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Empowering Communities Through Culinary Education

The Journey of MTK UK Phase 1

In the spring of 2023, the NNEdPro Global Institute for Food, Nutrition and Health brought its groundbreaking Mobile Teaching Kitchen (MTK) initiative to the United Kingdom, marking a significant expansion of a project that has already transformed lives in India, Mexico and the USA. The UK rollout was more than just another adaptation; it was the beginning of a focused and impactful journey that sought to address food insecurity and the need for new skills for livelihoods through culinary education and community empowerment.

Over the next six months, the MTK UK project took root in the Dundee and Angus region of Scotland, where it focused on empowering jobseekers, predominantly women, from a marginalised background, providing skills and knowledge needed to become culinary nutrition educators and potential micro-entrepreneurs. The journey culminated in a vibrant showcase at the Dundee Food Festival, setting the stage for the next phase of the project.

A vision takes shape: the launch of MTK UK

The MTK UK initiative officially launched in April 2023, with a public workshop in Cambourne. This event was a precursor to a series of roadshows across key regions of the UK, including London, Cambridge, Belfast, Aberdeen and Dundee. However, the project found its most fertile ground in Dundee, a city known for its culinary heritage and diverse communities, as well as its historical trade connections to eastern India. The programme focused its efforts on the coastal town of Arbroath, leveraging a partnership with Dundee and Angus College, providing culinary skills and nutritional knowledge to promote healthy food-based microenterprises to both feed and educate members of the public whilst also creating livelihood opportunities. The goal was to empower these individuals to improve their own lives and enhance the health of their broader communities through practical cooking skills and a deeper understanding of nutrition.

Culinary education in action: the Dundee & Angus training programme

The Dundee and Angus phase of the Mobile Teaching Kitchen (MTK) initiative was marked by a series of five intensive culinary education sessions that aimed to equip local jobseekers with essential cooking skills and a profound understanding of nutrition. Each session was meticulously crafted to introduce participants to different culinary traditions, broadening their knowledge and enhancing their ability to prepare nutritious meals.

The journey began on 21 February 2024, with an engaging introduction to South Asian cuisine. Thirteen participants from Arbroath were immersed in the cuisine's vibrant flavours and health benefits. They learned to prepare an array of dishes, including Wholesome Vegetable Pulao, Egg Kosha, Mixed Daal, Tomato Salad and Gajar Halwa. This inaugural session was not just about cooking but also emphasised fundamental nutrition principles, such as the importance of micronutrients and practical techniques for healthy meal preparation.

As the programme progressed, the second session on 27 March 2024, shifted focus to Mediterranean cuisine. This session saw twelve culinary professionals from Dundee and Angus College joining in. They explored dishes that emphasised plant-centric ingredients and healthy fats, staples of the Mediterranean diet. The session went beyond cooking, incorporating a detailed nutritional analysis of the recipes and discussions about food-based microenterprises. The participants examined how dietary choices can prevent chronic diseases, thus understanding the broader implications of their culinary skills.

By 8 May 2024, the programme was ready to revisit South Asian cuisine, this time with a new cohort of ten from the Tayside region. The session built on the earlier South Asian module, focusing on refining culinary techniques and deepening participants' understanding of the nutritional profiles of traditional dishes. This approach allowed for a more nuanced application of the skills learned in the previous session.





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The subsequent session, held on 22 May 2024, reintroduced Mediterranean cuisine to fifteen women from the initial cohort. This session was designed to leverage seasonal and local produce, further enhancing the relevance of the Mediterranean diet. Participants delved into the health benefits of the diet, including its positive effects on heart health and longevity, thus reinforcing the practical value of seasonal eating.

The culmination of the Dundee training programme occurred on 12 June 2024, with a focus on Scottish cuisine, bringing together all participants into a single workshop. This final session featured a newly developed Scottish menu template that combined traditional ingredients with contemporary culinary techniques. In exploring the nutritional analysis of Scottish dishes participants learned how to maximise nutrient density while maintaining cultural relevance, thereby integrating their culinary skills into a meaningful and contextually appropriate framework.

Throughout these sessions (all following an ovo-lacto-vegetarian format), participants not only gained technical cooking skills, but also developed a strong understanding of nutrition. This training was pivotal in preparing them for the Dundee Food Festival, where they showcased their skills and the practical application of their culinary education. The Dundee Food Festival provided a public platform for the participants to demonstrate the diverse dishes and nutritional principles they had mastered during the program. Our decision to participate in the festival was driven by the desire to engage the wider community, promote the benefits of healthy eating, and celebrate the cultural diversity of the cuisines explored during the training. The festival also served as an opportunity for the participants to gain real-world experience in a bustling, community-focused environment, reinforcing their confidence and skills. The success of these sessions underscored the effectiveness of the MTK model in fostering community empowerment through culinary education.

Measuring impact: data collection & assessment

Comprehensive data collection methods were used throughout the programme to assess the effectiveness of the MTK model. The data collection tools included Pre and Post Knowledge, Attitude, Practice (KAP) Questionnaires, the FACET Tool, and taste-testing forms. These tools helped

evaluate the participants' nutritional knowledge, cooking skills, and dietary behaviors before and after each session.

The data revealed significant improvements in the participants' understanding of nutrition and their ability to apply this knowledge in practical settings. They reported increased confidence in preparing nutritious meals and a greater awareness of the importance of diet in maintaining overall health.

A grand finale: the Dundee Food Festival

The six-month journey reached its climax at the Dundee Food Festival, held on the weekend of 6-7 July 2024. The festival provided the women who had undergone the culinary training with an opportunity to showcase their newfound skills to the public. The MTK stall quickly became a focal point of the festival, drawing in visitors with the aroma of freshly prepared dishes and the promise of nutritious and affordable meals.

The menu featured a blend of South Asian, and Scottish dishes, each carefully curated to highlight the different cuisines' rich flavours and nutritional benefits, with two bento boxes sold based on the respective menu templates. The response from the public was overwhelmingly positive. Many visitors expressed surprise at how delicious and affordable nutritious meals could be, and they were eager to learn more about the MTK initiative. The women who ran the stall gained invaluable experience in interacting with the public, managing logistics, and showcasing their skills – an experience that added an important dimension to their training and prepared them for future microenterprise opportunities.

Looking forward: the future of MTK UK

The success of the Dundee Food Festival concluded the first phase of the MTK UK initiative and set the stage for its next chapter. Data collected throughout the six-month programme, along with feedback from the festival, will shape future developments.

The first phase demonstrated the transformative impact of culinary education, from the initial training sessions to the vibrant festival. The initiative has empowered women, improved nutritional knowledge, and fostered community engagement. Moving forward, MTK UK will continue to advance healthy eating and address food insecurity across the UK, paving the way for a healthier future for all.

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