

Nottinghamshire Childhood Obesity Trailblazer

FOOD Clubs

Participant Key Findings

September 2021



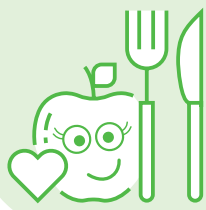
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INTRODUCTION

The following findings are based on interviews conducted with over 20 FOOD (Food On Our Doorstep) Club participants hosted by the Children's Centre Service at Harworth and Ravensdale in July 2021. As FOOD Club participants were collecting their weekly box, they were asked by an independent evaluator to take part in a brief interview. Most participants were happy to share their feedback and interviews varied in length from a few minutes to 15 minutes. The findings have been analysed and are presented below in emerging themes.

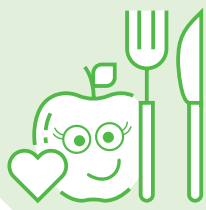
BACKGROUND

FOOD Clubs were established by Family Action, a national charity, to provide good-quality food at a low cost, while also reducing food waste. It costs £1 a year for a family to become a member. Once a member, families can purchase a box of food items each week worth £10 to £15 for just £3.50.

Family Action works with FareShare, the UK's national network of charitable food redistributors who take good quality surplus food from across the food industry and get it to various charities and community groups throughout England. FareShare surplus food typically includes items with packaging / labelling errors, stock that's become surplus due to forecasting errors, stock below minimum life on receipt (MLOR), fruit and vegetables past their best before end (BBE) date, stock past their BBE date, quality rejections (e.g., 'out of spec') etc. Surplus food that gets distributed therefore changes week-on-week.

As part of the Nottinghamshire Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme (COTP), two FOOD Clubs were established and hosted by the Children's Centre Service in Ravensdale and Harworth during 2020. As part of the COTP (focused on influencing the early years food environment), requests were made to Family Action to distribute 'healthier' surplus food items, and membership limited to those that live or work within approximately 15-minutes of the Clubs (as standard) with a child under the age of 5-years-old. In Spring 2021, two additional COTP FOOD Clubs were opened one hosted by the Children's Centre Service at Summer House, Sutton in Ashfield and the other at Ollerton (co-delivered with Life Spring's Church in a community setting). A similar evaluation with Children's Centre Service staff and Club participant interviews will take place early in 2022 following a similar timeframe of operation.





FINDINGS

Motivations to joining the FOOD Clubs

The main motivator for participants in taking up the FOOD Clubs was financial. However, most of the participants interviewed realised early in the scheme additional benefits to participation.

My main motivator to trying [FOOD Club] was financial.

My husband lost hours. Then the pandemic hit. I heard about the FOOD Club through school. We needed something that helped us. It's not just unemployed people that need help. It's low-income families, families who are working but whose income has taken a hit because of COVID.

I hope it continues.

Combating food waste was also recognised by some participants as a motivator to take up the FOOD Club. This reflects the increased national / international awareness of the food waste agenda experienced in recent years with ongoing media attention on climate change and other environmental issues.

What is valued about the FOOD Clubs?

The most frequently cited perceived benefits of the FOOD Clubs were the difference it made to people financially and the increased access to fresh produce. Other aspects of the programme that were valued included the flexibility of the scheme, access to recipes and positive impact on the diet of participants.

It's been a godsend. I've worked all my life but was made redundant. My son's got ADHD and my wife is a senior carer, so her shifts are never the same. Then there's school. I couldn't get a job back in the field I was in. It makes it harder, so I had to make the conscious decision to be a stay-at-home dad. We went from having a lot of money to being on the bones of our arse at one point. Things like this have been an absolute Godsend, the guys in there [the Children's Centre] are brilliant.



Nottinghamshire Childhood Obesity Trailblazer

Even if you have a really bad week this gives you the peace of mind that you have something. If you lose work because of having to isolate, at least you can rely on this.

Couldn't get this at Co-op, so much fresh fruit and veg. It's so expensive to buy fresh stuff, prices are going up all the time. This really helps make sure you can feed your family healthy options.

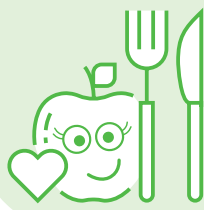
It's on your doorstep which is great, and it gives you a full cupboard and that makes you feel good.

Gives us treats for the kids that I wouldn't necessarily be able to buy.

Good that it comes in a Friday. Get it for the weekend.

It means you don't have to travel so far to buy food which is a good thing.

Time - takes 2 mins to come down and collect this. Would take more time to go to supermarket.



Changes to eating habits

Participants at both FOOD Clubs commented that the boxes encouraged them to try different ingredients and dishes, importantly the fresh items that people would not typically buy, such as a variety of vegetables and pulses, such as lentils.



We are eating healthier because we don't like waste. The prices of things keep going up, it's all the fresh fruit and veg is going up. You find yourself buying more processed stuff because it's cheaper.

Makes you try cooking different things.

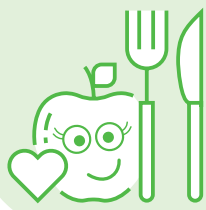
The children enjoy it - they try different things.

This is brilliant, it makes such a difference to people and to their health. It gets people eating healthier and trying different things.

Good getting this on a Friday - cook with my daughter at the weekend. We try new things, e.g., fennel and you have to think what to do with it.

My husband doesn't eat fruit and veg. And you get on their bad habits. This has made me get more fruit and veg in me.

It does encourage people to eat better and tackle obesity.



Other aspects that had changed included food planning, cooking from scratch, and eating together as a family.

It has made us cook more meals from scratch, for example there was a whole roast chicken one week and it made me think more about what to do with it.

The food boxes were also praised for changing shopping habits, with participants waiting to see what was in their box, then going to a supermarket to round out the ingredients into meals.

Addressing isolation and impact on well-being

The impact of the FOOD Clubs on well-being was far reaching by tackling isolation, encouraging participants to get out of their house, and prompt a return to 'normality' after lockdown. Some participants told us how receiving the boxes had become something of a highlight in their household particularly during the second national lockdown.

It's something to look forward to.

It gets you out and about.

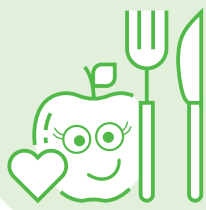
It's nice to have the routine of coming here every week.

My daughter and I open the box together and plan what we're going to cook. Then at the weekend we cook together and it's so nice. We really look forward to it.

Everyone is so friendly here it's lovely to come and see people. I can be in a right grump, and I come down and as soon as I see their smiling faces it cheers me right up. All they need to do is say 'hi' and I feel better.

It has helped with the return to normality.

I shared [my food] with others which made me feel good.



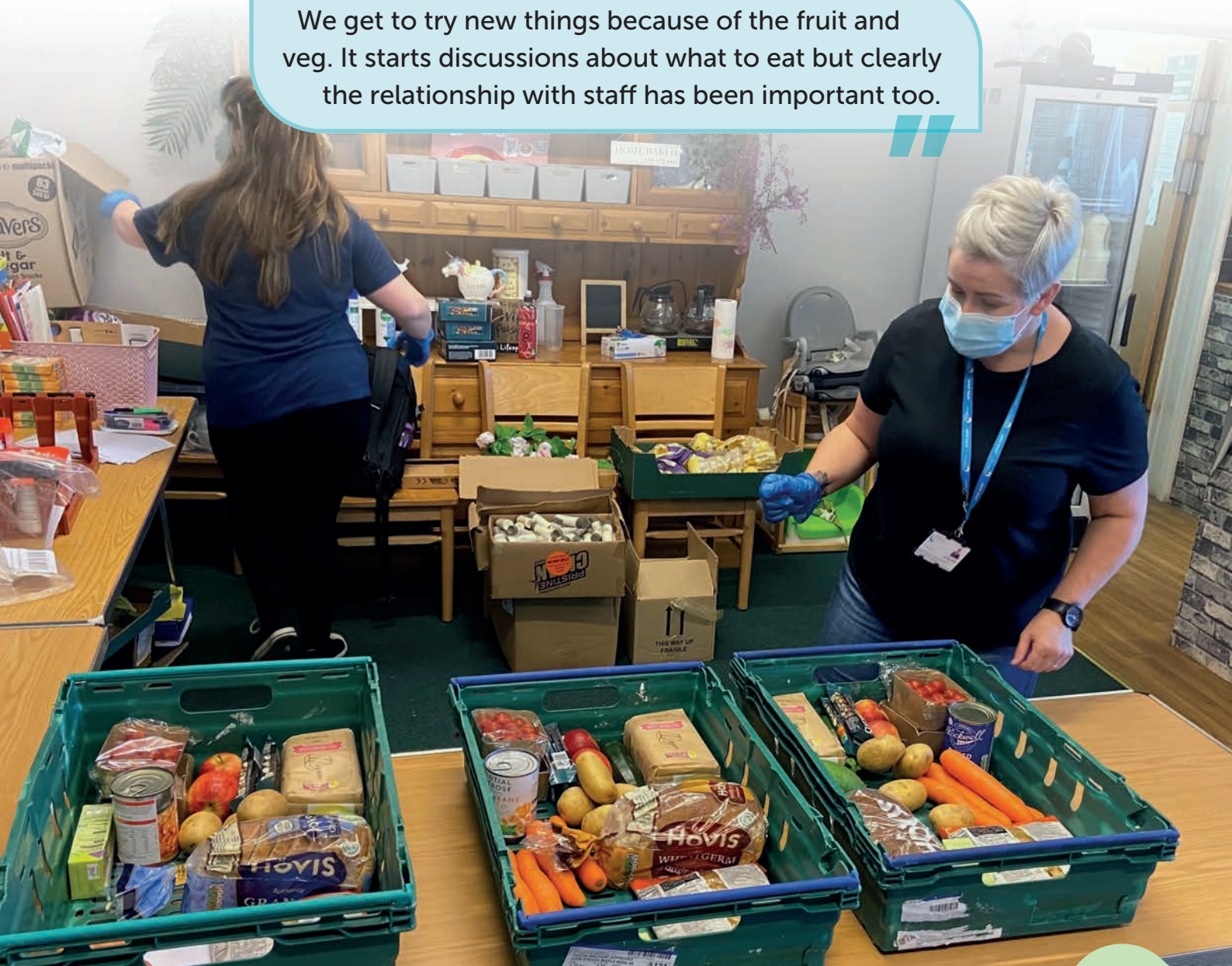
A way of connecting to the Children's Centre Service

Most participants interviewed at both sites had found out about the service through their Children's Centre Service. Their comments indicated how much they valued the connection to the service and had seen the FOOD Club as an opportunity to (re)connect during and following lockdown.

I was involved with the Children's Centre [before FOOD Clubs and lockdown] – it's a good way to reconnect.

It makes a big difference financially, but also it's nice to come and see these women and the lovely staff.

We get to try new things because of the fruit and veg. It starts discussions about what to eat but clearly the relationship with staff has been important too.





Stigma

It was acknowledged by some participants that there was a degree of stigma attached to coming to the Children's Centre Service / council building and accessing the FOOD Clubs.

I wasn't sure if we would qualify.

There is stigma attached to coming here, my cousin wants to come but he's nervous about coming down. I think people think others might look down their nose at you for taking the food packages but it's different to a food bank. You pay for this.

However, some participants were able to acknowledge a difference between how food banks and the FOOD Clubs are perceived.

It was suggested by some participants that FOOD Club ambassadors and promotional materials should clarify the difference between the FOOD Club and food banks to combat stigma – for example, that participation in the FOOD Clubs is beneficial to their family and wider society in terms of the food waste agenda.

It's different to a food bank because there's a limit on what you can take away. So, to feed you for a week you'd have to make multiple trips. But this will set you up for the week and you don't need to make multiple trips.

Future

Overwhelmingly, participants in the FOOD Clubs felt the initiative should be rolled out further, so others can benefit from it – including those with older children, and those without children.

It should be rolled out more widely, it's a really good thing. It makes such great sense.

Other suggestions included the provision of seeds so people could try growing their own vegetables.





Next steps:

The feedback from participants has been valuable to not only understand the motivations for joining FOOD clubs and the benefits for members but has also helped shape plans for the future. The following points are the next steps for the development of FOOD clubs in Nottinghamshire:

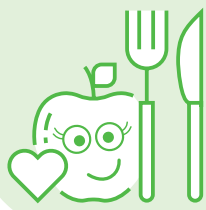
- ✓ Continued roll out of FOOD clubs hosted by the Children's Centre Service and other community settings
- ✓ Consider feedback in this report about motivations and barriers to the FOOD club and adapt future promotional materials to reflect this
- ✓ Develop the FOOD clubs offer in conjunction with the new Family Hubs when established
- ✓ Continue to develop the volunteering role within the FOOD clubs to realise the volunteer-led model

Acknowledgments

Being one of the local authorities selected to be part of the Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Programme has enabled us here in Nottinghamshire to test the limits of existing powers/levers and to develop innovative solutions to local obstacles to enable ambitious local action on obesity. One of the objectives in our trailblazer programme is to make access to affordable healthy food easier for local families. In October 2019 a visit was made to meet the Family Action team and attend a FOOD club hosted in a Children's Centre in central Manchester. During the visit the project team could see how the club worked, and heard about the impact it was making to families.

Fast forward 2 years, which included the start and on-going response to the global pandemic, when a light has been shone on food insecurity and access to food, and there are now (November 2021) 15 FOOD clubs running across Nottinghamshire. Over half of the clubs are hosted by the Children's Centre Service and others within other community venues. Funding is secured to ensure that across Nottinghamshire there will be 30 FOOD Clubs by March 2022, making the County the biggest provider of Family Action FOOD Clubs in the Country.





The Nottinghamshire Trailblazer project team would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank everyone who has enabled and supported the delivery of FOOD clubs in Nottinghamshire.

- The **Family Action** team for working with us on this ambitious roll out and sharing the vision of a network of FOOD clubs to support local families and developing the relationship with FareShare to ensure healthy food is delivered to every club
- Colleagues from **local District and Borough Councils** who have taken the leadership of the project into their own geographical areas and aligned strategic objectives with us.
- Colleagues within the **Children's Centre Service** for testing this model with us and helping to find solutions to barriers which we've faced along the way, along with supporting delivery and volunteers to make the FOOD clubs successful in short timescales. Also thanks to staff for supporting the evaluation, collecting data and contributing to interviews, all of which help us to demonstrate the impact and difference the clubs make to local families
- **Local families** for attending the clubs, trying something new and their feedback, not only through the interviews for this report but also sharing photo's of the delicious meals prepared with the food – keep sharing!
- Our external evaluation partner **Adam Billson** (Adam Billson Consulting Ltd) and **Sara Mair** (Mair Education) for undertaking interviews with local families and Children Centre Service staff team, the wealth of information gathered and presented demonstrates the impact of the FOOD Clubs, not only in terms of what we wanted to achieve – improving access to affordable healthy food, but also wider positive unintended consequences, which collectively provide the evidence for sustaining this work.
- **Your Health, Your Way** service delivered by ABL for their skills in making recipes for the food delivered into the clubs, ready for families to take home and make at home.

Finally a thank you to wider partners who have supported and encouraged from the side lines, seizing opportunities to work in partnership to make FOOD Clubs and other activities of the Trailblazer approach in Nottinghamshire a success.

Nottinghamshire Childhood Obesity Trailblazer Project Group

