

SOCIAL JUSTICE PULSE REVIEW 2025

COST OF LIVING, HEALTH INEQUALITIES AND RACE EQUITY

Growing Food Justice – A Feminist Food system

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Project Summary

This project showcases West End Women and Girls Centre's working model for a community-led, local and sustainable food system based on the right of all people to good food. A report was produced in collaboration with an illustrator, using data and testimonials gathered from staff and Centre members on the integrated social, economic, health and environmental impacts. This is aimed at community organisations, practitioners and policymakers with the vision of sharing successful grassroots practice.



The Challenge

One in five people in the UK suffer from food insecurity and the North East of England is the region with the highest number of people affected (Consumer Data Research Centre, 2024). Communities and individuals face systemic inequalities in accessing nutritious and sustainable food with resulting impacts which severely affect health, education and social cohesion, and have lasting consequences. This has been exacerbated by over 15 years of austerity, the pandemic and now the cost-of-living crisis. Many people rely on emergency food aids which are an immediate response to the issue rather than addressing the root causes of poverty.

Grassroots organisations which provide successful community-led models that innovatively address food resilience are often excluded from statutory reports and initiatives. They also often lack the capacity to share this vital knowledge and learning.

This project addresses that challenge for West End Women and Girls Centre, drawing on 44 years of expertise from staff and Centre members as they develop a community-led, socially and environmentally just, healthy, and sustainable food system. 100% of food used across the organisation is either grown sustainably, reduces food waste or is sourced locally through their:

- Smallholding in rural Northumberland
- Urban community garden and kitchen
- Edible Elswick – growing on local estates in Newcastle’s West End.
- Surplus food distribution programme

Findings

Research shows that West End Women and Girls Centre has a unique approach to community food systems. While many UK place-based food programmes focus on individual initiatives such as urban growing, distributing surplus food, or connecting food with community wellbeing and environmental action, The Centre combines all of these - and more.

- West End Women and Girls Centre’s work is a model for food sovereignty, going beyond alleviating food security which tends to focus only on food availability, to propose a localised circular food system which reclaims control from production to consumption, aiming to build a democratic and equitable food system and putting healthy communities and a healthy natural environment at its centre.
- West End Women and Girls food programme also helps tackle systemic inequalities in health and wellbeing and supports community cohesion. It provides a space for women and girls to share skills and cultural knowledge – such as traditional farming and cooking practices from across the world, passed down through generations of women. Women and girls spend time in the wilds, caring for animals, nature and the land, improve urban space and come together to cook and grow food. Every woman involved said the programme improved their health and wellbeing.



Recommendations

- This report offers valuable insights at both local and national levels. Support is needed to effectively disseminate its findings and engage with commissioners, policymakers, practitioners, and academics.
- Local authorities should adopt a hybrid policy approach that actively supports community-led initiatives to drive systemic change - backed by sustained and adequate funding.
- Support to enable peer-to-peer exchange is crucial to share and replicate best practice, influence policy and build the power of communities to shape their own food futures.
- With increased capacity and funding, West End Women and Girls Centre aims to scale this work and deepen its impact. Further research and support are essential to help realise this potential.

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