

Community Exchanges Toolkit



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Additional [Community Exchanges Resources](#)

- Case studies
 - Crosthwaite Exchange (video and written)
 - Bolton Exchange (video)
 - 'The Vic' Community Café (video)
 - Nicholforest Exchange (written)
- Example Constitution
- The Exchange at Crosthwaite: A Guide (2009)

Generic ACT [Guidance Sheets](#) and [Workbooks](#)

- Governance
- Project Planning
- Budget Planning
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Getting Going Workbook
- Policies & Procedures Workbook
- Sustainable Funding Workbook
- Robust Business Planning Workbook
- Developing your Budget Workbook
- Marketing Workbook
- Working with Volunteers Workbook

Introduction to Community Exchanges

What is a Community Exchange?

Community Exchanges are regular community-led events in the village hall that bring people together, provide services and information and reduce social isolation.

Crosthwaite Exchange started in 2006 as a response to the closure of the village shop and Post Office. Bolton Exchange opened for the same reason in 2008. (See *case studies*)

Since then a number of other Exchanges have opened, with support from ACT and some funding from NHS Cumbria. In most cases they have been established to bring the community together rather than in response to a specific event such as a shop closure.

Many communities already have coffee mornings, village hall pub nights and other events to bring people together, which fulfil some of the same purposes as an exchange.

ACT has defined a Community Exchange as a regular, community-run activity which:

- Brings the community together, particularly people who might not otherwise meet.
- Reduces isolation for residents who may feel 'cut-off' from the community.
- Provides services (i.e. opportunity to shop, socialise, access information, health care, or learn about public services).

Not all Community Exchanges need call themselves an Exchange. For example 'The Vic Community Café' at Culgaith is named after the village hall where it's held - the Victoria Institute. What's important is the Exchange approach.



What happens at an Exchange?

The project needs to suit the community and can be anything that regularly brings people together, reduces isolation and provides service. It's important that it's based on local need and that there has been some assessment of this before it starts.

Most Exchanges centre around food! Either a coffee morning/afternoon, or by providing a light lunch or breakfast. As well as selling refreshments they also provide; stalls to buy food or other goods, children's activities, and information on services.

Exchanges can be held any time of the day or in the evening to attract those who work during the day, whatever works best for your community and volunteers.

Community Exchanges are for everyone, young and old. It may be possible to borrow toys from the local toddler group and providing children's activities helps to attract a wide age range.

How are they run?

They are run by volunteers. Some are run as a sub-group of an existing community hall or by another local community organisation. Some are run by a new group, set up specifically to run the Exchange. A large team of volunteers lessens the workload for all and can be coordinated by a smaller committee.

The start-up costs for an Exchange need not be high and can often be covered by small grants. Most break even and many make a profit which can be donated back to the community hall or to other local groups.

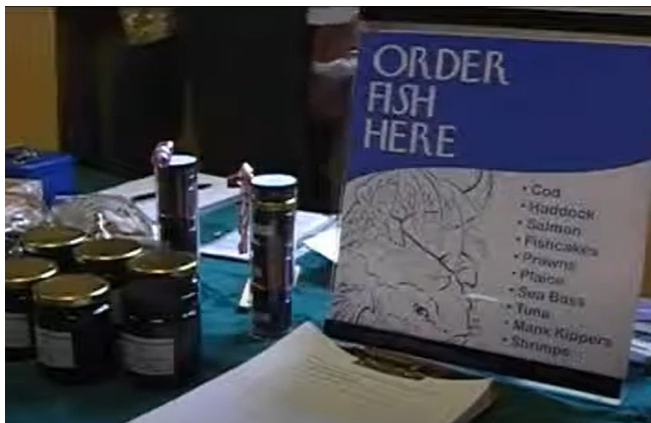
Example activities and services

Community- led:

- Tea, coffee and cakes; simple lunches (i.e. soup, roll and a hot pudding)
- Book / jigsaw / DVD exchange
- Produce from local gardens / allotments
- Children's crafts and toys (particularly during school holidays)
- Plant stall; Home baking stall; Craft stall; Traidcraft© and dried goods stall
- Themed food and decorations for Valentines Day, St George's Day etc.
- Theatre trips
- Visits from local school, choir or musicians performances
- Local art group displays
- Consultation for Community Led Plans
- Internet access

Local businesses:

- Chiropodist, manicurist, hairdresser, complementary therapies (held in a separate room)
- Fish / Butchers / Bakers van with ordering service.



Outside agencies:

- Fire safety information
- Community Police Officer
- Recycling roadshows
- Community Nurses (blood pressure tests, dietary information)
- Council Handyman service
- Energy efficiency information
- Repair Cafe



What are the benefits?

Exchanges bring people together and improve community cohesion, for some people it's their only regular social contact and, through Exchanges, people have made new friends.

They help to welcome new residents to the community too. For some Exchanges the involvement of young families through children's activities has been a particular benefit, bringing young and old together.

Exchange volunteers have increased confidence and self-esteem through their involvement.

The Exchange can be a central point for information and news. They provide an opportunity for agencies to share information about their services.

Warm Hubs

Exchanges can also be Warm Hubs, providing a warm, safe space, hot refreshments and warm welcome to everyone, plus energy advice and support.

Emergency Venue

An existing Exchange can quickly respond in an emergency to provide a warm, safe place for residents to gather, receive refreshments and access information about the situation, such as a mass power outage or extreme weather event.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults is everyone's responsibility. ACT has free guidance for village halls and a model Safeguarding Policy, available on request.

Running a Café

Most community social gatherings, including Community Exchanges, provide drinks and snacks. You may also want to provide hot meals. These basic food safety guidelines will help reduce the risk of food poisoning at events offering catering.

Start up Costs

Start up costs for a Community Exchange will vary depending on what you already have at your venue, but may include:

- Kitchen equipment for storing, preparing and serving food safely
- Crockery, cutlery and glasses
- Tablecloths and table/other decorations
- Aprons for those preparing and serving food. Branded aprons will also help to create the Exchange's local identity.
- Promotional leaflets, sign or A-board for outside when the Exchange is running.

Stocking the café and pricing

One approach which Community Exchanges have used is to ask local people to bake cakes and biscuits and reimburse them for their costs. Crosthwaite Exchange uses the following formula: 2 x cost of their ingredients + 25%.

Price your food so it's affordable, but to make a small profit so that your project becomes financially sustainable. One Exchange makes 70% profit on their cakes and drinks which keeps prices low but allows them to cover their costs and donate surplus money to community projects.

Atmosphere and appearance

To create a welcoming environment and to help make the room attractive consider the following;

- Matching aprons for helpers so that they can be easily identified
- Tablecloths and flowers on tables and smart crockery.
- Decorations for themed Exchanges
- Comfort levels and draughtproofing!



Planning

It will help if you plan your events carefully and make sure you do the following:

- DON'T make food too far in advance.
- DON'T leave food standing around for several hours in a warm room before it is eaten.
- DO make sure you've got enough fridge and freezer space.
- DO take special care with vulnerable groups; older people, young children and pregnant women are most likely to become seriously ill if they get food poisoning.

Cleanliness

Your hands can easily spread bacteria around the kitchen, increasing the risk of food poisoning, so its important to always wash them:

- Before during and after preparing any food
- After handling uncooked meat, seafood, flour or eggs
- Before and after using gloves
- Before eating

The risk of Covid-19 cross contamination to food and food packaging is very low but it is especially important to wash hands well.

Remember to use soap, rub hands vigorously for at least 20 seconds, before rinsing under running water, and dry thoroughly using a clean dry paper towel.

Cutlery and crockery should be washed in a dishwasher if possible as they wash at a high temperature which is a good way to clean equipment and kill bacteria.

If you do not have a dishwasher, use hot soapy water to remove grease, food and dirt then immerse them in very hot, clean water. Leave to air dry if possible.

Cloths and tea towels:

Dirty, damp cloths are the perfect place for bacteria to breed so it's very important to wash kitchen cloths and sponges regularly and leave them to dry before using them again.

If you want to choose the safest option, you could use disposable kitchen towels to wipe worktops and chopping boards. These are less likely to spread bacteria than cloths you use again.

Tea towels can also spread bacteria. If you wipe your hands on a tea towel after touching raw meat, this will spread bacteria to the towel and then onto anything else it touches.



Chilling

Inappropriate storage is one of the most common problems which can contribute to food poisoning outbreaks.

Make sure you've got the fridge and freezer capacity needed to keep food cool and safe. Keep perishable food in the fridge, particularly in the summer, as most bacteria grow quickly at temperatures above 5°C.



Remember:

- The coldest part of your fridge should be kept between 0°C and 5°C (32-41°F). Use a fridge thermometer to check the temperature regularly.
- Don't overload your fridge. The efficiency of the fridge will suffer if the cooling air circulating within it cannot flow freely.
- Keep the fridge door closed as much as possible. Leaving the door open raises the temperature.
- Prepare food that needs to be kept in the fridge last. Don't leave it standing around at room temperature. Leaving ready-to-eat food at room temperature for a long time can allow harmful bacteria to grow.
- Cooked foods that need to be chilled should be cooled as quickly as possible, preferably within an hour. Avoid putting them in the fridge until they are cool, because this will push up the temperature of the fridge. Where practical, reduce cooling times by dividing foods into smaller amounts.
- If you need to transport food to your venue, for example from home to a village hall or community building, use cool boxes.
- Always follow storage instructions on products. Highly perishable foods will have a 'use-by' date and generally require refrigeration. Do not serve food after the 'use by date' even if it looks and smells fine as it could put health at risk.
- 'Best before' dates indicate when food is as at its best. They are applicable to most foods other than highly perishable ones.

Cooking

Cooking food thoroughly is the key to killing most of the harmful bacteria that cause food poisoning.

Bacteria multiply at temperatures between 5°C and 63°C, the ideal temperature for bacterial multiplication is 37°C. Bacteria multiply more slowly at temperatures below 5°C and at temperatures above 63°C most food poisoning bacteria die.

Make sure frozen meat and poultry are fully thawed before cooking or expected cooking times might not be long enough. You can thaw food in the fridge, by microwaving or at room temperature.

Use any cooking instructions on packaging as a guide, but always check that the centre of the food is piping hot. Cut open food with a small knife so that you can check that it is hot in the middle.

If you are checking burgers, sausages, pork and chicken, cut into the middle and check there is no pink meat left. The meat should also be piping hot in the middle.

If you're checking a whole chicken or other fowl, pierce the thickest part of the leg (between drumstick and thigh) with a clean knife or skewer until the juices run out. The juices shouldn't have any pink or red in them. Using a meat thermometer is the most reliable method for taking the temperature of joints.

Hot food should be served immediately and not kept warm for bacteria to multiply.



Take proper care with leftovers. Throw away any perishable food that has been standing at room temperature for more than a couple of hours, and throw away all food scraps. Store other leftovers in clean, covered containers in the fridge and eat within 48 hours.

Make sure cooked food is not re-heated more than once. Always heat until piping hot all the way through. If the food is only warm it might not be safe to eat. Do not reheat rice.

Cross contamination

Cross contamination is the transfer of bacteria from foods (usually raw) to other food. Bacteria can also be transferred to foods via hands, work surfaces and equipment such as knives. Cross contamination is a major cause of food poisoning.

It's especially important to keep raw meat away from ready-to-eat foods, such as salad, fruit and bread. As these foods won't be cooked before being eaten, any bacteria which gets on them will not be killed.

Basic rules to help you keep food safe:

- Prepare raw and ready-to-eat food separately. Don't use the same knife or chopping board for raw meat, ready-to-eat food and raw fruit or vegetables unless they are cleaned thoroughly between uses.

- Wash dishes, worktops and cutlery with hot water and detergent.
- Hands should also be washed frequently with warm water and soap while preparing food, especially between handling raw and ready-to-eat foods, particularly after you have touched raw chicken or meat.
- Keep dish cloths clean and change them frequently. Also change tea towels and hand towels often. You might find paper towels a more practical option.
- If you have any cuts or grazes on exposed areas, make sure these are kept covered with a waterproof dressing. Don't wipe your hands on the tea towel, use a separate kitchen towel.
- Don't add sauce or marinade to cooked food if it has been used with raw chicken or meat.
- Store raw chicken and meat in a dish, on the bottom shelf of the fridge where it does not touch or drip onto other foods.
- Use separate tongs and utensils for raw meat and cooked meat.



Next Steps & Training

A number of Exchanges have volunteers who have completed training in Food Safety.

The CIEH Foundation Certificate in Food Safety (Level 2) is recommended and can be completed online. Search for courses accredited by CIEH (Chartered Institute of Environmental Health).

If you have teams of volunteers who each help at one Exchange per month then you could consider having one person in each team who has undertaken relevant training.

Food Standards Agency:

The Food Standards Agency is a UK-wide, independent Government agency, providing advice and information to the public and Government on food safety, nutrition and diet.

- 'Guidance on providing Food at community and charity events' also includes details on possible registration as a food business: www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene/providing-food-at-community-and-charity-events
- 'Safer Food, Better Business for Caterers' is a useful resource, available here: www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/safer-food-better-business-for-caterers

Registration as Food Business:

Food supplied, sold or provided at charity or community events must comply with food law and be safe to eat.

If you supply food on an occasional and small-scale basis, it's unlikely you will need to register. You may need to register if you provide food on a regular and organised basis.

Visit: www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/how-to-register-a-food-business and contact your local Environmental Health Officer for more information. They may wish to inspect the premises and provide recommendations.

Allergens

You should provide information about the food available and whether it contains allergens, such as nuts.

A simple tick box recipe card is available to download and for whoever prepares the food to complete. This is then displayed next to each item or provided to those serving, showing which items contain any of the top 14 allergens: www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/recipe-sheet_0.pdf

Links to Services

Community Exchanges can become a central meeting point for local communities and provide an opportunity for a range of organisations to contact local residents, provide information and let them know about their work.

Most of the following community services and organisations have provided information at Exchanges and may be of interest to local communities.

Fire Safety

Most fires in the home can be prevented by taking some basic and common-sense precautions. The Fire and Rescue Service offer free 'Safe and Well' visits. For details visit: cumbria.gov.uk/cumbriafire/services/safetyathome

Energy Advice

For impartial independent advice to help you: reduce your energy bills; make your home warmer; plan home improvements; and make your home greener, visit: www.simpleenergyadvice.org.uk

Cumbria Action for Sustainability (CAFS) provide a Cold to Cosy Homes service with free energy saving advice and equipment to help make your home warmer and more comfortable. For eligibility criteria visit: cafs.org.uk/cold-to-cosy-homes-cumbria

Police

For information on home security and local police services, please contact a member of Cumbria Constabulary local Neighbourhood Policing Team on Tel: 0845 33 00 247 or visit: www.cumbria.police.uk

Foodbanks / Fareshare

Your Exchange could benefit from free food by joining initiatives such as Fareshare: fareshare.org.uk/fareshare-centres/lancashire-and-cumbria

Coordination with a foodbank could also help those needing to access the service to do so locally.

Repair Cafe

Repair Cafes, where people bring broken household items to be fixed by skilled volunteers, can be a stand alone activity or an addition to some of your Exchanges. Contact Cumbria Action for Sustainability for details: cafs.org.uk/contact-us/

Recycling

District councils in Cumbria promote waste reduction through education, advice and the provision of practical recycling schemes and recycling centres.

Contact your local Recycling Team to find out what facilities are available to you. They may also be able to bring a 'recycling roadshow' to the Exchange.

Handy Person Schemes

Some councils operate 'handy person' schemes, whereby eligible householders (owner-occupiers or private tenants) can access a 'handy person' either for free or at reduced rates to carry out simple but essential work in their home e.g. fitting plugs/fuses, changing light bulbs, moving furniture, replacing toilet seats, fixing down hazardous carpets, trailing wires etc.

Those over 60, disabled, recently discharged from hospital or on means tested benefits are likely to be eligible.

Book Drops

Some Exchanges partnered with the County Council to offer Book Drops, holding a stock of library books and ordering service.





MP & Councillors

Community Exchanges are also an opportunity for local councillors and MPs to meet with residents in a relaxed setting.

County Council Area Support Teams

Officers from your local Area Support Team help may be able to assist with your Exchange and other community projects. For contact details visit: www.cumbria.gov.uk/yourcommunitysupport/yourlocalarea

Age UK Services

Age UK offers a wide range of information and advice, training, products and local activities for older people. In Cumbria, local Age UK branches are involved in a variety of initiatives:

Age UK South Lakeland

www.ageuk.org.uk/southlakeland

Age Concern Carlisle & Eden

www.ageuk.org.uk/carlislededen

Age UK West Cumbria

www.ageuk.org.uk/westcumbria

Age UK Barrow & District

www.ageuk.org.uk/barrow

Community Health Services

There are a number of community health professional roles linked to GP practices and primary health care teams, like **Social Prescribers**. Some Exchanges have had district nurses present to offer blood pressure checks and dietary advice.

District Nurses:

District Nurses visit people in their own homes, or a variety of community settings, providing care for patients and supporting family members. They assess the health needs of patients and families. Contact can be made via your GP practice or visit:

- North Cumbria: www.ncic.nhs.uk/services/district-nursing
- Lancashire & South Cumbria: www.lscft.nhs.uk/services/service-finder-z/district-nursing-service

Health Visitors:

Health Visitors support families with young children to be healthy. They work in partnership with families, identifying health needs, providing care and coordinating services to provide support. Contact can be made via your GP practice or visit:

- North Cumbria: www.ncic.nhs.uk/services/health-visiting
- Lancashire and South Cumbria: www.lscft.nhs.uk/our-services/service-finder-z/health-visiting-services

Health & Wellbeing Coaches:

HAWCs work with anyone over the age of 16 who wants to make positive changes to their life. They visit people in their own home or other settings. Visit www.cumbria.gov.uk/publichealth/hawcs for details.

For more information please contact ACTion with Communities in Cumbria on Tel: 01768 425 666 or visit our website: www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

ACT champions community and rural issues

ACTION with Communities in Cumbria, Office Q Skirgill Business Park, Penrith, Cumbria CA11 0FA

T: 01768 425 666 | www.cumbriaaction.org.uk | info@cumbriaaction.org.uk | Follow us on Twitter @ACTCumbria
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