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**RESEARCH ORAL ABSTRACT COTEC-ENOTHE2016**  
**EXPLORING RESIDING IN A HOMELESS HOSTEL IN THE UK**  
**THE USE OF ‘FOOD AS A LIFE-STYLE MOTIVATOR’ AMONGST HOMELESS PEOPLE: A**  
**MULTI-DISCIPLINARY PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT**

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**Background:**

The recent ‘Plymouth Food Cultures’ project (Pettinger and Whitelaw, 2012) found that participation in food projects can build trust, self-esteem and improve food skills with marginalised men. Building on this work the ‘food as a life-style motivator’ (FLM) project aimed to explore how food and food activities might be used with homeless people to support enhanced self-efficacy, health and wellbeing.

**Method:**

Participatory action research methods (Minkler and Wallestein, 2003) were used, consisting of surveys with key support staff within a homeless hostel, Photo- Elicitation methods with hostel residents and observations of food activities in the hostel. ‘Constant comparison’ of transcript data was conducted in a systematic way (Hancock, Ockleford and Windridge, 2009).

**Results:**

Data resulted in five key themes which describe deep-rooted personal expressions around food including; power and empowerment, occupation, emotion, meanings of food, space and place.

**Conclusion:**

Creative food activities and food-themed events can offer meaningful occupation. Thus generating a virtuous circle where food promotes engagement and engagement promotes interest in self-care. Food, therefore, becomes an expression of empowerment, with the potential to enhance health, wellbeing and social justice.

**Application to Practice:**

Collaborating on this multi-disciplinary project fostered a strong multi-disciplinary team ethos, thus providing a holistic view of some of the many determinants of food choice and poverty. Occupational Therapists need to promote meaningful food based social inclusion activities with individuals, at the organisational level and influence policy for people who are homeless.

**References**

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