

CAFFI PLANT



(Source: SMA baby, 2019)

PLAY | GROW | EAT

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Who am I?

I am currently a teaching assistant at a primary school in Carmarthen town centre and I am also studying for a degree in Early Years Education and Care. Whilst studying, I have gained knowledge and understanding of poverty and the effects living in poverty can have on child development. As an empath, I am always striving to find ways to help people when they find themselves in a time of need, which is why I have started this company.

Why do we need Caffi Plant?

It is no secret that poverty remains an issue in today's society. From my market research I found that last year 34.5% of households in my community were affected, this is higher than the national Welsh average (Carmarthenshire County Council, 2023).

The school that I work in has a high percentage of children that live in the most deprived areas of Carmarthen. Many of the children starting school at age three are often deemed to be behind in the typical development for children their age. Schmidt et al. claims that this can be associated with early life poverty. The first five years of life is when rapid neuronal growth and connectivity occurs, this can be hindered by poor nutrition.

In the current cost of living crisis, many people are struggling to afford the basics such as food to get by. Public Health Wales (2022) found there was an increase of 69% of people experiencing food insecurity in Wales between 2021 and 2022, they made claim that an urgent response was needed to alleviate inequalities in Wales caused by poverty. Whilst going hungry, children are being denied their rights to nutritious food, the best possible health and the opportunity to reach their full potential (UNICEF no date, and James, 2020). We need to act together as a community to invest in their future, ensuring no child goes hungry. The past seven years have shown little change to help children living in poverty (McFarlane, 2023).

What is Caffi Plant?

Caffi Plant translates to English as “Children’s Cafe”. It is a community interest company offering a welcoming, warm space, serving plant-based meals prepared from produce that has been grown by the hands of our young visitors. There is also an indoor play area that can be overseen by parents and carers from the comfort of the sofas and a garden area designed to be explored and nurtured by our youngest visitors. Caffi Plant fosters a sense of community and belonging with a focus on reducing hunger within our community. There are volunteering opportunities to be taken advantage of which are aimed at parents and carers in the hope of enabling them to gain valuable work experience that will hopefully lead to future employment which will be of benefit not only individual families but to our society as a whole.

Who is Caffi Plant for?

Witnessing family's struggling to provide for their children, especially with the added effects the cost-of-living crisis is having, has been a major influence in the start-up of my Caffi Plant, which aims to reduce hunger within the community, increasing wellbeing and child development.

Welsh Government () aim to roll out free school meals to every primary school child in Wales by September 2024, meaning that they will have at least one hot meal a day. As well as this, all the schools in Carmarthen town offer a breakfast club service each morning, ensuring that their pupils are nutritionally set for the day ahead. However, children who are not yet of primary school age do not have this guarantee of food.

This is why Caffi Plant is aimed at families who have children of preschool age, particularly those living in poverty.

PLAY

There is an inside play area influenced by Pikler, aiming to stimulate cognitive and physical development, independence and risk taking. The space is gifted with an abundance of natural light, greenery and natural materials. Parents are encouraged to allow their babies and toddlers freedom to move and explore equipment such as Pikler arches and frames. Marlen (2019, p.76) claims that this freedom of movement is fundamental in healthy physical and cognitive development in the first year of life.



(my baby nurse, no date)

GROW



(Lane, 2018)

There is a garden area that draws on the beliefs of MacMillan. The space is to be nurtured and maintained by the young visitors and volunteers of Caffi Plant.

The children will be encouraged to plant, nurture and harvest the crops, this will be beneficial to their fine and gross motor development as they use their fingers to handle seeds and tools and their bodies will be bending, stretching and balancing whilst moving around the garden. It will also develop the children's understanding and appreciation of the natural world and the impact we have on it, growing ethically responsible citizens that will help build a sustainable world.

There will be flowers, fruits and vegetables grown as well as a sensory herb garden, all of which will be edible.

EAT

The produce grown in the garden will be harvested by the children and brought into the kitchen to be prepared and cooked by the volunteers to provide delicious plant-based meals for our visitors.



(MAEOE, 2021)

We will be offering a “pay what you can” plant-based menu that will have suggested prices for meals. Visitors can choose what they feel comfortable paying, if they can afford to pay at all. Members of the community will be able to purchase meal tokens that will be used to cover the cost of some of the free meals that will be issued. Meals served will include breakfast and lunch. I have chosen to make meals free or affordable as a deficiency in nutrients during the initial two years of life can result in poor cognitive development (Roberts et al. 2022). The eating area comprises of child-sized tables and chairs to promote child independence and choice. There are also comfy sofas for parents and carers to relax on, whilst observing their children.

Challenges

One challenge that I am realistic about is the amount of produce the garden area will be able to supply to the kitchen. For this reason, I have been in talks with FareShare Cymru, who will be able to supply Caffi Plant with surplus food from the food industry (FareShare Cymru, 2024a). By becoming a member with them, I will be receiving products that are five to ten times the value of what I paid, which keeps my food bills to a minimum. I will also be accessing free surplus food from local supermarkets through FareShare Go (FareShare Cymru, 2024b). Another challenge that could possibly arise is the stigma attached to using a free service. Although I aim to make Caffi Plant a place of inclusivity where everyone feels like they belong. I am also aware that we live in a society where poverty stigma is an issue (Inglis, G. *et al.* 2022).

Finance

As a registered community interest company, I have been awarded grants from the National Lottery Awards for All Wales for a substantial sum (The National Lottery Community Fund, no date). Part of this has gone towards purchasing play equipment, children's furniture, gardening and outdoor equipment, and materials and paints to upcycle donated furniture. I have also been granted funding from Welsh Governments Community Facilities Programme which has gone towards installing a kitchen, updating the restroom facilities and purchasing a polytunnel for the garden area (Welsh Gov, 2022a). I have recently had approval for The Asda Foundation grant, which will be going towards volunteer recruitment checks, such as DBS, and training, such as Food hygiene certificates (Asda Foundation, 2024).

Marketing

I will be increasing the public's awareness of Caffi Plant using social media platforms, as they have the potential to reach large numbers of the community whilst being free to use. I hope to keep the public engaged and feeling involved in the company by asking for opinions through voting poles and posting videos of the progress being made.

Alongside social media, I will be creating flyers to distribute to professionals who work regularly with families living in poverty. There will also be posters in public areas such as the noticeboards of local supermarkets and the town market. I will also be reaching out to local families by asking the schools within the area to send out information regarding Caffi Plant on their individual schools app.



(Tursunov, no date)

PART 2 - Critical Analysis of Business Plan.

This part of the business plan critically analyses the potential impact that Caffi Plant will have on the development of young children. It will critically reflect on the comparisons of what is already available and accessible to families with young children living in poverty with that of the proposed business plan.

Caffi Plant is a not-for-profit social enterprise, community interest company with the goal of aiding the development of young children through the provision of nutritional plant-based meals, access to stimulating play resources and the opportunity to thrive in the outdoors.

As a community interest company, Caffi Plant's success will be determined by how much difference the business makes to the community, particularly the development of young children. This is also known as social value and is the determining factor between social enterprises and commercial enterprises, whose success is driven by financial gains (Yilmaz and Yilmaz, 2019). However, Gerlach (2021) explains how the quantification of this non-financial success can be problematic, as social change could be attributed to many other factors and not any one specific intervention. Kaz (2017) explains how these unclear outcomes could lead to ambiguity regarding the impact Caffi Plant is having on child poverty and development, which could affect the ability to prove its success to stakeholders. This could lead to uncertainty in funding arrangements as Caffi Plant is reliant on grants and financial donations from stakeholders to continue providing its services. Caffi Plant also relies on volunteers to help grow its produce and cook meals for the visitors. Hopkins and Dowell (2022) claim that the recruitment and retention of volunteers in not-for-profit organisations is complex, driven by motivational factors and receipt of rewards. These factors and rewards can vary between age and as such, the entrepreneurial leader of the organisation needs to communicate effectively and develop tailored management strategies to avoid a potential volatile workforce (Kaz, 2017 and Hopkins and Dowell 2022).

Ladge, Eddleston and Sugiyama (2019) state that the success of an entrepreneurship is often associated with men rather than women which can result in female entrepreneurs questioning whether they are in fact 'real' entrepreneurs, experiencing a phenomenon named imposter syndrome. This doubt can negatively impact the success of their business (Ladge Eddleston and Sugiyama, 2019). However, Gottlieb (2023), states that imposter syndrome can have favorable outcomes as well as unfavorable ones, claiming that some extremely successful entrepreneurs have imposter syndrome and could be driven to succeed by their feelings of imposterism.

Gallegos *et al.* (2021) and Dantas de Oliveira *et al.* (2020) state how a lack of access to nutritional food can have severe negative impacts on a child's physical, cognitive, social and behavioural development. By providing free nutritional meals and meal preparation ideas to visitors in need, Caffi Plant aims to enhance these aspects of child development. Ipsos and The Trussell Trust (2023) state that in the past five years there has been a 93% increase in children in Wales receiving food parcels from food banks within their network. Even with these increasing statistics, it is claimed that only 74% of the population living with food insecurity are accessing food aid (Ipsos and The Trussell Trust 2023), meaning that at least 25% of people in need are going hungry, which according to UNICEF (no date) is a violation of the right of every child to have access to nutritional food. Within Carmarthen, people experiencing food poverty can gain access to free food from the local foodbank, however according to Trussell Trust (2024) there are only two locations available to collect parcels from and of these, one is in the town centre, opening for one hour, one day per week and the other is out of town opening for three hours, three days per week. These opening hours and locations are potential barriers, as not all people in need will be able to access them during these times or be able to commute to the locations (Sosenko, Bramley and Bhattacharjee, 2022). In comparison, Caffi Plant aims to open daily to serve its young visitors already prepared nutritious meals. Another potential barrier for people accessing food aid, is that the charity is run by the Christian church, which according to Sosenko, Bramley and Bhattacharjee (2022), may be off putting for the non-Christian population. This is where Caffi Plant differs, as it is a non-religious establishment that promotes inclusivity and belonging. However, by offering only plant-based meals it may not appeal to all members within the community. Alcorta *et al.* (2021) claim that a large proportion of society believes that meat is a vital source of nutrients that should be included in every meal, which can pose a challenge for Caffi Plant within the plant-based food industry. However, Zimlich (2021) states that children between the ages of one and three, require 13 grams of protein a day for healthy development, which can be obtained from plant-based foods, Patel and Millstein (2023) agree that plant-based diets are beneficial to the healthy development of children.

Garthwaite (2016) states that members of the community who access food aid often feel a sense of shame whilst doing so, usually based on how they think others will perceive them and how they perceive themselves. This could be another potential barrier for people visiting Caffi Plant, whether they are in food poverty or not, as they do not want to be judged.

Caffi Plant also offers volunteering opportunities to parents and carers of its young visitors with the aim of aiding future employment. Nikolova and Nikolaev (2021) claim that parental unemployment can have a detrimental impact on the cognitive and emotional development of children. This is

because they are exposed to more stressors and the potential inability of the parents to provide resources that offer a safe and stimulating environment. However, Repetti and Wang (2014) disagree, claiming that there is no notable difference in child development in employed mothers compared to unemployed mothers.

The play area within Caffi Plant is based on the ideas of Emmi Pikler, babies and toddlers can explore and move freely, without the assistance of adults. One of the motivators for starting Caffi Plant was the number of children starting school at age three who were developmentally behind for their age. Marlen (2019) claims that neuro-motor immaturity in childhood is more prevalent now than ever, with a probable contributing factor being a lack of movement opportunities during infancy. Offering these opportunities of unassisted free play aims to develop autonomy which Piaget believed leads to learning. However, Vygotsky was a firm believer that children learn from having adult involvement, which subsequently leads to development (Aubrey and Riley, 2022). Sagastui, Herran and Anguera (2022) agree with Piaget and Pikler that children benefit from being in control of their own play and that adults should not challenge the child to stretch beyond their current capabilities. Pikler was also a pioneer in respectful care and building secure attachments, which is another aim of Caffi Plant stated in the business plan. Mukherji (2014) states how forming secure attachments between an infant and their primary caregiver can support the child's cognitive and linguistic development as well as increasing their sense of identity.

The garden area of Caffi Plant offers young children the opportunity to be involved in planting, nurturing and harvesting crops. The idea of including an outdoor space at Caffi Plant was inspired by Margaret McMillan who believed that being in the open air, tackled ill health and ultimately aided child development. Similarly, to Caffi Plant, McMillan also believed in social value, not only helping the child but their care givers as well (Bradburn, 1976). The curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings states how important being outdoors is to children's development, supporting their physical, spiritual, emotional and social development as well as their wellbeing (Welsh Gov 2022b). Caffi Plant also sets its young visitors up to reaching the four purposes of the new Curriculum, by creating healthy children who are knowledgeable about healthy eating and take part in physical activity. Their involvement in growing produce for the cafe gains them knowledge and understanding to become ethical citizens who are committed to sustainability of the planet. Being involved in a social enterprise allows opportunities for others to benefit from the children's involvement, meaning that they are enterprising, capable individuals (Welsh Gov 2022c).

Children will be encouraged to plant seeds, pick weeds, and draw on seed markers. They will also be encouraged to dig, carry soil, water the plants and harvest the crops. The act of doing these activities encourages development of their fine motor skills and gross motor skills (Sommerfield *et al.*, 2021). Likewise, Montessori believed that the outdoors was a perfect environment for children to practice their motor skills as it allowed opportunity to manipulate various objects and materials (Aubrey and Riley 2022).

Caffi Plant plans to increase public awareness through social media platforms. Burns (2022) claims that social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram are powerful ways of marketing for a start-up business, as they are cheap to use, they can generate interest through discussion and posts, and they can also help build emotional bonds between people and business through familiarisation with the service being provided.

Through the provisions available, Caffi Plant shows links to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act, aiming to improve not only child development, but social wellbeing, through tackling the food poverty crisis within the community. Economic wellbeing, through providing volunteering opportunities to individuals with the hope of improving future employment possibilities and environmental wellbeing, through educating young children on the value of nature and how to look after our planet (Welsh Gov 2015). In the future, business could be expanded by opening more establishments like Caffi Plant in other communities, aiming to combat food poverty and ultimately improve the lives of children throughout Wales and further afield in a sustainable way.

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