



GET TOGETHERS

Bringing people together through food

A year in review – Food for Life Get Togethers

June 2021 – May 2022



Welcome to the Food for Life Get Togethers (FFLGT) Year Three impact report. This report gives us a chance to review and reflect on the significant growth and achievements we have accomplished together this year. Our network of community organisers has continued to connect tens of thousands of people from all backgrounds and ages for the benefit of people and planet.

Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and delivered with the support of five national partners, FFLGT is part of a bigger food movement, supported by the Soil Association (SA), which supports a transition to healthy and sustainable diets for all.

And what a year! From the opportunities and challenges of re-opening and forging new connections after lockdowns to growing concerns around cost of living and access to good food, we continued to adapt to a fast changing external environment to ensure we kept communities in the lead.

Our mass mobilisation campaigns have developed real momentum. We learnt how these campaigns, underpinned by our small grants, catalysed agency and brought communities back together post covid, contributing to social cohesion.

Building community capacity and leadership was our key focus for the year. The FFLGT networking events programme, coproduced with a diverse group of community partners, inspired, connected and built capacity around local food activities amongst community organisers from every corner of the UK. My Food Community (MFC), a network for good food leaders to learn, connect and take action was launched in year and we have learnt so much alongside a cohort of **40** emerging and existing community leaders.

Overall, as the first year not majorly disrupted by the pandemic, we have seen the programme flourish, both in terms of significantly overachieving

our engagement targets and perhaps more importantly strengthening connections in communities. A few examples are the growth of **64%** more engaged groups than in (Year Two **953**), (Year Three **1563**) and the impact which shines through from the **MFC cohort film**.

In the last three years FFLGT has engaged* **3263** community organisers across the UK, inspiring them to bring their communities together at **1885** food-based activities, reaching almost **150,000** people.

My personal highlight is hearing stories from across the country about how the programme has supported communities to come together over food in what remains a challenging time.

The programme's University of the West of England (UWE) evaluation has shown the **important social value of community food activities** like FFLGT, which act as powerful connectors. It shows how: 'Cook and Share community events highlight the social meanings of good food, notably for those directed towards building social cohesion, citizen participation, personal and collective learning.'

FFLGT organisers saw this impact first hand, with the majority reporting that their events help improve the quality of life of participants **92%**, enhance positive attitudes towards ageing **64%** and diversity **68%**, and address loneliness and isolation **83%**. To me this shows the importance of connecting over good food.

A huge thank you to everyone who has played their part in bringing this impact about. If you too see the value of connecting over food please do get in touch and join the good food movement.



Dale Cranshaw,
Head of FFLGT

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*Engaged: registered a FFLGT activity, registered for a network, applied for a small grant, applied for MFC, is an LCP, or completed online training.

A world where people of different ages and backgrounds regularly connect, learn and play a more active role in their local food system

RESULTS FROM

- 1 People of different ages or backgrounds have stronger connections with each other in communities across the UK through cooking, growing and sharing good food
- 2 People across the UK have increased knowledge, skills, networks and resources to run and sustain social good food activities
- 3 Get Together organisers are more connected with each other, actively participating in or leading their own peer networks, which increase the transfer of information, knowledge, and resources about social good food activities within or between communities of interest, practice or geography
- 4 Knowledge and understanding related to equality, diversity and inclusion in social good food activities is developed and shared widely through the programme
- 5 'Good Food Champions' influence and inform changes in policies, practice or behaviour in their communities, settings or projects that contribute to regeneration of a world with good health, in balance with nature and a safe climate.

RESULTS FROM



INFORMED BY

Insights and learning

Bringing people together through food

MOBILISE

Participation is on the up...



747 Year One
953 Year Two
1563 Year Three

+64% 1563 new groups engaged this year - that's 64% more than Year Two (953).

Total groups engaged with FFLGT to date...
3263

510 Plant and Share activities registered - up from 195 for Plant and Share in 2021.



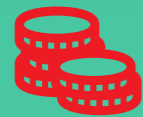
Groups have engaged across the UK

KEY
Groups engaged for first time in:
● Year One ● Year Two ● Year Three



BUILD CAPACITY

393 Small grants awarded in Year Three, with our two biggest rounds yet.



901 Total groups awarded a small grant since start of the programme.

77% of network attendees* said they will do something new or different as a result of a FFLGT networks session.

918 distinct individuals registered for a network, from St Ives to the Orkney Islands, and with over 31 individuals from outside of the UK.

23,248 downloads of Plant and Share resources.

201 highly engaged organisers - up from 80 at the end of Year Two.



BUILD LEADERSHIP

£33,000 of Community Action Project grants awarded to MFC members for innovative solutions to local food issues.



84 HOURS

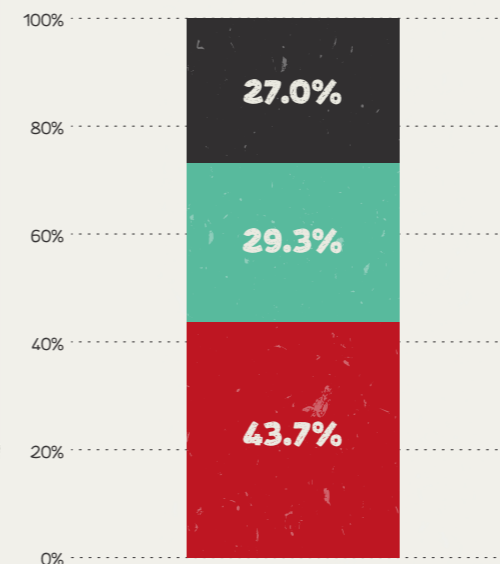


of MFC sessions delivered to our cohort of 40 good food leaders.

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

ALL ENGAGED

Maintained high engagement in most deprived areas of country, with **43.7%** of all groups engaged to date in the **10-30%** most deprived areas.



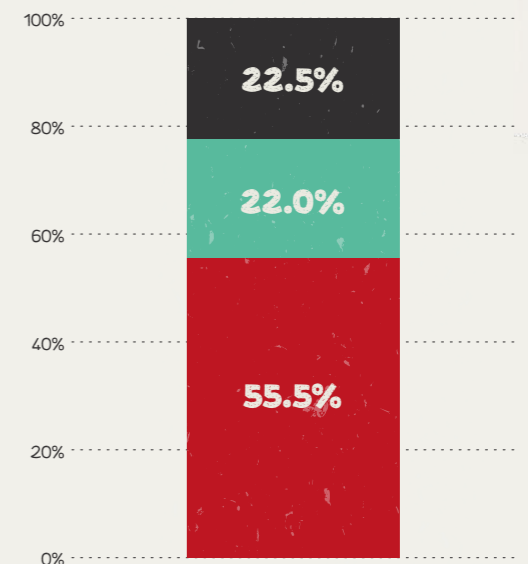
IMD or corresponding deprivation indices

- 10-30% Most deprived
- 31-60%
- 61-100% Least deprived

Data uses postcode at registration mapped against IMD or equivalent in each of the devolved nations.

HIGHLY ENGAGED

Of our **201** highly engaged groups, **55.5%** are in the **10-30%** most deprived areas.



IMD or corresponding deprivation indices

- 10-30% Most deprived
- 31-60%
- 61-100% Least deprived

? IMD = Indices of Multiple Deprivation

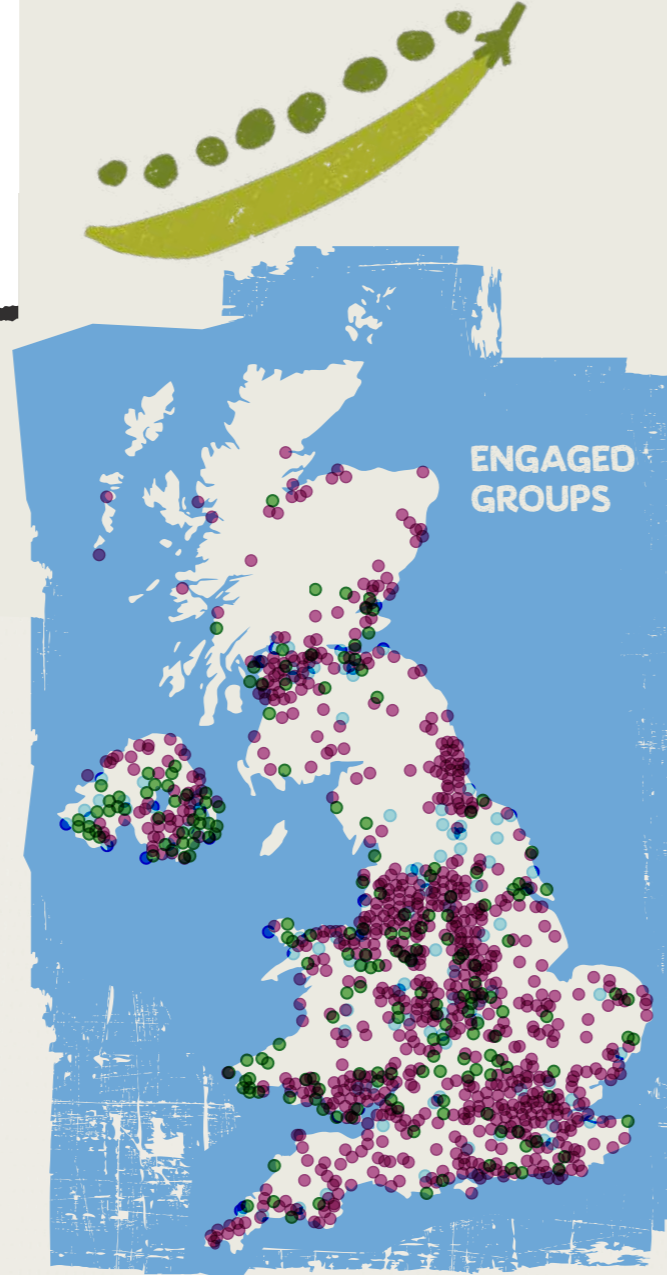
Mobilising

[Verb]: to organise or prepare something, such as a group of people, for a purpose.

ACTIVATION:

In Year Three of the programme, we scaled up our ambition of mobilising activity out of our test and learn regions to a national scale. Year Three saw us focus on the key areas of building connections, enabling communities and empowering local organisers, while maintaining our focus on engaging with those in diverse and or disadvantaged communities. This was achieved through the development of small grants, a comprehensive online and offline communications campaign through targeted mailers, advertising, social media, press activities and newsletters.

In Year Three we aimed to encourage **600** new activity registrations in total. We promote two month-long events each year which tie together. In spring Plant and Share aims to get communities together to plant fruit, veggies and herbs. The hope is that those connections continue to grow and that some groups come back together in autumn to harvest and share their crops during Cook and Share. Groups can sign up for one or both events. Cook and Share 2021 saw **440** registered events and Plant and Share in Spring saw **510** events, compared to **195** in Year Two.



KEY

Groups engaged for first time in:

- Year One
- Year Two
- Year Three

Engagement with the programme this year has surpassed all our expectations, with FFLGT playing a role in supporting communities to come back together over food following lockdown restrictions.

AT A GLANCE:

In numbers:

- **1885** newsletter sign ups, well exceeding our target of **1250** and **20.9%** higher than in Year Two.
- **516** new individuals engaged with FFLGT for first time through a network event.
- **1335** activities registered. **63.6%** of registered activities happen regularly (several times a year).
- Total expected reach of FFLGT activities is **67,550** bringing programme total to **145,310** people.

The **1563** new groups is set against a KPI target of **540** groups for the year, meaning, **we have engaged 289% more groups than the target.**

This has been down to a number of factors; our model of enabling participation through small grants, a comprehensive communications plan and supporting communities via Local Community Partners (LCP) and MFC.

Other highlights include:

- Year Three of FFLGT has seen our communication and engagement with community organisers grow and deepen, as the programme becomes more established and COVID restrictions lift. Providing ideal conditions to inspire community-led activity.
- The communication and marketing of our two key events continued to reach new audiences. We also grew participation in the events by engaging with existing registered event holders to build capacity on the ground and support ongoing community activity.
- Plant and Share saw over **20,000** participants dig, sow and grow this May. Which is a growth of over **100%** from the **9,500** participants in 2021.
- The theme for Plant and Share this year was biodiversity, the FFLGT team created free resources for 2022: Three new bee resources including a bee identification exercise which has been downloaded nearly **10,000** times.
- The support of national partners in promoting and supporting the programme has contributed to this success with **6.3%** of new engaged groups hearing about FFLGT from Eden Project Communities (EPC) and **5.9%** hearing about us from Royal Volunteer Service (RVS).

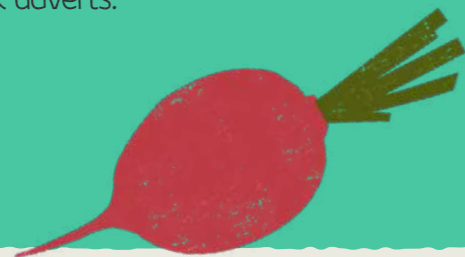
- We created digital assets and a social media campaign to encourage Get Togethers groups to host a Big Jubilee Lunch.
- **Cross-pollinating networks** to grow new audiences has paid dividends. As part of global intergenerational week 2022 Linking Generations Northern Ireland (LGNi) collaborated with FFLGT and Generations Working Together (GWT) to deliver 'Getting Together to Grow, Cook and Eat' webinar to showcase inspiring stories, examples of intergenerational growing, cooking and eating activities. Over **30** organisations registered to attend. All registrants received follow up information including links to FFLGT Plant and Share month resources.

Research by UWE showed that almost all organisers of Cook and Share events felt they helped people connect with one another **99%**. It also notes that FFLGT saw strong engagement with people living with mental health issues, long-term conditions, on low income, or with other forms of social and health disadvantage. This was partly because food-based events made social interactions feel less threatening and can encourage those experiencing social anxiety to attend in the first place. Events provided opportunities to make conversation, swap points of view, find out about others, help out in small ways, and generate ideas for other community activities.



LEARNINGS:

1. Our continued communication using automated email journeys with our community organisers has enabled us to maintain strong connection to our key contacts since the departure of the regional engagement officers on the ground, and supported the development of our network of community organisers through social media groups and virtual networking events.
2. Targeted social media advertising has had a substantial impact on increasing the number of visitors to the FFLGT website. The site has had a **61%** increase in traffic in Year Three with **33,000** visitors, **12,700** of which have come from social media posts, particularly from target Facebook adverts.
3. Paid advertising has proved to be successful in reaching new audiences, including under-represented Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) areas and has achieved great results during both campaigns. The increase in social media use has seen our own Facebook page grow to over **1,500** members.
4. During Cook and Share we trialled emailing press release templates to registrants and had fantastic engagement with an open rate of **42%** compared to the industry average of **30%**. We have developed this further in Plant and Share with weekly emails with ideas and support to registrants throughout the campaign, one of which achieved a staggering **57%** open rate. This type of support and engagement was key to maintain our relationship with organisers who previously had on the ground support from the regional engagement officers.



TOP TIPS FOR SUCCESS IDENTIFIED IN THE UWE REPORT ARE:

TIP 1: The importance of involving participants in decisions about food and format along with the need to be flexible about how events unfold on the day.

TIP 2: Making events a highly sociable experience that celebrates all forms of diversity. Avoiding making it into a 'project.'

TIP 3: Invite funders and local policy makers to food events to help them understand the value of work of the community group.


TIP 4: Using Cook and Share events to reconnect with community members, have fun and generate ideas for the future.

TIP 5: A food event is as a safe environment and a productive way to pilot and launch a more regular well-being café.

TIP 6: The success of working with the food interests of local residents and taking careful steps to develop new activities.

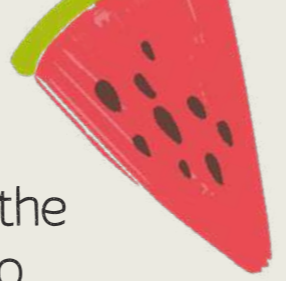
TIP 7: Not pressurising people and being attentive to the dynamics in the room are key to making the community teas welcoming and conducive to social interaction.

TIP 8: Mobilising hard to reach communities; it has become clear that the Small Grant is a key motivator for registration of events and unlocking communities.



It was a really nice way to reintroduce people that have still [been] feeling a bit nervous about going back into groups.

Friendly Faces of Kent



A CLOSER LOOK

Cook and Share grant: Keeping it 'easy-osey' on the northernmost island in the UK – the power of food to bridge the divide between people of different generations.

Live Active Unst is a community organisation situated on Unst, the most northerly inhabited island of the British Isles. Operating from the leisure centre, Live Active Unst runs a range of social activities for the island population of just over **600** people. A close-knit community in a remarkable part of the world, there are limited opportunities for the community to come together especially for older people.

Live Active used the Cook and Share grant to organise a potluck lunch encouraging people to bring a dish to share with the group, alongside sandwiches and soup for all. Apart from funds for equipment such as dining tables, part of the grant was used to create soup kits – with carrots, potatoes, onion, a stock cube and instructions – to be given out to participants.

It can be difficult to access fresh produce on the island, so an aim was to bring community members together to share recipes and cooking tips for healthy budget meals that would work well for both older single people and family groups.

Celebration for all ages

The event brought together a very wide cross section of the community. The oldest person was almost 93, while the youngest was 4 years old. In between there were teenagers of 15 and 16, and 'mums and dads in their 20s and 30s'. One disabled person in his forties found that the group was more attractive than an alternative day centre group that was mainly directed towards older people.

The food and social activities involved all these groups, for instance a pass the parcel game included both young and old in a robust contest.

“We have some really interesting people and I think it's nice for them to be able to 'be them' and not just be some 'Old dear' or 'Granny'. We like to celebrate the people's lives whether they're 4 or 93 years old.”

Live Active Unst

A chance to try a new menu

While the soup recipe kit was simple for some, it appeared to be particularly attractive for some of the younger less experienced cooks. The choice of food – including the bring and share contributions – felt relaxed and informal. While the event might have been themed around local dishes such as reestit mutton and tattie soup (stew of salted dried mutton and potato), the organisers felt that this was the sort of food that local people ate all



the time. Instead, they are planning to run further events around budget friendly meals such as those promoted by food activist Jack Munroe.

A further benefit of the event was to publicise the wider activities of Live Active Unst and the leisure centre:

“The food event was really a way of advertising what we do because there was a lot of misconception about the centre. Having people come along to a food and social event was a big crowd pleaser.”

Be flexible and keep things simple

Karen felt that it was important to have the encouragement from an umbrella organisation, in this case Ability Shetland which had supported connections between the Cook and Share events and other community initiatives. As far as setting up the event, a top piece of advice was to take a very open-minded approach and put the social aspects first:

“I would definitely recommend just making it a very sociable experience. Don't start with 'a project' in your mind, start with getting people to have the confidence to come through the door – at least twice.”

The next recommendation was to start by bringing people together with a simple set up – even if this meant having minimal aspirations around the food on offer.



“Keep it simple. Really the costs of doing [a social event] is next to nothing. We've had some board games, we hired the hall, we bought some tea, coffee, milk and sugar. You know, that's negligible. A lot of inter-generational things are based around a project and ours was very much just come along, drop in. Don't scare people away with a structured project. Keep it easy-osey: come in, drop in, drop out, no fear.”

We can fundraise!

The event attracted interest from elsewhere in the Shetlands as an easy, simple format for an intergenerational community activity. One of the benefits for the group was to demonstrate the ability to fund raise. Success with the Cook and Share grant has led to a further funding application.

“On one hand the £150 wasn't much, but on the other it was. This was a way of us being able to go “oh, look, we've managed to get a little grant!” It gave us the drive to think “We've done this, we can fundraise!”



Building

[Noun]: increasing someone's ability to do a particular thing.

Capacity

[Noun]: the total amount that can be contained or produced.



ACTIVATION:

Year Three saw us strengthening our connections with Get Together organisers to build capacity within communities that build on the successes of Years One and Two of the programme. We maintained our focus on supporting diverse and or disadvantaged communities, linking them with community food organisers across the UK, helping to remove barriers to engagement and by sharing widely what we have learnt. Our first-hand experience, which is supported by new research, shows that success is achieved for the long-term when community groups are supported and nurtured where they are, building on existing community assets and channelling the motivation of community leaders. In the last 12 months we have focused on three areas:



AT A GLANCE:

Increased food insecurity, social isolation and loneliness and the resulting negative impact on people's health and wellbeing has seen an added need to increase the capacity of community organisations to develop innovative approaches to coping with these issues.

Through bringing our 12 LCPs together at regular Steering Group meetings, we developed a strong sense of the emergent grass roots work taking place around food issues and the support required to make this happen. Alongside our partners, we put together a programme of network sessions that drew on people's deep love of growing, cooking and sharing food whilst also addressing the growing issues of poverty and hunger that has been seen in communities.

In these sessions we found a balance between providing specialist expertise on themes such as developing local networks and partnerships, cooking for the community and promoting dignity in food activities, as well as making space for attendees to network, share experiences and learn from one another.

We scaled up our small grants programme from a regional to a national campaign and built the capacity of new organisations from throughout the UK to deliver sustainable food activities. It also increased our number of Highly Engaged organisations (those that have engaged with FFLGT in multiple ways) from **80** at the end of Year Two to **208** by the end of Year Three, with **55%** of our highly engaged groups coming from the **10-30%** most deprived communities in the UK.

SMALL GRANTS: Small grants have been a huge success across many layers of the programme, from stimulating and enabling volunteers and community groups to sign-up for Plant and Share and Cook and Share to giving an opportunity to build on those achievements and apply for more funding. The grants also offered our LCPs a way of connecting with small community groups and leaders.

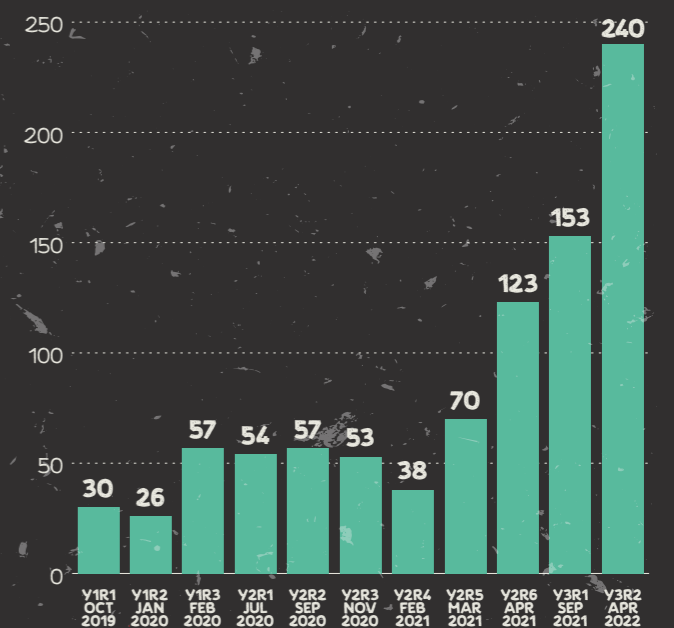
AT A GLANCE:

- Since the beginning of the programme, we have awarded grants to 901 different groups, with **47.5%** of these in the **10-30%** most deprived communities.
- In Year Three we built on learnings from earlier grant rounds to improve the efficiency of our grant process, hone our criteria and find ways of reaching our target audiences in the absence of regional staff. This allowed us to scale-up from frequent, small rounds of regional funding, to a national offer with two larger rounds linked to our key campaigns.
- We awarded **153** and **240** grants for our Cook and Share and Plant and Share rounds respectively – our biggest yet! Grant holders represented a diverse range of small-scale organisations and groups, such as LGBTQ+ groups; women's groups; sports, leisure and arts groups; residents' associations; community allotments and gardens; faith-based organisations; and educational bodies. Their activities were similarly varied, from sharing grow at home potato kits for Plant and Share to a healthy afternoon tea for Cook and Share.
- The % of grant holders in the **10-30%** least deprived communities remained roughly the same in Year Three, **44.7%** as in Year Two, **46.8%** – despite broadening criteria to all areas of the UK.
- In the UWE 'Good Food and Building Capacity through Cook and Share Grants' evaluation report we share key learnings on the value of small grants.

benefit organisers differently depending on their experience. First timers stand to gain basic skills in setting up community cooking events. Those with more experience use the opportunity to reach for more ambitious goals. This shows how grant givers can work with community food groups to grow the capabilities of people who get involved

- In addition to the FFLGT small grants, as part of their FFLGT partnership, LGNI awarded **22 grants** to kickstart intergenerational food activities and put ideas into practice. The **22** small grants supported events that brought together 660 older and younger people, of which **95%** felt more connected to their community and **99%** were keen to take part in further intergenerational activities.

NUMBER OF GRANTS AWARDED



LEARNINGS:

1. The UWE report states that: “The grant can act as a catalyst for new opportunities and a chance to extend social networks. The grants provided an opportunity to leverage additional resources. For several groups the grant was a catalyst to further successful funding bids or to attracting in-kind donations”.
2. Small grants are leading to benefits that extend beyond the initial funded event. UWE research found that almost all Cook and Share organisers went on to run further activities after the first event. They also reported a range of positive developments after the grant period, including having a new perspective on what they can achieve in the future, with several groups successfully gaining subsequent funding from other funding streams.
3. **Findings from Coventry University research** also highlight the benefit of diverse types of funding grants as a key enabler to support organisers to run activities and improve individual participation from diverse communities.
4. Automating the application system and tightening our criteria allowed us to streamline our internal processes and scale up from an average of **66 grants** awarded per round in Year Two compared to an average of **197** in Year Three.
5. Ease of access to grants was also mentioned by Coventry University as being key to enabling diverse groups to get involved and the development of our application process was underpinned by this principle.
6. Building on our regional networks from Years One and Two, targeting our comms and promotion to more areas, and making our application process simple and accessible helped us to maintain a high percentage of grant applicants in the **10-30%** most deprived areas of the UK.



“We have found this [the grant] beneficial as we were able to buy supplies to get people involved. We are currently developing a community garden and this event brought people into our space to see how we are developing the space to suit the needs of the local community. The support from FFLGT has been fantastic from the emails with information and guidance and the grant that enabled us to provide the event for free to the public.”

Post activity survey respondent

COPRODUCING NETWORKS WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS:

We work with 12 local partners (LCPs) across the UK, in strategically important areas, to embed our work in communities. These well linked and passionate organisations help us live out our belief that change happens locally – they link us as a national organisation to individuals in communities.

The partnerships work two-ways; in the last year we have given a platform to community partners in our online network sessions reaching 918 individuals across UK. These online sessions bring together our partners and a diverse network of individuals involved in the good food movement to be inspired, informed and connect with one another.

FFLGT funded research, from Coventry University, identified the importance of the enabling role for facilitating organisations such as ours has in building and supporting networks within and beyond communities to support a joined-up approach to fostering good food activities. We maximised the local and national partnerships that we have developed throughout the programme to deliver a diverse programme of networking opportunities for community organisations that focussed on sharing knowledge, building leadership and confidence of food leaders and building a strong movement of empowered organisations throughout the UK.



AT A GLANCE:

- As with small grants, we have built on what we learnt earlier in the programme and have moved from a regional network offer to UK-wide online network events, delivering **11** of these alongside our local partners in Year Three. Topics all link into wider goals of building a good food movement and range from supporting children and young people to better understand where their food comes from, to responding to growing need for emergency food provision, centring dignity and community empowerment.
- **918** distinct individuals have registered for a network in Year Three, **56.2%** of whom were new to FFLGT when they registered. **24.9%** have registered for multiple networks, suggesting that we are starting to build a network of regular attendees.
- Registrants have been geographically diverse, with representation across the whole of the UK, a mix of rural/urban groups, and 31 non-UK-based individuals. They also come from diverse roles and organisations, and have included GPs, Local Authority staff, small community groups and interested individuals hoping to start their own projects.
- According to our post-session survey **77%** of attendees said they planned to do something new or different as a result of the session. This involved planning to connect with other organisations to share skills and experiences, trying out ideas that they had picked up in the session, or using toolkits produced by our partners.
- At in-person sessions we supported people to usefully connect both through the chat and in breakout rooms. People have been using the chat to ask questions to other attendees and have initiated plans to connect outside of the sessions. Our post-session survey showed that **69%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they felt better connected to other people involved in good food activities in their community as a result of the session.
- Not all sessions have been national. As FFLGT local partners, PAVO and Cultivate are jointly facilitating a new food network in Powys called Grow Cook Share. Local meetings are taking place to engage with local community groups including Incredible Edible (IE) Llandrindod, The Wilderness Trust, Play Radnor and Presteigne & Norton Allotments' Association.
- Our partners in Scotland, Generations Working Together (GWT), host food network sessions and have used these sessions as an opportunity to share learnings from the FFLGT programme on setting up and sustaining community food initiatives. We have seen other national partners link up at these networks with RVS being invited to share expertise in setting up groups and EPC facilitating two network sessions on using growing activities to strengthen communities as part of Plant and Share month.
- We have been bringing together our LCPs at quarterly meetings as well as at other FFLGT events, to share knowledge and ideas, and learn from each other's work. This has proved really successful. The Active Wellbeing Society and Edinburgh Food Social have connected outside of these sessions to share ideas around leading similar cooking sessions and B-arts were recently inspired to set up a local good food network after hearing Mary Clear from IE speak at our Manchester networking event.

LEARNINGS:

1. We now have a sense of how size affects the experience, even in virtual space. There is a buzz in a very large network session (**60+**), but often a much nicer feel and much higher participation in smaller network sessions (**~30**). It may be worth considering what size we want for different kinds of network session and adjusting promotion accordingly.
2. We have learned a lot about the mechanics of running sessions and making them engaging as well as safe places where people feel like they can share and connect, developing a zoom guide to share with LCPs and also MFC members.
3. Participants highlighted both the practical advice around growing/cooking/community building and the ability to meet and connect with like-minded people as the most important aspects of the sessions. People have found it especially useful to hear about what didn't work and how groups responded to that – we were able to create spaces of enough trust that this could happen, though much is due to the openness and generosity from session leaders in providing this.
4. Things continue to be in flux as we emerge from the many challenges of lockdown only to face the cost-of-living crisis. We have seen registrations for network sessions decrease over time, and are still analysing possible reasons, but the emergence from lockdown, and ubiquitous working from home, seems like one big one we hope to check against the experience of other organisations.



👍👍 I find it helpful to have learned that there are others out there trying to accomplish the same goal. This solidarity gives me confidence that we can work together to network and share ideas but also that there is the potential to actively work on events and activities together. 👍👍

Network attendee



A CLOSER LOOK

Community Food Project Lead at The Active Wellbeing Society, a FFLGT local partner.

The Active Wellbeing Society is a community benefit society and cooperative working to build healthy, happy communities living active and connected lives. Vicky manages their food team, which aim to find ways of breaking down physical and social barriers to accessing food. They joined FFLGT as a Local Commissioned Partner (LCP) in early 2020. In March 2021 their funding was extended to engage local groups in Birmingham with FFLGT and to support the delivery of the Midlands networks. They are now one of our second stage LCPs.

"When we started working with Food for Life in early 2020, we were running community cafes and had a food truck. But we didn't really have funding to expand our offer or do any of the exciting things that we've been able to do because of the FFLGT funding. We couldn't do our original growing and cooking courses because COVID hit. But because [FFLGT] were adaptable, we moved to lots of test and learn, with online cookalongs and recipe kits. We also started a community garden at one of our cafes bringing in social prescriber patients and growing food for the cafes. It really was a wonderful opportunity to test and learn – I suppose [it was] a catalyst to trial those things we'd wanted to do.

It's led on to further opportunities. For example, we did some recipe kits and cookalongs as a package for the Council as part of a free school meals, holiday activities and food [programme] last summer. We wouldn't have been offered that if we hadn't tested and learnt with your funding. So it's just been a great way of building our own capacity. We've since received further funding for the community garden that we'd started, including a partnership led by Incredible Surplus to help deliver a citywide project called Compost Culture, which is National Lottery funded. We're building on what we started and we have resources and funding to carry on with the garden, which is great.



We switched to being a local partner last March to help engage the wider community with FFLGT. We've got two key networks that we do this in. There is a Birmingham Food Justice Network that was born out of COVID. [There are] 200+ organisations that come together to help [with the practicalities of] delivering emergency food provisions and fighting against food poverty. You've got Shelter, Crisis, Food Cycle, ourselves, just all sorts of people – anyone's welcome! And then there is a second network that has come out of this as well, called the Growing Network. That brings together growers to have a coordinated voice to share, resources, information and try to reclaim land across the city.

Being a partner with Food for Life has really helped us to connect to new organisations. The resources that you offer can help build capacity in the community. One of our main aims is to improve access to cooked meals to those in need. I think that the Food for Life resources, plus my support as well, can help people to support their local community with food. There is still a lot of need for these sorts of things. Our community cafes, and others are only in so many postcodes in the city. There's still a lot more need.

We benefited from being part of and running the networks as well. We ran one on partnerships and it was really good for us to create a partnership guide and to really think about what makes a good partnership. We're able to use that guide in our own organization as well. We run a growing network and we had someone come from a Birmingham organization, who runs the Mother Garden. The garden provides the seeds, the cuttings etc to spawn a load of other gardens. It gave him a national platform to tell everybody what he did, and he managed to connect with another group in Ipswich who wanted to learn more about the Mother Garden network.

We benefit from being part of the networks as well. They're so inspiring and motivating. It's great to see all the ideas that people offer up, I'm always writing down 'I must try this!'



Plant and Share 2022 artwork



Building

[Noun]: the process of creating or developing.

Leadership

[Noun]: the set of characteristics that make a good leader.

As well as our LCP and national partner work to embed and grow leadership in communities the last 12 months has seen the MFC project come to life.

The FFLGT programme so far has identified some outstanding work being undertaken by highly committed individuals in providing good food activities to support their communities. Despite this, there is no over-arching framework for delivering community food activity and many organisers have used a trial-and-error approach to establishing what works. We identified an important role that FFLGT could play in bringing organisers together to share, learn and activate community organisers that could act as “Good Food Champions” in their local areas.

Our work with Coventry University identified five key enablers for community organisers to sustain their involvement in providing good food activities.

These are:

- Access to resources (including grants),
- Networking a learning community,
- Support to co-design effectively with the community,
- Community capacity for an inclusive approach,
- and Institutional support.

We have adopted these enablers in our work by facilitating networks, offering grants and other resources, and developing the MFC offer. We aimed to build a learning community of Good Food Champions that could benefit from our institutional support to take a leadership role in their communities. This fits our ethos of asset-based community development, finding community-based grassroots solutions and building the capacity of community organisers.

MFC is a leadership programme, to help build people’s knowledge, skills and expertise on leading a Good Food Movement. The pilot phase took on design principles to ensure a mutual learning space was created between participants and FFLGT programme staff.

“My food community programme has gone beyond and above my expectations. Although I didn’t know what to expect the whole journey so far has been very interactive through sharing ideas & lived experiences. We have heard the high’s & lows of other projects. What I have enjoyed the most is hearing Real life experiences and having group discussions sharing solutions to find ways that can help overcome them so far, all aspects to the programme have had a positive impact on me.”

MFC Member

MFC – Principles

We're all learning, all the time

Everyone learns differently

We are all on individual journeys with different starting points and needs

We are all connected, and part of a wider good food movement

We develop better together, when we collaborate, share and build with each other

Learning has most meaning when it supports and leads to taking action

MFC IS DESIGNED TO INSPIRE AND SUPPORT MEMBERS TO:

1. **Build knowledge:** people learn together and individually, and access resources.
2. **Connect with others who champion good food:** in a local community and across the UK.
3. **Develop leadership skills:** take action and lead positive change for good food in a community.

ACTIVATION:

The activation of the first pilot MFC programme was divided into two connected phases. The focus of the first part of the programme from September 2021 to January 2022 was on expanding participants’ knowledge of food systems, issues around food and understanding opportunities for change. With bringing such a diverse group of food leaders together it was important to develop a shared language and understanding among our members. Learning and Inspiration workshops and Connect and Share sessions were geared around deepening the understanding of shared challenges related to community food work and understanding the potential individuals can have on influencing positive change.

From January 2022 onwards the focus moved to applying the learning and enabling community action and influencing positive change on local food systems. This was achieved by planning and delivering MFC funded Community Action Projects. Underpinning both phases of the programme was a focus on developing members’ individual leadership capacity. This involved personalised coaching alongside leadership masterclasses. Leadership techniques were applied to expand participants’ spheres of influence across their local food system.

AT A GLANCE:

- We delivered **84** hours of MFC sessions over 9 months, including Learning & Inspiration sessions, Leadership Masterclasses, Roundtable discussions, and Connect and Share sessions.
- We have drawn on the expertise of partners and other teams within the SA to deliver sessions and give our cohort different perspectives and sources of inspiration. These include, Koreo, EPC, Royal Voluntary Service, Food Ethics Council (FEC), IE and the SA's Citizenship team.
- In response to feedback from our members, who indicated that they would benefit from a face-to-face session, we brought together MFC members and some of our LCPs in Manchester in March. Our Wales Programme Manager also arranged a Wales-specific policy event, bringing together Welsh MFC members, Sustainable Food Places coordinators and Veg Advocates to share best practice, develop relationships and share opportunities for collaborative working. Feedback from both events was overwhelmingly positive, and as a result we have built in several face-to-face elements into our phase two plans.
- We awarded **£33K** of grants for members' Community Actions Projects. The grants are designed to help members apply the confidence, skills and networks they've gained from the programme to bring about change in their local food systems. Projects are ongoing but range from experimental planting of pea varieties to building resilience and dignity in emergency food provision.
- As phase one draws to a close, we are in the process of setting up a phase one alumni group to form a self-led network and take part in elements of the delivery of phase two. There has been a strong appetite for this from within the cohort, with many keen to stay in touch with one another as well as support the next cohort of members.

LEARNINGS:

1. A diverse and passionate group of people leads to many personalities and ideas, we have worked hard to tweak the open agenda to a lightly structured one at our sessions to balance the desire for a participant and community up approach that still delivers useful and balanced sessions for all participants.
2. Research interviews undertaken by UWE revealed that participants wanted key dates, deadlines and templates in advance to help them plan their time and contribute more effectively. We have incorporated these learnings into phase two of MFC.
3. We had a lot of feedback from MFC members that technology was difficult to access and that they found it hard to easily connect outside of sessions. Internally, we have also found the platforms we used for phase one delivery have been clunky and time-consuming. Based on this learning, we are now trialling a new platform, Circle, for our phase one alumni and phase two members. The platform will allow us to communicate with the members and for member to communicate with each other easily, and will bring all our resources and videos into one place.

Map to show locations of MFC projects across the UK



GET TOGETHERS
Bringing people together through food



Attitudes to leadership changed as the programme progressed with some participants expressly stating they had changed their views on what constitutes leadership whilst others talked of becoming better able to take the initiative within their communities.

UWE interim report



A CLOSER LOOK

MFC – Jo Searle reflects on the opportunities ahead.

To say Jo is busy is an understatement that characterises many primary school teachers and community volunteers. Jo is a teacher and PE specialist, having been teaching for nearly 40 years, and works at a primary school in a diverse part of Sheffield. About five years ago the school Head asked Jo to consider adding food education to her specialisms and despite feeling a little overwhelmed initially, Jo agreed.

The power of food to break down barriers

The children at the school Jo teaches at adore the practical side of food education, Jo gains minor celebrity status in the school corridors if she dons her apron, as the children eagerly anticipate being chosen for a cooking session. Pupils say they don't get to do much, if any, cooking at home.

Jo soon realised that whilst she could fill a cookery club several times over, she needed a framework and some support to create a cross curriculum programme that was bespoke to her school and the community it serves. She wanted to build links into families and engage them in skills the whole family could use whilst also not wanting to be out of her depth on areas she had less experience in such as food poverty or food citizenship and how to make connections in her area.

Jo came across FFLGT and hoped it would give her a way of creating a moment for families to cook and learn together, so in February half term 2020 she created a session for vulnerable families to come into school and cook together in family groups then share a communal lunch with the whole group.

That day, although busy and taking weeks to create was one of the most enjoyable and fulfilling things I have done. It was a truly special day; to see families share recipes and ideas from one culture to another or one generation to another was wonderful.

That session helped Jo decide that she wanted her food education programme to not only cover cross curriculum links about measuring and weighing or growing and cooking but to reach out to parents and grandparents. To share knowledge, heritage and make cooking about connection again not about convenience.

If we don't make those connections now then recipes will be lost, the link to a family's cultural past would be severed forever.



Pandemic pause

Just as Jo was forming the outline of her idea the pandemic hit and schools were closed, meaning Jo's sessions couldn't get off the ground. But undeterred Jo spotted an article in a FFLGT newsletter and signed up to be consulted on how to create My Food Communities. Not really knowing what she was letting herself in for, a phrase Jo may repeat as the programme developed, Jo found herself giving up a good deal of her time to help refine the modules. Believing this was the very programme she could use to benefit her community Jo applied to be in the 2021/22 cohort.

Fast forward to Easter 2022 and Jo has been part of the MFC programme for 9 months and she hosted an Easter family cooking event.

Covid restrictions meant that families took home what they cooked but the sessions were still a huge success, parents commented that they liked using the day constructively and wanted to know when the next one was.

Jo wants to use the family sessions and school cookery clubs to create a book of community food stories and recipes, harnessing all the culturally diverse recipes in the local community before they are lost and maybe even involving some of the parents and grandparents to share the skills and methods at sessions.



The power of local

Jo has now made new links with food networks locally; she is now connected to Sheffield Food Poverty Action Group and has been invited to speak about her project. When asked if MFC matched Jo's expectations she explains that they exceeded them; "I thought I would learn some things, expand my horizons, get a grounding and for it to be about cooking. But it is so much more than that; it is about gardening and access and skills and poverty. I didn't expect the camaraderie and I think it has given me a confidence I didn't know was missing.

She continues, "I don't see myself as a leader, I didn't want to be one, but I do see myself as someone who makes things happen, albeit quietly and I am a problem solver. I think it has shown me a different side to leadership and one I am quite comfortable in. I have become better at letting go a bit, so if I can't run a session in half term then I know my colleagues now want to help and it may look a little different as a result but that is okay.

But what it taught me most is that my role in my community has impact, and our school can have a positive impact on our community, that has a value I perhaps hadn't appreciated before. If more people work in and with their own community then the power of that cannot be matched".

Looking ahead to a more resilient food system



Whilst there have been many things to celebrate this year, with communities reconnecting at FFLGT activities after covid lockdowns, the road ahead has many challenges for communities, including the cost of living crisis and the shockwaves in the food system from the war in Ukraine. We urgently need to build more resilience into our food and farming systems so that communities are in a better position to deal with these kinds of shocks in the future and to make healthy and sustainable diets accessible for all.

Unfortunately, there is no one silver bullet solution here. As our research with Coventry University this year observed there are multiple factors at multiple levels affecting participation in community food activities. What's needed is solutions that work across these levels and adapt to different communities or places' particular 'ecosystem' of motivations, barriers and enabling factors influencing healthy and sustainable diets. This is why at the SA we work in communities, settings, places and through accreditation schemes, joining the dots to build more resilience into local food systems for a better future for people, climate and nature.

FFLGT's work increasing participation in community food activities remains extremely important as a way to enable people to play more active roles - as 'food citizens' rather than food consumers - in their local food system and community. The greater number and diversity of people playing active and connected roles in their food system will build more resilience into it, just as more biodiversity in nature supports the health and resilience of natural systems.

As we have seen during the covid crisis community food projects, like those supported through FFLGT, play a vital role in supporting people at risk of food insecurity and exclusion. Evaluation of FFLGT Cook and Share activities by the University of the West of England has shown how FFLGT have strong engagement with people living with mental health issues, long-term conditions, on low income, or with other forms of social and health disadvantage. However, despite the important social value these kinds of community food activities provide they are too often overlooked as 'nice to have' and remain poorly or insecurely resourced, making it difficult for organisers to sustain and deepen the impact from them longer term.

There are opportunities on the horizon, such as the government's levelling up agenda and place-based shared prosperity funds, to invest more in the social infrastructure that enables community food activities to thrive, respond to the cost of living crisis and build resilient food systems for all. In our final year of FFLGT we will continue to enhance this infrastructure by:

1. Catalysing more active food citizenship through our Plant / Cook and Share campaigns.
2. Building capacity for sustained community food action through a coproduced programme of networking events which give a platform to community food champions and connect the good food movement.
3. Developing community food leadership, through our innovative MFC programme and coaching and support for local commissioned partners.
4. Focussing on legacy and learning, from research projects to embedding the FFLGT approach into existing and new service provision.





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