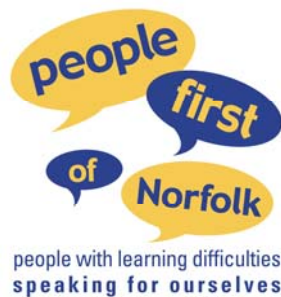


Garden  
Science Trust



# Superfoods explained

Evaluation report March 2010

Partners: Garden Science Trust, People First of Norfolk, Institute of Food Research, Shellytelly

Location: Norfolk

Timescale: January to February 2010

## Phase 1: Planning and Consultation

We wanted to consult with adults with learning difficulties about their concept of superfoods and the effects of food on health. The project group (project manager, project worker and supporters, scientists, film-maker) met to design the format of the consultation.

**Chosen format:** a mix of asking people questions, presenting the idea of food with specific health benefits, tasting of a wide variety of foods and drinks which claim to be superfoods, a demonstration of parts of the body (heart, vascular system, gut) with a model torso.

We held 4 consultation meetings with existing advocacy groups which meet regularly. We went to Attleborough, Great Yarmouth, Holt and Norwich. In total we consulted with 52 people with learning difficulties and 13 support workers.

### **Main findings:**

Very few people with learning difficulties had heard the term 'superfood.'

Most people with learning difficulties could name a range of healthy foods.

People who live in residential homes have little choice about food bought or prepared for their main meals. People living with family or in supported living were more used to shopping for food.

People found out about healthy foods from the television (advertising and cookery programmes) and dietician or doctor. A few read magazines and were aware of food labelling.

People who buy their own food thought mostly about cost and taste. Some mentioned health benefits.

## Phase 2: Activities

The project team met again to plan the second stage activities. The consultation had shown that not many people had heard of superfoods, and the scientists were fairly sceptical about the benefits claimed for many of the foods. Therefore we decided to concentrate on the link between a small number of foods and their specific health benefits, as we didn't want to confuse people.

**Format:** Team game of Pictionary to get participants thinking visually about foods. Short presentation about six superfoods: benecol yoghurt (proven to lower cholesterol), salmon, avocado (oils also reduce cholesterol), blueberries, dark chocolate (anti-oxidants may help blood pressure by softening arteries and veins), probiotic yogurt drinks (boost immune system and help regulate gut). Model torso is used to explain where foods are having an effect.

Participants taste foods and work in small groups on one of the foods. With help from supporters and scientists, participants make poster about their food and present findings back to rest of group. Blood pressure monitor is used as an extension activity.

Process, presentations and mini-interviews are filmed for DVD.

We held five activity meetings, four with groups who had also taken part in the consultation (Attleborough, Great Yarmouth, Holt and Norwich) and one new group from Kings Lynn. A total of 55 adults with learning difficulties took part.

### **Findings:**

Activities were well received and we had some excellent posters made. We filmed parts of the activities for the DVD and gathered comments from participants at the same time.

### **Baseline research:**

Given that not many people with learning difficulties had heard of superfoods before taking part in the project, we attended the Norwich Food Festival and asked passers-by a few questions about superfoods and the foods we were studying in particular. We spoke to 30 people.

Our baseline research showed that about half of those questioned had heard the term superfood. About half could match some of the food to their claims for health. Several were very sceptical about the health claims.

## Making the DVD

An important part of the project was to track the process and to present our findings in a DVD. Shellytelly, a community film-maker based in Norwich, was engaged to make our film and contributed a huge number of ideas for presenting visual information. The project team worked with the food scientists to make sure that the content was sufficiently accurate as well as being simple enough for the target group to understand.

We also talked to the specialist dietician for people with learning difficulties, and visited the Wellcome Trust in London to talk to the funders and to gain extra material in the museum. Finally we went to the Institute of Food Research to capture some of the atmosphere of a research laboratory and to get an idea of how scientists work. The voiceover was written and recorded and some extra shots were taken. We were lucky to find a local performer to write and sing a superfoods song.

## DVD premiere and dissemination seminar

The premiere was held on February 3<sup>rd</sup> 2010 at the John Innes Centre in Norwich. We invited all the people who took part plus science communicators, voluntary organisations, policy makers, funders. Dr Ian Gibson, a well known local politician and champion of both science industries and organisations for people with learning difficulties in Norfolk, introduced the event and to led a discussion after the DVD showing. 45 people attended the event.

The event was fun with a performance of the superfoods song by local musician Maddi Cassell, an interview with June Walton, project worker, the DVD and facilitated discussion. Each participant had a goody bag with badge, taster superfoods, wordsearch, calendar and pen. Exhibitors included Joy of Food (local lottery funded project), Adult Education, About with Friends (who run a catering business staffed by people with learning difficulties) as well as the project partners. We ordered a healthy lunch and commissioned a special superfood dark chocolate celebration cake.

## Evaluation

The evaluation is backed up by the DVD which tells the story of the project.

## Project outcomes

### People with learning difficulties will:

1	Have raised awareness about the role of science and society, for example how science can help inform choice and decision making	✓
2	Have improved knowledge about how science research works, for example how science is evaluated and communicated	✓
3	Have improved knowledge about the science behind superfoods, by working with scientists and taking part in simple tests and experiments	✓
4	Have better access to information about superfoods, by developing and using the DVD resource	✓
5	Be better equipped to make choices about buying and eating food, through consultation and discussion with scientists, communicators and support staff	✓
6	Gain experience of consultation and debate throughout the process of the project	✓

1. Participants with learning difficulties had not met a working scientist before this project. Practising food scientists took an active part at each of the workshops and discussed how scientists contribute to knowledge and debates about food.
2. We discussed how scientists collect evidence and how they can tell if certain foods are really good for us. For some foods there is a direct cause and effect (eg products which claim to lower cholesterol), whereas for others the situation is more complex (eg probiotic yoghurts – the idea is sound but our guts already contain millions of good bacteria and these products are loaded with sugar.) We used dark chocolate as a good example because everyone likes chocolate; dark chocolate is surprisingly good for us for known reasons but only in small quantities. The people with learning difficulties made posters and presented what they had learned back to the scientists. This showed that they had grasped some of the complexity of the arguments and helped them understand one of the ways that scientists communicate with each other.

3. The scientists explained how some of the so-called superfoods we tasted might have beneficial medical effects and made strong links between medical health, eg blood pressure and cholesterol testing, and dietary choices.
4. Scientists were involved in the workshop development and DVD content and worked closely with the project worker to explain how they found evidence for the health benefits of specific foods. The DVD was very well received at the premiere and copies were requested to show to parent carers, locality groups and in group homes.
5. We found that many participants with learning difficulties did not normally choose what they ate, especially those living in residential homes. Through the initial tasting activities, most of the participants tried food they had never eaten before, such as salmon, avocado pear and a variety of fruit smoothies. At the dissemination event, three people said they had started to choose different foods after learning about them, showing that it is possible to influence people's choice through information. Two had started to ask for salmon, and one had chosen to eat actimel yoghurt which she enjoyed. We felt there was a lot more work to be done with support workers, some of whom said they felt poorly trained about food and health. Our findings will also be passed to the Joy of Food programme, a three year advocacy project to get people in Norfolk thinking about food and health.
6. All the workshops and activities were run in a consultative way, with plenty of time for discussion with the scientists and peer participants. The final event included a 20 minute debate, led by Dr Ian Gibson, when people who had just watched the DVD asked questions and made comments to a panel of scientists and the project worker. The debate was lively with good questions from the floor about food labelling, local (i.e.sustainable) fruit and vegetables compared with exotics, availability and cost of good food, choice for people living in residential homes, change of diet because of the project.

**The project worker and self-advocates will:**

1	Gain experience of working as equal partners with scientists	✓
2	Gain experience of designing and producing resources	✓
3	Gain experience of organising a consultation process	✓
4	Gain experience of paid work	✓
5	Gain experience of evaluating a project	✓

A project worker with learning difficulties, June Walton, worked on the project from the beginning. Several self-advocates helped out in a volunteer capacity at various times.

1. June worked with the scientists, organising and taking part in meetings and working on content for the DVD. She gained a lot of confidence and was always ready to contribute her ideas which really helped the project along.
2. June was involved in the DVD production process, especially with the location filming in London and Norwich. She worked hard on the interviews which she conducted on film for the scientists, the nutritionist and the funders. She played a big role in looking at the designs for the DVD leaflet and cover to make sure it was as accessible as possible for people with learning difficulties.
3. June learnt how to set up meetings, send emails and made a number of important phone calls. She also took part in all the workshops and in the public consultation at the Norwich Food Festival. She worked hard on her presentation style and also spent time outside the project talking to people about superfoods and the project.
4. June was a paid member of staff on the project. Apart from improved confidence and presentation skills, she has also got more used to travelling by bus and train on her own and feels more independent all round. She is now looking for more paid work but meanwhile she is extending the project by taking the DVD out to various meetings and talking about her experience of the project and of her paid work. We are also hoping to find funding for her to organise some workshops on women's health for people with learning difficulties.
5. June has been a major contributor to the development of the project all along, which has been achieved by evaluating each stage.

**The Garden Science Trust and People First of Norfolk will:**

1	Build on their experience of working with people with learning difficulties to produce a science based resource	✓
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1. Both organisations have thoroughly enjoyed this project and it has enabled us to do some really interesting and worthwhile work. We have had a great experience working with the scientists from the Institute of Food Research and would all like to do this sort of project again.

Highlights for the Garden Science Trust have been working with June and seeing her develop, reaching so many people with learning difficulties in Norfolk and making the DVD.

**The scientists/science communicator will:**

1	Gain experience of working with people with learning difficulties	✓
2	Gain experience of producing accessible information	✓

1. The scientists from the Institute of Food Research were extremely helpful and supportive. We had excellent access to Dr Dave Hart and Dr Paul Kroon. Dave is very experienced in science communication and has worked a lot with school students, and contributed a number of ideas and resources such as the model body. It was quite a challenge for the scientists to work with people with learning difficulties, and to simplify the science to a point which could be understood while remaining accurate. The large numbers of people with differing abilities in each group posed an additional challenge but the scientists rose to the occasion and confessed that they had learnt a lot and enjoyed themselves as well.
2. In the end, most of the information we produced was on the DVD, but during the project we had several entertaining discussions about suitable wording. For example, words like 'chemicals', 'ingredients' and 'constituents' are too complex for many people with learning difficulties whereas words like 'stuff' and 'things' can work when spoken but not written! Perhaps the main learning point was how much time and effort goes in to producing information which is truly accessible.

## What worked well?

We reached a large number of people with learning difficulties with workshops and activities.

We produced an excellent DVD which tells the story of the project and explains superfoods in an accessible way. The addition of the superfoods song was fun and memorable.

We employed a person with learning difficulties on the project who gained a lot of self-confidence and new skills along the way.

We held a very successful DVD premiere with 45 guests. The DVD was enthusiastically received, and led to an excellent discussion around science, food and choice, with many of the target audience participating in the discussion.

There will be follow on presentations where we will show the DVD, and the project worker will talk about the issues and her experience of the project.

The three partners worked together really well, plus the addition of the film maker at a later stage.

The partners brought a lot of added value to the project eg equipment we could borrow, room hire, transport costs, hire of the event venue.

People tried foods they hadn't had before. We raised awareness that people should have more choice, wherever they live.

## What didn't work so well?

Participants were not as aware of superfoods as we expected, and our scientists were quite sceptical about their value. We had to be careful not to promote superfoods too much but to try and make a link between specific foods and medical health.

With three essential partners and a planned programme of workshops throughout the year and the county, it was sometimes hard to timetable events around other commitments.

Again with three partners it was occasionally hard to manage who was doing what.

'I loved the Superfoods DVD Premiere. It was fabulous to see so many people with learning difficulties engaging with the project: watching the dvd, singing the Superfoods song and taking part in the debate. I thought the speaker Ian Gibson and the scientists Paul and Dave were brilliant. The tone and words they used were perfect.' Michelle Savage, ShellyTelly

'Paul and I would like to say a very big thank you for all the wonderful work you put in towards the making of the 'Superfoods Explained' DVD. Working with you made us both stop and think very hard about how best to try to explain our work so that it was easy to understand.' Dave Hart, Institute of Food Research

'The project has been lots of fun and very interesting. I enjoyed learning about superfoods and going out to meet lots of different people. It was good working with Dave and Paul, the scientists, and the Garden Science Trust and Shellytelly.' June Walton, Superfoods project worker

'We achieved our aim of taking science to adults with learning difficulties. Working together helped us all learn how to make complex information accessible. Making the DVD was a great experience and showed what people with learning difficulties can achieve.' Sheila Mathias, Garden Science Trust

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