

# Sir John Cass's Foundation Primary School

## *Healthy School Project*

May - December 2015

### **Introduction**

Sir John Cass's Foundation Primary School (SJCS) is a one form entry school with some 180 families/250 children. The school community is richly diverse in terms of ethnicities and first language backgrounds.

As part of the Healthy School Project at the SJCS, funded by public health and jointly set up by the City of London Public Health and Adult Skills and Education teams, East London Food Access (ELFA) Ltd, was commissioned to run a weekly fresh produce stall in the school playground on Thursday afternoons between May and December 2015.

The stall operated in the playground for one hour when parents and carers picked up their children at the end of the school day. ELFA made available for sale a comprehensive range of quality fresh fruit and vegetables, including local, seasonal and ethnic produce, all at competitive prices.

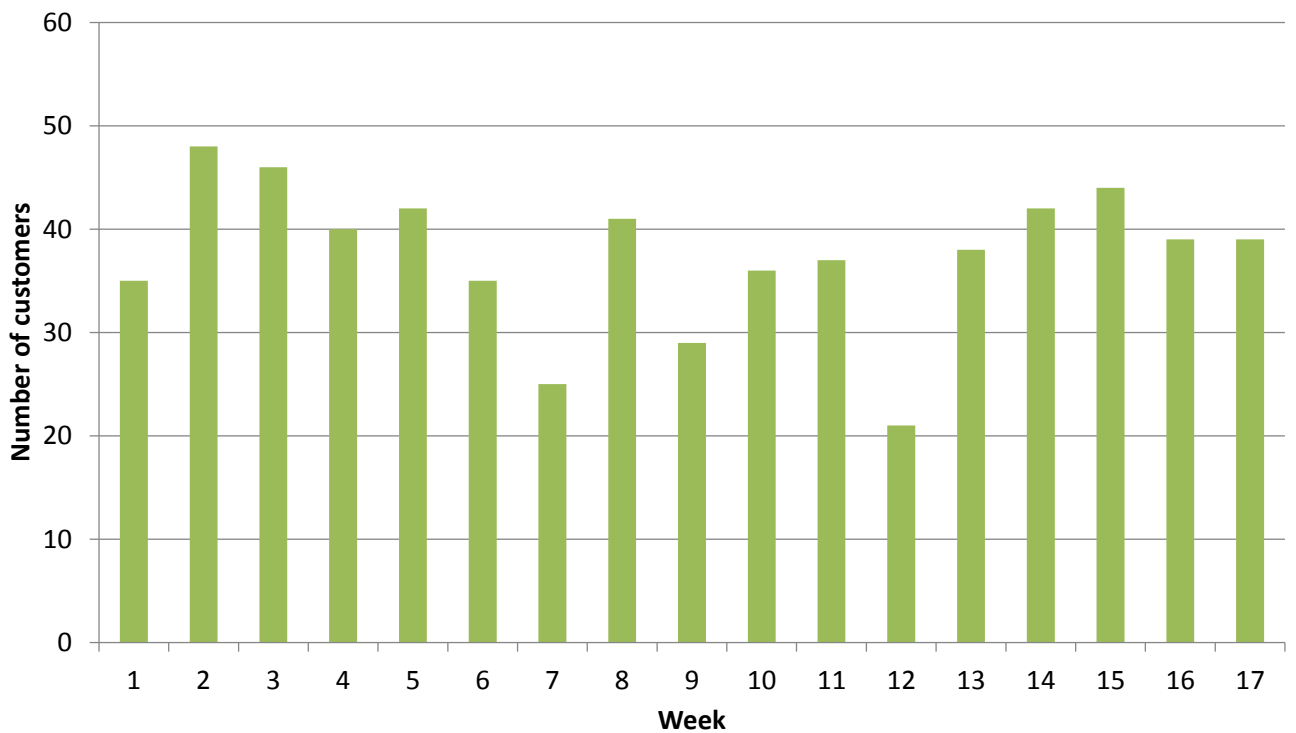
The aim of the Healthy School Project was to promote healthy living at SJCS through activities that engaged children, parents and carers in thinking about what they buy and eat, how they cook, what they grow and how they exercise. The ELFA stall quickly became a key element of the project, creating a focal space for:

- the exchange of ideas and information
- children-centred opportunities to have fun and enjoy exercising and eating healthy food
- parental involvement through volunteering to help run the stall
- the availability of excellent quality fresh produce at prices well below the norm in the area

### **The number of customers who made purchases from the stall was**

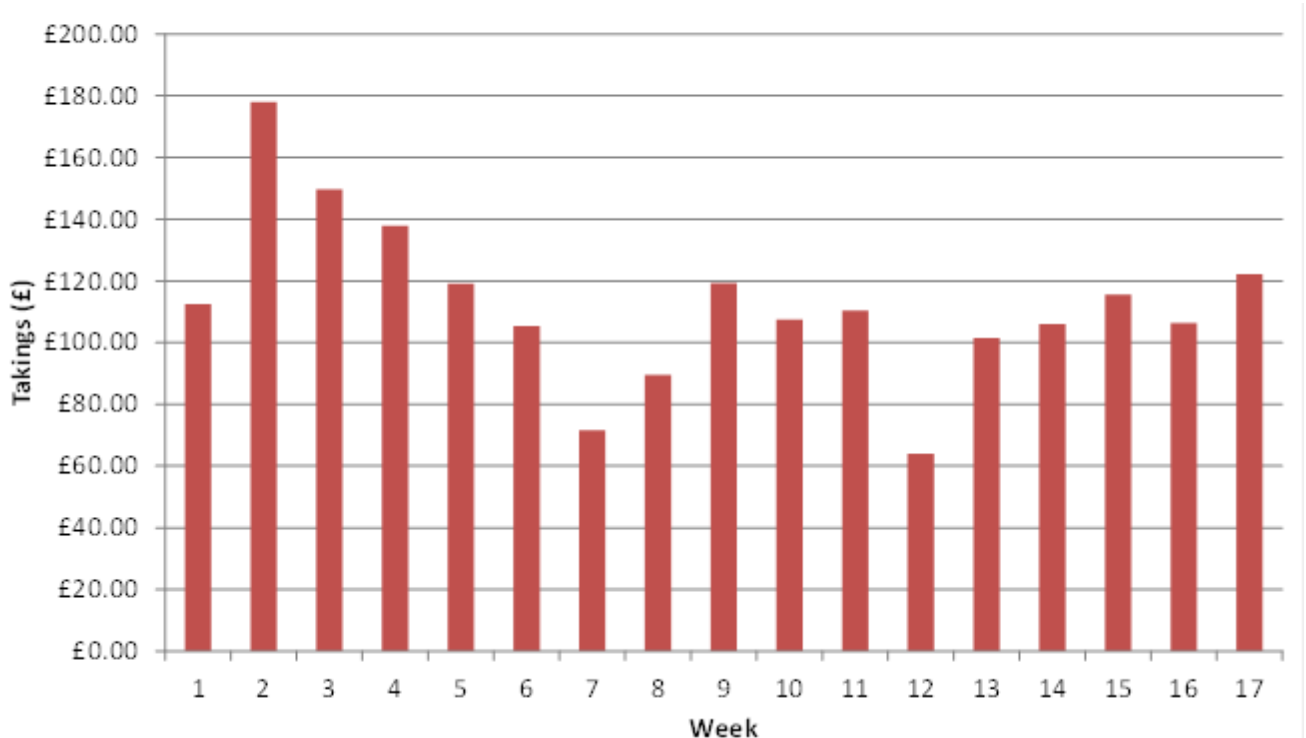
**consistently high.** Figure one below shows that the number of customers peaked in week two with nearly 50 customers before settling to a more consistent rate of around 35- 40 customers per week. The summer term (weeks one to six) experienced slightly more customers due to the popularity of seasonal berries. There were two weeks of low takings both of which were due to circumstances beyond the control of the staff. Week seven was the first week back after the summer holidays and on week 12 there was a lot of rainfall.

**Figure one: Number of Customers at Sir John Cass Fruit Stall, Thursday Afternoons, May-December 2015**



Average spend per customer was £3.00, which might typically afford 5 apples or pears, a small bunch of bananas, a cauliflower or four large bunches of spinach, or a net of garlic. Figure two below shows the takings over the weeks which largely reflect the number of customers.

**Figure two: Taking by week at Sir John Cass Fruit Stall, Thursday Afternoons, May- December 2015**



## **Satisfaction survey**

45 parents and carers who purchased products from the stall were surveyed in the last three weeks of term.

- 93% believe their children enjoy sampling fresh fruit and vegetables from the stall
- 93% believe the stall has a positive impact on their children's health
- 91% believe the stall provides high quality fresh produce
- 91% believe the stall offers value for money

## **Children's engagement**

Over the 17 weeks, children began buying fruit and vegetables independently of their parents/carers. Children who at first were shy to speak were found to gradually more confident, asking questions about the produce and the prices. One parent spoke of supervising her son each week whilst he made purchases and counted his change.

## **Creating healthy eating habits**

Each week 30 fruit kebabs were prepared in advance and sold at 10p each. These often sold out within minutes. One father told the stall holders that he has started to make fruit kebabs with his children at home. The fruit kebabs are now the 'brand' of the stall.

The children sampled different types of fruit and raw vegetables, such as tomatoes, carrot, cucumber and pepper sticks. Many overcoming a reluctance to try different foods.

Activities such as constructing a "fruit and vegetable face" or a "clock" on a plate from pieces of ready cut produce were extremely popular and encouraged the children to then eat the healthy food. Fruit smoothies were made at the end of the Summer Term as a treat, with a "health warning" to parents about the sugar rush that smoothies bring.

Over the weeks, the stall holders noticed a notable decrease in the number of parents bringing sweets, doughnuts or biscuits for the children to snack on after school on Thursdays and a marked increase in the children leaving the playground eating fruit.

## **Staff involvement**

The project received excellent support from staff at SJCS, not least from the Leadership Team who recognised the potential benefits of the stall for the whole school. The Deputy Head played a significant role throughout the two terms facilitating the integration of the stall into the school.

In the Summer Term a PE teacher volunteered to organise competitive challenges for the children on three Thursday afternoons - skipping, hula hoop and obstacle course challenges with winners receiving strawberry, raspberry and sunflower plants as their rewards.

Many teachers and school administrators bought produce from the stall each week. The school cleaner purchased apples which he juiced at the weekend for his family. Some members of staff commented that they had begun cooking again, stimulated by the fresh produce they were buying. The school began to purchase fruit for the staff room in September.

## **Parent and PTA engagement**

Over the two terms, parental involvement with the stall gradually increased:

- The small PTA committee has supported the project and has encouraged parents to become involved
- There have been 8 parent volunteers who have helped on a weekly rota basis since September
- ELFA were in contact with Spice, the agency who develop Time Credit systems, to investigate how to use time credits to incentivise volunteering. Unfortunately, training is required and this is available quarterly. Should the commission to extend the fresh produce stall be extended, ELFA will book to undergo training in January 2016 and time credits may then be available to reward volunteer time.
- Parents have read with interest the Plant Histories prepared over the two terms on strawberries, avocados, beetroots and potatoes and have stopped to read and talk about them.

As the project became more established and parents came forward to help, they established a relationship with the stall holders, stories and recipes were exchanged, resulting in the production of The Fruit Kebab Recipe book. The recipe book is now edited and copies will be printed by the City of London for the school early in 2016.

## **Permaculture - interest, workshop and next steps**

Over the course of the Autumn term, one of the mothers who used the stall regularly discussed her interest in permaculture with ELFA's Director. As a result of their conversations she approached the Head Teacher and he agreed to fund a workshop for parents, led by ELFA's Director, entitled Permaculture in 60 Minutes. The workshop took place at the school in December 2015.

As a result of the workshop, a meeting will be held in January 2016 to consider whether a Sustainable Development Group can be set up at SJCS. The long-term aims of such a group would be to explore how permaculture design could help build the future sustainability of the school.

## **The Future**

Feedback from the school, parents and carers is extremely positive and there was a strong consensus that the school community would like the ELFA stall to continue operating for at least the rest of the academic year. On the last Thursday of December there was great disappointment expressed that the stall might not be returning in January 2016.

**Building parental involvement** has been a challenge but has gradually gained momentum. A strategy to sustain parental interest and involvement is needed. ELFA has an excellent, reliable volunteer who has come and supported the stall at SJCS but on-going parental involvement is needed if the stall is to become sustainable. Working with Spice in the future will support with this aim. The next steps might be for the Leadership Team to call a meeting of parents and carers and ELFA, specifically contacting and inviting all the parents who have already volunteered or have expressed a desire to help run the stall, to discuss ways forward including the use of Time Credits and Permaculture Design.

**Weather and use of outdoor pavilion** in the winter months. Bad weather can have a very adverse impact on the stall. However, on one occasion the stall set up inside the school and was held along a ground floor corridor. It worked well, though it required more time and effort to set up. Nevertheless, this might be a strategy to employ in the future.

**Driving to and from school** is extremely time consuming for ELFA and wasteful in terms of ELFA's resources. There is an interest in commissioning a fresh produce stall at some additional sites including the Artizan Street Library and the City of London Community Education Centre with a potential start date in Quarter 1 2016/7. The aim will be to operate a stall (or equivalent) at a time to complement the stall at Sir John Cass. This will result in a sharing of driving time to and from the sites. There may also be networking opportunities resulting from participation in the Time Credits system which would need to be followed up closely during the next term. The feasibility of holding a stall or collaborative buying group at other locations such as libraries is currently being explored.

**Surplus** and what to do with produce not sold is an issue that needs further discussion. There are a number of ways forward which can be investigated. Stock records were maintained during the stall operation and these can be examined. In the short term it may be possible to design the re-use of a proportion of the surplus through use in cooking lessons, bulk buying, sales to local food establishments, school caterers etc. The school is already purchasing a significant amount of fruit for the staff room and some provision could be made to develop the involvement of by users of The Cass Child and Family Centre. Due to issues with access users do not currently support the stall. Next term the operation of a sister outlet at either Artizan Street Library or the City of London Community Education Centre will offer further potential solutions.

A key factor is the economic value of the surplus itself as often the time spent distributing the surplus is in excess of the value of the surplus itself. However the aspiration to reduce surplus to a minimum remains central to ELFA's aspiration to operate the stall in a sustainable way.

The design of a system of measures to absorb the surplus could also be considered by the Permaculture Design Group.

The fresh produce stall has had a positive and inclusive impact on the SJCS community and it is to be hoped that further funding will enable greater parental involvement and the development of its original aims.

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January 2016