone the service with their shopping list are prompted if they do not order fresh fruit and vegetables to check whether they would like any.

4.2.7 Exceptions to the rule of not 'policing' shopping lists are cases where Social Work or a family member have alerted the service to customers who are alcoholic and should not be provided with alcohol. In the cases of Social Work referrals, Social Work should be alerted if alcohol is ordered and the customer should be declined their order for alcohol.

4.2.8 The evaluation has revealed anecdotal evidence of some customers gaining access to fresh healthy foods and for whom such goods would otherwise not be accessible. For example, a customer who was housebound after breaking a hip used the service weekly to buy a range of groceries including fresh fruit and vegetables. She said:

"The doctor said to me, 'Are you eating?' and I said I was, and he said 'Well, tell me what you had to eat yesterday'. I told him what I had and he said, 'I really can't fault that!'".

Customer

4.2.9 In the customer survey, 16 customers answered the question, 'Would you say that The Food Train service has allowed you to eat healthier food?'. Of these, 11 said that it had (7 said it definitely had and 4 said that it had to some extent).

Relief for Carers and Increased Independence

4.2.10 Some customers had previously relied on family members, friends or neighbours to bring shopping to them. The Food Train service has therefore allowed some customers to feel more independent and has also reduced the burden on carers to provide shopping. In some instances this has meant more 'quality time' with

family members rather than family members' time being devoted to shopping tasks.

- 4.2.11 Of the 16 customers who answered the question, 12 said that they felt the service had made them more independent (6 said it definitely had and 6 said that it had 'to some extent').

Help and Advice

- 4.2.12 Although The Food Train has not yet established an 'extra' service in West Lothian, it was evident from contact and observations with volunteers and customers that customers already benefit from informal advice and help during short visits by volunteers when collecting shopping lists or delivering groceries. This included, for example, help to fix a window blind or putting a bag of rubbish in an outdoor bin as the volunteer left. Volunteers have also been able to signpost customers to other services (although more formal training which is planned for volunteers may assist in this).

- 4.2.13 Of the 14 customers who answered the question in the customer survey, half (7) said that The Food Train had given them help and advice about services.

Relationships with Customers

- 4.2.14 The regular contact offered by the Food Train service allows customers to be regularly checked on and staff can alert the appropriate agencies to any concern (for example, if customers do not answer their door or telephone at times when they would be expected to be in and after repeated attempts). A volunteer also mentioned, for example, that he had raised concern about the suitability of housing for one customer.

"For volunteers, their gut instinct kicks in when something is not right, even if they're not sure what it is – all they have to do is alert Social Work and suggest that they need a visit".

Manager, Voluntary Sector Gateway

- 4.2.15 Customers are always informed about any approach to Social Work or other agencies regarding concerns about customers, and a record of concerns raised is held by The Food Train.

4.3 Interest and Uptake of Volunteering Opportunities

- 4.3.1 Both Food Train staff and the manager at the Voluntary Sector Gateway felt that The Food Train has proved to be a popular choice for those wishing to volunteer and, perhaps compared to other volunteering opportunities, was an 'easy sell'. The reasons for the service being popular with volunteers appears to be the desire to help elderly people and the very obvious and immediate impact the service can bring to its customers.

"We've got volunteers ranging from 21 to their 70s, we've got men and women from all sorts of backgrounds – and every one of them has come to us saying that they just want to help the elderly. Compared to other voluntary organisations that struggle for volunteers, we've got a great selling point, the hook of being able to say you're making a real difference for elderly people".

Regional Manager

- 4.3.2 Many volunteers are retired and have volunteered as a means of meaningfully using their time; some volunteers are nursing or social work students who are gaining valuable work experience and others are long-term unemployed.

4.4 Early Impacts on Volunteers

Social Contact

- 4.4.1 From observation and discussion with a retired volunteer who was helping on the delivery van, it was evident that the work provided valuable social interaction for the volunteer as well as the customer, and gave a sense of fulfilment. Social contact was also a benefit for those working as volunteer shoppers who worked in small teams and clearly had a sense of camaraderie. All of the 10 volunteers who took part in the survey said that working for the Food Train had given them friendly social contact, at least to some extent.

Personal Satisfaction

- 4.4.2 All volunteers surveyed said that they found they work personally satisfying. Discussions with volunteers also confirmed that the key motivation for volunteering and continuing to volunteer was the satisfaction of knowing that the work was worthwhile and that the service was hugely appreciated by customers.

"How happy the customers are when we visit is heart-warming for me".

Volunteer (comment on questionnaire)

"The customers are so grateful for the service – you can see the difference it makes to them. You might be the only person they see all week. That's what makes it worthwhile".

Volunteer

New Skills and Employability

- 4.4.3 Of the 10 volunteers surveyed, 5 said that the work had given them new skills and 2 felt that the work had given them experience which could help them gain paid employment. One volunteer who was consulted was long-term unemployed and had no employment references due to his previous employer closing down. Volunteering for the Food Train has allowed him to meaningfully use his time and skills and he is hopeful they may also provide valuable references for future employment

Active Lifestyles

- 4.4.4 Volunteers undertaking shopping and delivery tasks have found the work very physical and felt that it is likely that the work has impacted on overall fitness and physical activity levels for those volunteering regularly. Indeed, one volunteer shopper who was working in the very large 'Supermarket A' store used a pedometer for one shift and discovered that she covered three and a half miles in the course of her shopping tasks. This has been repeated a number of times and on average volunteers found they were walking between one and a half and three miles per shift.

- 4.4.5 The Food Train has received a silver award through the Healthy Working Lives award scheme, and offers a range of initiatives to promote healthy lifestyles to both staff and volunteers.

5 Future Developments

5.1 Introduction

- 5.1.1 This chapter focuses on the existing and potential plans for future development of the service in West Lothian and for national expansion of the service to other parts of Scotland.

5.2 West Lothian

An New Van and New Logistics

- 5.2.1 The service in West Lothian continues to grow apace, and the imminent attainment of a second van will significantly increase capacity and will mark a new phase in the service's growth. At the time of interviewing the staff in West Lothian they were unsure as to how the logistics would work with a second van, but this would be reviewed according to customer needs. For example, it must be considered whether it would be more effective to assign one van to 'Supermarket B' deliveries and one to 'Supermarket A', or whether it would be better to give each van its own geographic area and collect shopping from both shops to serve this area. The logistics can only be worked out according to current geography of customers and their preference of shop, and this is something which changes each week, particularly as not all customers have weekly deliveries.

Strategic Development

- 5.2.2 It is recognised that in the early months, the focus for the West Lothian Food Train staff has been establishing the service and managing the day-to-day operations. However, it is recognised that the service is now entering a stage where the Regional Manager can begin to take a more strategic role in developing the service:

"Up to this point my job has not been about planning for the future, it's been about managing the operations. I hope in the next few months I will be able to take a step back and start planning".

Regional Manager

- 5.2.3 One area in which the Regional Manager may become more involved is sourcing support and/or funding locally. This may include, for example, local businesses to sponsor the service, provide valeting/repairs for vans, etc.

Extra and Befriending Service

- 5.2.4 The intention from the outset had been to establish the core grocery delivery service for a year and then consider augmenting the service to include the 'Food Train Extra' service, as offered in Dumfries and Galloway, which will offer customers help with small ad-hoc chores. The Befriending service would also be considered to offer companionship, social contact and opportunities for trips out.
- 5.2.5 Both the Council (Social Policy) and Community Health Care staff were very enthusiastic about the potential to develop an Extra Service, although it was recognised that it was right to allow the core service to develop first before introducing this element. The Service Development Officer (Community Health) within the CHCP Health Improvement Team who was part of the steering group indicated that her interest in the service had, from the outset, been mainly around the potential for the Food Train Extra service. She envisaged forming a partnership with the Food Train to train volunteers to be aware of, and recognise needs around depression, poor diet and lack of physical activity. She would like to

see Food Train volunteers being enabled to give advice on these areas and also signpost customers to relevant services.

- 5.2.6 The customer survey showed that there was some interest in the Extra and befriending service among customers. Of the 15 customers who answered, four said they would be interested in an Extra service and a further four said they would perhaps be interested; one was interested in a befriending service and a further seven said they would perhaps be interested.

5.3 National Expansion

- 5.3.1 Pending a funding decision, there are plans to introduce the service to two further committed local authority areas in Scotland, and further ambitions to roll out the service to more local authorities nationally in time.

5.4 Future Developments for The Board and National Management

- 5.4.1 At the time of interviewing The Food Train chairman there was a Board vacancy which is intended to be filled by a representative from West Lothian. Indeed, the current 'working assumption' is that as The Food Train expands to new local authorities, each local authority area will have a representative on The Food Train Board. However, it is recognised that significant growth may make this unfeasible, and it may be re-considered whether Board appointments should be made on the basis of geography.

- 5.4.2 It is anticipated that as the Food Train expands across Scotland there may be some challenge to the organisation's headquarters being in Dumfries and Galloway. However, the Chair is keen for the service to remain in the area:

"I know it is likely to cause some tension and debate –for example about where we hold our Board meetings. But I'm quite keen to buck the trend of having all headquarters in the central belt".

Chair, Food Train

- 5.4.3 As the service expands, there are likely to be implications for management. The role of the Chief Executive has already evolved from a 'hands-on' role developing new branches in Dumfries and Galloway to a more strategic development role and providing support for the Regional Managers in the two areas. As the service grows to cover more parts of Scotland, there may be a need for more staff to support the work of the Chief Executive and the National Development Co-ordinator.

6 Discussion and Key Learning Points

6.1 Discussion

6.1.1 The evaluation has shown that the Food Train service has been very successfully implemented in West Lothian. Despite some key partners' reservations of the efficacy and transferability of the service from rural Dumfries and Galloway to the more urban and compact area of West Lothian, there has evidently been a high demand for the service among the elderly and the service appears to be operating very successfully. It is evident that the service meets a real need for elderly people with disabilities and infirmities for whom, even in urban and accessible areas, obtaining groceries can be a great difficulty. Although it has been highlighted that supermarkets were already delivering groceries from internet shopping orders throughout West Lothian, it has been seen that some customers switched from supermarkets' own deliveries to The Food Train service. Indeed, The Food Train service offers a uniquely different service in many ways, including:

- Friendly social contact;
- Monitoring of customers;
- A flexible services (e.g. allowing customers to pay later when they have insufficient cash);
- Collecting hand written shopping lists and telephone orders;
- Offering help and advice;
- A lower delivery charge;
- A choice of supermarkets.

6.1.2 The development of the service in West Lothian has hugely benefited from the advice and experience available from The Food Train service in Dumfries and Galloway and the staff benefited from on-going support as part of a larger organisation. The service has developed and grown rapidly, with a high level of interest from volunteers from varied backgrounds and circumstances, and a high level of demand from customers. Customer numbers have also grown rapidly due to publicity, many referrals from statutory organisations and valuable 'word of mouth' recommendations. Even with the service still in its infancy, a wide range of very positive early impacts have been evidenced for customers including improved social contact, access to a wider choice of groceries and improved opportunities for healthy eating. Customers enthused about the service and its impact on their quality of life.

6.2 Key Learning Points

6.2.1 The evaluation has highlighted some key learning points from the development, implementation and early operation of The Food Train service in West Lothian, and these are discussed below.

Partnership Working

6.2.2 It is clear that the level of enthusiasm and support from West Lothian Council and other key partners have been instrumental to the success of the development of the service. Support has been provided in numerous ways including:

- Directing The Food Train to key community groups for the elderly to approach and inform about the service;
- Directing The Food Train to appropriate individuals within Social Work and other statutory services to which links could be made as sources of referrals;
- The funding of a high profile launch of the project and coverage in the Council newspaper which raised publicity and attracted volunteers;
- The provision of accommodation in Council offices for staff interviews;
- Advertising for volunteers and customers on the Council website and the Community Health and Care Partnership website;
- The high volume of referrals through Social Work and other statutory agencies;
- Assistance with ensuring that roads to/from the office were a priority for clearing/gritting during winter weather.

6.2.3 A further learning point around partnership working is the importance of establishing key roles and expectations at the outset – for example with regards to progress reports and level of involvement and influence in The Food Train activities.

Relationship with Supermarkets

6.2.4 The key operational challenge in West Lothian has been building an effective and efficient working relationship with local supermarkets. 'Supermarket A' had not previously worked with The Food Train in Dumfries and Galloway and it took considerable time to iron out operational problems including identifying appropriate areas for volunteers for storage and checking tasks, payment processes and ensuring that store staff were aware of the required procedures. The result was that Food Train staff spent a large (and unanticipated) amount of their time in supermarkets supporting volunteers and liaising with shop staff. The development of processes within 'Supermarket B' was easier due to existing relationships in Dumfries and Galloway with 'Supermarket B' stores and knowledge of the store processes (e.g. around payment). It is therefore anticipated that any future relationships with 'Supermarket A' stores in other areas would benefit from learning achieved in West Lothian. Overall, the experiences in West Lothian highlight the importance of building effective working relationships with supermarkets from the outset and establishing clear procedures for shopping. It also appears to be beneficial to begin operating with only one supermarket during the early stages to ensure that adequate staff resources are available to deal with early problems emerging.

Contingency Planning

6.2.5 The extreme and severe winter weather highlighted the need for contingency planning. Although there had been an assumption that a four wheel drive vehicle may be hired during snow conditions, this proved impossible to arrange until a volunteer came forward. Also, although an approach was made to the Territorial Army for assistance, this was not possible to arrange at short notice. A formal

request has now been made for an agreement for assistance when needed from the Territorial Army. Although the heavy snow very early in the winter season was quite unexpected, this highlights the necessity to have contingency arrangement in place from the outset of a new branch operating, including identifying sources of four wheel drive vehicles, having an agreement in place with the Territorial Army if possible, and ensuring that the access roads to the local Food Train office are identified as a priority for the Council to clear and grit.

Pace of Growth

- 6.2.6 The fast pace of the growth of the service in West Lothian has been logistically challenging, particularly in light of the operational difficulties in the supermarket to begin with. Nonetheless, the service coped admirably with the logistical demands, and has always been in the position where they have been able to accommodate new customers. The rate of growth of volunteer numbers has been appropriate for the rate of growth of customer numbers, although it is recognised that this can be difficult to achieve as any publicity to attract volunteers will also reach potential customers. The experience of West Lothian would appear to substantiate the Chief Executive's advice of starting small and allowing natural growth without any extensive customer recruitment activity in the early days.

The Balance Between Regional Independence and 'Corporate Identity'

- 6.2.7 The West Lothian Food Train appears to have successfully achieved the nationally desired balance with a somewhat independent service which can flexibly adapt to local need and be run according to the Regional Manager's judgement, while at the same time adhering to the core service function and values of the wider Food Train organisation. It may be beneficial, particularly if further national expansion is to take place, to formally set out the key values and principles and the 'essential elements' of a Food Train service and to develop a universally consistent Food Train logo to ensure that some corporate identity is established and is consistent throughout Food Train branches.

6.3 Concluding Comments

- 6.3.1 The development of the service has not been without its challenges. Indeed, it was recognised by the organisation at the outset that there would be challenges in expanding the service to a new local authority area, and a key reason for commissioning this evaluation has been to learn from the challenges encountered as well as the reasons for success. The key learning points identified here are likely to be of much value in informing the development of future Food Train branches nationally, but it is likely that other areas will encounter their own unique challenges. The learning from the evaluation, however, suggests that such challenges can be successfully addressed through flexible and adaptive working practices, effective local partnership working and the support of the wider Food Train organisation.
- 6.3.2 The evaluation has shown that the Food Train service has been very successfully implemented and developed in West Lothian, that the service has grown rapidly and has fulfilled previously unmet needs for the local elderly population. Local partnership working has been instrumental to its success to date and a wide range of benefits for both customers and volunteers have been identified.

Appendix: Customer and Volunteer Survey Questionnaires
