



## **Choosing the right ingredients: The future for food in Scotland: Discussion paper**

### **A Response by WRVS**

**April 2008**

#### **About WRVS**

WRVS is a charity registered in Scotland (SC 038924) and in England and Wales (1015988). It is also a limited company registered at Companies House (2520413).

WRVS wants every older person to have the opportunity and choice to get more out of life. We enable older people to do so by delivering practical support through the power of volunteering and working to publicise and address the issues that affect older people. We also provide in-the-field support to the emergency services.

Our many services are entirely reliant on our 56,000 volunteers, 11,500 of whom are in Scotland. These dedicated Scots, men and women of all ages and backgrounds, deliver hundreds of community-based projects including meals on wheels services, good neighbour befriending schemes and community transport initiatives. We have, in Scotland alone, over 200 emergency services teams involving more than 2300 people and well over 50 established hospital operations supporting visitors, patients and staff.

#### **Our Response**

WRVS supports the provision of opportunities for individuals to choose healthy lifestyles. Our various voluntary services enable many, many people, especially but not exclusively older people, to do just this. For example, we work with local authorities to deliver meals-on-wheels to people who may not easily be able to prepare a hot nutritious meal for themselves; we operate lunch clubs in the community that serve wholesome home-made food and our hospital cafes offer numerous healthy options alongside more traditional dishes and snacks.

Our groundbreaking 'fruit and veg co-operative' in Sefton, Merseyside sees volunteers deliver bags of fresh fruit and vegetables to over 1500 people annually, including those who find it difficult to get out, those in sheltered accommodation, children in local schools and kids and their families in children's centres (more information on the Sefton scheme can be provided on request).

Without our community transport services many people would find it difficult to access opportunities to pursue healthy lifestyles in the community or to physically reach health providers (NHS and others) who ensure their immediate and longer term well-being.

There can be no doubting our commitment to the healthy living agenda but we happily admit that there is always room for improvement and we are proud to say that we are always striving towards more and better healthy options for our service users.

Our approach to service delivery is founded on enabling those who use our services to have a choice about the way they live their lives. As such we have long recognised that there is clear water between encouraging people to take up certain opportunities and obliging them to do so. This extends to the provision of food and has a unique application in the context of our hospital cafes.

We know from decades of experience, stretching back to the Second World War, that people who come into contact with our services value, more than anything else, the human contact that those services provide. A WRVS hospital cafe is not simply a place that serves food. It is a haven of sympathy and warmth in the midst of a tumult. From the joy of new parents to the grief of a family with a sick relative WRVS volunteers are *there for people*. People feel comfortable talking to our volunteers, being supported by them, being comforted by them being listened to by them. This is what makes WRVS services in hospitals (and elsewhere) different from those provided by others. And, as this work continues, the success of the cafes themselves helps support further WRVS activity across the community as well as gifting untold resources annually to the NHS. WRVS wants to this relationship to continue. We know that the NHS values it too.

That is why, while we recognise how important it is for the Scottish Government to drive forward an agenda for healthy food options, we urge it to recognise the bigger picture with respect to our services and also to understand that any drive by the public sector – and particularly the NHS – on healthy food must recognise the difference between encouragement and obligation.

Public sector establishments do not exist in isolation when it comes to the provision of food. If the public sector chooses to limit people's options in terms of what that sector offers them or allows to be offered in its establishments and people do not like what's on offer, they will not simply 'take it', they *will* go elsewhere (we should note that much food typically and unhelpfully referred to as 'unhealthy' – for example chocolate or 'meat and pastry' products – is only unhealthy if consumed to excess or as part of an imbalanced diet). Restrictions on what is on offer will not necessarily develop healthier eating habits or lifestyles amongst the population and they run the risk of compromising services like those of WRVS that have hitherto striven to find, and have succeeded in finding, a balance. These are services which have been, and continue to be, able to utilise that balanced approach to deliver so much more to the thousands and thousands of people who use them every day.

For WRVS this could lead to a classic situation of the baby being thrown out with the bathwater, whereby what really matters to cafe customers is lost because of well intentioned but overzealous decisions on food policy.

We trust that Scottish Government will take these comments into account when finalising its food policy. WRVS stands ready to work with the public sector and others in Scotland to ensure that what will doubtless be a measured and realistic food policy operates for the benefit of the health and well-being of the people of Scotland across all aspects of their lives.

**For more information contact:**

**Andrew Jackson**  
**Media and Public affairs Manager for Scotland**  
**WRVS**  
[andrew.jackson@wrvs.org.uk](mailto:andrew.jackson@wrvs.org.uk)  
**07714 898 623**

**[www.wrvs.org.uk](http://www.wrvs.org.uk)**