

# Dinner Time

a  
COMMUNITY  
Kitchen



**HANDBOOK**

# WHAT IS A COMMUNITY KITCHEN?<sup>1</sup>

Community kitchens combine a delicious way to reduce food waste with a great reason to bring a community together. They are a celebration of food, family and friends - old and new. The idea is to reclaim food in your community by making and sharing a meal together, reducing the amount of food we throw away and maybe gaining a new skill along the way.



The idea of DinnerTime is to use food catalyst to bring people of all ages and backgrounds together using only the resources we already have. Spare food is all around us; in the back of your cupboard, growing in your local allotments, it is just calling out to be used.



Reading this guide you will see how easy it is to set up a fantastic community kitchen, and by putting on your first event you will realise that the key ingredient is enthusiasm. If you need help at any stage then there are people waiting to give you a hand. The DinnerTime team can support you every step of the way and put you in touch with people who have the skills, resources or knowledge that you need.

**To contact the team visit [itsdinnertime.org/contact](https://itsdinnertime.org/contact).**

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# INGREDIENTS

## The Basics – what do you need to start with?

**PEOPLE** a few key people to co-ordinate everything  
invitees  
skills (food hygiene, first aid)

**PLACE** access to electricity and running water  
work surfaces  
toilet  
food

**FOOD** no meat  
nothing that will go off if left out for a while (inc. dairy)

**EQUIPMENT** buckets (for waste and compost)  
cookers  
knives and chopping boards  
pans  
cleaning and drying equipment

## The Special Ingredients – what can really make a difference?

**PEOPLE** a real mixture (local groups, community representatives)  
cooking talent  
someone to take photos

**PLACE** easy to get to  
large room  
a few large tables  
separate sinks for hand washing and food washing (although these can be also be done in bowls/buckets as long as water is available)

**FOOD** the essentials (spices, herbs, oils, rice, potatoes, pasta, stock, salt, pepper etc.) to supplement what people bring along

**EQUIPMENT** somewhere for people to write what they are making  
enough cookers and space/surfaces for everyone to get involved  
lots of big pans, big bowls and serving utensils  
spare cutlery and plates/bowls/cups  
reusable table cloths  
labels to put on unlabelled foods

# COOKING UP A KITCHEN:

## how to bring it all together

### the schedule

Some elements of the schedule are fixed – the food has to arrive before it's cooked, and it can only be eaten after it's cooked. Aside from that, however, the rest is up to you.

Here's an example:

3-4pm – people arrive with (or without) food

4-6pm – the food is cooked

6-7pm – the food is eaten

This works best if you are flexible – if people arrive early they can start cooking earlier with whatever ingredients are ready. If the food is not cooked by 6 then dinner can be put back. The event could ideally go on until 9 since the best bit is cooking and eating together. This should go on as long as people want. Bear in mind, however, that there will be a considerable amount of clearing up to be done – but there's no reason this can't be part of the event with everyone helping out!

The less time available, the stricter the schedule will need to be to make sure that there's enough time to cook and eat. Remind everyone how long is left and there shouldn't be a problem. Remember to leave enough time at the beginning to arrive and set up.

### The food

It's easier to get hold of food for an event like this than you might think. Firstly, you can ask everyone who comes along to ransack their cupboards and fridges, and to bring along any spare food that they find. Maybe they have a tin of something that's been there for a while and they don't know what to do with. Just make sure they check the "use by" dates. Even better, if they grow food at home or on an allotment, ask them to bring along any surplus which they're not going to use. It's also worth asking anyone who can't come along on the day if they have anything you can collect from them beforehand.

You can also ask community groups to donate food for the event. Most cities have a food bank, community gardens, allotment associations, and some even have "abundance" projects which collect unpicked fruit from trees in the city. Many of these groups would most likely be delighted to donate spare produce to the community kitchen. Oh, and invite them along to the event too!

### the equipment

Part of the purpose of DinnerTime is to help people learn new recipes and skills which they will then be able to use in their own homes. All of the equipment, therefore, should be standard household items. Ask around for donations of equipment from family and friends as well as local shops and businesses if possible. Look for key items on networks such as Freecycle. Put together a collection of as much of the equipment listed in the appendices as possible and work out where to store it.

Ideally this can be done locally and shouldn't cost you anything. Support is available from the DinnerTime team to help with both funding and borrowing equipment should you need any.

## the safety

Before the event it is important to think about any risks that might create problems before, during or after the event and how you can minimise them. For example, everyone will need to wash their hands before preparing food. Write a risk assessment including any potential risks posed by the venue and the activities. Leave space to add more risks you notice on the day and print out a copy and display it clearly. An example risk assessment is in the appendices, if you wish to use that make sure you add any risks specific to your event.

You should have someone at the event with training in food hygiene and first aid. See the appendices for advice on this. You should also have a first aid kit in the venue, proper hand-washing facilities at toilets and in the food preparation area (with hot water and soap). Food should always be off the floor, and should be checked on arrival to make sure it is in good condition and hasn't started to go off.

## the layout

Uncooked food will need to be put on a table to allow people to look at the amazing things on offer before deciding what to make. Plan ahead – this table could also be used to serve the finished meals from, as long as any unused food is cleared out of the way. The cookers will need to be accessible and safe, preferably against walls and near power sockets.

Space is important - more space around the tables and in your kitchen means more chance to mingle and talk to different people. Have a look in the appendices at an example room plan for the first DinnerTime event.

## the people

It is worth deciding in advance how many people can attend, bearing in mind the capacity of the venue. Invites can be sent out to a select list, or to all and sundry, or a mixture of the two. It is important to have a really diverse range of ages, background, skills and stories. A room full of people you already know is all well and good, but the opportunity presented by DinnerTime is for so much more. An example plan is to invite key members of the community (or communities) and their families and then publicise the event widely to get the rest of your attendees.

Make sure people are advised to bring food, cutlery and plates, bowls, cups and Tupperware – anything you won't be able to provide. This saves on washing up, too! Remind them that they can come for however long they want, they don't have to bring food and cooking skills are not essential. Put up posters in and around the venue if it is frequently used and ask others to pass it on by email and put it up on websites. In the appendices is an example poster which can be edited to suit your event.

If you want, you can send out a press release to local newspapers, newsletters, magazines, radio and TV stations. The combination of learning new skills, money-saving opportunities and community cohesion is very newsworthy. An example press release is in the appendices.

If your event is well publicised you should have no problem filling the room, but for peace of mind it is worth asking for RSVPs from those you invite personally so you know you won't be on your own!

# ...AND SERVE:

## what to do on the day

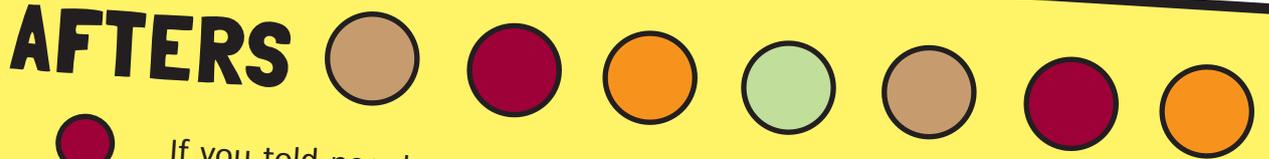
### TO START

-  An hour or so before the public is scheduled to arrive, set up the room with tablecloths, a space for food and all the equipment needed to make people feel that they can jump right in as soon as they get there. If you have a lot of food to begin with, you can sort it into groups.
-  People will arrive at different times, so it may be best to start early with some smaller dishes, or some basic jobs such as peeling vegetables. If there is plenty of talking and action and no-one looks like they need a hand then it might not be necessary, but a list of jobs to give people and help with recipes, ideas and cooking can be very handy.

### MAIN COURSE

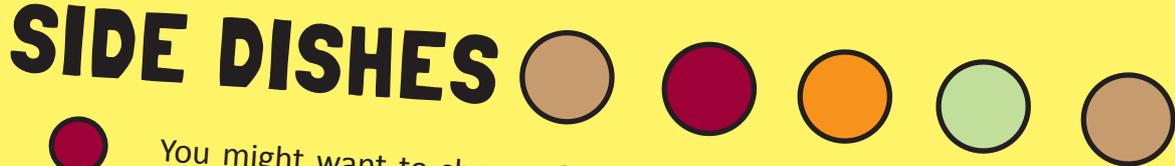
-  Keep anything that is not being used out of the way, for example in food waste buckets or recycling bins. People can be encouraged to wash up what they use, but be prepared to step in if there is a sudden shortage of something.
-  Help people who need guidance and put people who know what they are doing together with people who are less sure and need a role.
-  Make sure that there is somewhere to put a dish once it is finished. Preferably somewhere everyone can see it to spur on everyone else and whet everyone's appetite! It's a good idea to get the cooks to write up what they're making somewhere visible. This can be done once they've decided, while they're cooking, or when the dish is finished.
-  Give gentle time reminders every now and then to encourage people towards finishing at around the same time, or for a set time. If very busy you could ask people not to start anything new after a certain time.
-  Have a pad or paper handy to jot down thoughts, ideas and improvements you might otherwise forget while cooking, and take lots of photos!

## AFTERS



- If you told people to bring Tupperware then make sure they fill it with any leftovers! As little edible waste as possible is the goal. Hopefully, there won't be too much mess at the end as long as people have been cleaning as they go along.
- However, there should be plenty of food waste to compost, and a fair amount of packaging/containers to be reused or recycled.
- Have a quick chat at the end. What went particularly well? What could be improved next time? And just take a moment to sit down after a very full day. Later that night, or the next morning, you can write up a news article, press release and/or group email to share the event with others – photos too!
- You can upload your photos, menus and any feedback from the event to the DinnerTime website: [itsdinnertime.org](http://itsdinnertime.org)

## SIDE DISHES



- You might want to show a film at the end, in which case you will need the relevant equipment (e.g. a laptop, a screen, a speaker system and the right cables). You can't advertise the name of the film (unless you have acquired the rights to show it) so simply advertise that there will be a film but don't name it.
- Add music to the mix. Get some speakers and a music playing device and simply plug in and play. It probably shouldn't be too loud, but perhaps something nice and upbeat – it could even attract a few passers-by!
- Another nice idea is to incorporate some kind of cooking skills session - from knife sharpening to top-notch chopping, or how to use bits of vegetables which often get thrown out. This is a great opportunity to allow people to practise skills they might never have the space or confidence to try otherwise.

# APPENDICES

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## kit list

Cookers – simple plug-in electric hobs are easy to use, safe to transport and powerful enough to cover a huge variety of dishes - one for every five people is a good amount.

Pans – lots and of varying sizes

Sharp knives

Chopping boards

Buckets for compost and for water to put with each preparation table

Tea towels (lots!)

Labels to stick on unlabelled food

Large bowls

Wooden spoons

Large serving utensils

Spare cutlery and bowls/plates/cups

Table cloths

Peelers, graters and other vegetable weaponry

Paper and pens

A whiteboard (and pens) or similar to display what has been cooked

## key job roles

Chef/cooking leader – to suggest ideas and get people cooking on the day (this role might not be necessary but can be useful)

Publicity – to get the media interested before and after the event, organise photos, design and distribute posters

Safety – to write any risk assessment, supervise first aid, food hygiene and safety

Transport – make sure that all the food and equipment gets where it needs to be on time

## first aid and food hygiene certification

At least one person at your event should be trained in first aid and food hygiene. If you are going to host regular events, it's a good idea to get yourself and as many of your group as possible trained in these areas. Contact the DinnerTime team ([itsdinnertime.org/contact](http://itsdinnertime.org/contact)) who can organise first aid and food hygiene training at a very low cost. These skills are really useful for all sorts of events, so don't hesitate to get in touch. If no-one can get the necessary qualifications in time, one of the trained members of the DinnerTime project will be very happy to come along and be the qualified person at your event.

## example menu

**From Sunday 13 November 2011**

Caramelised onion hummus  
 Pumpkin soup  
 Salsa  
 Root vegetable stew  
 Sweet brussel sprout risotto  
 Courgette, cauliflower and tomato salad  
 Spanish omelette  
 Onion, courgette and tomato pasta  
 Apple, beetroot and cabbage coleslaw  
 Soda bread  
 Radish salad  
 Asian noodle salad  
 Stewed apples with sultanas  
 Chocolate blinis  
 Rice pudding with grated chocolate

## press release example

DinnerTime, an international award-winning community kitchen idea, is up and running in Oxfordshire. The pilot event, put together by OxGrow, CAG, the Oxford Food Bank and Oxford Food Justice, took place on Sunday 13 November at the Student Hubs building on Turl Street, Oxford.

Combining a delicious way to reduce food waste with a great excuse to bring a community together, DinnerTime is a celebration of food, family and friends. The idea is to reclaim food in your community by making and sharing a meal together, reducing the amount of food we throw away and maybe gaining a new skill along the way. Plus it's absolutely free!

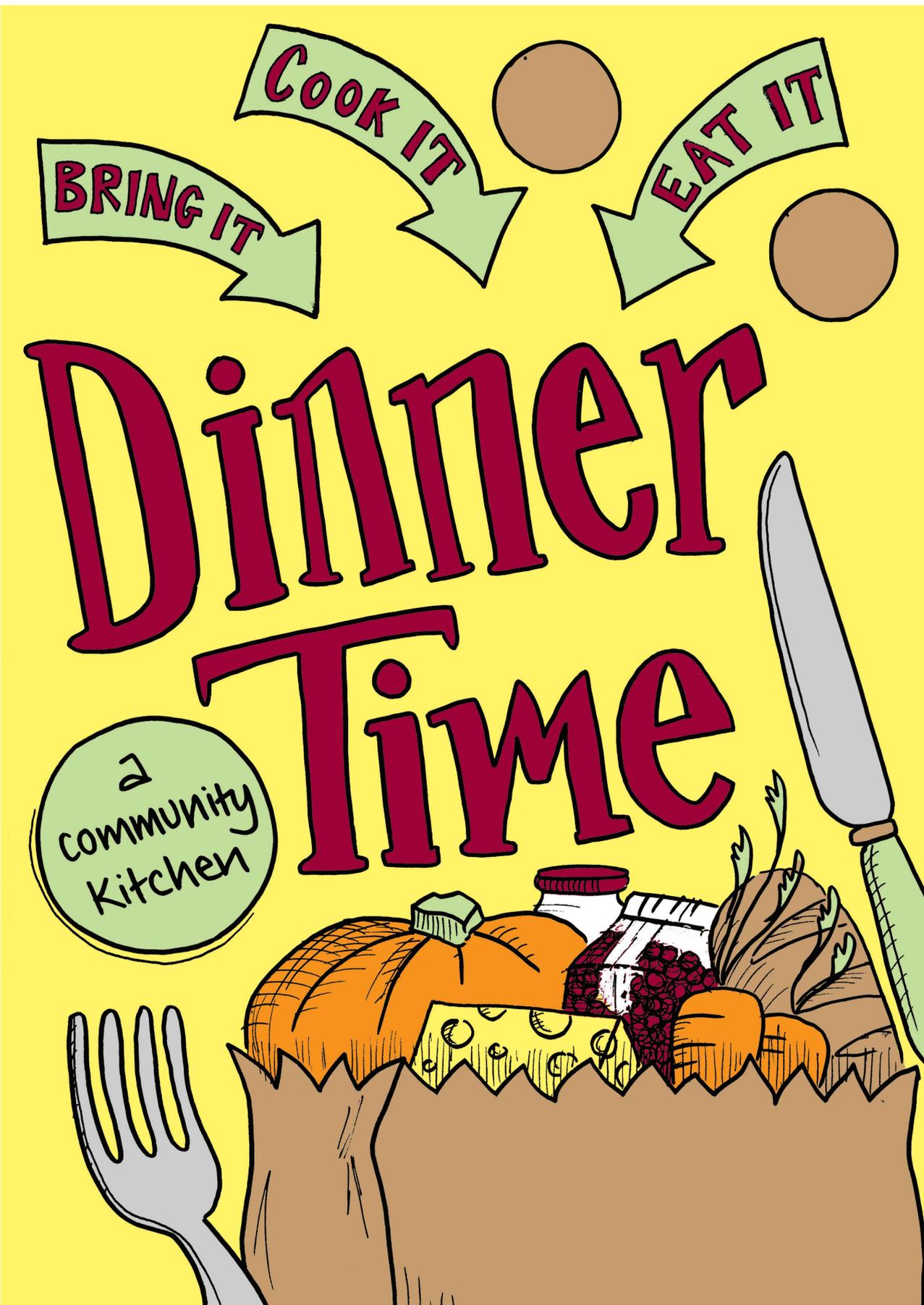
The first event was a roaring success, with over 35 people of all ages and backgrounds attending. Some fantastic dishes were created, including sweet brussel sprout risotto, Spanish omelette, caramelised onion hummus and rice pudding.

Peter Lefort, from the Community Action Group Project, said "After a brilliant first event, the next step is for groups and individuals to take the model into their own communities. From equipment and food to publicity and venue, we have comprehensive support for anyone excited by the idea of bringing their community together over a hot stove."

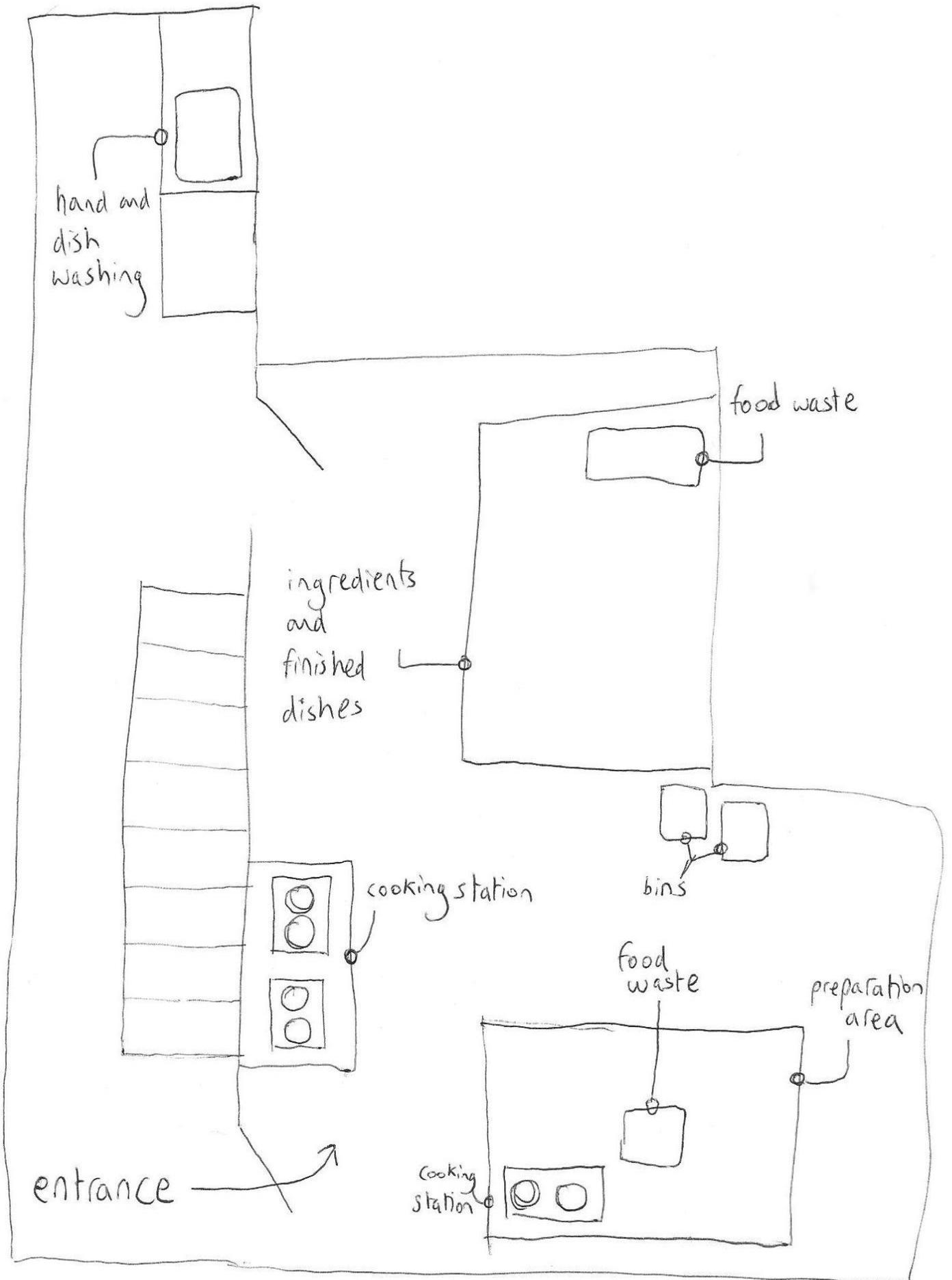
*For more help with press and publicity – from radio interviews to handing out leaflets – the Community Action Group Project can support you. Contact Peter Lefort at [peter.lefort@resourcefutures.co.uk](mailto:peter.lefort@resourcefutures.co.uk) for more details.*

● publicity

Download the poster below from the DinnerTime website, itsdinnertime.org, and add your own event's details in the blank spaces in the blanks and dots.



# ● example room plan



# risk assessment

For help with the risk assessment contact Peter Lefort at the Community Action Group Project – [peter.lefort@resourcefutures.co.uk](mailto:peter.lefort@resourcefutures.co.uk)

An example risk assessment can be downloaded from the DinnerTime website: [itsdinnertime.org](http://itsdinnertime.org).

Below are some example potential risks and control procedures:

## risk

## control procedures

Much of the food used will be surplus from local businesses and homes. This makes it difficult to guarantee the quality and safety of the suppliers and represents a recognised risk.

The utmost diligence will be applied to critically assessing the quality of produce to ensure the safety of consumers.

The beneficial nature of this project in raising awareness of food waste, bringing the community together, and minimising environmental impact of food production was seen to outweigh this danger.

All produce used will be vegetarian and predominantly vegan. This produce represents a lower food risk than if meat or animal products were involved.

Volunteers will be proficient in food hygiene with the relevant qualifications.

Volunteers and public may be injured if they trip over objects or slip on spillages.

Work areas kept tidy, goods stored suitably etc.

Kitchen equipment maintained to prevent leaks onto floor.

Volunteers clean up spillages (including dry spills) immediately using suitable methods and leave the floor dry.

Suitable cleaning materials available.

No trailing cables or obstruction in walkways.

Steps and changes in level highlighted

Injuries such as strains or bruising from handling heavy/bulky objects

Injuries such as strains or bruising from handling heavy/bulky objects

Commonly used items and heavy stock stored on shelves at waist height.

Handling aids provided for movement of large/heavy items.

Staff trained in how to lift safely

Scalding or burns injuries from contact with steam, hot water, hot oil and hot surfaces

Ensure handles on pans maintained

Any use of hot liquids or surfaces closely monitored by volunteers.

Children under 16 years of age monitored by a parent/guardian.

A good way to find unwanted yet good quality food is to ask local businesses if they are happy to donate their wasted stock. They might not be able to use it - but you can! Below is an example letter to copy and edit for your own purposes.



DinnerTime  
c/o the Community Action Group Project  
Speedwell House  
Speedwell Street  
Oxford OX1 1NE

**DinnerTime** is a European award-winning new Community Kitchen model which aims to:

- help people gain new skills and confidence with food
- raise awareness of and actively reduce food waste
- create a new social space where diverse communities can come together over cooking and eating great food.

**The events are entirely free**, and can be held anywhere with access to electricity and water. We invite everyone to bring food they would otherwise throw away (*half a cabbage, that old tin at the back of the cabbage, surplus herbs from the garden*) and we aim to supplement this with unwanted food from Oxfordshire's businesses.

**This is where you come in!** If you have any excess food which you would otherwise throw away, then please let us know and we might be able to take it off your hands. We can't take meat or dairy for hygiene reasons but anything else could be a massive help! We can arrange collections and also publicise your business through our networks, what we're interested in are partnerships which benefit everyone.

If you think you could help and want to find out more, please get in touch via 07903037290.

DinnerTime is part of the Community Action Group network of over 50 environmental voluntary groups across Oxfordshire – [www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk](http://www.cagoxfordshire.org.uk)

[itsdinnertime.org](http://itsdinnertime.org)  
[www.facebook.com/pages/DinnerTime/171703652938179](https://www.facebook.com/pages/DinnerTime/171703652938179)

