

## **St Andrews – rising to the challenge**

St Andrew's is the UK's largest not-for-profit mental health care charity, offering specialist services in mental health care, learning disabilities, autism, acquired brain injuries and progressive and neurodegenerative conditions. The charity has 800 beds over three sites at Northampton, Essex & Birmingham, with 97% users from the NHS rather than being privately funded. People attending the hospitals are called service users rather than treated as “psychiatric patients”, and tend to be in rehabilitation and recovery for an average stay of 18 months or more.

Until recently the charity's food had a poor reputation with only 55 % of users describing the food as 'good' or better. That all changed when the Chief Executive and Medical Director, Professor Philip Sugarman, attended a seminar in February 2008, organised by the Soil Association with HRH Prince Charles at the Royal Brompton Hospital. He came away determined to increase the proportion of local, sustainable, wholesome food. After the seminar, the charity switched from using cook-chill ready meals, reopening old kitchens to prepare food in-house in each facility. The hospital now has separate kitchens in each of the different buildings on site, so food is freshly prepared by on-the-ward chefs and doesn't need reheating.

The Charity also decided to go well beyond the 10% local food criteria suggested at the seminar, initially aiming to procure more than 30% of their food within 50 mile radius and to increase the use of organic food. At the end of 2008, 33% of the ingredients were local and 20% were organic. Currently, almost 40% of food is local with all milk, yoghurts, poultry, bacon and cured meats coming from producers within the 50 mile radius. Organic milk comes from Windmill Foods in Flitwick – and does not cost more than the previous supplies because the charity switched to 4 pint containers. The hospital uses local and seasonal vegetables and has just changed its vegetable supplier. It will shortly be getting more than 40% of all vegetables within the 50 mile limit. St Andrew's estimates that these changes have saved around 96,000 food miles.

The Charity also concentrated on offering staff more healthy options in the restaurant, including a new salad bar and sandwiches with fresh home-made fillings. The kitchen makes small dessert pots and recently started making supermarket style fruit boxes which have been very popular.

Ready meals are used occasionally for cultural diets, although one chef on a unit with a wide range of ethnic backgrounds developed halal meals from first principles. As those are cheaper to make in house, the hospital has now made the ingredients available to all chefs to order.

UK produce is the standard fall back position if the catering team are not able to get food from within the 50 mile radius, although some products have to come from overseas, such as bananas, coffee, tea etc. Where this is the case, St Andrew's tries to use ethically traded products such as fair trade bananas and Rainforest Alliance tea and coffee. The Charity also buys a range of fair trade dry goods and items for gluten free and vegan diets, such as muesli, cereal/snack bars and nuts, from the Daily Bread Co-operative which rents a building on the main Northampton site. The charity also uses MSC assured fish – using Pollock rather than cod in fish pies.

St Andrew's is still working towards a challenging target of 50% locally produced food. Although the Charity uses farm assured Red Tractor meat from a local catering butcher, the supplier does not necessarily limit supply to just local sources, pork and beef in particular. The contract is due for tender shortly, and the hospital is planning to include sustainability criteria in the selection process but may have to increase the 50 mile limit to 60 or 75 miles. The Charity may include free range poultry in the meat contract, and is hoping to offset the extra cost of switching to free range by bulk buying local meat supplies.

The Charity has found it difficult to get sufficient supply of organic products to allow it to increase the amount of organic food further. For example, an organic vegetable supplier dropped out of the main contract tendering process and the dairy did plan to supply organic yoghurts but decided not to do so.

The Charity does have more flexibility than most NHS hospitals but still has to operate within a strict financial budget. Rather than cutting local suppliers, the catering team have moved towards cheaper cuts of meat and MSC fish (which is generally cheaper). The procurement team also use their NHS contacts to compare the Charity's quotes with those being given to the NHS and other large catering providers. The catering team has developed its own software for ordering, based on the Excel programme, which allows chefs to order what they need. Deliveries are made to a central purchasing hub on the hospital site where orders are carefully checked before being passed to the kitchens. As well as cutting waste, this has cut the amount of traffic on site – important when users and staff use grounds for exercise and relaxation.

These changes are reflected in patient feedback – food scores improved very quickly once the changes were made and scores for 'good/excellent' are consistently now over 80% compared with just 55% three years ago. The team is also now involved in rolling out the successful new in-house approach to food to its other sites in Birmingham, Essex and Nottingham.