

ShowCase

Experience Food at Work

Topic:

Healthy eating

Organisation:

Breckland District Council and Uscreates

Location:

Breckland, Dereham (East of England)

Dates:

2007 to 2008

Budget:

£2,000 (Council grant); £25,000 (Uscreates work-in-kind)

Website:

www.uscreates.com/work/workplace_eating_behaviours

Contact:

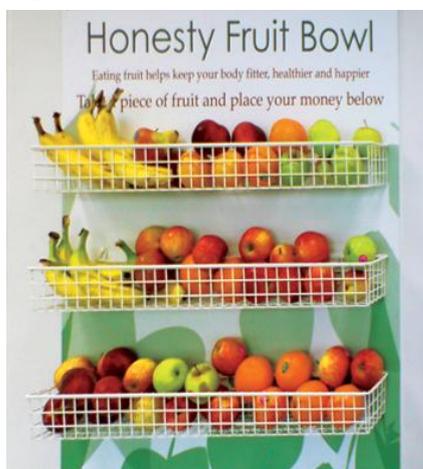
Zoe Stanton (Director, Uscreates)

Email:

us@uscreates.com

Telephone:

0203 1426 686



Overview

'Experience Food at Work' was a pilot initiative that aimed to improve workplace eating behaviours at the Breckland District Council offices in Norfolk. Led by London-based design and behaviour change consultancy Uscreates, the project used creative research and co-design techniques to develop innovative methods to improve eating behaviours, such as encouraging staff to eat more fruit and vegetables during the work day and take lunch away from their workstation.

Five interventions were introduced: an honesty fruit bowl system; a visiting chef; a healthy lunch pack delivery service; health and nutrition MOTs with a dietician; and redesign of the communal eating facilities in the staff room.

One year after the interventions were introduced:

- 23 per cent of employees rated their lunch as healthier than a year ago
- The number of people who ate no fruit at work reduced by half
- 72 per cent of staff ate two or more portions of fruit at work
- The percentage of those who ate lunch at their desk every day dropped from 41 per cent to 29 per cent
- 70 per cent of action points for change set by employees at their MOTs had been achieved



The workplace is a key target area for improving eating behaviours, as 60 per cent of our waking hours are spent in the workplace and a third of our meals and most of our snacks are eaten there. Research published in the Charter for Health, Work and Wellbeing has shown that every pound spent on promoting health in the workplace could lead to a £2.50 saving for businesses. Furthermore, companies that encourage a better work-life balance have been shown to be much more productive.



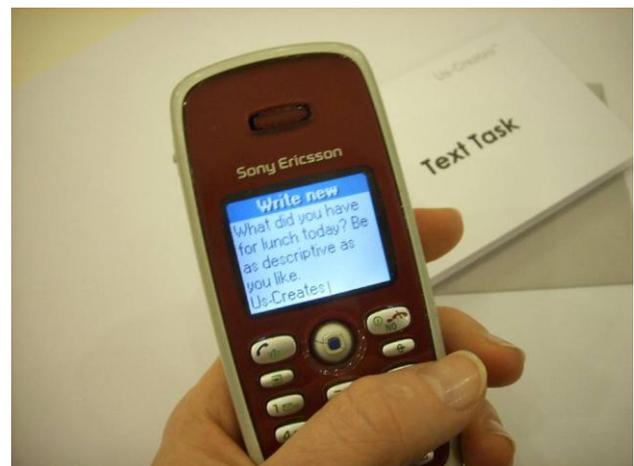
The Breckland District Council offices are situated on an industrial estate in rural Dereham. Limited healthy lunch options were available to staff and there was a culture of eating at workstations rather than taking a proper lunch break. In an effort to improve workplace eating behaviours, Breckland District Council collaborated with London-based design and behaviour change consultancy Uscreates on a pilot project to provide its workforce with opportunities for healthy eating. The focus for the project was also influenced by the Government's *Health, Work and Well-Being Strategy*, *Investors in People*, and *Choosing Health* objectives.

“Healthy eating was, and still is, on the agenda. Jamie Oliver was around, ‘5-a-day’ was around. So it was relevant to previous work we’d been involved in and it was on everybody’s lips.” (Zoe Stanton, Director of Uscreates)

Breckland District Council paid £2,000 towards implementing interventions. This was supplemented by an estimated £25,000 of work in-kind from Uscreates. As a start-up company with previous experience of using product design to promote healthy eating, the co-founders of Uscreates were keen to build on this experience to demonstrate how design could improve eating behaviours within a workplace setting.

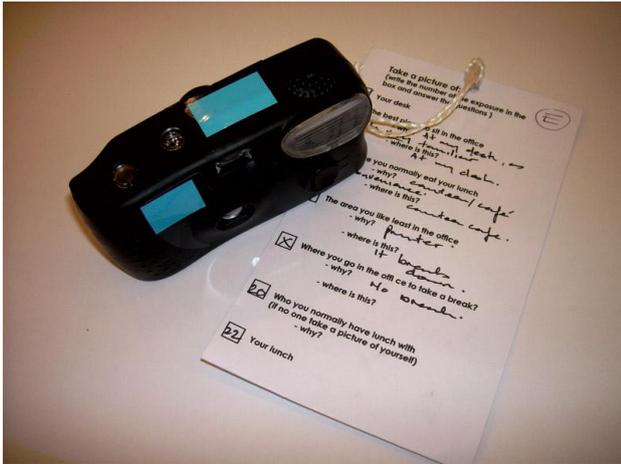


The Uscreates team began by spending two days carrying out qualitative research with the Breckland District Council's Economic Development Team, the Asset Management Team and the Environmental Planning Team. Creative and engaging research methods were used to gain an understanding of the culture of the workplace and involve employees in the initiative from the outset.



Research ‘probes’

These included a camera task (which asked staff to answer questions by taking pictures); templates that participants filled in with drawings to show work pressures; and text message questions sent out at regular intervals.



Workforce interviews

Eight one-to-one interviews with Breckland District Council employees were conducted, which explored a number of topics including healthy eating and lifestyles, communal eating, work breaks and productivity.

Traditional statistical data collection

An online questionnaire was sent to all Breckland District Council staff, asking for information about productivity as well as what they ate for lunch, where and when. Guidance for this questionnaire was received from the British Dietetic Association (BDA) and formed the baseline for the project's evaluation. Respondents were entered into a prize draw to win restaurant vouchers and a fruit and vegetable box. The response rate for the online survey was 33 per cent.

“The employees were nervous about what we were going to do, because we were basically hanging out in the workplace giving people these little tasks to do, so we had to be clear that it wouldn't take longer than 10 minutes and that it wouldn't disrupt the working day. When people got involved they realised it was actually quite fun. We spent some time in the workplace before designing the tasks to make sure we fitted in with how they worked, rather than going in all guns blazing and disrupting and annoying people.” (Zoe Stanton, Director of Uscreates)

The different research techniques used were successful in gathering insights, whilst also engaging the target audience in new ways that got them excited about the project. Some techniques worked better than others. For example, the text task received fewer responses than hoped.

“We did a text task which didn't work as well as we thought and I think it's because people had to pay for the texts. That was quite interesting and in other projects we use a free number they can respond to.” (Zoe Stanton, Director of Uscreates)

Key insights into the eating behaviour of the Breckland District Council workforce included:

Low levels of communal eating and high levels of at-desk eating

- Poor breakout and eating environment and limited, underused communal facilities: “I'm not sure where the staff room is”
- Poor sharing culture: “I hide my teaspoon at the back of the cupboard”
- Feeling that eating lunch at the desk is the most work-efficient option: “If I stop I just won't be able to get going again”

Staff were stuck in a sandwich rut and had limited variety in their diet

- Very basic onsite kitchen for preparing food: “I wouldn't want to cook anything in those kitchens”
- No onsite canteen, limited local food outlets, and a sandwich delivery service that did not sell well-balanced options: “I just walk over to Tesco and grab a sandwich”
- Lack of inspiration and perceived difficulty of bringing in healthy food, including the belief that eating fruit and vegetables at work means being very organised at home: “I just make a simple sandwich everyday because it's quick and easy”

Lack of knowledge about the nutritional and wellbeing benefits of a balanced and adequate lunch break

The research helped to break down the Breckland District Council workforce of 250 employees into three different segments according to lunchtime behaviours:

1. Those who bring lunch into work (but not necessarily a healthy one)
2. Those who buy lunch
3. Those who eat at their desks (a large proportion)

These findings were taken to a stakeholder roundtable (co-design event), which brought together topic experts and workforce representatives to develop solutions. These stakeholders were identified in consultation with Breckland District Council using established professional networks. Those who took part in the co-design event included:

- Representatives from Breckland District Council
- Representatives from NHS Norfolk
- Dr Amelia Lake, British Dietetic Association (BDA)
- A local chef
- Service design consultants
- A dietician



Creative facilitation techniques were used to generate ideas for interventions based on the research findings. These included modelling techniques (using plasticine to explore ideas and express what would be important for an intervention), mini briefs, and profiling (using pen portraits to develop ideas around a representative character). Ideas generated were mapped against the three identified audience segments to deliver the right mix of services, events and materials that would cater to the range of staff.

“We tried to keep it as informal and untraditional as possible, because there had already been a lot of work around this subject area. So we knew if we wanted to do something different and better, we had to use different and better ways to come up with ideas. The methods generated a lot of ideas that we took away and worked out, within the budget that we had, which ones we could deliver and could work.” (Zoe Stanton, Director of Uscreates)

Behavioural goals and targets

The baseline survey data showed that staff at Breckland District Council tended to eat lunch at their desk and consume little or no fruit and vegetables at work. Uscreates and key stakeholders used these findings to set behavioural goals for the project, which were to:

- Increase lunch breaks taken away from workstations
- Increase the amount of fruit and vegetables consumed in the workplace

Additional goals included to:

- Increase the variety of food consumed in the workplace
- Improve knowledge about how to make positive changes to nutritional health
- Improve awareness of nutritional choices and effects on personal health and productivity



Using ideas developed by stakeholders in the co-design event, Uscreates developed a number of interventions including events, products and services all aimed at breaking down the barriers to healthy eating in the workplace and making the healthy option easy and enjoyable.

Health and nutrition MOTs

In partnership with NHS Norfolk, health and nutrition MOTs were developed to be carried out in the workplace. Fifteen-minute one-to-one sessions with a qualified dietician would be offered to all employees. Participants would be provided with a bespoke five-point plan to make positive changes to their diets. To support participants in achieving their goals, a personalised text service would send out relevant information supporting their action plans. A reminder card written by participants would also be posted back three weeks after the MOT to encourage them to continue with the positive changes.

Honesty fruit bowl

The office had a strong snacking culture, with staff treating each other to unhealthy foods. In response to the perception that bringing healthy snacks into work involved being very organised at home, an honesty fruit bowl system was developed. This would provide easily accessible fruit to the workforce and would sit in a prominent place to remind staff about healthy snacking options. To keep costs to the organisation to a minimum, a partnership was set up with a local food business to supply the fruit and employees would simply drop money into an 'honesty box'.

Healthy lunch pack delivery service

Sandwiches represented the main competition to a balanced, healthy lunch and they were

easily and conveniently available from the nearby Tesco store. Efforts were made to try and involve Tesco in the actual intervention. However, this did not lead to a working partnership.

Instead, to try and compete with their offer, the sandwich delivery van that served the office was supported to develop a more healthy lunchtime offer. A lunch pack delivery service was developed with the local cafe (The Sandwich Bar) and would be aimed at those who packed or bought unhealthy lunches because they were perceived to be the most convenient. Each lunch pack would contain at least three of the five daily recommended portions of fruit and vegetables and could be ordered over the phone and delivered direct to your desk.

Re-vamp of the breakout zone



Taking lunch at the desk represented another main form of competition for healthy eating behaviours. At the start of the project, there was no real competition for this habit – there were poor eating and catering facilities on site, staff did not know where the communal eating area was and the staff room was run down and neglected. Eating at the desk was therefore the preferred option.

To create an attractive alternative to eating at the desk, a communal breakout area was developed by putting eating facilities in the

staff room and re-vamping the decor. Simple and cost-effective changes were made, such as introducing bar stools, dining tables, bookshelves, plants and a kitchen bin (to replace the open waste paper basket), as well as clearing out unused items and office equipment. This would provide a comfortable and appealing alternative to staff who took lunch at their desks.



Visiting chef

A professional chef would be invited to come into the workplace to give cooking demonstrations, provide taster sessions and create recipe cards to inspire staff to make more exciting and healthy lunches. This intervention would be aimed at members of the workforce who prepared their lunches at home.

A Workforce Champion Group, made up of Breckland District Council employees, was set up to pre-test intervention ideas, provide feedback on development and support delivery throughout.



The interventions were piloted at the Breckland District Council office in 2007 over a nine-week period.

The project was publicised to employees through internal posters as well as a dedicated blog, which was set up so the project partners and Breckland District Council employees could be informed about developments. In addition, a presentation was made at monthly staff briefings and updates posted on the intranet and in-house newsletter.

The different activities were coordinated and monitored by the Uscreates team, in partnership with other stakeholders, including NHS Norfolk, a local chef and the local sandwich bar. Bringing partners on board early in the development stage helped gain buy-in and embed interventions so that the impact of the project could be sustained.



The visiting chef event was coordinated with the launch of the newly re-vamped staff room. This provided publicity for the new communal eating area, while providing much needed inspiration for simple, tasty and healthy lunches to help employees get out of a 'sandwich rut'.

The pilot phase highlighted strengths and weaknesses of the different interventions. For instance, the health and nutrition MOTs were a big success – they were popular with employees and provided measurable targets through the five-point action plans.

“The MOTs were completely oversubscribed and people really liked them. The good thing was they made a five-point action plan and we

could then ask them what they achieved later, so we could measure the impact” (Zoe Stanton, Director of Uscreates)

The lunch pack, however, was less successful. Priced at £3.75, each lunch pack contained three of the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetable. The pricing proved too expensive for the workforce, meaning not enough sales were being made. This coupled with complicated logistics meant that after the trial run this service was discontinued.

“The lunchbox was potentially least successful, but interestingly there is now a company that posts healthy lunches, with two or three of your five a day to your desk. It’s a national company – if it had existed at the time we could have linked up and promoted that.” (Zoe Stanton, Director of Uscreates)



Evaluation was carried out by Uscreates in collaboration with Breckland District Council. Various methods were used to measure success against the goals set in the scoping stage. These included:

- Online surveys (three surveys were conducted, including an initial baseline measurement survey, and two subsequent surveys at three months and one year after the pilot commenced)
- MOT evaluation questionnaires
- Lunch pack delivery sales figures
- Fruit sales figures

Baseline statistical data, collected via the online survey, showed that:

- 41 per cent of staff ate lunch at their desk every day
- 88 per cent ‘hardly ever’ ate lunch in the staff room
- 74 per cent ate one or no portions of vegetables at work per day
- 36 per cent ate one or no portions of fruit at work per day

Key impacts on behaviour goals are summarised below:

Three months after the pilot commenced

- 30 per cent increase in fruit sold to Breckland (according to sales figures)
- 32 per cent ate lunch in the staffroom at least once a week
- The number of people buying lunch from the sandwich van remained the same

One year after the pilot commenced

- The number of people who ate no fruit at work halved
- 72.4 per cent ate two or more portions of fruit at work
- Those who ate lunch at their desk every day dropped from 41 per cent to 28.8 per cent
- The number who ‘hardly ever’ ate in the staff room remained the same (88.1 per cent), but there was an increase in occasional usage
- 45.8 per cent of respondents (compared to a baseline of 22.9 per cent) rated their lunches 5 or 6 when asked “How healthy do you think your lunches at work are on a scale of 1-6?”
- Use of the sandwich van increased from a baseline of 5 per cent of respondents using the van 1-3 times a week, to 13.6 per cent

MOT evaluation questionnaires

- 70 per cent of agreed action points established with the dietician were achieved by participants

A key learning from this pilot project has been around evaluation and measuring and demonstrating impact.

“The biggest problem for us, because it was one of our first projects, was measuring and demonstrating the impact. We had behavioural goals and ideas about what we wanted to achieve, but we didn’t quantify those initially. So it was really difficult to say whether it was a success or not. Now we have an academic evaluation partner for each piece of work and from the first kick-off meeting we set all the objectives for the evaluation at that point.” (Zoe Stanton, Director of Uscreates).



The results and the feedback from the project were disseminated to Breckland District Council employees and key stakeholders through the project’s dedicated blog. The project was ‘highly commended’ at the Health Service Journal Awards 2008.

Attempts were made to build sustainability into the interventions to ensure that healthy workplace eating behaviour would be encouraged and maintained. This was sought through working with local partners and businesses who could continue to deliver the new services beyond the timeframe of the pilot. Unfortunately due to pricing and logistical problems, the lunch box delivery service was discontinued.

Keeping the momentum of the pilot going within the workforce also proved difficult, especially due to staff turn-over – many of those who were involved in the project have since left the Council. In hindsight, interventions needed to be more comprehensive to achieve

sustainability, including the need to influence policies and strategies.

“Getting senior management involved would be key for sustainability, changing policy and procedures rather than one-off interventions. Lots of the approaches were really end-user approaches, but we would look at a more comprehensive strategy if we were doing it now.” (Zoe Stanton, Director of Uscreates)

Lessons learned

Behavioural goals were not quantified by percentage increase and by time, so it was difficult to say for certain if the project was successful or not, so SMART behavioural goals are a must from the start. Equally, it is important to decide how you are going to measure your goals from the onset. For instance, in this project it was hard to demonstrate the impact of diet on work productivity, as a measurement was not established.

Build in a robust sustainability plan to ensure the work continues after the life of the project. One aspect that hindered sustainability for this project was regular staff turn-over, which would need to be addressed in any sustainability plan.

Buy-in from the right people is essential for any project. While there were some important stakeholders on board who were integral to the successes of the project, it was difficult to engage senior management and decision makers from the start, which made driving the project forward difficult at times.

Experience Food at Work was conducted on an exceedingly tight budget, yet managed to show that interventions can be effective while being relatively low cost. Simple changes, such as putting in dining furniture, providing a bin appropriate for food waste and getting rid of old furniture and magazines, involved little time or money yet had a big impact in transforming the

staff room and producing an appealing communal eating area.



To provide value for money, which has become more important than ever, forming partnerships and utilising existing resources is vital. For instance, working with dieticians to provide the health and nutrition MOTs through relationships built with NHS Norfolk was a great success. Equally, interventions that are not having the desired impact should not be continued. It is important to develop feedback and improvement loops, so that if things are not quite working out, then there is scope to make changes and adjustments, rather than spending money on interventions that are unsuccessful.