

FareShare's impact on individuals 2023





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Introduction and methodology

A word from Alyson Walsh, Commercial Director, FareShare

I'm delighted to be able to present this report, which analyses FareShare's impact on the individuals who receive food support from our nationwide network of charities and community groups.

This is the first time that FareShare has been able to carry out such an extensive survey on a large scale and as well as yielding some fascinating results, it provides us with an important opportunity to evaluate the social impact of our work. The high volume of responses received illustrates the huge variety of people our food supports and the insights are invaluable in informing our future plans and focus.

We are enormously grateful to everyone who supported the team in orchestrating the survey and compiling the results.

Thanks must go to our regional network partners, all of whom assisted in the task of distributing surveys to charities within their respective regions. Thanks to the charities themselves, who distributed the surveys to service users by any means necessary and assisted in collating responses.

Finally thank you to all those individuals who took the time to complete the survey, giving us a unique insight into their circumstances and sharing with us the important place food support plays in their lives during challenging times.

People who completed this survey included single parents, asylum seekers, those with mental health conditions, people fleeing domestic violence, and those with life-limiting health conditions. The cost-of-living crisis continues

to have a very real impact on people who are already struggling and it is heartening to hear about the positive impact food from FareShare is having on their lives.

Food distributed by FareShare helps people enjoy healthier, more varied diets; enables them to access a range of essential support services; allows them to connect with others, reducing isolation and loneliness while strengthening communities; and empowers them to make positive steps towards reducing food waste.

The results of this survey will have a galvanising effect on everyone involved in FareShare's operations. They will ensure that we strive to do the best we can to fulfil our mission to get even more good food to people who need it, rather than letting it go to waste.

A Walsh

Introduction

Through data gathered from more than 2,600 individuals, this evaluation has found evidence of the life-changing impact its food has on individuals.

No matter the type of organisations distributing the food, individuals report that not only have their urgent needs for food been met, but they also experience **improvements in mental wellbeing, reductions in stress and financial pressure, strengthened community connections, increased access to healthy foods and a sense of pride in reducing food waste.**

There is valuable learning for FareShare from this evaluation, and much to celebrate given the evidence that the social outcomes it intends to achieve are indeed being achieved.

While FareShare regularly evaluates the impact of its food distribution by drawing on the insights

of the charities and community organisations we support, we wanted to hear directly from the people who ultimately receive the food to understand the impact it has on their lives.

The main purpose of the evaluation was to understand what impact FareShare’s work has on individuals, what is most valuable to them and what can we learn from this to help us achieve even more social value from our work.

The evaluation was undertaken by Rocket Science in partnership with the National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), and was supported by a Research Advisory Group, comprising people with lived experience of receiving food support.

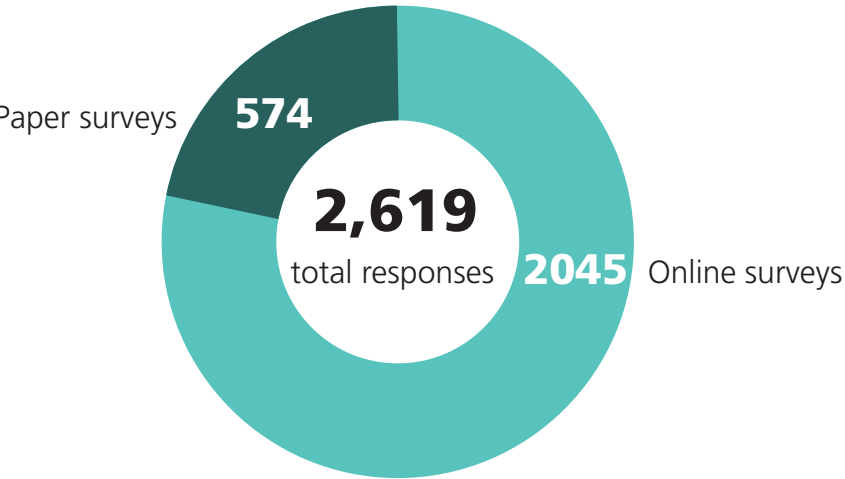
The full report is available on [FareShare’s impact webpage](#).



Methodology

The evaluation took a mixed methodological approach through the use of a national survey and visits to three different sites for qualitative data collection.

Survey responses



Deep dive sites

Granton Mission Foodbank

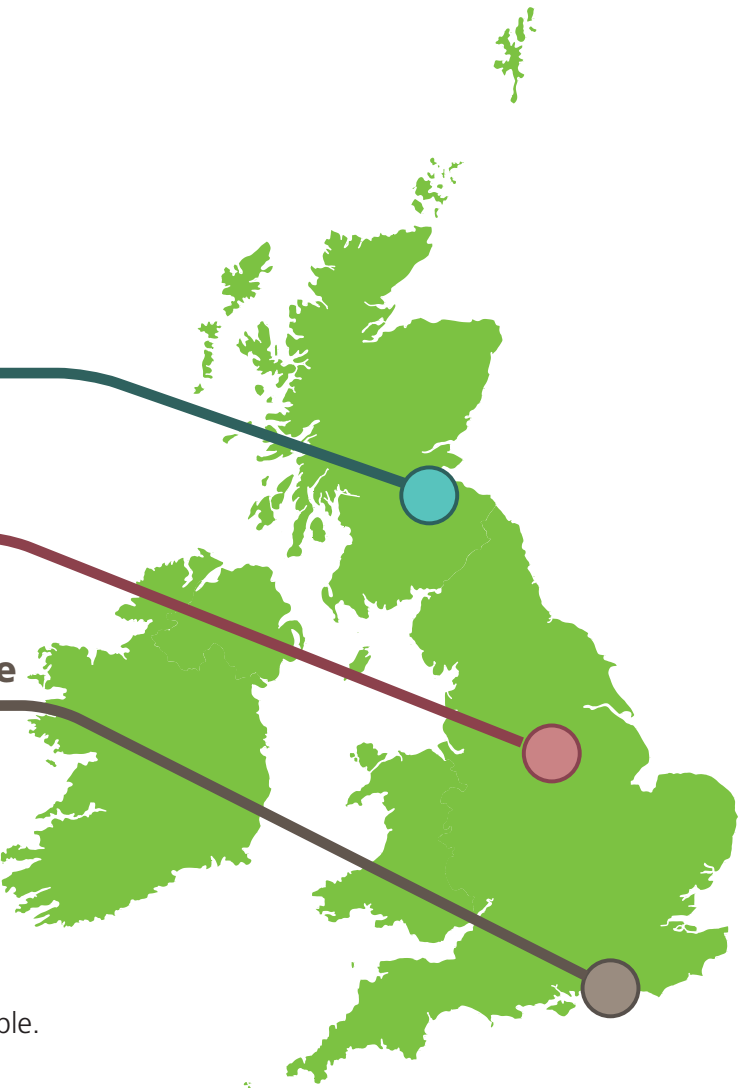
Edinburgh

Rhubarb Farm

Midlands villages

Littlehampton Community Fridge

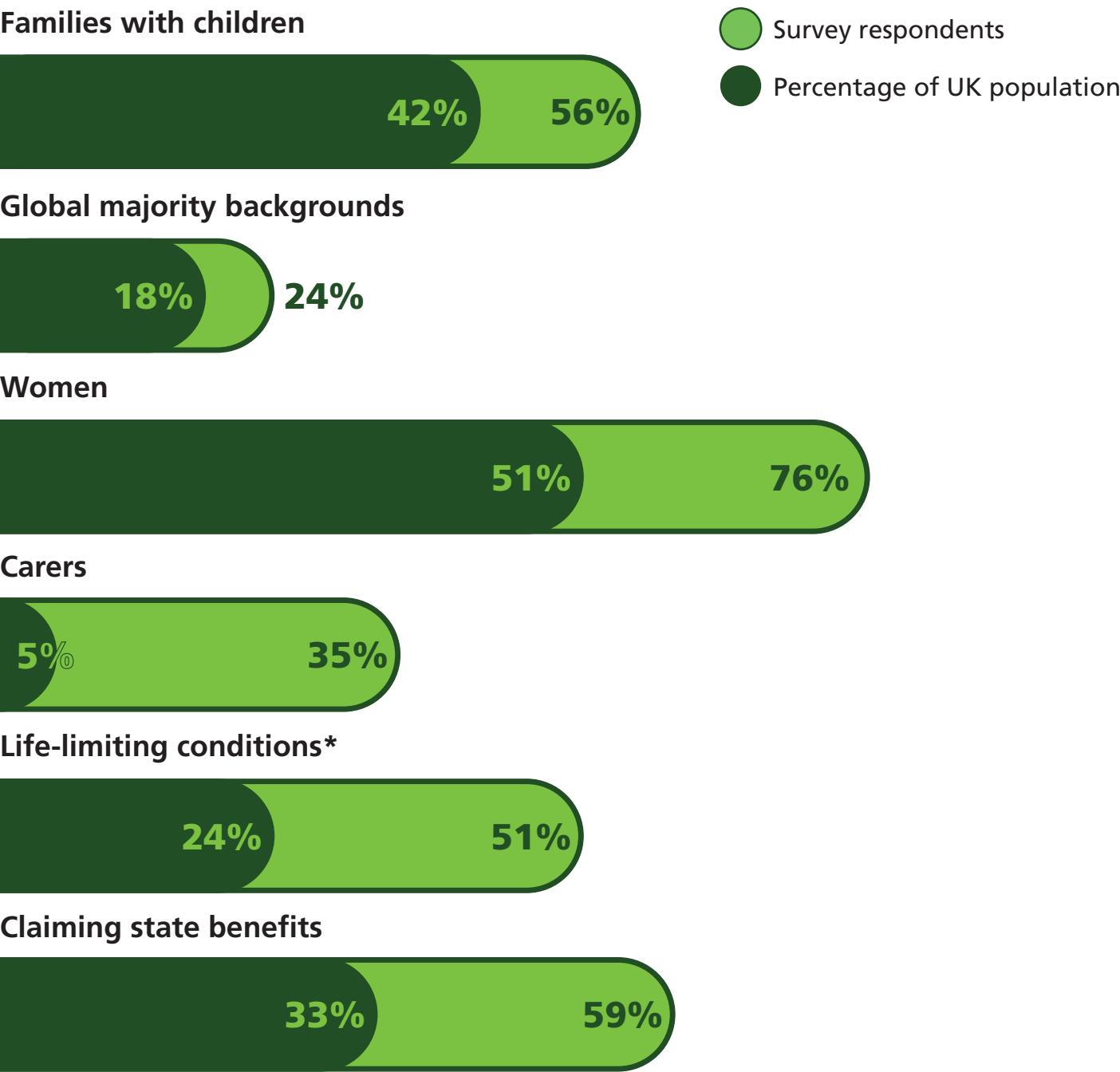
Sussex



Deep dive site visits included immersive full-day observational research and interviews with 49 people.

Key Findings

Who attends our food services



Our survey responses reflect the unevenly distributed impacts of food insecurity.

Footnote:

* The survey question asked about life limitations as the researchers wanted to capture people's limitations as a result of long-term conditions in addition to those with physical disability. This response rate has been compared with UK disability rates.

Percentage of UK population figures sourced from ONS: [gender](#), [ethnicity](#), [families](#), [carers](#); DWP: [disability](#), [benefits claims](#).

Outcomes from attending food services

Access to healthier food



Less financial stress



Community connectedness



Improved health and wellbeing



Cost of living crisis

Many participants said that the rising cost of food, alongside rising costs of electricity and gas, was leading to increasing levels of financial strain.

Many indicated that they were experiencing in-work poverty and were unable to meet the rising costs of rent and mortgages, and so had to access the foodbank to ensure that they were able to pay housing costs. Over a third (37%) of respondents were employed, making it apparent that being employed is not always enough to prevent food insecurity.

“The cost of living crisis has been difficult. I have three children and two children have dietary requirements that can be difficult to fulfil (allergies, illness related). They might have choice here.”

Food service user, Edinburgh



**1 in 3 respondents
are employed**

Some described situations where they were struggling to meet the dietary needs of their family members due to the impact of the cost of living crisis. For those who were struggling to meet dietary requirements, the offer of choice at the foodbank was crucial.

People with no access to public funds expressed that the cost of living crisis had exacerbated an already difficult situation. Uncertainty about this was causing them to feel increasingly stressed.

“The cost of food, with rising prices and multiple children/grandchildren, is a big impact. With other costs going up too, being able to access low cost food helps because food is a lot of the household budget.”

Food service user, Derbyshire



Outcomes

Healthier food

In all settings, those accessing FareShare food report that they have improved access to food.

Poor diets and skipping meals are major issues facing people who live in low-income households in the UK, and the situation is worsening due to the rising costs of food and other household essentials. A net score of +76% of respondents said that thanks to being able to access FareShare food, they are now able to eat more fruit and vegetables. A further 57% noted that because they had been able to access FareShare food, they were now skipping less meals.

Without food support, many respondents felt they would have access to less food, fewer meals, or that they would have to resort to cutting back, skipping meals and ultimately, going hungry. Respondents also emphasised that without this food they would have less choice. They noted that they would access less fresh produce and felt their health would reduce.

In terms of physical health, survey responses suggested that increased food variety, better food quality and more fruit and vegetables led to healthier eating habits, improving nutrition.



+76% ate more fruit and veg



+69% worry less about food

“We have more vegetables in the home so are getting better nutrition. Adults are able to eat with kids without worrying about whether we can still give kids good food every day.”

Food service user, Midlands

“Some days I would not have had anything to eat for myself and my family. Now I am eating different kinds of food, I am eating more fruit and vegetables, I am aware of using seasonal products and making more healthier choices.”

Food service user, Northern Ireland

Outcomes

Financial savings

The evidence also shows that the food provided by FareShare enables people to make financial savings. This was of high importance to people accessing food support.

People cited a worsening financial situation, intertwined with food insecurity, as the most likely potential consequences of not accessing food support. The increase financial strain also negatively impacts on many people’s mental health and their sense of wellbeing.

In the qualitative responses to the survey and in the accounts from direct beneficiaries at the sites, many people shared that they had been experiencing financial strain before the cost of living crisis, but for most, the situation had worsened.

In the Littlehampton deep dive site, interviewees estimated financial savings of between a few pounds and £500 per month because of accessing redistributed food. Across the other sites, people gave many examples of how the savings had allowed them to stretch their budgets further.

One respondent’s story:

“The most important change in my life is having a decent meal a day. I no longer have to skip a day or two because my benefits have had to be spent on electricity to charge my wheelchair. I’m actually healthier and slowly getting healthier and stronger. Even my GP has noticed a change.

I was pretty desperate when I first visited [my local food service]. I was being mentally affected and was skipping most meals to the point where at its worst, I probably had one slice of bread and margarine a day and only ate a hot meal every five days. My social worker was becoming concerned. I did however manage to hide this quite well because I didn’t want people to think I was begging. I now have a purpose, a sense of worth. Something I didn’t have before. I can’t thank [the organisation] enough”

Food service user, Sussex



Outcomes

Connecting with others and feeling a part of the community

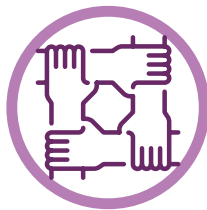
FareShare has a considerable impact on community connectedness and reducing social isolation. Survey data shows that accessing food significantly increased the feeling of being part of the community (+78%) and reduced feelings of loneliness (+66%).

Many respondents emphasised that attending the services had an impact on their sense of community, feelings of belonging, and the formation of new friendships, all contributing to a strong sense of camaraderie stemming from accessing food support.

The deep dive sites were insightful in this regard. The second and third in particular showed evidence that this outcome was being achieved even in settings where there were no spaces allocated for socializing, or even for people to sit or interact. Over time, this led to people experiencing feelings of community and belonging, and the emergence of informal support networks:

“I needed a place I can call home and people I can connect with.”

Food service user,
Glasgow & The West of Scotland



+78% felt closer to their community



+66% felt less lonely

Outcomes

Improved mental health and wellbeing

Improved wellbeing was a strong outcome across both survey and deep dive sites. Increased food security significantly reduced stress and worry, particularly among those with children. Participants expressed relief at having regular access to free or affordable food, which reduced day to day food related stress and contributed to financial savings.

Connecting with supportive volunteers and staff, accessing both formal and informal support, and building connections with others facing similar situations played a pivotal role in enhancing overall wellbeing.

Without food support, respondents emphasised that their mental health would worsen, with increased

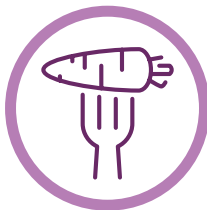
stress, anxiety, and worry. Respondents noted in their free text responses that pre-existing conditions, such as General Anxiety Disorder and PTSD, would be further aggravated in the absence of support.

“Everything is getting more expensive and as an asylum seeker it is difficult. They have helped me so much. [Staff member name] has helped me with many things and they have been so supportive. He gave me the chance to live my life again.”

Food service user, Edinburgh



+75% feel better about their overall wellbeing



2 in 3 eat healthier

Outcomes

New outcomes discovered

As well as testing FareShare’s established outcomes, the evaluation identified several additional outcomes for people accessing food services. These include:

Community resilience and increased community capacity

Organisations with no eligibility criteria and few support services seemed to have the potential to become social hubs where community members bond over shared struggles, share advice, recipes, and even bring in support such as clothing for each other.

“It’s quite a social thing. Everyone gathers and talks, and I’ve met people who’ve offered recipe ideas and swapped puzzles, things like that. It’s a bit of a community thing that’s really sweet.”

Food service user, Sussex

Feeling good about preventing food waste

People receiving surplus food experienced less stigma due to a sense of reciprocity, of doing something good for the environment and for society by using food that would otherwise have gone to waste.

“It removes a lot of the stigma attached to food bank use, so you don’t have to feel embarrassed to use it. Some people can judge you when using it.”

Food service user, Tayside and Fife



+89% feel good about stopping food waste



+58% say kids do better in school

Positive effects on families and children

People frequently mentioned that food insecurity placed a strain on family life, resulting in increased stress. Accessing food support was seen as a means of alleviating some of this. Accessing food support had positive impacts on family relationships, children’s eating habits, and the ability for families to cook meals together.

“We all have a healthier diet and eat regularly each day due to being part of the [local pantry]. My children attend the youth groups each night and get their supper too.”

Food service user, Glasgow & West of Scotland

Becoming volunteers and contributing to the community

Some beneficiaries who accessed food support also became volunteers, leading to improved well-being and a sense of contributing back to the community.

“We now volunteer as we love helping out on a weekend, we have met some lovely people and now know the community”

Food service user, South Midlands

Outcomes

Summary

When analysed, the survey findings showed that all types of charity/community organisation had strong social impact, though with community centres, food-only services and faith organisations having the strongest impact on feeling part of a community. It also showed the key role food support plays as a gateway to a broader range of positive impacts with

the majority (+77%) of people first accessing support for the food offer and it is the main reason most (+81%) continue to attend.

Most people first access support because of food

Responses to question “What was the main reason you first accessed this organisation?”

Affordable food support



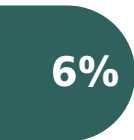
Emergency food support



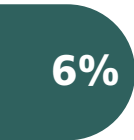
Other



A specific issue

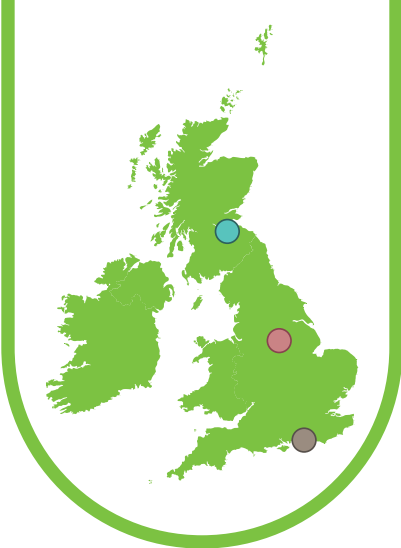


Meet people/socialise



Deep dive site focus

In addition to the survey, the research team conducted full days of immersive research at three charities supplied by FareShare.



Granton Mission Foodbank

About this site:

- Edinburgh, urban area of high deprivation.
- Free foodbank requiring formal referrals. Café onsite.
- Drop in clinic with onsite housing and budget advisors.
- Serving people in acute need, like asylum seekers.

Impacts observed:

- Lifeline access to food
- Relief of anxiety and stress, positive impacts on mental health and wellbeing.
- Access to additional support.
- Improved financial circumstances.

Rhubarb Farm

About this site:

- Midlands, three semi-rural villages, moderate to high deprivation.
- Social supermarket/food hubs. Low fixed price food.
- No eligibility criteria.
- People not struggling for basic survival, but under financial strain.

Impacts observed:

- Keeping up with rising cost of living
- Reduced social isolation
- Sharing recipes and cooking advice
- Improved confidence to try new, healthy food options
- Sense of solidarity, community connectedness, and collective resilience

Littlehampton Community Fridge

About this site:

- Sussex, small coastal town. Wealthier areas mixed with areas of high deprivation.
- Community fridge/freezer
- No other formal support or communal spaces.
- No eligibility criteria.
- Cross-section of community. Most affected by rising costs and struggling to keep up.

Impacts observed:

- Reduced anxiety and financial strain
- Positive social atmosphere despite lack of formal spaces
- Improved dietary habits
- Feeling supported
- Reduced isolation
- Strong positive sense of community
- Feeling good about reducing food waste

Deep dive site focus

What do these sites tell us?

Different outcomes for different people

All sites had a strong social impact, though in different ways. This reflects the different needs of the people being served. The two sites without eligibility criteria had stronger impacts on community connectedness and reduced isolation. The Granton site had less of a jovial social atmosphere, but there was a stronger sense of relief of anxiety around not being able to access food, leading to positive impacts on mental health.

“Other people looked down on me however every time I have came to you for help there was no judgement, [just] friendly happy staff and I felt amazing. These people being genuinely nice and helpful. When they knew I had young girls they would always give me nutritious food for my girls.”

Food service user, undisclosed location

Reducing stigma

All three sites had features that reduced the stigma around seeking food support by creating spaces where people felt welcome and not judged.

A common thread in reducing stigma was the presence of trusting relationships, whether through formal support or informal socialisation. At Granton, this happened mainly through staff/volunteers interacting with people attending the food service, whereas the other two sites had much more socialisation between people attending the food service, often sparked by conversations about new and varied foods. Even in the absence of a formal gathering place at the Littlehampton site, the queue before the fridge opened became a buzzing social hub for swapping recipes and ideas.

Other contributing factors mentioned included: staff helping them access additional support (Granton), choice in food (Granton), lack of eligibility criteria (Rhubarb Farm and Littlehampton) and feeling that they were reducing food waste (Littlehampton).

Littlehampton Community Fridge

Littlehampton Community Fridge in Sussex is a community fridge and freezer site run entirely by volunteers. It operates out of a Methodist church, in one of the 10% most deprived areas in England. The Fridge is open for a short period, five days a week; and the food is free - people are allowed five items from the fridge and freezer, plus bread. Up to 120 people visit each day.

Referrals aren't required and there's no eligibility criteria, so it attracts a wide range of people in need – working families, the unemployed, homeless, retired, full time carers and so on. They generally hear about it through word of mouth – and no one is turned away.

Savings can vary, from £5 per week to £500 per month: "I made a whole meal from the bits I got from here the other day, and it lasted me for two dinners and that was for both of us. And I've still got spares left over".

The queue outside the Fridge serves as a social hub, with a strong sense of friendship and camaraderie:

"It's quite a social thing. Everyone gathers and talks, and I've met people who've offered recipe ideas and swapped puzzles, things like that. It's a bit of a community thing that's really sweet."

"And also, if somebody doesn't come, if you haven't seen them in a little while. So, you phone them up and say, do you want me to get you anything or are you alright? So, it's a welfare thing as well."

Many see it as a lifeline: "I have severe depression, anxiety and emotionally unstable personality disorder. And this place keeps me alive. Literally. My dad died two months ago and if I didn't have this place and these guys, I dunno if I'd be here. ... all their support from the volunteers and the customers, they become like family."





Conclusion and thanks

In addition to alleviating food insecurity, outcomes include reduced financial pressure and subsequent reductions in stress and improvements in wellbeing, increased access to healthy food options and the development of community connections. Positive social impact was seen across all types of charity organisations, though it may be achieved in different ways depending on what the people accessing that organisation need.

Without food support, people's financial situations would worsen, and their level of food insecurity would increase. This highlights FareShare's significant contribution to alleviating these interconnected issues.

Food, and particularly the surplus food provided by FareShare, should be seen as a key contributor to these outcomes. Through the survey and deep dive sites, people shared how important it was to them to have affordable access to high quality, nutritious and varied food. This helped people meet fundamental nutritional needs and relieve financial pressure. The

variety of the food not only offered healthy options but was also seen as a talking point, helping to facilitate social bonding and encourage people to try new foods. Feeling good about stopping food waste was rated as the most meaningful outcome in the survey at +89% and acted as a motivator for many survey respondents and interviewees.

The evaluation also highlights the rising impact of the cost of living crisis on a broad and diverse demographic, highlighting the need for inclusive and comprehensive food support services.

We would like to thank the experts by experience research advisory group, the charities and community organisations which distributed our survey and to all the individuals who took part in surveys, focus groups and interviews to provide their feedback.

Outcome statistics in this report have been given as a net score. Raw response data is available in the [full report](#).



fareshare.org.uk

Registered charity in
England and Wales (1100051)
and Scotland (SC052672)