

Peter McGrath on his round with Harrogate Food Angels.



being, the value of meals on wheels must be recognised and it must be protected.”

To generate support this year, he invited Peter McGrath, LACA's new national chair, and Philip Shelley, the Hospital Caterers Association (HCA) national chair, to join deliveries in Harrogate and Bristol respectively to experience the impact the greatly anticipated knock on the door has on the lives of service users.

McGrath says the uplifting experience of recently spending a day with Harrogate Food Angels taught him that the hot meal was just one of the many valuable benefits the service offers the community.

Harrogate Food Angels was founded in January 2012 by Harrogate Neighbours Housing Association in response to local demand. It delivers approximately 100 home-made hot meals a day, from Monday to Friday, to 125 clients aged 60–103.

Each meal is freshly prepared on the day of delivery and, as it is the only hot meals service in the district, the Harrogate Food Angels van is proving a welcome sight for many.

A team of dedicated volunteers ensures that every meal reaches its destination but, as McGrath discovered, their role is so much more.

“Each delivery is made with genuine care and respect,” he explains. “The time is always taken to check that clients are fit and well, to help with other services and to spot potential safety hazards. But most importantly, they listen and they chat with them.”

As 75% of the Harrogate Food Angels clients live alone, the importance of this

“A passion for delivering a great service clearly runs through Harrogate Food Angels, from the managers and catering team to the volunteers,” says McGrath.

“The clients I met spoke highly of the quality of the food and they also described how much the hot meals means to them. It was clear that the service is invaluable to them and that they rely on their homes being visited and prepared to be.”

“I have no doubt that the Harrogate Food Angels service is a vital part of the community and, without it, the district would certainly be a poorer place.”

Meanwhile, in the West Country, Shelley joined Bristol Community Meals Service. After completing his 28 deliveries, he said he was utterly convinced that the service was a vital part of the community.

A local authority operation with 480 clients aged 45–95 covering the Bristol City borders area, Bristol

Community Meals Service offers hot lunchtime and cold evening meals 365 days a year, delivering around 400 meals a day during the week and 350 at weekends.

It caters for all tastes, dietary requirements and cultures, and also an increasing number of users with dementia. Links with emergency services and care providers ensure the safety and well-being of clients.

A team of 16 drivers operate up to ten delivery vehicles daily, and Shelley says he was immediately impressed by their highly professional and respectful approach, qualities that were mirrored in the service given to each client.

He says: “My companion, Sally, had a great knowledge of the routes and the necessity of the safety of the service. But above all, she understood and appreciated how very important the service is to the clients.

“As well as being grateful for their meals, they clearly depended on the relationship. It was obvious that, for some, we were the only people they were going to see.” In fact, over 70% of the service's clients live alone.

Shelley concludes: “I was very proud to be involved with the service. The dedication of the team is exemplary and definitely improves lives in the Bristol area.” ■

Meals on Wheels Week 2015 carries the slogan ‘More than just a meal’ and runs 9–13 November. To get involved with your local delivery service and help the NACC to protect this vital lifeline, visit www.thenacc.co.uk.

