

# Tony Mulgrew

## Todmorden High School

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**M**y name is Tony Mulgrew, and I am the Catering Manager at Todmorden High School. My story started way back in 2007 when I decided after much research to change the way Todmorden High's Catering Team delivered, sourced and produced food from the kitchen to the table. I knew that we needed to become more involved with growing fresh produce at a local level and decided to investigate how we could make this sustainable and economical. This is when I decided that joining the Food for Life Partnership would be a brilliant step forward, knowing that we were the first school in Calderdale to become involved and then to quickly reach Bronze level showed our level of commitment. It was a fantastic opportunity to go for Flagship status as well as raising the profile of the catering department allowing us to focus on all the excellent practice that happens on a daily basis.

We found that to move forward and to make the programme work, it had to become a whole school issue, including the school leadership team, parents and students, every one's voice needs to be heard. We focused on using the programme as part of the school curriculum, educating staff and students as to where their food comes from, explaining the miraculous journey from field to table.... this went down a storm. We invited parents to watch us make meals so they felt part of the bigger picture, they knew what the children were eating and how we produced such high quality meals continuously and for such reasonable costings.... they were impressed.

I definitely felt that not only should the school leadership team be

involved but finance, School Council, and the SNAG. The whole school and community were developing through the Food for Life Partnership programme.

Has it been worth it? Yes of course... although a bigger work load was inevitable, the benefits have outweighed this by tenfold. By involving governors and the school leadership team we worked together to ensure that costs were covered including food and wages. A basic understanding of how the benefits of using fresh ingredients showed in how the food had changed over the years. Students were still keen to lunch in the canteen, proving that making healthy choices and changing the way staff and students viewed their food was a resounding success.

Working for the same goal, knowing that we are part of something that in years to come will have shaped peoples understanding of food and where it comes from has been the biggest and most satisfying feeling yet. As part of the Food for Life Partnership you are not alone, the bigger picture is out there and you are growing with it. Everybody wants to see students grow up healthy, educated and well grounded in the knowledge that they know where the food that they have been eating comes from, how to cook it and then grow and share this knowledge with the wider community.

I now find that my role has changed and I have become the driving force within school, not only working in the kitchen but being involved with Extended School activities, community cohesion groups, cookery demonstrations, after school food

club... the list is endless. Where there is a will to learn I want to become involved. I am developing links within the local community and I am in discussion with the Parents and Friends Association who liaise within school to educate them about programmes such as the Food for Life Partnership. This is a life style choice that needs to be set in stone... make the right food choices now and enjoy a happy healthy life. It is as simple as that!

This is a lifestyle that each person that lives in the community can be involved in and this can help families working together in changing their life so that they are making healthy choices.

This past year has been so busy with work and there have been lots of highs and lows but we have had a few proud moments specifically our nomination for the Sustainability Award, becoming a Food for Life Partnership flagship school, achieving our Bronze award and winning the Education Business Catering award. But my most proud moment would be when the Food for Life Partnership team and Jeanette Orrey asked me to be part of the Cook's Network. Knowing that the work that you are doing in your school can help and support others and to see that others appreciate the work that you are trying to do within your own community and surrounding areas is a great feeling.

The most helpful tip that I can offer is to get involved by meeting others and sharing ideas and good practices. You'll find that you can build and move forward to offer a better service for your students, staff and to your community.

**Yorkshire**