

Hands Together Community Lunch News

We have been delivering a weekly community lunch for a number of years out of Helena Lane Day Centre where there is a fantastic kitchen and large dining area.

On 19th November we were informed by Shropshire Council that to continue to use Helena Lane from January 2025, we would need to pay 'around' £10,000 a year including VAT (assuming business rate relief continues) and take on a 5-year lease for full-time use. We are unable to hire the kitchen and dining space for just the one day a week we use it.

This is very disappointing and with the lack of notice given, has forced us into thinking not only creatively but also very quickly.

We have explored other venues in town, but these would also come at a significant cost and present other difficulties as well as the need for us to raise funding to spend elsewhere when we already have a building to run.

Therefore, we have decided that we will upgrade our tiny kitchen at The Hub and run 2 community lunches each week on a Tuesday and a Friday, therefore splitting the group who currently attend HL. We will be able to cater for up to 20 people at a time but will aim to start with 15 so we can work out the logistics. Spending some funds now will make us more sustainable going forward as it will be a one-off spend rather than an annual one, and we will have a much-improved kitchen that will enable us to better deliver our other planned food activity.

Running community lunch is a core HTL activity. Those who attend often say it is 'the highlight' of their week and 'this is a lifeline; I don't know what I would do without it.' So it is really important we make sure we can keep it going.

Two thirds of the attendees live alone so alongside the freshly cooked 2-course meal they get companionship, structure and belonging. The food served is well-balanced and healthy which means that, at least once a week, diners are getting well fed with nutritious and good quality ingredients.



In 2024 38 diners answered a snapshot questionnaire and for 58% of them, attending was **very important** and was **extremely important** to 16%. We asked them how they felt after lunch on that day, 66% felt **much better** and 31.5% felt **a bit better** so it is clear that attending also has a positive impact on mental health.

Access to good healthy food is key to our charitable objectives as the impact of enjoying social meals and eating well is well documented in terms of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, remaining independent and reducing isolation and loneliness.

We also feed 30+ people on Christmas Day. This we will do at our Hub from 2025, expanding our dining area into the Community Fridge room for the day.

The community lunches are a key part of our work in reducing food waste, using mainly surplus food to produce tasty, nutritious meals.

This move will be a steep learning curve (and an unexpected expense) for us all so please bear with us during the transition. We have to take out the old kitchen and install a new one during the week of 6th January. This means the Social Space will be closed all week although the Community Fridge will remain open.

So, from the week of 13th January 2025 (fingers crossed) our Social Space will open like this:

Monday: Open 11am - 2pm with drop-in Lucky Dip lunch for £2. (latest lunch served 1pm)

Tuesday: Pre-booked 2-course lunch served £3.50. Open for lunch only 12:00, lunch served at 12:30.

Wednesday: Open 11am - 2pm with drop-in Lucky Dip lunch for £2 (latest lunch served 1pm)
2:30pm - 4:30pm Board games afternoon for all

Thursday: Open 11am - 2pm with drop-in Lucky Dip lunch for £2. (latest lunch served 1pm)
Mindful Colouring from 11am-12pm

Friday: Pre-booked 2-course lunch served £3.50. Open for lunch only 12:00, lunch served at 12:30.

Other activities and groups will be planned around the times above.