

Dumfries International Street Food Festival (DISFFEST 2024) Report

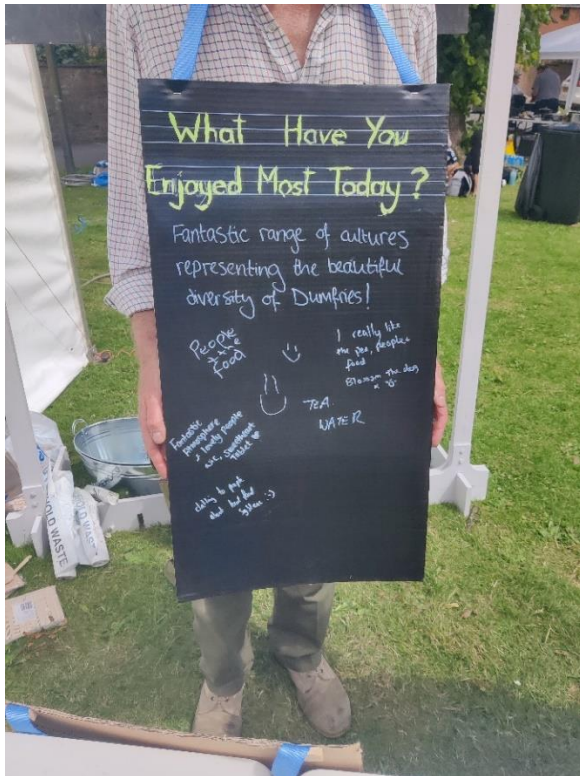
Background

Our mission is to demonstrate how our area benefits from the arrival of people from different cultures and backgrounds through the running of a Street Food Festival in Dumfries. We aim to involve as wide a variety of cuisines and community groups as possible, alongside commercial enterprises. We want to give the different cultures the chance to display the richness of their heritage.

This was the second time that the event was run but our first event since setting up as an independent enterprise. Having had to cancel our original date of 8th August 2024 due to weather we finally ran on 22nd June – the final day of the Scottish Refugee Council’s refugee week. We were delighted to run an event that, we felt, fulfilled our original aims; enabling people to recognise the value of having New Scots in our society and, at the same time helping the new arrivals to take pride in the value that they bring.

We wanted to celebrate the importance of diversity through food, music and culture, to enable migrants to the area to celebrate their own culture and for some of them, to investigate the possibility of starting their own business in food.

The first event, run under the charity Massive Outpouring of Love (MOOL), was a considerable success but this was a step beyond.



Instant responses.



Some instant responses



Dock Park full of families enjoying the day.

Event Overview

We had well over 4500 people come to festival across the day. People came to enjoy the food and music and to share in a brilliant family friendly atmosphere. From our survey, people had come from the Lake District, Glasgow and Edinburgh as well as across Dumfries and Galloway.

Commercial stalls were delighted with their sales, many of them sold out of their food towards the end of the day as did our “Community Village” offerings.

We were able to offer a wide range of cuisines., with offerings from Afghanistan, China, Ecuador, Iran, Malaysia, Punjab, Syria, Sudan, Ukraine and of course, Scotland. A survey of 56 attendees showed that over 80% had tried a dish that they had not encountered before. Not all of them loved what they tasted but over 70% were keen to eat more.

All those surveyed were keen, not only to return to the event if it were run again, but also to see more similar multicultural activities in the future.



Kebabs from the Community Village

Community Village

One crucial aspect of our aims was to help people, whether New Scots or people born here, to explore the possibility of starting a food business. To do this we ran a “Community Village” marquee. Stalls in this tent involved asylum seekers and Ukrainian refugees as well as other migrants. For these groups we provided free Food Hygiene courses, subsidised ingredients and hired catering equipment for use on the day.

We felt it was necessary to charge for the food in this area. The first food festival had featured some wonderful free food offered by some of the New Scots who’d come here from Syria. This could have caused friction for those commercial enterprises who’d paid for pitches if their sales had not been good. In the event they all sold out. We were concerned that this time the commercial firms would bring more food and might not sell out so that charging would be important. This also meant that those exploring the chances of setting up a food business would have a realistic view of their chances.

To do this we sold vouchers for food in this tent so that the participants didn’t have to set up a float or manage card readers. At the end of the day each group was rewarded according to the number of vouchers they had received for their food.



Inside the Community Village Marquee

Food Vouchers and help for Families

We needed to reach as wide a section of the community as possible.

The fact that all food had to be paid for might have made this a difficult event for some families to attend. However, the use of vouchers enabled us to offer targeted help for those who might otherwise have struggled. We reached out to 12 community organisations across the region to ask if they would be able to distribute free “Child meal” vouchers to families in difficulties. We are grateful to the commercial firms who also agreed to honour these. This minimised any embarrassment for the families concerned since the child meal vouchers which they used were identical to those sold on the day. In the end 140 vouchers were given to the organisations and 53 children used these to get free meals as a result. Particularly pleasing was the fact that several used the vouchers to buy food from more exotic cuisines.



Potential Businesses

One of our aims was to help people who might be thinking of starting food-based businesses to do so.

Three groups, from Ecuador, Malaysia and Ukraine are seriously considering taking their business forward based on their successes on the day. We were able to offer them a contact at the local college to investigate further training if need be and to point them in the direction of the Business Gateway for more commercial advice. We are excited to watch (and maybe participate in) their success in the future.



A very popular Malaysian stall

Entertainment

We wanted to look beyond food for other areas of cultural interaction to celebrate.

We arranged to have storytellers from the Indian subcontinent, from Europe and from Africa as well as, of course, Scotland come to entertain. We had music from Ndaja, Gang of Three, Samba Sisters, Community African Drumming Group and Bogle Mufty. There was a very moving demonstration of ballet from Mariia Turdio and children's entertainers Kingdom of Creatures were a great success.



A fabulous set of dancers with Bogle Mufty

Collaboration

We worked with a wide variety of community and other organisations.

We were very fortunate to engage Strawberry Lemonade Events to handle the event management. They have been fantastic partners at every stage of the work and without them the festival could not have run.

We are grateful for the funding we have from "Awards for all" and from Dumfries and Galloway council.

Beyond these we had important support and help from DGMA and MOOL and some excellent advice on keeping people from Dumfries and Galloway Radio Unit.

In looking to help people who might otherwise have found it difficult to attend we had a lot of help and useful advice from Apex Scotland, Dalbeattie Foodbank, Lochside Community Association, and particularly the Summerhill Community Centre.

We are very grateful for the loan of some beautiful banners from Emily Tough and her art group.

Environmental Impact

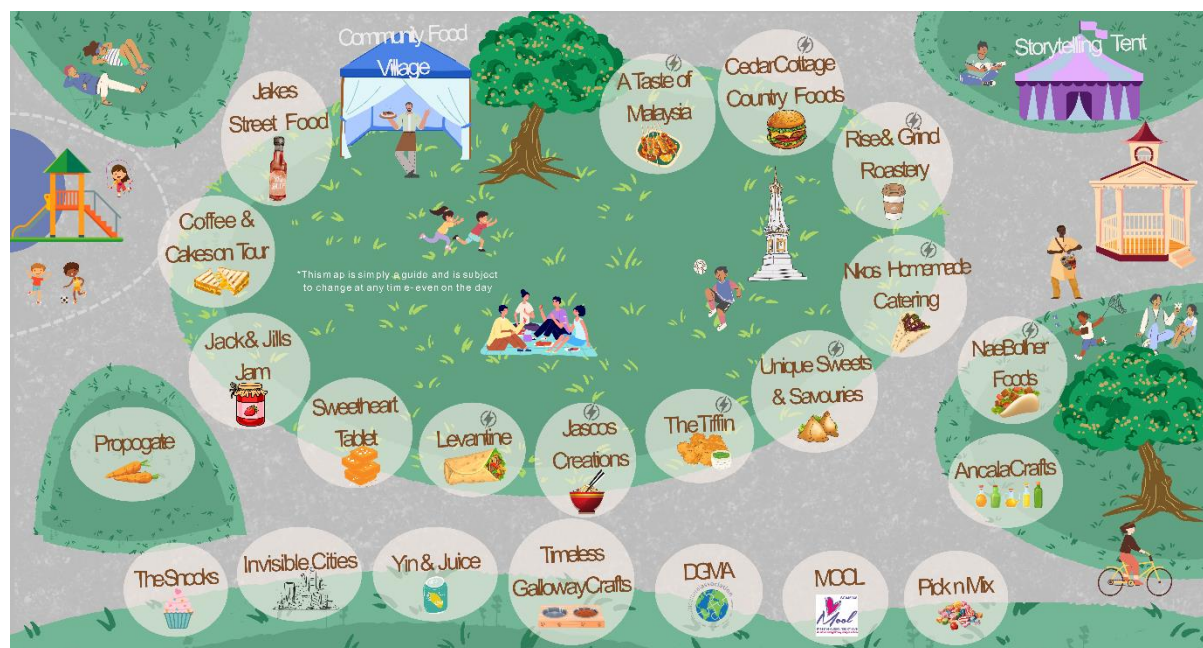
We are keen to minimise the environmental impact of the event.

All the packaging and eating utensils we provided for the Community Village were cardboard or wood and we had an arrangement with Summerhill Community to take any surplus food for redistribution. In the event this turned out to unnecessary since there was no unsold food from the Community Village to be disposed of.

Promoting local food and food products is a vital part of making our food culture sustainable and we were delighted to have discussions with Propagate, a worker led collective specialising in local, community and sustainable food project in the run-up to the event and to take a stall with us.

One aspect of the arrangements which we had thought we had in hand was a range of recycling bins on the site. In the event these did not arrive which meant that some items which could have been recycled probably ended up in the general waste. We were however able to make sure that the site was left as clean and tidy as we found it.

Conclusion



We feel that DISFFEST is a testament to the power of food in bringing people together and celebrating cultural diversity. We hope that it has offered a unique and enriching experience for all who attend and judging by the feedback we have received they would like it. We are currently looking to repeat the event next year and ways to make it an even better event if we do.