FareShare Merseyside

Mental Health/Isolation Project

EVALUATION REPORT – May 2023

LCVS TOGETHER FOR LIVERPOOL FOR GOOD

FareShare fighting hunger, tackling food waste

The LIFE ROOMS

Liverpool City Council

Evaluation conducted by:

Liverpool Charity & Voluntary Services


Ya Ma's Kitchen
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To book your place or to refer someone

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation set out to assess the impact of activities of FareShare Merseyside (FareShare) and its partnership with Mersey Care NHS Foundation.

Two key questions formed the cornerstone of this evaluation. Namely:

1. Does food supplied by FareShare, via frontline food provisions, impact on mental health and isolation in Liverpool?

2. Where (and how) is FareShare Merseyside and its local network most effective in tackling mental health and isolation?

The evaluation involved consultation with 142 individuals from 6 locally based frontline organisations.

Each of the 6 organisations offered a variety of food-based support, including:

Food parcels: loose food items to take home; pre-prepared meals to eat at home; food-based activities e.g. cookery lesson; shared/socially based food activity e.g. sit down meals.

Those accessing food-based services also accessed a wide range of other services, including welfare and housing support, coffee mornings, exercise classes, training courses, mental health and stress management support and bingo. Of all those additional options, the most prominently accessed services were those involving social interaction (accessed by 64% of people receiving food).

Most food services were accessed once a week, but those accessing complimentary social/recreational activities engaged with their local organisation at least 2-3 times a week.

Overall sentiment regarding food-based services was extremely positive. 94% of surveyed clients stated that they were either happy or very happy with the food-based support.

Food appears to play a very important role in promoting engagement with each centre, with 65% of clients stating that food was either important or very important to their engagement.

Whilst a majority of those consulted initially contacted the organisation to access other support. Food was seen by **all** participants as a key catalyst for engaging with other services within each centre. A theme that came through prominently throughout the consultation was that food acted as a “gateway” or “encouragement” to accessing other services.

Food based services play a key role in improving mental health. 92% of surveys individuals reported an improvement in their mental health following engagement in food-based services. When speaking in greater detail, face to face, reasons given included lowering levels of anxiety about the lack of food in and of itself, but also providing access to services that can mitigate other contributory factors to poor mental well-being. This includes accessing support to improve physical activity, links to domestic abuse services, accessing training to improve skills and confidence and developing peer networks through engagement in shared activities.

Food based services are also important in alleviating the impact of social isolation. 95% of consultees stated that they had reduced feelings of isolation following engagement in food-based activity. Food was seen as an important catalyst to engaging with services, creating a positive environment within which a relationship of trust can be developed between organisation and client. In addition, providing food alongside social activities allowed those with food needs to access support under the guise of accessing other services, avoiding perceptions of stigma surrounding the need for food support.

Where services are delivered was seen as incredibly important. Locating services in pre-existing, neighbourhood level organisations was reported as vital. A majority of respondents stated that they would be reluctant to access food support from a newcomer to their local area, regardless of need. Moreover, locally based organisations offered a more personal approach, with increased time given to each client. Local staff/volunteers were reported to have better local intelligence and a higher capacity to refer quickly to follow on services as required.

Consultees also reported that **how services are delivered was also seen as key to the success of food-based support.** Every individual consulted face to face stressed the importance of having different forms of food-based services, available concurrently e.g. food parcels AND food provided at the organisation. Food itself can only solve some of the issues facing people in need and often, food alone does not address other underlying challenges people face.

However, people wish to engage with support differently at different times. Sometimes the same person wants food to take home, other times they require socially based shared dining or food associated with another activity. Using food to encourage involvement and supplement other services increases the likelihood of people engaging with assistance when it is offered.

As such, organisations should, where possible, offer a blend of food-based services to the community they serve, empowering their communities to engage with the support that best suits their needs.

Whilst feedback overall was extremely positive regarding the quality and range of food provided, several constructive suggestions were offered by both clients and frontline staff/volunteers. These ranged from provision of additional information regarding “sell-by” dates, tailored deliveries based on bespoke recipes, more courses and education to help users prepare meals effectively, additional staple foods and additional fruit and vegetables where possible.

In conclusion.

1. **Does food supplied by FareShare, via frontline food provisions, impact on mental health and isolation in Liverpool? Mental health = 92% said yes. Isolation = 95% said yes.**
2. **Where (and how) is Fare Share Merseyside and its local network most effective in tackling mental health and isolation? = By locating food-based support in neighbourhood level community organisations and providing food as part of a wider range of services to address underlying issues facing those in need.**

2. INTRODUCTION

This evaluation set out to assess the impact of activities of FareShare Merseyside (FareShare) and its partnership with Mersey Care NHS Foundation.

In April 2022, FareShare partnered with The Life Rooms at Mersey Care NHS Foundation Trust to begin to work together to support and improve the mental health of Liverpool residents.

The project aims to tackle the low-level mental health and social isolation that is caused by or exacerbated by food insecurity and hunger.

As part of the project, FareShare was funded by The Life Rooms to supply 30 new organisations across the Liverpool City Region, increasing access to good food for individuals and communities at risk of deprivation.

Much of 2022 was spent recruiting new organisations to work together within this partnership, with most partners beginning project delivery by the end of November 2022.

3. OBJECTIVES FOR THIS EVALUATION

Two key questions formed the cornerstone of this evaluation. Namely:

1. Does food supplied by FareShare, via frontline food provision, impact on mental health and isolation in Liverpool?

2. Where (and how) is Fare Share Merseyside and its local network most effective in tackling mental health and isolation?

Other questions were also included as part of this assessment, in order to inform future delivery and to support the continued evolution of FareShare activities.

Such questions informed the structure of both the consultation and the structure of this report.

- What is the nature of service provided at frontline organisations working with FareShare?
- What are the overall sentiments regarding such services?
- What is the role of food in promoting engagement with locally provided support?
- What is the role of food in promoting engagement with additional services?
- What is the impact of food on mental health and isolation?
- What impact (if any) does the location and method of delivering food-based services have on the impact on tackling mental health and isolation?
- What future needs/issues need addressing?
- Additional feedback/suggestions for improvement

4. REVIEW APPROACH

The evaluation was undertaken by Liverpool Charity and Voluntary Services (LCVS), an independent charity operating in Liverpool that works to support voluntary and community sector organisations.

The evaluation was conducted between January – March 2023.

The evaluation included in depth consultation with 6 locally based frontline organisations. These were:

1. Interventions Alliance
2. Bridge Community Centre
3. Bronte Youth and Community Centre
4. Porchfield Community Association
5. Big Life Group
6. Leamington Community Primary School

The consultation utilised a range of different tools and techniques, including:

- 26 unique visits to organisations to conduct face to face evaluation activity.
- 32 one to one interview with clients
- 3 focus group events
- Face to face consultation with a total of 44 unique clients across all 6 projects
- 79 surveys completed by additional services users.
- Consultation with 19 members of staff/volunteers across the 6 organisations
- The completion of 5 self-assessment case studies by clients
- 2 additional case studies provided by frontline organisation volunteers.

In total, **123 unique services users** were consulted during this evaluation. With the additional of staff/volunteers, this consultation involved direct consultation with **142 unique individuals.**

Key findings

5. NATURE OF SERVICES ACCESSED BY CLIENTS

The support accessed by services users of all 6 frontline organisations was extremely varied.

Fig.1: The food related support of each case study organisation was as follows:

Organisation	Activities	Nature of food-based support	Level of intervention
1. Interventions Alliance • City centre • L21TS	Activity hub supporting people on a licence or community order to reintegrate back into their communities and make a positive contribution.	Provisions of food parcels to take home. Average of 8 per week Breakfast and lunch for people attending other services and activities. Monday – Friday.	7- 8 bags of food per week to take home 25 per week take breakfast, between 50-75 access lunch per week.
2. Bridge Community Centre • Clubmoor/Norris Green • L4 9RG	Support to able bodied / those suffering mental health & depression and anxiety related issues / Autism – Aspergers – Learning disabilities/difficulties.	Food during educational classes Daily social space (Mon – Fri) Welfare advice Holiday playscheme – food for children and carers Food parcels and advice on cooking healthily	25 Food parcels per week 6-8 hot meals to tale home per week Circa 52 people per week with food during activities 10 per week access g food during drop-in service
3. Bronte Youth and Community Centre • City Centre • L3 5NB	Provides a facility and service to young people for approximately 50 weeks of the year using a programme that aims to educate and be enjoyable in a warm, welcoming environment. The centre also holds various community-based activities to encourage people of the community to meet and interact.	Food made available at the centre during activities	10 – 12 per week accessing food support
4. Porchfield Community Association • Croxteth • L119DT	Social and educational activities for older people.	Weekly cookery class Food bags	10-12 per week 70 food parcels per week

5. Big Life Group • Toxteth • L8 6TS	Drop-in centre for homeless people, signposting to mental health and accommodation support services. Providing a "living room" atmosphere and social/peer support.	Weekly drop off. Informal pick up of food on demand as people access other services. Hub opens 3 days per week. Weekly hot meal.	106 clients
6. Leamington Community Primary School • Norris Green • L11 7BT	Community school – Family Liaison worker providing targeted support to families in need. Referrals to welfare and other support services.	Targeted food packs for families Weekly food pick up from playground	30 families per week, on average

Promotional Image for Interventions Alliance

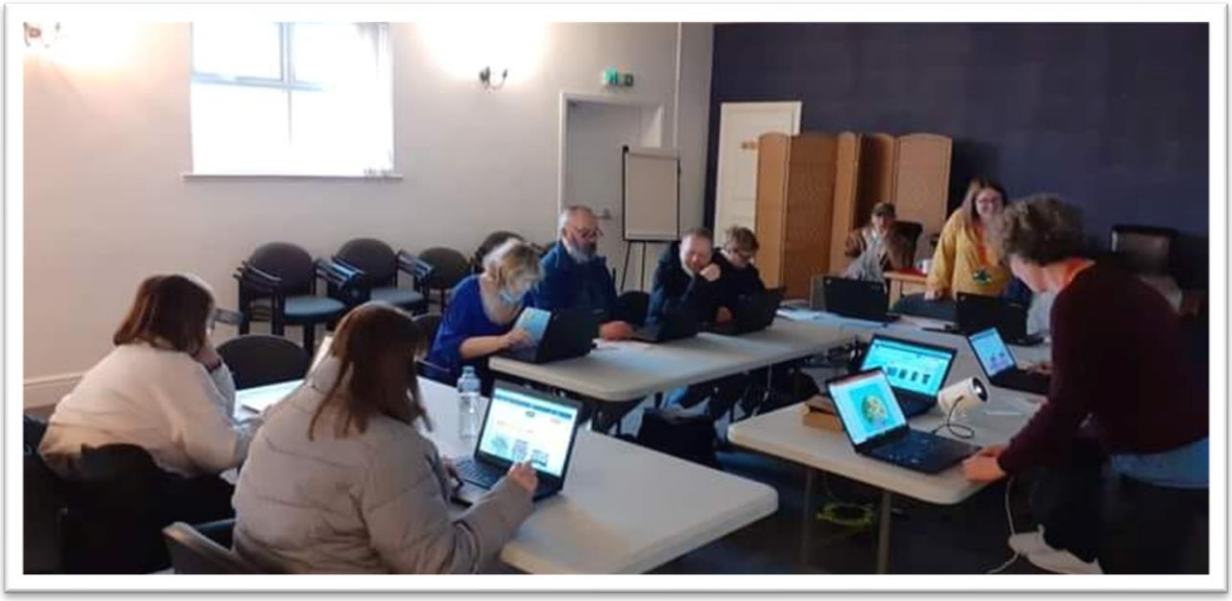
"Came for support first so would have been here but the food is brilliant and helps us all have a chat and interact with each other over meals".

Other than food related support, the services access by users ranged from those promoting social interaction, help with mental health matters, training and education, digital inclusion and advice with debt, employment, and other benefits. Of all the respondents consulted face to face, all reported that they accessed further services in addition to food.

Other activities taken up by those accessing food-based services include:

1. Clothes washing
2. Form filling in relation to welfare and housing rights.
3. Links to domestic abuse services
4. Youth activities
5. Bingo
6. Coffee mornings
7. Showering and personal care support
8. Stress management support
9. Walking groups
10. Arts and craft classes
11. Dance and exercise classes
12. Counselling
13. IT courses
14. First Aid classes
15. Horticultural activities
16. Food handling courses
17. Advice/mentoring for dealing with statutory agencies.
18. Informal gatherings

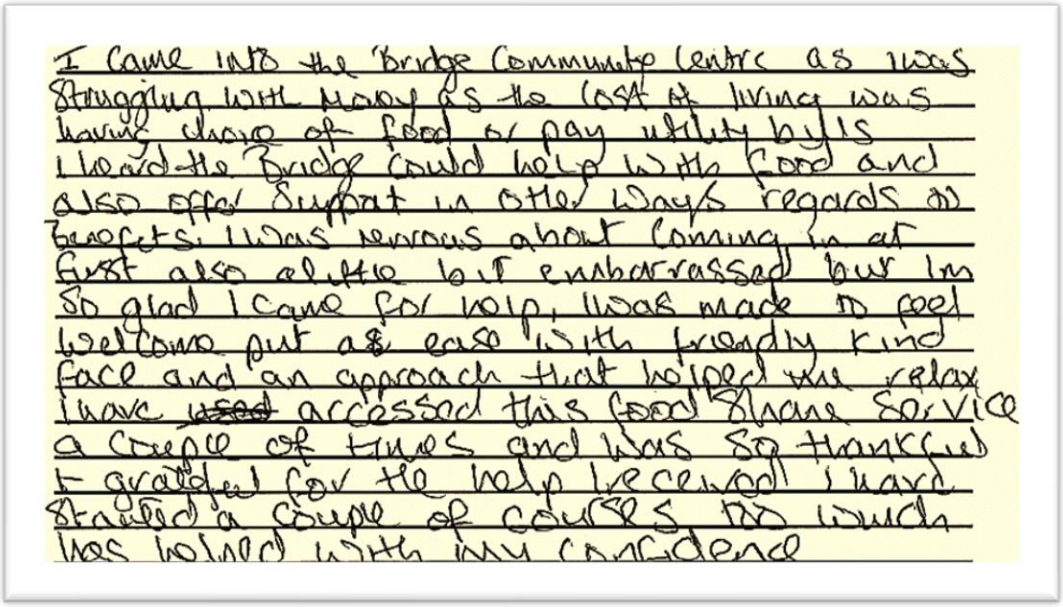
Training activity at Bridge Community Centre



Service in addition to food received	% of respondents accessing that service
Social interaction / meeting new people / making friends	64%
Enjoyment / fun	64%
Help with mental health and wellbeing	61%
Help with physical health and wellbeing	60%
Help with my independence	46%
Creative / cultural / leisure activities	36%
Training/education	29%
Overcoming barriers that are specific to my community	23%
Contact with nature / outdoors	23%
Digital inclusion	18%
Help with parenting/family situations	14%
Advice about debt, employment, or benefits	9%
Other	9%
Asylum/immigration help	1%

NOTE: ANY PERCENTAGES IN THIS REPORT ARE ROUNDED TO THE NEAREST WHOLE PERCENT. AS SUCH, TOTALS MAY RESULT IN A 1% VARIATION OVER/UNDER 100%.

Client case study – NOTE: All transcribed client case studies are attached within the report appendices.


I came into the Bridge Community Centre as I was struggling with money as the cost of living was having choice of food or pay utility bills I heard the Bridge could help with food and also offer support in other ways regards to benefits. I was nervous about coming in at first also a little bit embarrassed but Im so glad I came for help. I was made to feel welcome put at ease with friendly kind face and an approach that helped me relax I have ~~used~~ accessed this food Share Service a couple of times and was so thankful & grateful for the help received I have started a couple of courses too which I was helped with in confidence

6. FREQUENCY OF ACCESSING SUPPORT

Most clients consulted (63%) accessed food-based support once a week, with 24% accessing support 2-3 times a week. Only 12% of clients accessed services less than once a week.

However, the level of engagement across all different services varied significantly, depending on the nature of the services provided.

Frequency of access was higher amongst those individuals who used services to reduce social isolation, as they attended the centre primarily for social interaction activities and peer support. These individuals accessed the centre at least 2-3 times per week. Organisations such as Big Life and Bridge Community Centre were typical in this regard.

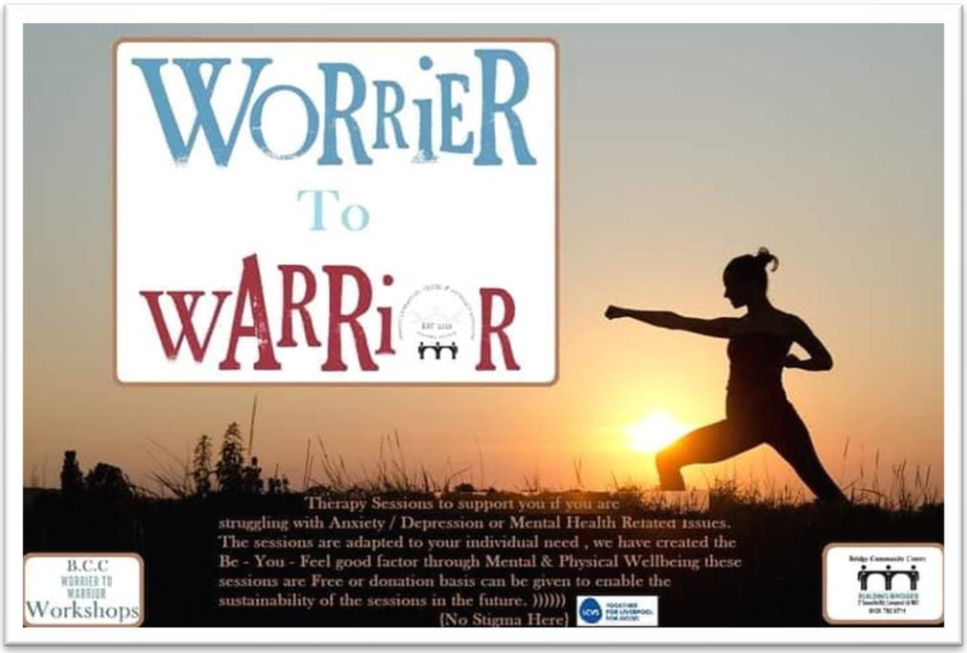
Those who accessed the services mainly for food or for other specific reasons accessed the services less frequently. This would usually coincide with a "sit down" meal event, a cookery class, attending specific training courses or appointments or picking up food as part of a package to take home. These individuals attended once or twice a week, typically. Most of the other organisations fell into this category.

Interventions Alliance had a relatively even spread between those respondents' accessing services once a week and those accessing services more frequently.

Frequency of access	% of respondents
Over 4 times a week	0%
2-3 times a week	24%
Once a week	63%
Less than once a week	12%
Never	1%

"I can't thank the food services I receive enough. It has taken a lot of stress and worry away".

Bridge Community Centre mental health support activity



Healthy eating learning activity at Porchfield Community Association

"The FareShare and the centre has been a godsend for me, it is a very social place, I find myself participating in stuff I would never do, gets me out of the house, and gets me active. It's such a boon to our mental health too, my family are happy for me to be involved and a bit more active, it has made everything better, probation meetings are shorter, happier, and much less stressful."

7. OVERALL SENTIMENTS REGARDING SERVICES RECEIVED

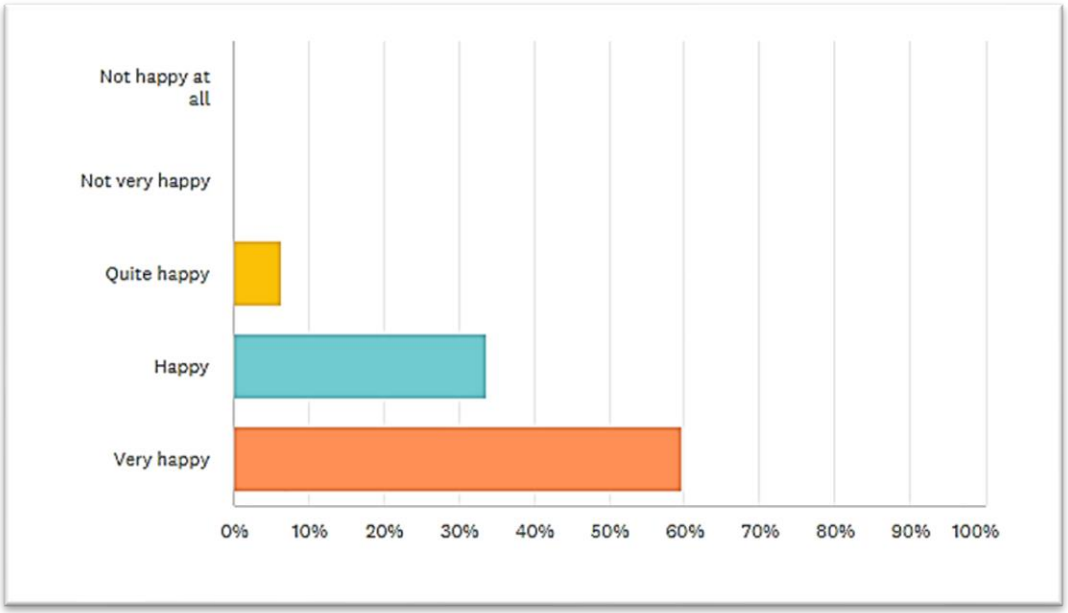
Overall sentiment from clients was extremely positive. 94% of surveyed clients stated that they were either happy or very happy with the food-based support they received. No respondents stated that they were unhappy with any of the services.

This was reflected in the face-to-face feedback received at all 6 local organisations. All individuals responded extremely positively when discussing the services they received. The impact will be discussed in more detail later in this report, but the overall themes of feedback received were that:

- Food was of a high quality.
- Services received were extremely effective in addressing physical hunger.
- Food played a key role in improving mental health and reducing social isolation.
- Food was important in acting as a gateway to support.
- Food made accessing other services more accessible.
- Food based services received were flexibly delivered.
- Staff and volunteers were skilled, sensitive and adaptable.

How happy are you with your food-based services?

Answer choices	% of respondents
Not happy at all	0%
Not very happy	0%
Quite happy	6%
Happy	34%
Very happy	60%



You run a purposeful scheme that you will probably never really know just how important the scheme is for us".

I HEARD ABOUT THE FARESHARE SERVICE BY VOLUNTEERING IN THE COMMUNITY CENTRE THE SERVICE HELPS ALOT TOWARDS EVERYDAY LIFE IN I HAVE ACCESS TO THE FRESH PRODUCE AND FOOD ALSO THE COURSES THAT ARE PROVIDED

Porchfield Community Centre food bags

A cookery class participant

8. ROLE OF FOOD IN PROMOTING ENGAGEMENT WITH EACH SERVICE

It should be noted that this evaluation was conducted relatively early in the delivery of this current FareShare project. All organisations had been using FareShare food by the time of the evaluation, but 3 had only begun using FareShare food by November 2022. This may have limited the number of users that would be entirely new to each organisation by the time of this evaluation. As such, there was less evidence of food being the primary driver to engagement, with the majority of consultees already engaging for other support.

Nonetheless, feedback in this area was again extremely positive.

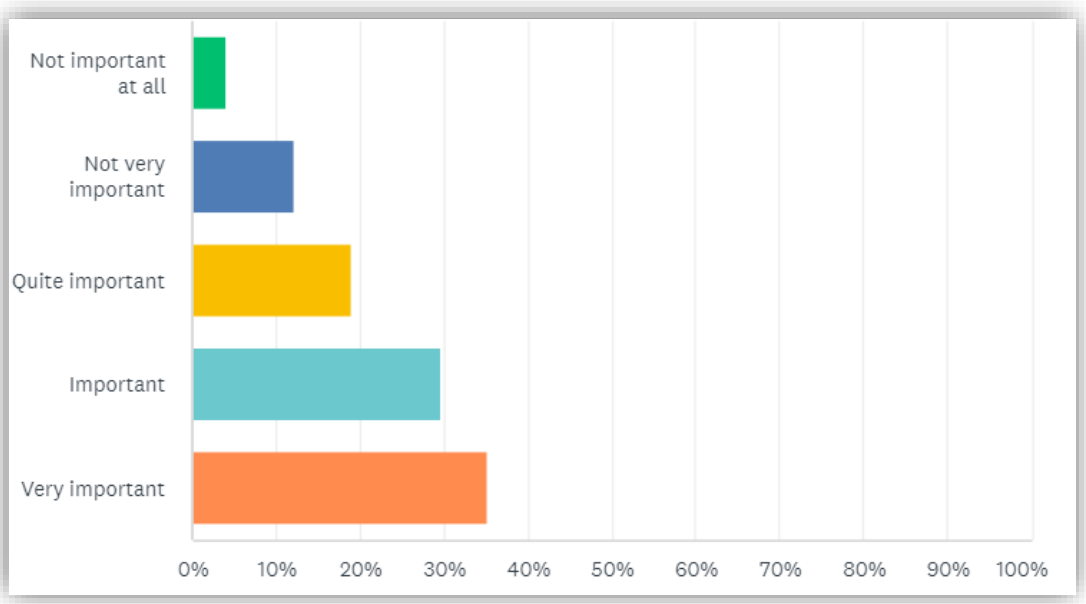
As indicated below, only 16% of survey respondents stated that food was not important at all or not very important to their engagement with the service. Conversely, 65% stated that food was either important or very important to their engagement.

Whilst a majority of those consulted on a face-to-face basis stated that they mainly came to the organisation to access other services, there was a strong sense that food was an important reason for people to keep engaged in a service.

For example, a majority of those accessing Interventions Alliance were referred to the centre as a part of their journey through the judicial system. Many stated that they would have come to the facility anyway, but that the provision of food helped to provide an environment that encouraged them to engage with ongoing support.

Similarly, most participants at Bridge Community Centre were already accessing services from the organisation but felt that cost of living concerns meant that they had begun to access food-based support from the organisation in addition to assistance already being provided.

> "The food wasn't important at the start, but it has become more important ad time has gone on, I've been more involved in it and more likely to use it at home. It's a social thing too though, something people can rally around and spend a little time with each other that feels more relaxed."



ANSWER CHOICES	% of respondents
Not important at all	4%
Not very important	12%
Quite important	19%
Important	30%
Very important	35%

"It's all that the food is part of a larger programme to get us back on our feet again, I don't need the food at home, but many do. The food facilitates interaction among participants here and that is critical. This is a learning, social space that has helped my mental health and integration, building my confidence. I would still be here if it didn't have the food, but you know hoe critical it is for some, this pace is the only source of food for some".

9. ROLE OF FOOD IN PROMOTING ENGAGEMENT IN OTHER SERVICES

As mentioned, a majority of those consulted initially contacted the organisation to access other support to food.

For example, Leamington School users typically had children already attending the school. Bridge Community Centre users were primarily referred to the organisation via Job Centre Plus. Bronte Youth and Community Centre users primarily had children attending the centre for youth activities and Porchfield Centre clients often engaged with the centre in order to attend recreational and social activities.

Nonetheless, food was seen by **all** participants as a key catalyst for engaging with other services within each centre. A theme that came through prominently throughout the consultation was that food acted as a "gateway" or "encouragement" to accessing other services. Food was reported as catalyst to breaking down barriers to engagement and increasing the likelihood of other underlying challenges being discussed.

Feedback from consultees raised common themes:

- Food provision at different services reduced a cost burden in participating in additional activities, thereby promoting further engagement.
- The offer of food when describing further activities helps to generate a sense that subsequent services would be delivered in an inclusive, informal and accessible environment.
- Accessing food was a low commitment means by which individuals can initially engage with an organisation with whom they might not be familiar.
- Arriving for food parcels as an initial form of support allowed services users to engage with frontline staff/volunteers, who could further identify additional needs during conversation and signpost individuals to other services, both within and outside each frontline organisation. This was a key element of how services are delivered at Leamington School. A school environment is not readily open to the wider community and most adult clients initially engage with the services simply through accessing food parcels/picking up food from the playground. However, this gave the family liaison officer at Leamington an opportunity to discuss additional challenges facing those receiving food, allowing signposting to other services and support agencies.

"I came first time for the service and the support so I'm good there, the food was a later thing for me, but it has been a huge help. I think everyone would be here one way or another through bail or after jail, but the food stuff is great. It's a thing where we all have a meal together and share that, share stories and tips on how to get on with it."

10. IMPACT OF FOOD-BASED SUPPORT ON MENTAL HEALTH

Feedback from all 6 consultee organisations was overwhelmingly positive. 92% of surveyed clients reported that food-based services have a positive or very positive impact on their mental health.

All 6 organisations reported that food played a key role in improving the mental health and well-being of their clients, either:

- By directly alleviating stress/anxiety caused by the lack of access to food itself; or by
- Providing access to other services that also alleviated stress/anxiety and supported mental health; or
- Creating an environment that promoted calmness, trust, social engagement, reduced isolation, safety and well-being.

Participants across all 6 centres commented on the cost-of-living crisis and how that has increased stress and anxiety levels for themselves and their families. As such, having access to food related support helped to directly mitigate the impact of the increase in food costs on clients. Income that they had could be directed to cover other costs such as heating, clothing, and transport costs.

Whilst food was regularly referenced often as a key part of improving mental health, the reasons for this differed from centre to centre.

For example, in Bridge Community Centre, several clients refenced that, not only were food prices causing anxiety, but that some parents accessing the centre simply did not eat for days at a time because of an acute lack of funds. Not only did this cause physical harm, but also caused significant mental harm to both the parents and their children, who were upset at the stress caused to their parents. The provision of food directly helped to alleviate this immediate cause of poor mental health.

Cookery class taking place at Porchfield Community Centre

Similarly, Big Life clients referenced acute lack of food as a significant challenge in their lives. This caused significant distress and anxiety, which was relieved somewhat by the provision of food products.

Leamington clients also specifically referenced cost of living as a direct cause of anxiety and that accessing food directly mitigated against the worst impacts of financial pressures.

In all settings, food was also seen as a catalyst for providing other services in an environment that supported improved mental health.

Bridge Community Centre delivered training courses promoting mental health wellbeing and “emergency mental health first aid”, empowering clients to manage their own mental health more effectively and support others.

Interventions Alliance consultees were very extremely positive in relation to how food helped to improve their mental health. Not only did they often lack food and the means to cook it in their transitionary accommodation upon leading prison, but they had also recently left prison, with many reporting existing in highly stressful and oppressive environments with little opportunity to relax or develop trusting relationships.

Mental health support service advertised at Bridge Community Centre

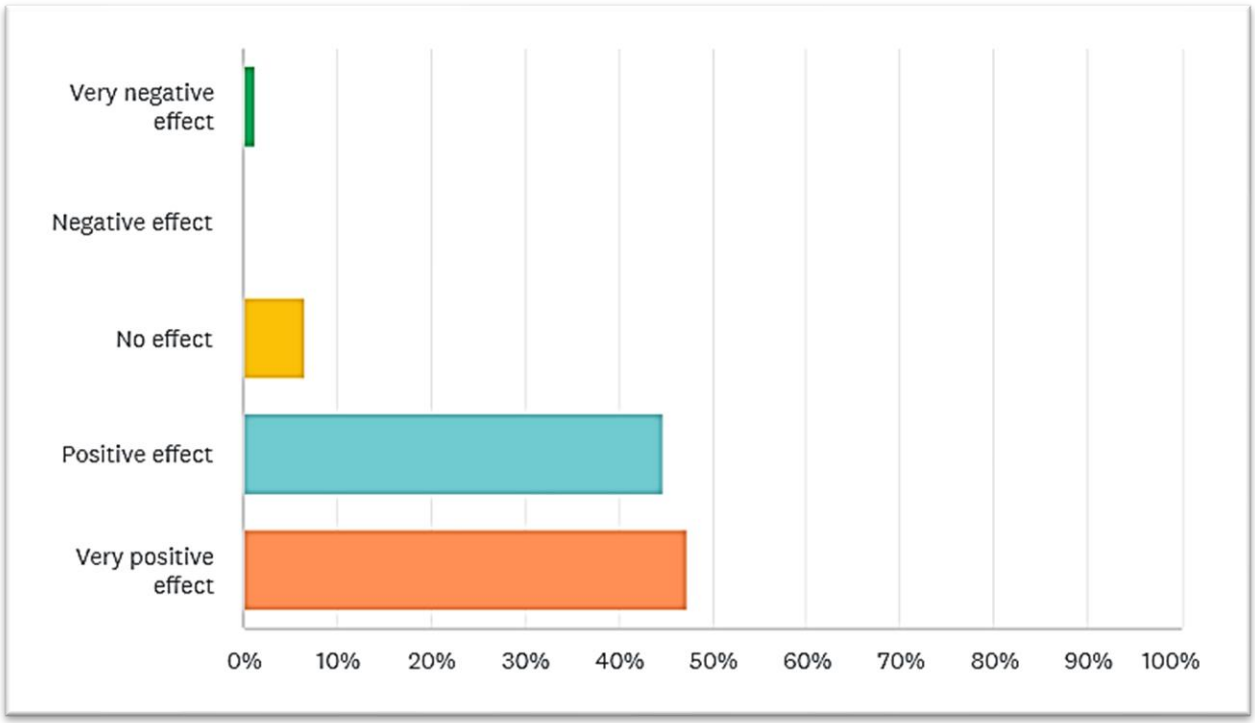
Interventions Alliance consultees highlighted the informal "living room" atmosphere within that helped to diffuse tensions when they first engaged with the organisation, providing an environment that helped them to relax, which improve their mental health and promoted engagement with further activities. This further engagement reinforced the improvements in their mental health by providing them with a peer support group of other clients, opportunities to socialise and develop practical skills in matters such as banking/managing their homes etc.

A significant proportion of Porchfield clients are older women, many of whom have been widowed. Accessing food in a social setting was identified by participants as a key factor in improving their mental health because of feelings of improved inclusion and reduced isolation. Having access to a group of likeminded people also provided a peer support network outside of Porchfield, where individuals could assist each other during times of increased anxiety and stress.

Big Life clients reported particularly high levels of depression, because of homelessness/tenuous housing situation. Consultees reported that having food both in the centre-based setting and to take away to heat at their accommodation helped alleviate the symptoms of depression and help provide a platform for stability, which in turn helped improved mental health. Clients also reported accessing additional mental health support services whilst attending food-based activity, further improving their mental health.

All the centres, apart from Leamington School, highlighted to importance of a sense of community in accessing the service. Feedback regarding Leamington was extremely positive,

but the service delivery model focused more on direct one to one support packages to families rather than community-wide, open access activities.



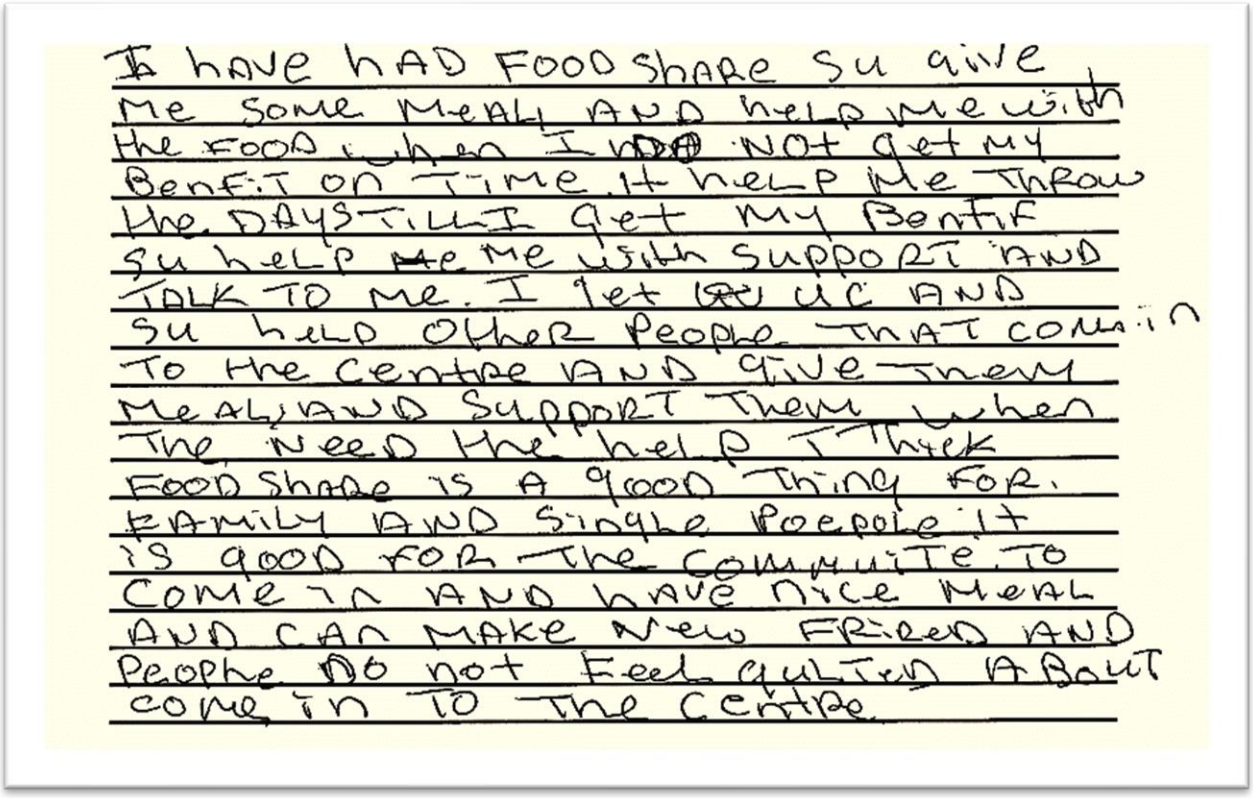
ANSWER CHOICES	% of respondents
Very negative effect	1%
Negative effect	0%
No effect	7%
Positive effect	45%
Very positive effect	47%

"The sessions and the food help with our mental health and wellbeing, it is a very social activity and gets us all out of the house"

"This place has been a huge part of my moving from incarceration back into the community and the food has helped me gain new skills and look after myself, I'm in a very different place now".

"Gives us, some of us, full meals so help hugely. I'm not from here so it has been a huge benefit to happiness and mental health, though this is more about seeing people and reducing isolation".

"It has been amazing, they make something with all of this, and it has helped with my self-confidence, it has been a real benefit to my Mental health, its non-judgemental and really friendly. I feel more engaged, this is my community now. There has not been a single issue and we get to bring some food home".


I have had food share su give me some meal and help me with the food when I not get my benefit on time it help me throw the days till I get my benfit su help me me with support and talk to me. I let uc and su help other people that coming to the centre and give them meal and support them when the need the help I think food share is a good thing for. family and single people it is good for the communite. to come in and have nice meal and can make new friend and people do not feel guilty about come in to the centre

Food provided at Porchfield Community Association

11. IMPACT OF FOOD-BASED SUPPORT ON ISOLATION

As with improvements in mental health, feedback regarding the impact of food-based support was extremely positive in reducing feelings of isolation. As indicated below, 95% of surveyed clients reported a positive or very positive effect in reducing their sense of isolation.

Providing food-based services in a community setting appears to be a key contributor to consultees having reduced isolation. This message came through very strongly from consultees at all six organisations.

When asked about this in greater detail, participants often referenced the welcoming nature of each setting. All the organisations other than Leamington School offered a range of services via an open-door policy, which users stated helped to promote accessibility and reduce increase their confidence about engaging with support. The social nature of each setting appears to cultivate a sense of community, with consultees reporting that it increased the likelihood of new clients engaging with likeminded people and accessing support in a non-judgemental manner.

Consultees reported that a key element in reducing feelings of isolation was meeting people in similar situations to themselves. This could be other older people (Porchfield), those leaving the judicial system (Interventions Alliance), people experiencing homelessness (Big Life), people with disabilities (Bridge) etc. Each organisation provided support to a cohort of people who could support provide peer support to new clients and make them feel

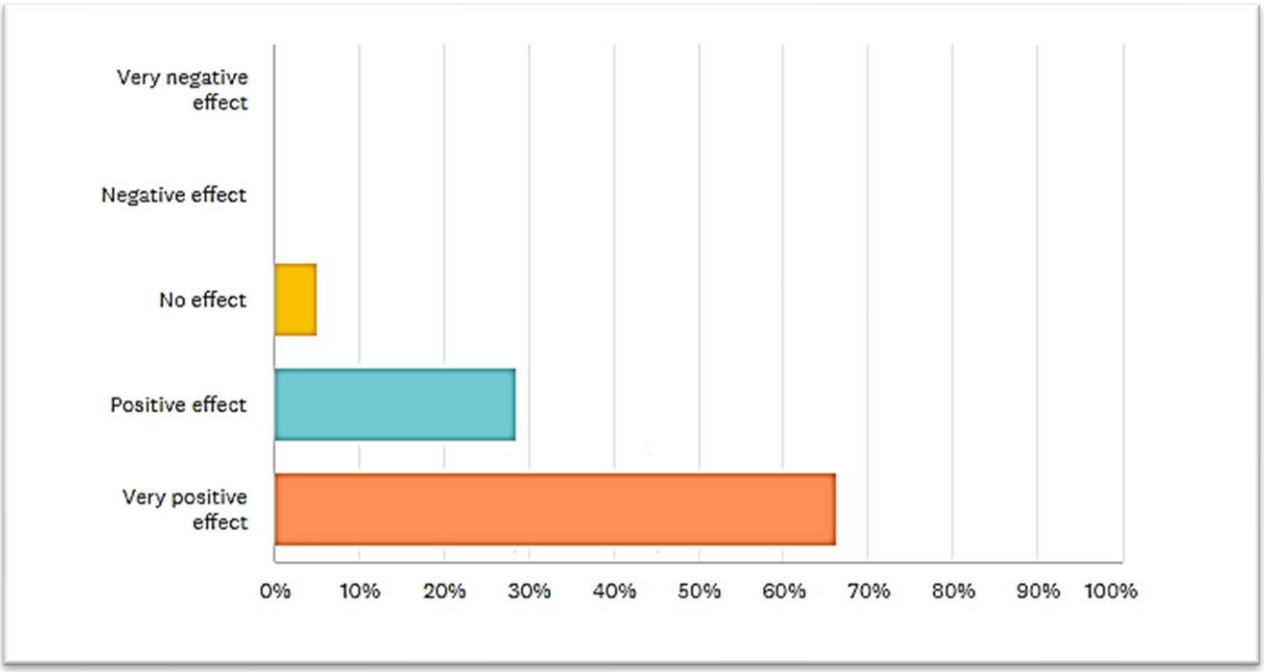
welcome. The importance of this approach was reference prominently by consultees from all six organizations.

Group activity supported by food at Porchfield Community Centre

Even those individuals who only access food parcels, as opposed to participating in shared food-based activities, felt better engaged in their community and felt that there were options available to them for future support, should they wish to access them. Parents accessing support via Leamington primarily accessed food parcel-based support but reported feeling more involved in their community by virtue of improved links with the school and its wider support network.

Several Bridge Community Centre consultees reported being referred to the centre by statutory services that simply felt their circumstances was too complex for their staffing capacity, with them being simply passed over to Bridge without any further support provided. A number of consultees reported that this made them feel isolated and excluded from mainstream services. After accessing food-based support at the Bridge, these consultees reported a significantly improved sense of belonging and reduced social isolation. All reported an increase in participation in social activity as a result.

A number of Big Life clients specifically highlighted the initial motivation for engagement was social contact in a safe setting. They reported that it was difficult to develop strong social links whilst homeless and that contact can often be tenuous and unsafe. Big Life provides a safe place for individuals to socialise, reducing their sense of isolation and improving their feeling of being engaged in a community.



ANSWER CHOICES	% of respondents
Very negative effect	0%
Negative effect	0%
No effect	5%
Positive effect	29%
Very positive effect	66%

"It has helped with meal planning and finding deals through the week, it is very social, so it does help with loneliness too. Finding deals (discussed during cooking class) and simple ways of cooking have been very helpful".

"I get a lot of anxiety and never really left the house before coming here. After coming her I really feel part of something and look forward to coming all the time. "

"The job centre just didn't help me. It's like I did something wrong. But here I feel like I can be helpful, and they really help me get involved".

Fitness activity taking place at Bridge Community Centre


FOOD FOR THOUGHT THURSDAYS
HEALTHY LIVING
Bridge Community Centre is offering our new food for thought Thursdays to our most vulnerable & isolated elderly within the community
Pop along for a lunch to go or call us to book your sitting place here with us at the centre.
Bridge Community Centre
2 Daneville Road L4 9RG
Call us on 0151 792 8711

12. OTHER BENEFITS

Beneficiaries from all six local organisations provided feedback stating that they received additional benefits from engaging with food-based services at their respective centres.

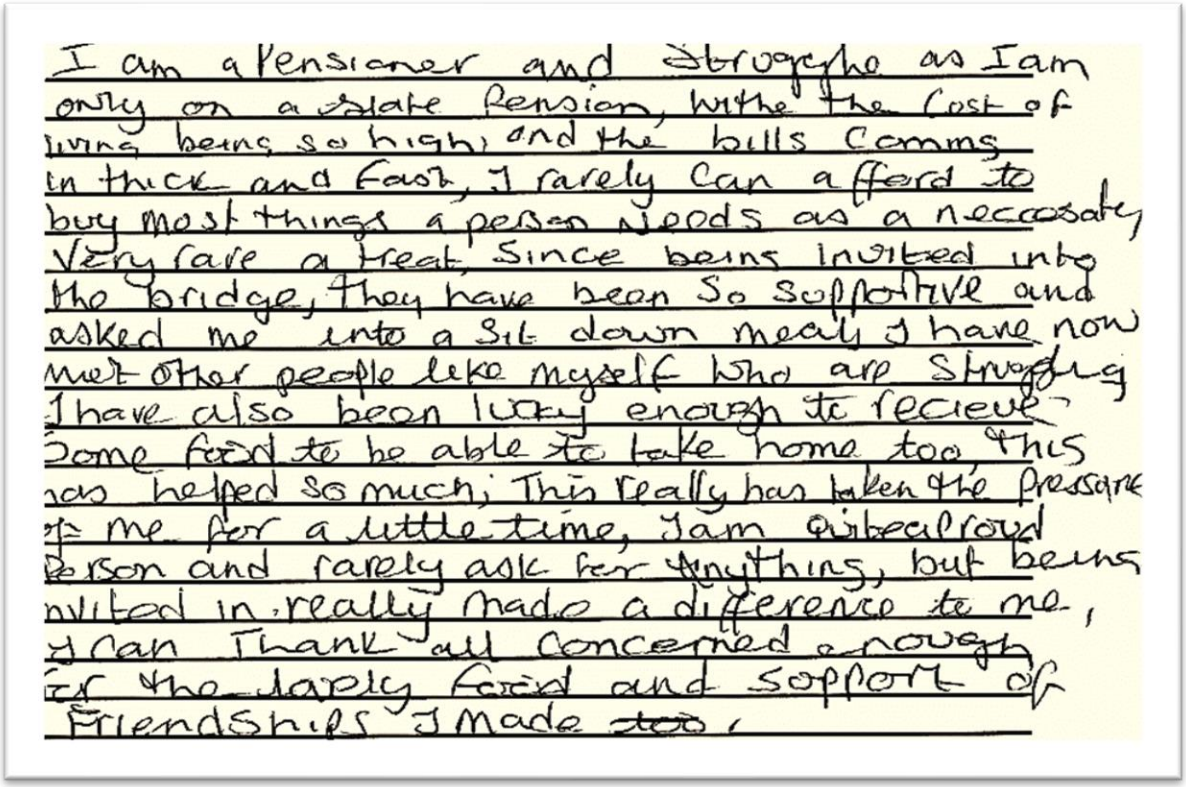
These included:

- A significant majority of those consulted face to face stated that accessing support in a social environment also improved their physical wellbeing.

Social isolation can lead to poor eating habits and malnutrition. A high proportion of face-to-face consultees reported that, prior to engaging with the activities and accessing food, they consumed less healthy food and that eating alone more frequently encouraged poor dietary habits. Many reported that cooking for one reduced their motivation to cook and enjoy a "proper meal", opting for quick, nutritionally incomplete meals like tea and toast.

Conversely, accessing food from their respective centre promoted healthier dietary habits. This was by virtue of:

- Provision of healthier, higher quality ingredients
- Provision of healthy eating tips and guidance, including some organisations giving instructions to take home alongside food packages.
- Encouragement and support from staff and volunteers to try new recipes and ideas.
- Receiving pre-cooked meals, either to take home with them or to eat at the centre itself.


I am a Pensioner and Struggle as I am only on a State Pension, with the Cost of living being so high, and the bills Comms in thick and fast, I rarely can afford to buy most things a person needs as a necessity very rare a treat, Since being invited into the bridge, they have been So Supportive and asked me into a Sit down meal I have now met other people like myself who are Struggling I have also been lucky enough to recieve some food to be able to take home too, This has helped so much, This really has taken the pressure off me for a little time, I am a proud person and rarely ask for anything, but being invited in really made a difference to me, I can Thank all concerned enough for the lovely food and support & Friendships I made too,

- Consultees also reported improved physical health because of having to leave home to come to their respective centre. That act alone promoted increased physical activity and improved health.

Other clients, e.g., those attending Porchfield and Bridge Community centre, client reported engaging in physical activity e.g., dancing/exercise classes as a result of their engagement.

- Clients reported an increased sense of independence because of food related support. When prompted further on this, a prominent message relayed back to the evaluator was that providing food-based support reduced one additional burden of responsibility on those for who may be caring for others but are experiencing difficult circumstances in their lives. Taking away the anxiety relating to food appears to allow individuals to focus on other areas for personal development, giving an additional sense of agency and improving their confidence.

- A significant proportion of respondents referenced that food-based assistance also supported a more settled homelife. Reductions in anxiety reduced the level of arguments and disruption at home, which supported a more stable family environment. Several parent respondents mentioned that this also supported their child's development at school, with the home environment being more conductive to homework and engagement with school activity.

As reported elsewhere in this report, when asked what other services individuals accessed other than food, a large range of other services were reported as being accessed, with the most prominent being support with physical/mental health.

Very few consultees stated that food was the only service they received from their local organisation. This was reflected in both the conservations held face to face and the survey results received.

"I had not eaten anything for 3 days before coming here. I only had enough food for my children. Times are so hard. Without the Bridge, the food and the help they have me I don't know if I'd be here today".

Whilst here getting food, I've also been able to speak to the psychoanalyst and they helped me fill in my PIP form. They also signposted me to a choir that I have started attending and they helped me find a place to live."

As a result of accessing food and these additional services, other benefits prominently referenced by consultees included:

- Accessing welfare advice and housing support, leading to clients enjoying more secure accommodation and an improved financial situation. Several consultees reported securing improved financial well-being as a direct result of additional services accessed at their local organisation.
- Significantly improved feelings of self-confidence and capacity to manage matters for themselves.
- Participants within Interventions Alliance reported that their improved mental health had contributed to more positive engagement with probation services. This reduced the amount of time spent in probation meetings and accelerated the transition from the judicial process to accessing learning and other development opportunities, including housing and job opportunities.
- Bridge Centre participants spoke about accessing training courses that they would otherwise not engage with, giving them new skills, as well as opportunities to take up work and support family members/dependents financially.
- All participants referenced in improvement in their self-esteem and confidence during interviews.
- A Leamington school consultee stated that they had been in violent relationships in the past and that had relocated to the school to ensure their safety. The additional support provided by the school, associated with food provision, increased their feeling of safety. This participant also mentioned that during their previous relationship, they were financially controlled by a partner and were still having difficult managing money. Free food provision helped to alleviate the difficulties of managing money.

Cooking demonstration at Porchfield Community Association

- Consultees from multiple organisations referenced being in low paying employment and not in receipt of means-based benefits. The increase in cost of living meant that, were it not for food-based support, they would have to consider leaving employment. Leaving employment would allow them to access additional statutory benefits but would cause other forms of harm. When prompted about this, users mentioned the negative impact unemployment would have on their mental health and setting a poor example to their children regarding the importance of work.
- Of the volunteers interviewed during this process, a majority had previously accessed services at the organisation themselves. Having received support, each reported that support increased their skills and confidence to the extent that they felt able to volunteer for the organisation itself. As such, using food as a lever to encourage engagement appears to be a strong motivator for keeping users involved even as their acute needs reduce. Clients appear to wish to remain involved in their "host organisation", giving back to the organisation and supporting others who are in similar situations to themselves. Not only does this provide valuable experience for the volunteer, but it provides better services to the organisation and their services users, as their volunteers have lived experience of the issues facing their other clients.
- Several volunteer consultees were previously asylum seekers who had been subsequently granted leave to remain. The volunteering opportunities provided to them following on from receiving food-based support supported their further integration into the local community, improving their language skills and links to the community in which they lived
- Organisations hosting the volunteers from other background/nations also referenced the extra dimension given to them as a service by having volunteers able to speak multiple languages. This knock-on effect ensures that such groups can offer their services to newer residents for who English is not their first language.
- Multiple consultees reported that they were actively seeking employment opportunities because of the skills received following their time spent volunteering.

"Before coming here, I did not feel safe and I did not know anyone. Coming here helped calm me down and find out about what other help I can get. The food was why I started talking to the staff, but they put me in touch with other help too."

An additional mental health service provided at Bridge Community Centre

13. WHERE (AND HOW) IS FARESHARE MERSEYSIDE AND IT'S LOCAL NETWORK MOST EFFECTIVE IN TACKLING MENTAL HEALTH AND ISOLATION?

Where?

In addition to asking whether food-based services had helped improve their mental health and reduce isolation, the next question asked was the importance of the location and setting from which food-based services are delivered.

The key messages received from consultees were:

- The setting/location of food-based services was extremely important. Incorrectly placed services would not have been accessed by almost all consulted individuals, regardless of need.
- Placing food-based services within pre-existing community organisations was critical to encouraging them to access support. These organisations are trusted by the local community and they can rely on "word of mouth" from people that are already known to those who may need support. A majority of consultees learned about each organisation via informal social networks in their community.
- Locally based organisations have significant local intelligence regarding additional services. Staff were referenced as having prior knowledge of their needs and a pre-existing knowledge of other services that may be able to assist e.g., counselling/social activity organisations.
- Several consultees referenced the usefulness of a named person within their local organisation making a personal referral to other services as expediting support from that service. As such, services from another organisation are often accessed more quickly than via anonymous/remote referral systems.
- Linking food to other activities that promoted well-being was extremely helpful in encouraging participation.
- Linking food to additional services offered within a community setting was extremely important. A "one stop shop" approach was referenced as being preferable to having to access multiple services from different organisations. This supported continuity of service, whilst reducing the need to "re-explain" issues/revisit difficult circumstances and trauma.
- Placing food support in existing community facilities provided a degree of "discretion" to people who may feel stigma about needing access to food. Key words such as "shame" were commonly referred in conversations. Allowing people to access food without it being made public knowledge promoted more positive engagement with a service and increased the likelihood of accessing other support.

> "I only came because everyone in the area knows this centre. People trust the staff and are sometimes even friends and family. I don't think I'd have come if it was a bunch of strangers".

How?

All six organisations employed multiple models for delivery and did not rely on a single mechanism/model for delivering food-based support.

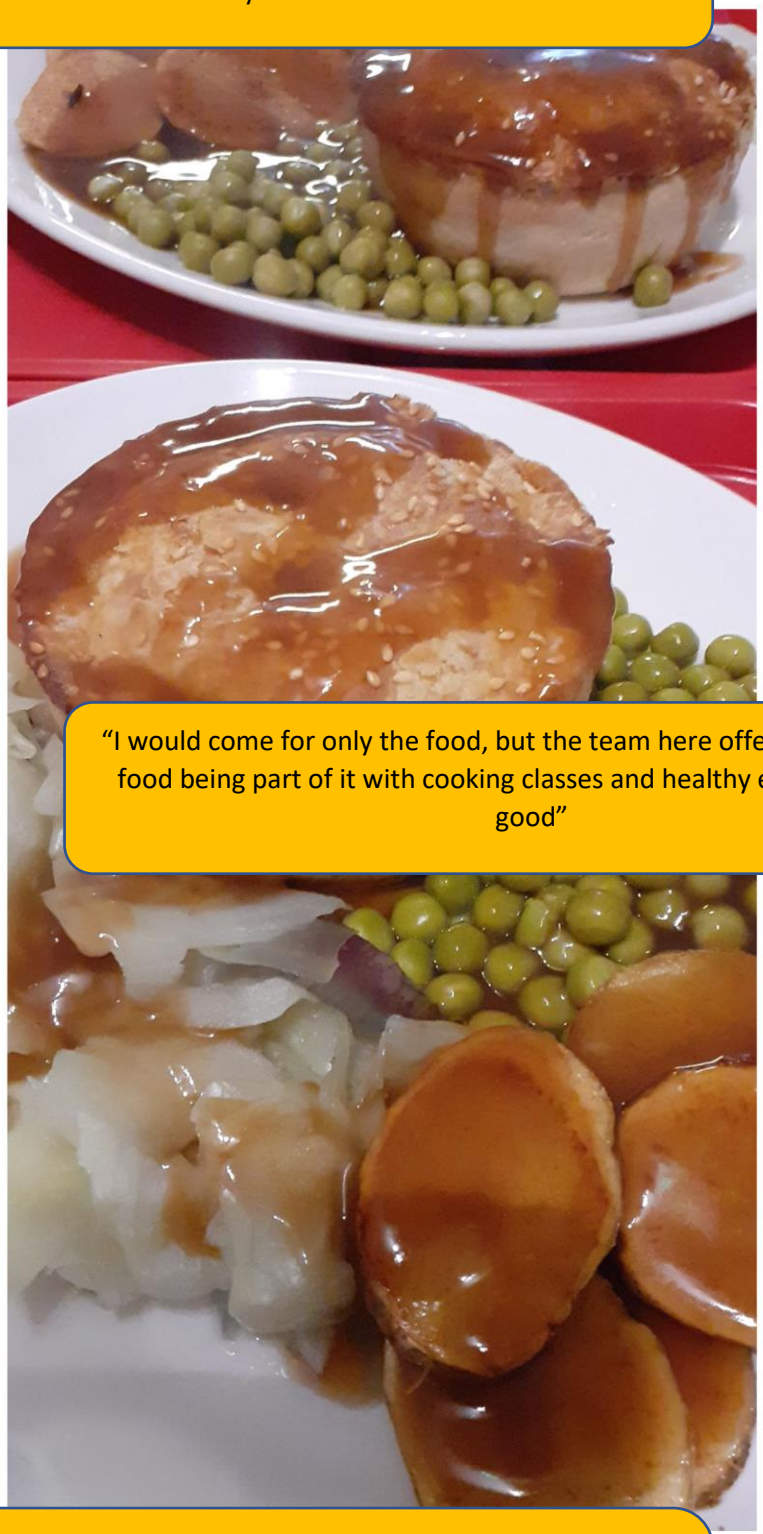
Some users accessed food only, others accessed food in a social setting. Indeed, almost all individuals consulted during this process each accessed food-based services in multiple ways. On some occasions taking food items to cook at home, whilst on other occasions eating food in a social setting, depending on their circumstances.

The key messages received from consultees were:

- It was critical that the food could be delivered flexibly, in different ways, to meet people's evolving needs at different times. Some users sometimes only needed a food parcel, but at other times felt an acute need to participate in a shared dining/social activity.
- A high number of consultees stated that offering a food bank alone limited choice and risked disempowered those in need from being able to select the service and engagement that best suited them. Embedding services within facilities offering additional services encouraged users to feel agency about how they addressed issues in their lives
- Making participation in other activities a mandatory requirement to access food would be an extremely strong disincentive for people to access support. Participants always preferred food available on its own as an option
- Those participants that accessed food early in their engagement with an organisation reported a stronger affinity with staff and referenced a strong sense of welcome. This included even simple items such as tea and biscuits during their initial consultation. When asked about this, many reported that it generated an informal atmosphere and a feeling of trust, in contrast to the formal, appointment based statutory services with which they had previously engaged
- A significant number of those interviewed stated that, had services only been delivered via a traditional food bank model, they would not have accessed the services. Reasons given for this primarily related to stigma and a reluctance to want to ask for food and food alone.
- An open-door policy was critically important to accessing the services that improved mental health. Services that operated a "walk-up" approach received extremely strong feedback.
- Offering food and mental health services at different times, on different days, provided an increased incentive to engage. A more rigid service would be less likely to promote involvement.

"The stigma of a food bank is bad. I never thought I'd be the sort of person that needs a food bank. I don't think I'd have come here if it was just a food bank".

“I just couldn’t get any appointments. It was so frustrating and stressful. But then they made the call for me, and I got an appointment the next day.”



“I would come for only the food, but the team here offer so much more, food being part of it with cooking classes and healthy eating classes is good”

“It helps with getting a couple of meals most weekends and helps with what to do with the food. Getting out of the house has been great, helps with feeling better and spending time with other people, I am involved in much more now. My kids are happy that I am more active now, especially after lockdown”.

14. FEEDBACK RE: FARESHARE – SUGGESTIONS/IMPROVEMENTS

Clients

As referenced elsewhere, feedback from clients was extremely positive. Nonetheless, in the interest of continued improvement, participants were asked about what improvements could be made to the food-based services they accessed.

- Additional staple foods were requested by a number of services users
- The addition of spices would be welcome as it would encourage more diversification to the dishes that services users could prepare/receive.
- Several users, as well as volunteers, requested the provision of bags to help with the preparation and distribution of food parcels. This would encourage clients to take away larger volumes of food if required, whilst limiting the cost to each local organisation
- Some clients asked for more information relating to "sell-by" dates, to support them to make informed choices about what to cook when.
- Additional food that could be provided that relate specifically to bespoke recipes.
- Additional instructions on how to prepare meals using the food provided.
- Some clients requested additional food as some organisations occasionally ran out of food.
- An increase in variety would be welcome, but not critical.
- Additional cooking courses e.g., "Feed a family for a fiver", nutrition, slow cooker courses etc.
- Additional fruit and vegetables where possible.

Holiday Playscheme and parent peer support activity at Bridge Community Centre

Staff

Again, feedback in this area was extremely positive. Staff and volunteers were extremely appreciative of the support provided by FareShare. The quality of food was described as high, with the variety of options being good. Specialist needs such as vegan were also well catered for.

- FareShare were referred to as a trusted partner and an important part of the services that they offered to those they supported.
- Several staff were specifically complimentary about FareShare drivers, who had an extremely positive approach to their work and were particularly helpful.
- Flexibility is vital. Giving people options lets people decide for themselves.
- Being a food-based service was important, as opposed to a provider of food. The distinction was seen as an important one when a service is trying to empower people and not simply help them to survive.
- Support with identifying fridge/freezer capacity was requested by some organisations.
- Providing leaflets regarding best by dates would be preferable than word of mouth, as clients often forget that information when told.
- Most services stated that they could extend the support offered if additional food was provided.
- Staff at some organisations requested additional notice regarding what food would be received each week, if possible. This would allow them to plan recipes or secure items that were complementary to those provided by FareShare.
- Additional fruit and vegetables were requested by a number of organisations.
- More food for bulking out main meals e.g., pulses.
- Provision of items such as slow cookers to donate to families in need.
- An increase in tinned products as some organisations reported a decrease in the amount being received.

Exercise activity at Bridge Community Centre

15. CONCLUSIONS

Having liaised with over 140 individuals as part of this evaluation, several observations can be made regarding the impact of food on mental health/isolation, as well as the relative importance of location and setting when it comes to addressing such issues.

1. Does food supplied by FareShare, via frontline food provisions, impact on mental health and isolation in Liverpool?

In short, yes. The evidence received during this evaluation appears to draw an unequivocal link between food-based support and improvements to mental health and reductions in isolation.

A shortage of food, in and of itself, is extremely distressing and a direct cause of anxiety, particularly amongst those with additional needs or challenges. Indeed, all of those accessing support from each of the 6 frontline organisations appeared to be experiencing other forms of challenges in their lives, aggravating the anxiety already caused by the lack of food.

One common factor shared across all consultees was a concern regarding financial distress. Poverty or financial vulnerability appears to be a pervading characteristic shared by all participants and these concerns are not abating. On the contrary, they appear to be getting more challenging and prices of food and energy continue to rise.

Food provision appears to directly improve mental health, whilst also being a facilitator of engagement with other services that can further improve mental well-being by addressing other underlying causes of distress e.g. housing concerns/poor physical health/social isolation/financial distress.

The provision of food encourages those in need to contact organisations, but also to share their experiences with other people in similar situations to themselves. This fosters informal peer support networks and encourages self-help.

Other direct and indirect benefits highlighted during the evaluation include improved physical well-being, improved self-confidence, better housing, better engagement with local community activity, improved skills and greater employability.

2. Where (and how) is Fare Share Merseyside and its local network most effective in tackling mental health and isolation?

Neighbourhood based organisations are critical partners in the effort to address issues of poor mental health and isolation. Several factors contribute to this being the case, including:

- Local community facing organisations are more trusted that statutory organisations, less formal in their approach and often have better connections to other services that might prove useful.
- New organisations would struggle to quickly engage with those in greatest need, due to the time required to develop trust and local knowledge.

- Local organisations offer a range of pre-existing services, many of which also contribute to addressing other underlying causes of isolation and poor mental health.
- Delivering food-based support via pre-existing organisations increases the likelihood of engagement with other forms support.
- The use of food, particularly in a social context, contributes to the creation of an environment that is conducive to positive engagement and prolonged involvement with community-based services.
- Local organisations can expedite referrals in ways that more formal referral system may not.

Food can play an important role in this, but food alone only represents a part of the solution. Social and recreational activities are an important part of reducing isolation directly, but also act as a vital conduit for further referral/engagement with targeted services addressed other issues e.g., debt, housing, domestic abuse etc.

Offering a blend of approaches is extremely important. Providing food alone limits the impact of support and offering food, as well as food within a social context, whilst allowing an individual to choose how they engage with support at any given time, provides individuals with solutions that they can choose for themselves, an important part of ensuring that clients take a lead role in addressing challenges in their lives.


I Have found the Service very friendly
and efficient, Helpful and very understanding
staff.
Open and welcoming - Food available is
always a high Standard and served with a Smile.

APPENDICES: VOLUNTEER GENERATED CASE STUDIES

Volunteer Case Study 1

Subject	Your own Case Study
Name	Jane Doe
Describe the person	An older vulnerable female pensioner, who lives locally with her husband who is extremely socially isolated.
Were they facing any problems when they first joined you?	Jane attends Porchfield Community Centre 3-4 times a week and has been attending classes here now for 4 years. At first, she was very scared of meeting new people and making new friendships. But throughout this time, she has gained self-worth and confidence, made numerous friendships, who she meets outside the Centre, and she also now does volunteer work at a Charity Shop. Her husband, however, does not go out, he is extremely isolated. They are both on a low income and during the past year with the Cost-of-Living Crisis, they have both struggled with their mental health with regards to paying bills etc.
What did you notice about them when they first joined?	As stated previously at first, she was very scared of meeting new people and making new friendships, but she knew she had to make this step to help with her mental health, as she has suffered with depression and anxiety for many years, due to personal reasons. Jane was also quite shy at first, but after several weeks her confidence dramatically changed for the better.
What did you do?	Jane has attended our Healthy Food Courses at Porchfield, where we have incorporated the FareShare items within this course. Therefore, when given a food parcel after each session she has been able to go home and prepare meals for herself and her husband with the items she has received, saving her a fair bit of money on her food shopping. When the Cooking session had ended, she also still received food parcels and is so grateful that she cannot thank us enough.

Have you seen any change since they have been involved?	Yes, Jane is so happy being a member of Porchfield. She has made so many new friendships, who she sees outside the Centre and as stated earlier she also volunteers at a Charity Shop once a week, she believes this is her way of giving back to the community.
Have they said anything to you about how they feel	Yes, Jane stated, "You guys, really don't know how much you are helping me and my husband in these difficult times. Your Centre and what you have to offer has giving me a Lifeline, that I really needed, thanks you so much."

Group activities at Bridge Community Centre

Volunteer case study 2

Subject	Examples for you	Your own Case Study
Name	*X*	
Describe the person	*An older person who lives locally*	The person is currently in temporary accommodation has recently been released from custody, is lonely and isolated and has no family locally. Has very limited support in the local community
Were they facing any problems when they first joined you?	*They felt isolated and were struggling with the cost of bills going up. They also said they felt very stressed.*	Very limited support in the community, benefit issues, health issues and living in temporary short-term accommodation. Has very limited support networks, frustrated with these circumstances finding it increasingly difficult to manage in the community without help and support
What did you notice about them when they first joined?	*They acted like they were really stressed and upset and seemed quiet. They didn't join in with activities at first*	They lacked confidence and had low self-esteem, struggled to communicate need, also has poor memory due to health issues. Shy and quiet. finds it increasingly difficult to build trust with people. Apprehensive and nervous to attend groups initially.

What did you do?	*We got them joining into our healthy activity classes once a week and gave them food parcels.*	Worked with them 1-1 for a period of time, supported them in building confidence and self-esteem , worked on building positive peer relationships ,they started regularly attending breakfast and lunch clubs ,meeting others and slowly talked to others .
Have you seen any change since they have been involved?	*They seem a lot happier and join in regularly. They now come to activities every week and have also joined another club outside of our centre too.*	They are much more confident and positive now. They can communicate effectively there needs and wants they now attend more groups as they are comfortable and less nervous, they have built up more recovery capital in the local community. Now they have more support.
Have they said anything to you about how they feel	*They said to us they feel a lot happier now and they go out more often than they used do. They tell me they feel a lot happier now and*	They are more comfortable attending the hub now, they have built positive relationships with staff and other participants. They attend regularly and enjoy the groups, there social isolation has reduced

Transcribed client case study feedback

1. *"I came into "Bridge Community" as I was struggling with money and the cost of living was having a choice of food or pay utility bills. I head the Bridge could help with food and offer support in other ways regards benefits. I was nervous about coming in at first also a little embarrassed but I'm so glad I came for help. I was made to feel welcomed, put at ease with friendly kind face and an approach that helped me relax. I have accessed this food share service a couple of times and was so thankful and grateful for the help received. I have started a couple of courses too, which has helped me with my confidence."*

2. *"I heard about the FareShare service by volunteering in the community centre. The service helps a lot towards everyday life, and I have accessed the fresh produce and food, also the courses that are provided."*

3. *"I have had FoodShare Su give me some meals and help me with the food. When I do not get my benefit on time. It helps me through the days til I get my benefits. Su helped me with support and talk to me. I get U.C. and Su helps other people that com e into the centre and give them meals and support them when they need the help. I think Foodshare is a good thing for family and single people it is good for the community to come in and have nice meals and can make new friends and people do not feel guilty about coming into the centre."*

4. *"I am a pensioner and struggle as I am only on a state pension. With the cost of living being so high and the bills come in thick and fast, I rarely can afford to buy most things a person needs as a necessity. Very rare a treat. Since being invited into the Bridge, they have been so supportive and asked me into a sit-down meal. I have now met other people like myself who are struggling. I have also been lucky enough to receive some food to be able to take home too. This has helped me so much. This really has taken the pressure off me for a little time. I am quite a proud person and rarely ask for anything, but being invited in really made a difference to me. I can't thank all concerned enough for the lovely food and support of friendships I made too."*

5. *"I have found the service very friendly and efficient, helpful, and very understanding staff. Open and welcoming – Food available is always s high standard and served with a smile".*

Exercise activities at Bridge Community Centre

Group meeting at Porchfield Community Centre