

Vegan Campaigns

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The Vegan Pledge 2008 was the start of something innovative and exciting in vegan outreach. Caroline McAleese of Vegan Campaigns reports

With a New Year, New You! message, Vegan Campaigns supported 25 Londoners to become vegan for a month from January to February 2008. Around 137 animals were saved! Half of the participants plan to stay vegan, and almost all the rest are now vegetarian or cutting down on animal products. We're delighted!

An article in the Daily Mail by reporter Edward Batha, who discovered that being vegan for a month improved his health, prompted fellow Vegan Campaigns member Chrissy to phone me. She said, "Why don't we recruit a group of people to go vegan for a month to see if their health improves and how they help animals and the environment?" I thought this was a great idea and that New Year would be the ideal time to organise what became the vegan pledge. We took the idea to the following Vegan Campaigns meeting (mid flow of organising a vegan food fair!) and the rest of the group came on board with some more ideas and enthusiasm for the Vegan Pledge.

Vegan GP, Dr. Mike Hooper and well-known nutrition expert and author of *Plant*

Based Nutrition, Stephen Walsh PhD, also came on board.

We used flyers, email lists and a press release to promote the Pledge. It was a pleasant surprise to see that half of those signing up were meat eaters, increasing the impact of any change.

HEALTH CHECKS

So, a few months later we gathered at a local community centre, with participants ready

for their health check (which we repeated at the end and noted any difference), and discussed people's expectations. We kept in touch with participants during their vegan month by telephone and email, and asked people at the end-of-pledge meeting how they got on. The health changes were impressive. Mike explains, "It was surprising how quickly switching to a vegan diet improved people's health. Most participants lost weight, and their average for two important health indicators – BMI and Waist:Hip Ratio – dropped from an "at risk" level into the ideal range, as well as an overall reduction in blood pressure. "Pledgers" reported more energy,

Other comments from participants included:

Finding lunch at university was most challenging as there are not any vegan options. The tomato and lentil soup apparently had milk in it!

I enjoyed experimenting with new recipes. This has been great fun, and tasty.

It made me think more about what I eat - when you have to scour ingredients, you realise the amount of rubbish you normally put into your system.

I found it difficult to resist vegan puddings and chocolate - which is why I didn't lose any weight!

Once you know the facts, how can you not be vegan?



Vegan fair

Lichfield, a beautiful city, a historical treasure trove and home of the first dictionary, but what has this got to do with veganism? Verity Hunt-Sheppard reports

The historical Guild Hall was recently the setting for a free vegan food fair whose success exceeded all expectations.

Lichfield's Guild Hall is truly beautiful. With good weather on the day the stained glass windows were vibrant with colour. I don't doubt that many a feast has occurred in the Guild Hall over its History, but how many of those feasts were vegan?

We were glad a local church hall we first asked turned us down, saying we were being biased against meat eaters – the Guildhall did us proud! Veganism is becoming a widely adopted and a more accepted way of living, with vegan events regularly occurring the length and breadth of the UK. Free Vegan Food Fairs invite the general public to try a wide variety of delicious vegan foods completely free of charge! As vegan readers will know, people may turn their nose up at 'vegan' but rarely do so at 'free'.

The recently formed group Midlands Vegan Campaigns (MVC) were the organisers behind the event and they had the pleasure of seeing people fighting to get into the building before the fair had even started! The sight of free sandwiches being given out at the door was very tempting! Fair goers were treated to an array of vegan foods that included spicy

London Vegan Campaigns

Vegan Campaigns started in 2005. We run monthly food sample and information stalls in busy shopping areas across London. We find these stalls positive, cheap and easy to organise, and they are often people's first taste of veganism. We have regular vegan food fairs, pro-vegan leafleting, stalls at green fairs, university and community events; we sometimes cater at local events to promote low cost, vegan food.
 * www.vegancampaigns.org.uk * 07960 036 044 * info@vegancampaigns.org.uk.
 * If you don't live in London, and are interested in vegan campaigning, visit www.activeveg.org to find your local active vegan group.

better sleep, better digestion, fewer premenstrual symptoms, and healthier skin, nails and hair. The Pledge month has been an enormous success, and suggests a range of health benefits from a vegan diet."

We're so pleased with the results that we plan to repeat them with double the number of people next year. We'd love to make this a national event, so get in touch if you'd like to organise one in your area. The Campaigns teams work well together and we always welcome new ideas and hands on deck, so do let us know if you would like to get involved.

* The full Vegan Pledge report can be found at <http://vegancampaigns.org.uk/veganpledgeevaluationreport.pdf>



chick pea curry, shepherds pies, mini quiches, pizza slices and Thai noodles and if that wasn't enough there was a fabulous selection of cakes including chocolate, fruit, and lemon drizzle. As well as free food, savoury burgers and cakes were on sale for those either wanting more food, those wanting to take food home to share with their family or friends, or for those already vegan who supported the event.

WHY LICHFIELD?

After the success of MVC's Birmingham based Free Vegan Food fair some months back we decided the message of compassionate living should not be confined to areas where success is virtually guaranteed. So it was decided that next time MVC would move out of Britain's second largest city and into new territory. The Guild Hall had everything that was needed for a Vegan Food Fair: A kitchen, main hall and a smaller room for talks and cookery demonstrations. Once the hall was booked it was all systems go. A room plan was drawn up, sponsorship applications were made and food companies were contacted with a polite

request for donations. Organisations such as the Vegan Society, Animal Aid and the Fair trade foundation were invited to have stalls in the main hall, as was Lifescape Magazine. Cooks were enlisted and recipes selected. Cookery demonstrations and a nutritional talk were booked for the smaller room as it's vital to provide people with practical advice on making the switch to a healthy and balanced plant based diet. A Free Vegan Food Fair can be organised by a small committee as long as you can enlist plenty of volunteers on the day.

Once the doors closed there was lots of exit talk about how well the event went and how interested people were! An estimated 500-600 people filed through the doors. Those attending the fair were invited to fill out a questionnaire and we found there was a huge pile of them to analyse, plus hundreds of free leaflets and booklets about veganism were taken too. ■



Light streamed through the stained glass of the Guildhall as people enjoyed the Fair



Don't forget to vote!

The Vegetarian Society Awards promote best practice among caterers, manufacturers and retailers, and highlight the importance of integrity in the vegetarian marketplace. The Awards also acknowledge those who promote vegetarianism through the media.

This year's Award categories are as follows:

1 BEST UK INDEPENDENT RESTAURANT OR PUB FOR VEGETARIAN FOOD

Is there a venue you feel caters well for vegetarians? One that not only offers a great choice of vegetarian dishes but also gives good service, is helpful, welcoming and good value. If so then visit www.vegsoc.org/awards

2 BEST VEGETARIAN READY-MADE DESSERT

Most people enjoy a little sweetness now and again. And it's not just veggies who want their little pots, puddings, slices or spoons of loveliness to be free from gelatine, crushed beetle or animal fat. So which ready-made dessert deserves a nomination? It's as simple as that.

3 BEST VEGETARIAN BEAUTY PRODUCT

Which favourite products aren't tested on animals and don't contain animal by-products? Designed to make you feel better, fresher or even just cleaner - let us know which product scrubs up for a nomination.

4 BEST TV CHEF

With so many cookery and food programmes currently on television, The Vegetarian Society is asking the public to vote for the TV chef who is the most veggie friendly.

Nominations can be made until 30 June 2008 and the winners will be announced in October.

GO TO THE VEGETARIAN SOCIETY WEBSITE www.vegsoc.org/awards or email Vicky@vegsoc.org for information/01619252000

A date for your diary

MVC's next project is a BIG vegan festival in Wolverhampton on November 1st, on World Vegan Day! Please try to be there! If you would like guidance on organising your own Free Vegan Food Fair contact MVC: info@veganmidlands.org.uk or telephone MVC on 01527 458395. www.veganmidlands.org.uk