



## WRCC SLOW COOKING COURSES: OCTOBER 2023 – MAY 2024



### OVERVIEW

These slow cooking courses were organised by WRCC with a panel of chefs providing cooking demonstrations at 11 welcoming, safe community venues across Warwickshire. There were 12 places available on each course for local residents who would particularly benefit from attending, and free slow cookers, food ingredients and supporting materials were provided. The courses aimed to help reduce social isolation, food poverty and fuel poverty, promote healthy food choices and healthy lifestyles, build confidence and increase life skills.

Cooks focused on teaching people easy to prepare affordable, healthy and tasty meals using a slow cooker, and developing their confidence to cook on a regular basis. Attendees went to four sessions in each course, lasting up to 1.5 hours, where they learned to cook a soup, two main courses and a pudding. This gave them an insight into the versatility of slow cooking while also encouraging them to have fun with food, enjoying any “treats” in moderation.

WCC funding was used to provide for chefs’ demonstration sessions, ingredients for attendees to take home (as well as ingredients for each cook to prepare a meal for tasting and at the session), course materials plus venue hire. Cadent, sponsors of WRCC’s Warm Hubs project, supplied 136 family sized 3.5l slow cookers for attendees and chefs, plus carbon monoxide alarms and more supporting materials including advice on the Priority Services Register, etc.

WRCC organised five experienced cooks to run the sessions, who selected their own recipes, two of whom ran four courses each (numbers varied subject to availability and location). They included extra cooking tips and advice, eg on food hygiene, making money go further, and

advising people to adapt recipes to use any available food in their store cupboard rather than letting it go to waste. Volunteers from the community group(s) involved attended each session to welcome attendees and portion out ingredients, and a WRCC representative attended at least one, and usually two, sessions as well.

**WARM HUBS  
FREE SLOW COOKING COURSE**

Slow cooking is an easy way to make tasty, healthy meals and save EEE on your energy costs and food bills too. Whether you live alone or have a family to feed, slow cooking or have never had the confidence to try, this fun course is for you.



- FREE 4-week demonstration course including starter, mains & pudding
- FREE slow cooker, weekly ingredients & recipes to take home and make yourself!
- FREE energy saving/home safety pack with carbon monoxide alarm
- Enjoy FREE refreshments & meet new people in small course group (12 max)



If you live in Warwick and would benefit from attending this course, book now!  
Email: [warwickwarmspaces@gmail.com](mailto:warwickwarmspaces@gmail.com)/tel: 07507 722537  
At: New Life Church, Friars Street, Warwick CV34 6HD  
Sessions: Thursdays 11th, 18th and 25th January and 1st February 2024, 1.30pm - 3.00pm  
(please note you will need to attend all 4 sessions)

NEW LIFE CHURCH  
Get Cooking!



These slow cooking courses are provided thanks to a collaboration between



There was a budget for ingredients averaging just over £4.00 per meal (four portions) across the course (mains, particularly those containing meat, were of course more expensive than puddings). Cooks could also use their budget to make extras such as bread, provide a range of takeaway containers, pots, etc. It cost approximately 4p per hour to use the slow cookers.

To engage attendees fully, each was given a slow cooker in the first session. They also sampled a pre-cooked meal at the start and received the recipe and pre-portioned ingredients at the end of each session. People were asked to confirm any intolerances and allergies in writing prior to the first session, so cooks could provide other options for tasting menus and recipe ingredients.

Additional recipes, resource folders, a range of energy and home safety advice, and materials and information from WCC, Cadent and other community partners were also provided. At the end of each course, people were asked to complete feedback questionnaires before leaving.

## PARTICIPATING COMMUNITY GROUPS AND VENUES

- All Saints and Lantern Churches, Bedworth, at St Michael's Children and Family Centre
- Benn Partnership Centre - Rugby Warm Hub
- Coleshill Community Centre, Temple Way
- Compassionate Kenilworth and Kenilworth Warm Hub, at the Kenilworth Centre
- Great Alne Parish Council and Alcester Foodbank, at Great Alne Village Hall
- New Life Church, Warwick
- Polesworth Parish Council, at The Tithe Barn
- RBL Community Hub and Café, at Galanos House, Southam
- The Chapel, Newbold
- Wembrook Community Centre, Nuneaton
- Windmill Sports and Social Club (Friends of the Windmill), Nuneaton

Attendees were either contacted directly by local community groups/hub organisers or on occasion via local advertising/Facebook groups. WRCC created flyers (see example below) to help organisers promote courses. Residents were deemed to be more vulnerable, and therefore more likely to benefit, for a range of reasons, including age, health, living alone, having young children and/or other relevant needs.

The majority were of retirement age, with more women than men participating at all venues except for Kenilworth. Most courses attracted some parents of young children, with the course at Bedworth being specifically aimed at parents. Another venue in Nuneaton focused on parents but couldn't attract sufficient numbers to run the course, leading to them cancelling the day before their first session started. This meant there was insufficient time for WRCC to arrange another course at a different (twelfth) location before the end of May 2024.



## OUTCOMES

- **132 people attended 11 courses**, the majority of whom attended all four sessions except in instances of illness or other personal reasons
- 115 attendees (**87%**) completed feedback questionnaires
- **One third** of respondents previously only cooked weekly or occasionally and 3% had never cooked before
- 4 in 10 people had never used a slow cooker before
- **Nearly two thirds** said they were cooking **slightly more or much more** due to the course
- 47% advised they were using their slow cooker **2-3 times per week**, with a quarter using it **4 or more times per week**
- 8 out of 10 people most enjoyed the ease and convenience of slow cooking, while **saving money** and **eating more healthily** were also identified as important benefits
- **27% felt a little more confident** and **51% felt a lot more confident in cooking** after attending the course
- **Meeting new people** was ranked as being the most important social benefit by **a third** of responses, closely followed by **learning a new skill**
- **88% would like to attend some type of cooking classes in the future**



## ADDITIONAL COURSE FEEDBACK

- **Course format and learning**

The feedback showed that more than eight of out every ten people would like to attend further cooking courses, and so the sessions clearly had a very positive impact.

Attendees liked the overall structure of the sessions and felt they benefited from the small group environment. There was a relaxed pace and people had time to watch what the chef was doing as well as ask questions about specific recipes, as well as other questions about slow cooking, food preparation and hygiene, and the costs involved. They liked the fact that all the ingredients were provided for them ready to take home and practice:

*“It was a good format, seeing the preparation then having the ingredients to make the recipe”*

*“Thank you to all involved in the organisation and delivery, the right size group meant all the questions were asked and answered”*

*“Really enjoyed the delivery – fun and interactive”*

*“Thoroughly enjoyed the course, it was very insightful and informative, and well demonstrated”*



The size of the group made it easier for the cooks to tailor tuition to meet particular interests and preferences. One group was given two choices for their second main course demonstration and chose aloo gobi. Another group was excited about learning to make different types of

bread, eg with wholemeal flour, seeded etc. One cook demonstrated how to make sponge puddings in the slow cooker, while also whipping up some chocolate rice pudding on their induction hob and showing people how to make oatmeal milk!

People were also generally very happy about the amount of resources provided:

*“More than generous – really considerate”*

*“I think the materials provided were very, very generous”*

Everyone attending received at least a dozen recipes and attendees were also signposted to websites such as BBC Good Food and Tesco’s slow cooking recipes. A few people did say they would like more recipes, although they were aware of where to access more online and in cookery books, including via their local library.

- **Building confidence with slow cooking**

Lack of confidence was identified as a barrier to trying slow cooking (and other forms of cooking) - over half those who attended said the course had made them feel much more confident about cooking, plus over a quarter who said it had improved their confidence a little. The friendly, informal nature of the courses encouraged people to have a go, and to share their experiences – what worked and what didn’t – with others in the group.

*“The course was explained very well – it’s helped me with confidence”*

*“My slow cooker will be on constantly as I build up confidence”*

*“I am getting really good with using a slow cooker ... I feel so confident now!”*



The impact was not only limited to those attending the courses, though, as attendees’ families and friends also benefited from their cooking - one person said that her 15 year old daughter was interested in cooking as a result of the food and recipes she was taking home, and now had the confidence to use a slow cooker. Another person brought her home schooled daughter expressly so she could learn a new life skill. Many older people were delighted to be learning a

new way of cooking, especially those living alone who may not have bothered otherwise.

It was important to create a friendly, inclusive environment for all classes where those who had never cooked and/or who were less confident were able to ask questions and feel supported. A major contributor to this was the cooks' teaching style as "friendly experts" who were also willing to share mistakes they had made while cooking in the past and how they'd remedied these, to encourage those attending to have a go and not to give up. The relatively small size of the classes which meant that everyone had the opportunity to ask questions.

Cooks were passionate about helping people learn to cook affordable, healthy and tasty food and attendees were welcomed to share their own suggestions and experiences with the group. The feedback about the chefs was very positive: descriptions such as "*thorough*", "*kind*", "*super*", "*brilliant*", "*knowledgeable*" etc all featured strongly in conversations and completed questionnaires.



The chance to meet new people and enjoy learning as a group in a safe, welcoming space was a fundamentally important benefit of the course for many people. One person commented, "*I really looked forward to the camaraderie and cooking every week*". Some community groups and centres have run/are running more courses (the Kenilworth Centre and Benn Partnership Centre) or planning to do so (Wembrook Community Centre). The Bedworth group are also continuing to support each other via their slow cooking WhatsApp group (case study below).

- **Easy and versatile cooking**

Nearly 60% of respondents said that the easy aspect of slow cooking what was they liked best, helped by including the ingredients for them to take home and practice straight away. The course also gave attendees the opportunity to sample meals/healthy ingredients which they may not have tried before. Some said, for example, that if they hadn't tasted the chicken and vegetable noodle soup recipe at the start of the first session, they wouldn't have wanted to cook it and were very surprised that they enjoyed it.

Attendees enjoyed the richer taste of slow cooked food, due to the longer cooking time, and the aromas from the meal while cooking. Cooks also emphasised the health benefits, including the fact that none of the nutrients were lost (unlike when boiling vegetables, for example), "*what goes in stays in*". Some people started using a wider variety of herbs and spices as a result.

The ease of slow cooking meant that it appealed to some attendees who had been deterred from any form of cooking and weren't eating a balanced diet, or who didn't want to make the effort to cook just for themselves. One person said they previously relied on take aways (which were also expensive) and some often ate ready made meals.

People were reassured they didn't need to master any complex cooking skills. They were shown how to prepare food properly, eg chopping vegetables carefully and safely, layering root vegetables at the bottom of the slow cooker, adding dried herbs and pasta in the later stages. Chefs included lots of practical tips, including how to thicken or thin sauces and add extra flavouring towards the end of cooking if required. Food hygiene was also discussed, with added handouts including information on chicken hygiene, reheating, storing and freezing food etc.



People were genuinely surprised by the versatility of slow cooking. Even those who had used slow cookers previously hadn't necessarily used them on a regular basis, and the course opened many people's eyes to the range of meals that could be created to suit all tastes.

Cooks' recipes included chicken noodle soup, minestrone, pork goulash, vegetarian fahitas, sausage and bean casserole, aloo gobi, mini sponge puddings, chocolate cake, plum cobbler and slow cooked bread, as well as other soups, bolognaise, chilli and stews. At Wembrook, Rina Sarna from WCC spoke about using different daals and their nutritional and cost benefits.

*"The variety of cooking is endless"*

*"I was surprised how much you can make in a slow cooker, including bread and cakes"*

*"This course has increased my knowledge of things I can do in the slow cooker immensely"*

The only difficulty experienced by a couple of people, one of whom had arthritis, was finding the slow cooker a bit heavy to handle and therefore difficult for them to get all of the food out.

- **Saving time and money**

Saving time with slow cooking was another major benefit for attendees, many of whom liked being able to "*chuck everything in*" and leave it to get on with their day. Some added that they

were pleased they didn't have to use lots of pots and pans to cook and using the slow cooker made it quicker and easier to clean up afterwards.

*"The freedom! Set it in the morning and it's ready for tea time"*

*"I enjoy the nutritional value, saving time, and avoiding the hassle of [normal] cooking"*

*"[I like] leaving it to cook and knowing I have a healthy meal to enjoy when I'm hungry"*



Reducing energy bills and being able to use cheaper cuts of meat and food while still creating tasty meals were also felt to be important benefits of slow cooking. One person asked if they would be able to cook their meal with 50p left on their meter. Another had limited kitchen facilities and using a slow cooker would make it much easier for them to cook meals regularly.

Many attendees hadn't appreciated the low cost of using a slow cooker and were relieved to know they could reduce energy costs compared with, for example, cooking using a conventional oven. Cooks also recommended those living alone (or not with a family) to save money by batch cooking, then freezing portions for later use, shopping around, and planning menus in advance. The resource packs provided additional support for people budgeting for energy and food costs.

*"It's made my life easier, not having to stand over a cooker for hours"*

*"Taste, flavours, cheap to use, lots of different ideas!"*

*"Very helpful to help the elderly and people living alone"*

*"Ideal for first time cooks and busy mums ... and those leaving home for the first time"*

## **FINAL COMMENTS**

The courses were very well received by attendees and community groups, and the cooks also enjoyed running them! Increased interest in slow cooking (and other forms of cooking) has been generated, with 88% of respondents indicating they would like to attend more courses

*"This has been a wonderful opportunity!"*

*"Great ambience, great initiative – would like more sessions"*

*"I would never have bought a slow cooker and cooked in it. This course has encouraged me greatly"*





*“[Attendees] really enjoyed having ago at the cooking, finding out about things that you could cook, which they did not know about before. Also, the money they could save with electricity and by buying fresh food and cheaper cuts of meat and being able to cook for a few days is all a great saving ... One lady had her cataracts done yesterday day and would not miss the cooking class in spite of her operation”*

- *Coleshill Community Centre*

*“It was a massive success and the feedback I have received has been awesome ... residents were very grateful for the learning opportunity. I think we have made a really positive change for many people”*

- *Great Alne Parish Council*

*“I have loved the enthusiasm of participants and it has been great to show them basic cooking skills that go beyond slow cooking to improve their overall confidence in the kitchen with more vegetables and use of spices and herbs that may have been unfamiliar to them. It has injected some enthusiasm for cooking again and realising food made from scratch has more nutrition and flavour without being complicated or expensive”*

- *Get Cooking (Anne Marie Lambert)*

## **NEXT STEPS**

- WRCC has been granted funding from WCC, and another supply of slow cookers from Cadent, to run more slow cooking courses using a similar format in 2024-25
- WRCC is considering including more specific nutritional and wellbeing advice to support those attending courses, and potentially links to support appropriate physical activity, eg seated exercise for those who are less active
- WRCC would like to collaborate with more community groups to attract more parents and young adults to attend slow cooking courses

## SHORT CASE STUDIES

### Benn Partnership Centre



People enjoyed the sessions both for learning new cooking skills and for social interaction. A widowed father attended with his son, as his wife used to cook all the family meals, and they both wanted to learn how to use a slow cooker. They also now attend the Friday Warm Hub lunch sessions to continue socialising with others over a communal meal.

Along with other attendees from the group, they wanted to learn more about other forms of cooking as well. Their cook is therefore running more courses in May and June 2024 to teach them how to use an air fryer (a common request in many of the groups) and microwave cooking to supplement their slow cooking skills.

Due to demand, the Benn Partnership Centre also plan to run more cooking sessions on Saturdays during the summer.

- **Kenilworth**



The majority of attendees at Kenilworth were older men who were single or widowed, living alone and who wanted to learn how to cook more meals for themselves. This was very different from the usual profile of cooking groups in general, which tend to be more popular with women.

However, Compassionate Kenilworth has developed an extensive network of hubs and events in the town, and therefore several people already knew each other from the Walking for Health Group as well as the weekly Kenilworth Warm Hub. This social connection probably made it easier for men to join the group on this occasion.

As the course was considerably over-subscribed, Compassionate Kenilworth has since run other well received slow cooking courses (on which occasions, most of the attendees were women) in a similar format at the Kenilworth Centre in November 2023 and March 2024.

- **Bedworth**



Although many people brought photos of their cooked meals to share with others in their groups, attendees at Bedworth (and their cook) took this one stage further by setting up a WhatsApp group when their course ended in March. This was particularly appealing to the majority of younger parents who attended, who didn't want the course to end and also enjoyed the sociable aspect of meeting up weekly.

Photos of slow cooker bread, Easter egg pudding, curry, slow roast beef, stuffed peppers and pulled pork meals were shared, as well as the recipes demonstrated by the cook, who really enjoyed the continuing engagement with the group. People were very appreciative and supportive of each other's cooking. Comments included:

*"It's been such an enjoyable experience and made me want to cook more from scratch again"*

*"Really enjoyed the course, everyone so friendly, thank you and gutted it's over"*

The group connection via WhatsApp has helped people to keep motivated and increased the potential impact of the slow cooking course in the longer term. It has also been a way for people to keep in touch socially.

The group has also received updates on local events and from the community group hosts - a "Wear and Share" event by Think Active at Bedworth Leisure Centre, and a money saving tips and advice course running at St Michael's Children and Family Centre.