



Article

## Perfect 10

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**Borough Market demo chef Jenny Chandler joins hundreds of excitable children to celebrate the 10th birthday of School Food Matters**

Last week the serenity and calm of the College Garden at Westminster Abbey was shattered for a few hours by hundreds of excited children; the occasion, a celebratory 10th birthday picnic for [School Food Matters](#).

Stephanie Wood set up the charity as a campaign to improve school meals in the London boroughs of Richmond and Kingston, a decade later and School Food Matters has not just helped to transform lunches and influence government school food policy, but is also involved in numerous programs connecting kids with the food they eat.

One project, Young Marketeers, has been hosted by Borough Market for the last six years. Pupils, with the support of School Food Matters, learn to grow fruit and vegetables in their school gardens, which they then bring in to the Market to sell. The programme works on so many levels: kids get to spend valuable time engaging with nature, and learn about planting, nurturing and harvesting food with the expert guidance of a professional gardener. Over 7,200 children have been involved so far, growing their own food and getting a chance to connect with real ingredients rather than the often more familiar processed snacks and fast food.



### **Food poverty and waste**

Schools participating in the Young Marketeers scheme kick off with an assembly given by the [FareShare](#) charity, uncovering both the realities of food poverty and the absurdity of food waste. A few months later, with some valuable coaching from Borough traders, the children sell their own produce from the school vegetable patch to raise money to feed vulnerable families. Kids see that they can make a tangible difference, with every pound they raise paying for four FareShare meals. The numbers are really beginning to add up too: to date 77 schools (three quarters of which come from Southwark), with over 25,000 students involved in the programme, have sent 416 Young Marketeers to sell their wares, raising over £4,500.

The cooking element of the Young Marketeers project is crucially important too, and it is where my involvement has been. We started out with chef demonstrations at the summer and harvest sales, inspiring kids with simple, seasonal recipes using their produce. Last year we added a winter sale (now an annual event) when older students share the Market's Cookhouse with chef Nicole Pisani, learning to make wonderfully tasty soup from food waste, and knocking up some ciabatta at Borough's own Bread Ahead Bakery to sell in aid of FareShare. That's more meals for vulnerable families (over 3,000 so far from the soup and bread sales) and more culinary confidence for the kids; it's a perfect win-win situation.



**Diving in**

So, with much to celebrate, we set forth in the sunshine to take a little bit of Borough Market to the big party at Westminster. Armed with a few graters, pestles, mortars, half a dozen spiralisers (don't knock 'em until you've tried one), spices, seasonings, a fabulous olive oil and a mountain of fresh summer produce, the mission was to get those kids making and eating salad. It's always amazing how a child can approach an unfamiliar ingredient such as a courgette or a bulb of fennel with suspicion or even revulsion, then after just 10 minutes of preparation, some peer pressure and a bit of excitement, will be diving in like there's no tomorrow. "I didn't think I'd like this, too many weirdy vegetables, but I'd eat this for every lunch," said Fred (who of course became my hero of the day).

The picnic highlighted the vital connection between kids and real, nutritious food that School Food Matters is all about. There were seed planting sessions, edible hanging basket workshops, guided tours of the ancient herb garden, bicycle-powered smoothie blenders, a cooking competition and a record-breaking simultaneous carrot crunch. It was an extraordinarily joyous and engaging day for all the kids (and adults) involved and a perfect way to mark a milestone birthday.

Here's to the next 10 years with, as Stephanie Wood says, "so much still to achieve"—we look forward to continuing being part of such a fabulous project.