

# Case Study: Student Volunteer Organisations supporting Surplus Food Redistribution in Wales



Volunteers from Swansea University prepare surplus food at their on-campus kitchen for local residents

## Summary

Student volunteer organisations run and support projects throughout the UK – it is a great way for students to make a positive difference to the communities they study in, and an excellent way to learn new skills.

In Swansea the local student volunteer organisation, Discovery, joined with their local Morrisons store and Swansea University to set up a pilot scheme to redistribute surplus food.

Student volunteers collected, sorted and distributed £3,000 worth of surplus food from Morrisons, supporting two local charities, Women's Aid and the Swansea Young Single Homeless Project. Swansea University also benefitted by supporting more community based projects.

## Outcomes

In the first four months of the Swansea pilot, £3,000 worth of surplus food was donated by the Swansea Morrisons store to those in need.

A key barrier for surplus food schemes is the need for regular access to volunteers and transport to collect and distribute food. Discovery's logistical needs were identified and supported by staff from Swansea University, including food storage, transport, and additional volunteer support during student exam and vacation periods.

The Discovery charity have agreed to continue with the scheme beyond the pilot, and plan to expand it to cover other food surplus suppliers from September 2016.

Swansea University have altered their kitchen use regulations to allow access to their main kitchens from August 2016 for student volunteers to prepare meals. They are also investigating the possibility of establishing a commercially operated surplus food café in the city.

## Forming the partnership

Morrisons and WRAP Cymru instigated the project following an announcement by Morrisons in November 2015 that, where feasible, they would donate all of their surplus food to charity across the UK. WRAP Cymru used this rollout to examine the concept that student volunteer organisations could play a strong role in facilitating the redistribution of surplus food, overcoming key barriers that charities face in finding volunteers and transport to collect surplus food. Students volunteer across Wales and the UK each year and volunteer numbers are consistent.

## Making it work

Morrisons rolled out their surplus food redistribution scheme from January 2016, providing guidance to local stores on choosing charities, with a preference for end-users who cooked the food surplus, such as community cafés.

The [Discovery](#) charity, based at Swansea University, is one of the largest student volunteer organisations in Wales, running a number of community schemes aimed at vulnerable groups and supporting local environmental and community projects. They agreed to support the pilot project, running from February to June 2016.

This is the first surplus food scheme that Discovery had been involved with. Following internal publicity to find volunteers the charity approached a number of end-user groups to receive the food surplus, and selected [Swansea Women's Aid](#) and the [Swansea Young Single Homeless Project](#).

*The Morrisons scheme was easy to set up, with straightforward documentation and good communication.*

*We knew our student charity needed our support with this scheme, so we provided storage and access to transport for picking up food from Morrisons.*

*We expect this pilot scheme will grow quickly. From our experience on this project we are now planning our own food surplus café to utilise surplus from our own cafes, together with surplus from our local farmers and food suppliers for the benefit of the community.*

**Paul Robinson, Associate Director, Estates and Facilities Management, Swansea University**

## Overcoming barriers

A number of barriers were encountered during the pilot phase:

- Student volunteer organisations are keen to support surplus food redistribution schemes. However, they are often unable to access appropriate transport, facilities for storage and sorting surplus food, and cannot guarantee sufficient resource commitments during vacation and exam periods. Host universities can play a significant role in overcoming these barriers, by supporting their students and as part of their own Corporate and Social Responsibility. Swansea University has agreed to support Discovery with their permanent scheme and will share learning with other universities through professional networks.
- Simple distribution of surplus food from supermarket to end-user may not be the most effective way of utilising surplus food. The

preferred option of supermarkets is for surplus food to be cooked with other ingredients, which requires access to kitchens. University kitchens are large and used for high volume catering. As this is primarily for breakfast and lunch their kitchens are often underutilised in the afternoon and evening. [The Campus Kitchens Project](#) in the United States allows volunteers to use kitchens to prepare and cook food during off-peak hours. This scheme is currently run in 51 colleges and universities across the US. Swansea University have agreed to pilot a scheme using their main kitchen from August 2016, in partnership with Swansea Council, Discovery and the local Bishop Gore Secondary School.

- Some end-user groups are not able to register or sign-up for existing food surplus collection schemes, either because they are too small, or are not able to provide relevant documentation which many schemes ask for, such as food hygiene qualifications or regular transport provision. A student charity such as Discovery, who can provide trained volunteer staff, can therefore act as an intermediary to overcome these barriers.
- Increased engagement between supermarkets, catering and hospitality businesses and the volunteering and charity sector is required to increase the potential to redistribute surplus food. Student volunteering groups work across a wide number of community projects and can support improved linkages, while host universities can provide wider engagements with the regional business sector.
- To be successful food surplus schemes need to be straightforward for all participants - charities, volunteer groups and suppliers. The Morrisons initiative was notable for its clarity

and simplicity – from paperwork to pick up. High levels of enthusiasm from individuals within the local store were noted - Community Champions, Duty Managers and warehouse staff.

- Surplus food cafés are an excellent way to reuse food surplus and raise awareness but are normally staffed purely by volunteers, so limiting opening hours and commercial opportunities. Volunteers with key skills, such as chefs, can be difficult to find. University supported student volunteer organisations can help.

## Delivering benefits in Swansea

Three months from the pilot starting, surplus food is being collected on a regular basis from Swansea Morrisons. The scheme is at an early stage and lessons, particularly related to logistics of identifying, collecting and distributing food surplus, have been learnt and will be shared with student volunteer organisations across the UK.

Discovery are keen to expand their role in food surplus. Interest and enthusiasm from students has been positive and the local charities have welcomed the additional support. Discovery therefore plans to increase the range of local supermarkets and charities they work with prior to the next academic year in September 2016.

From their own learnings from this pilot Swansea University have agreed to be involved further. They are currently planning to set up a surplus food café and resource centre, using food surplus from their own restaurants and cafés, local farmers and suppliers. The café will employ chefs to ensure quality and consistency, with

student volunteers involved throughout the rest of the operation. The centre element will also offer training, interpretation and meeting space to engage further with local businesses and communities to raise awareness of the surrounding issues of waste and food poverty. It hopes to act as a national model for a larger scale food surplus catering outlet.

The University is proposing to redesign some kitchen space in their campus redevelopment to make it easier for students to cook, prepare and distribute surplus food for charity use.



Community meal made using surplus food

## Delivering benefits in the UK

The potential for using student volunteers to support schemes on a Wales and UK wide basis is real and worthwhile, but would benefit from their host universities being involved who could provide the facilities, support and resources to enable sustainable schemes to take place. Universities also have an important role in stimulating regional and national debate on economic and social development, and can act as a catalyst for wider engagement across the retail, catering and voluntary sectors.

Swansea University will share their learning with other universities through various Catering and Sustainable Networks to encourage further collaboration.

*"It's been a very interesting piece of work with a positive response from our charity recipient. It's been good to be involved in assisting in waste reduction and we hope we can find a way forward for future sustainability."*

**Vixie Williams, Volunteer Manager, Discovery Student Volunteer Charity**

## Next steps

Either a retailer, hospitality business, student volunteer organisation or a charity could instigate a surplus food partnership. If you would like to know more about how to set up and run a surplus food project, please view our series of "How to" guides. The guides pull together best practice and experience of this and other projects. The guides are available on the WRAP website and can be accessed [here](#).

Further information relating to this case study is available via the following links:

- [Morrisons Food Donation Programme](#)
- [US universities Campus Kitchens Project](#)
- [Swansea University Campus Catering](#)
- [Food Redistribution Guiding Principles](#)

Charities supported through this scheme were:

- [Swansea Women's Aid](#)
- [Swansea Young Single Homeless Project](#)

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