



# THE BRITISH DIETETIC ASSOCIATION

*The Professional Association for Registered Dietitians*  
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# Media Release

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## **Glasgow dietitians awarded for health education for people with learning disabilities**

Glasgow Dietitians Mary Laidlaw and Dimitrios Spanos have been recognised by their professional body for their work in helping people with learning disabilities understand the importance of a balanced diet.

The British Dietetic Association (BDA) presented Mary with its Research Award and Dimitrios with its Education Award at an Awards Ceremony during its Annual Conference in Liverpool on 19 June.

The Research Award consists of funding of £1,000 to enable a dietitian to embark on a research project. The Education Award – sponsored by Birds Eye – is designed to recognise and help fund individual community development projects within the area of dietetics and nutrition. Dimitrios was also presented with a cheque for £1,000.

Mary and Dimitrios, both Senior Dietitians with the Glasgow Learning Disability Partnership, have been working with a healthy-eating group of eight people who are all aged over 30 and have varying levels of disability.

The aim of the project, which started in 2006, is to give people with a learning disability the opportunity to make informed choices about healthy eating in the same way as anyone without a disability might do. The project uses interactive learning techniques – including PowerPoint presentations, sensory activity games involving touch and smell, and visits to supermarkets and allotments – to educate them on where food comes from and the importance of a balanced diet.

Dimitrios said: “People with learning disabilities don’t have the same level of access to health promotion messages and therefore they have unmet needs. So we meet every Wednesday for 28 weeks during which we explore seven subjects – sugar, fibre, fat, fruit and vegetables, salt, healthy bones and food labelling. As part of the programme, we use recipes from the Healthy Living in Scotland Campaign – that’s a really good initiative but not very accessible in its existing form, so we modify them with pictorial representations and larger text.”

**Website: <http://www.bda.uk.com>**

Mary said: "Some of the most fun sessions have been baking different breads and soups and tasting foods flavoured with herbs and garlic instead of adding salt. As a result of the project, the service users' group in the centre decided to increase the number of sugar free drinks available from the vending machine."

The project is part of NHS Health Scotland's Health Promoting Health Service Initiative and is the only health service project in Scotland looking specifically at the needs of people with a learning disability.

Mary said: "Most people have heard of Health Promoting Schools where education, food provision and all school activities link together under a health promoting umbrella. We are trying to do something similar for people who attend our day centre in south-west Glasgow."

There are 5,000 people in Glasgow with a learning disability and Dimitrios hopes that the success of the project combined with the recognition given to it by the BDA will help to broaden the project and improve how people with learning difficulties are given access to health education. "An important part of the project is the evaluation and we've found that we've had a positive effect on their learning.

"This is the second year that we've done the project in Scotland and it continues to evolve and develop based on feedback from participants and carers. We recently presented it to the Health Promoting Hospitals Conference in Berlin and it was well received. And hopefully this Award will help take it into the mainstream too. We were really excited to learn that we had won because it means that the project has been recognised by our peers and that gives us strength to continue."

**Media enquiries to The British Dietetic Association should be directed to our media hotline on 0870 580 2517 or [pr@bda.uk.com](mailto:pr@bda.uk.com).**

**ENDS**

### **Notes to Editors**

1. The Survey was carried out during May & June 2008 and approximately 20 dietitians (of approximately 80 questioned) working in diabetes responded by email.
2. The British Dietetic Association, founded in 1936, is the professional association for registered dietitians in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is the nation's largest organisation of food and nutrition professionals with nearly 6,000 members. About two-thirds of members are employed in the National Health Service. The remaining members work in education, industry, research, sport settings or freelance.
3. Registered dietitians hold the only legally-recognisable graduate qualification in nutrition and dietetics. They are experts in interpreting and translating the science of nutrition into practical ways of promoting nutritional well-being, disease treatment and the prevention of nutrition-related problems. Their advice is sound and based on current scientific evidence. Registration, awarded by the Health Professionals Council, is an indication that a dietitian is fit to practise and is working within an agreed statement of conduct. For further details about the British Dietetic Association, please visit our website: [www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com).

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