



**Get Togethers:  
Programme Headlines**  
Bringing communities together  
through cooking, growing and  
sharing good food.



**GET  
TOGETHERS**  
Bringing people together through food



**COMMUNITY  
FUND**





# Making Good Food the **Easy Choice** for **Everyone**

**Food for Life Get Togethers, a four-year (2019-23) UK wide programme funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, is part of the Soil Association's Food for Life initiative, which is a community-based Good Food Programme.**

The programme was delivered with the support of five national partners<sup>1</sup> and twelve local partners<sup>2</sup>. Each partner had an expertise in different aspects of community engagement and building a good food movement and brought specialised insights in how to facilitate Get Togethers activities in specific localities or with communities of interest.

The Soil Association acted as a coordinating agency within the programme, bringing the different perspectives and inputs together to create a cohesive programme plan. This involved a convening and engagement role, as well as a formal role in holding overall accountability and governance for the National Lottery Community Fund grant.

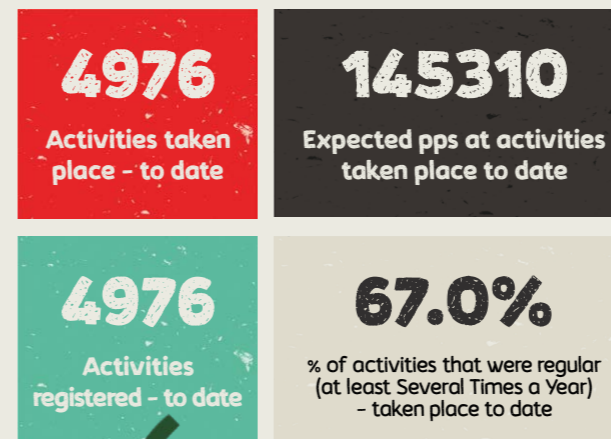
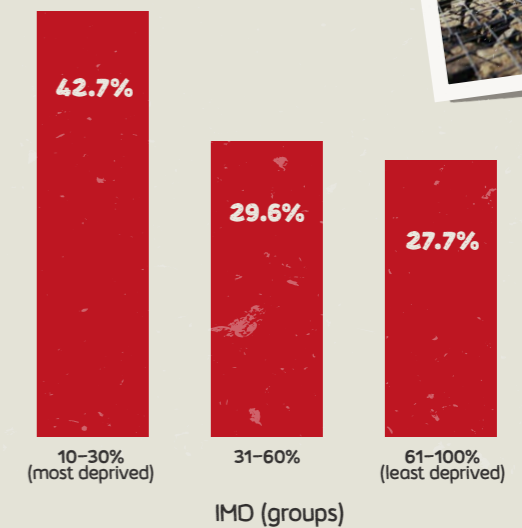
The aim of the Get Togethers programme has been to help create a world where people of different ages and backgrounds regularly connect, learn, and play a more active role in their local food system. This has also included making meaningful connections between organisations and individuals across the UK with shared ambitions and goals in a good food movement.



Over the four years, the programme expanded its reach and involved **5553** diverse community settings and interest groups mainly (**42.7%**) from **10-30%** most deprived areas of the UK nations.

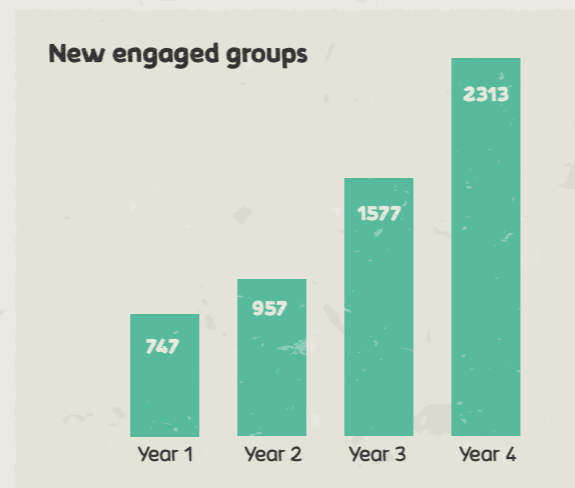
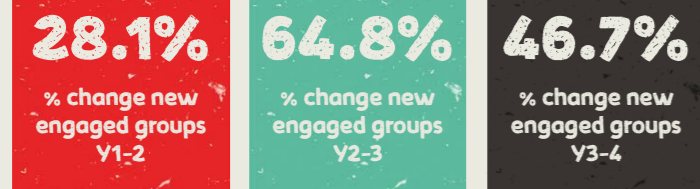


## All engaged groups to date



During delivery and engagement with thousands of diverse community settings and groups, Get Togethers highlighted the impactful and valuable connections that people from all ages and backgrounds can make through growing, cooking and sharing good food.

At a time of converging crisis in cost of living, low wages and a shortage of funding to support people in communities across the UK, the Get Togethers programme was created at a timely moment. It has shown that with a small amount of funding and providing the right support by listening to, and working with grassroots communities, it is possible to connect a vast range of people and organisations across the UK to help them build capacity and empower meaningful grassroots leadership.



**84** Engaged groups outside of UK - to date.



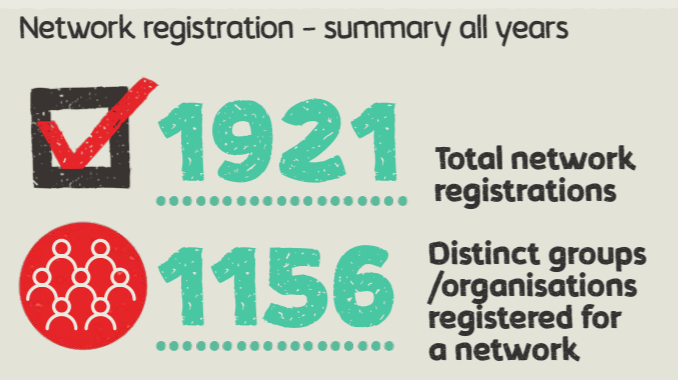


# Strengthening Networks for **Community-Based Action** on 'Good Food'

Get Togethers launched a national Network Event series to explore using the power of networks to promote community-scale good food citizenship, as well as facilitate greater peer-to-peer connections both locally and nationally.

The programme's unique approach to Network Events allowed a broad spectrum of people to come together. These networks included anyone who wanted to know more about the good food movement, from growing food, to cooking it, to building a community around it. The networks events also created space for people to share and learn from others from a wide range of backgrounds, locations, experience and knowledge.

A total of **1921 groups** or individuals registered for Networks Event, with **1156** registering for Network Events for the first time, showing that almost **40%** of network registrations were returning participants, the network also continued to grow with **60%** new registrations throughout the programme of delivery.

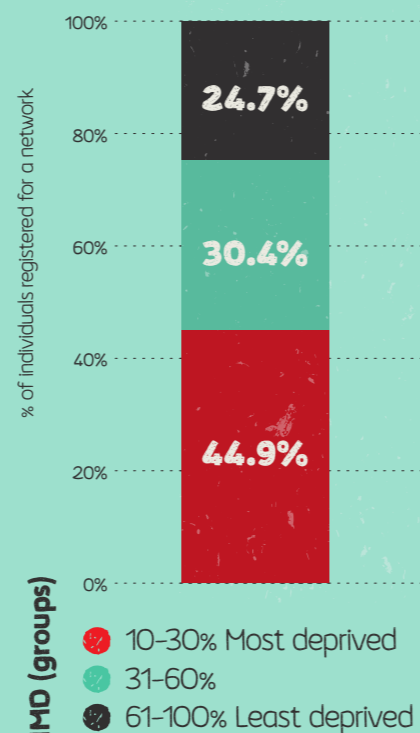


## Diversity and Inclusion

A core objective of the Get Togethers programme was to reach a wide and diverse cross section of society. The approach to achieve this included:

- 1 Employing Regional Engagement Officers carrying out intensive outreach in key areas.
- 2 Content created by frontline organisations, responding to key issues at grassroots level.
- 3 Practical advice, with opportunities to network and meet others going through similar experiences.

Get Togethers' Network Events and beyond had a good uptake with diverse individuals and groups across the UK. The sustained high proportion of registered individuals (**45%**) indicates substantial interest in topics covered at Network Events from the **10-30%** most deprived areas of the UK.



## Personal Value of Network Events for the Participants

Reflecting on the value of the Get Togethers Network Events, participants reported a wide variety of benefits. The programme evaluation demonstrated that these events helped participants to **feel less isolated** and **build capacity** by **having a space to talk** about community food and **feeling affirmed by hearing about others working on similar issues**. Networks Events also provided participants with **practical ideas, knowledge and resources** to take back into their own community and implement a new local food activity, encouraged them to become more actively engaged in networking than before, **and gave them the motivation** for developing ongoing meaningful relationships.

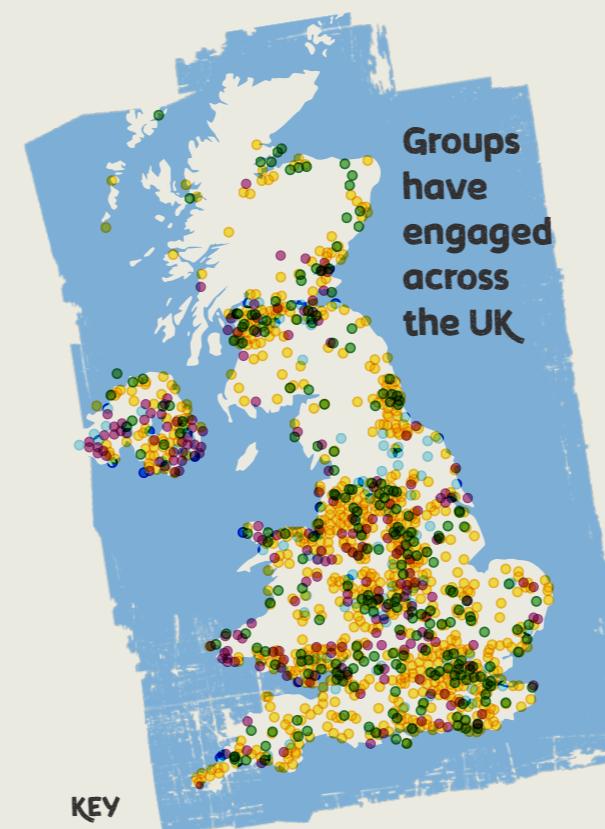
**50%** said that they made connections with others following Network Events, of which **13%** of 'super networkers' made more than **16** new connections out of events they attended.



**69%** used **ideas, knowledge, and contacts** from events to help organise **food activities**

**62%** felt that the events **fostered connections** between participants **very/extremely well**

**61%** said that the sessions had **strengthened their capacity** to run food activities



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

## Approach to Network Building

Get Togethers strategically focused on strengthening networks at both local and national level by;

- hosting network events,
- sharing newsletters,
- creating national campaigns such as Plant and Share Month,
- delivering training and giving support through partnerships.

Throughout the programme **22 online** and **10 in-person** events were hosted by the Get Togethers' Local Commissioned Partners, presenting a wide variety of themes and showcasing community food initiatives across the four nations of the UK.



## Building an effective Network and Partnerships

Involvement with the Get Togethers programme has been the **catalyst for the development** of new working partnerships that were unlikely to have come about otherwise.

One of the interesting dimensions of these partnerships is the way it has **brought together** community food initiatives with other types of third-sector organisations. This has helped food projects to expand their reach and non-food groups to bring **cooking and growing more centrally** into their programmes of work.

These collaborations enabled the groups involved to capitalise on each other's expertise and networks.

**The Get Togethers Network Events have fulfilled a latent demand for practical guidance and peer support and collaborations around community-scale action on good food.**

Prof Matthew Jones,  
University of the West of England



**We've been really lucky to be part of Soil Association's Get Togethers, we became a local partner and have been involved in working together with other organisations across the UK, learning from them about how they're doing things on their different projects, what's going on, how people are combatting the crisis in the food system, and also sharing our learnings from running our community cooking classes.**

Kirsty – Edinburgh Food Social –  
Local Partner

## Value of Network Events for the Partners

Programme Partners reported that Network Events helped them to **expand their reach, share their ongoing good practice, disseminate their resources, initiate new partnerships, inspire and support new strands of work.** As facilitators of the Get Togethers Network Events, Partners also felt the validation and motivational value of seeing their work in a national context and value being associated with the Soil Association, its reach and influence.

## The power of connections in community food projects – The Active Wellbeing Society (TAWS)

As a Local Partner TAWS received a Get Togethers grant three years ago to create a campaign to bring people together around food, cooking and growing. Vicky Hemming, the Head of Food at TAWS explains: 'It was the project I always dreamed of, and it seemed perfect, not just for me, but for our communities. But no sooner had we got everything organised and sent the invites out to come to in-person sessions, literally the same week, it all had to stop because of Covid. Despite our fears that it was all going to stop we worked with Get Togethers to come up with new ideas. Everything had to radically change, the plans were all useless! But the great thing about the Get Togethers' team was that they were really flexible and supportive in helping us all to become more agile and test new things.'

**With the breadth of Community projects that we work within not just including food, it includes all types of community projects, and due to that, what we don't have is the depth of knowledge to go into those individual passions – so partnering with the Get Togethers meant that we could signpost people onto them to follow their passions.**

Samantha – Eden Project Communities –  
National Partner

She continues: "We decided on recipe kits, with all the ingredients, step by step instructions and then these kits were given out to local families and people who were struggling or who had lost their jobs and people living alone. By working with the Food for Life Get Togethers programme we learned a lot. There was so much collaboration with other partners and projects across the country, and through that we gained valuable advice from other groups."

**Being a national partner with the Get Togethers has been able to elevate the work we do, and on another level, it has allowed us to expand what we do, who we talk to as well as provide us with tools in terms of resources and campaigns.**

Hannah – Food Sense Wales –  
National Partner

"I am really going to miss Get Togethers, it is an excellent catalyst to inspire and take the next step. It helped us do more than 'just food' – we now connect people to plants and where their food comes from and that is down to Get Togethers. You have to see it to be it. It is like the very best virtual hand holding, but one where you are heard too and can share ideas and also learn so much."

The Get Togethers' Network Events and the wealth of practical guidance, peer to peer support, and community collaborations to come from them, helped to identify a gap and provide support to those working at the frontline of good food community-action. The networks unearthed the vast potential for community-based food initiatives to develop, broaden and deepen their impact on creating regional and national connections for those working in a similar space, with a potential to make real and lasting systemic change from the ground up.

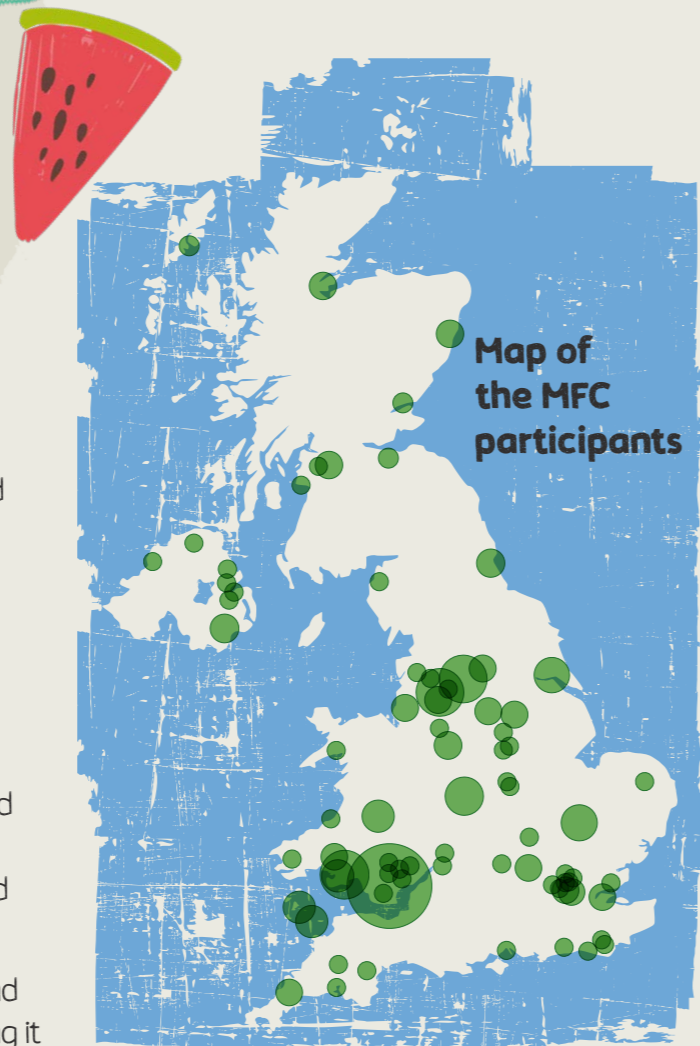


# My Food Community: A Network for Good Food Champions

Over the past few years a spotlight has been shone on the role of community food organisers. They have met challenges, built food resilience, tackled poverty and become activists of a broken food system. The skills, experiences and tools developed through My food Community (MFC) have helped communities promote sustainable, healthy and affordable diets. There was a growing need to come together to share, support and learn from one another.

MFC, originating from Food for Life Get Togethers, is a community leadership programme intended to create a network for good food champions to learn, connect and take action. The online and face-to-face environments enhanced flexibility to engage with the programme and connectivity by bridging geographical barriers.

Central to the MFC design has been an ethos of 'test and learn', making the programme flexible and agile, allowing it to evolve and adapt according to feedback during delivery.



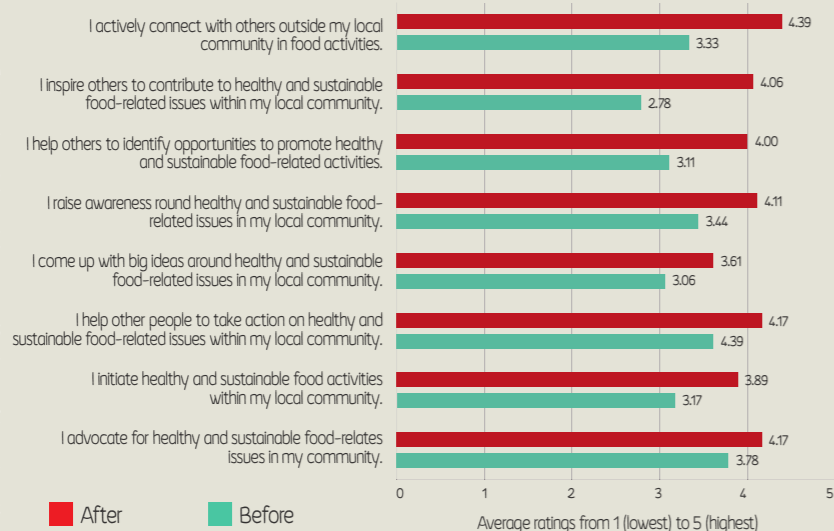
**TWO** Cohorts  
**114** food leaders



**138** training hours

**£50,000** funding for Leadership Action Grants

## Differences in ratings of leadership competencies Before and After MFC



## Effectiveness in Developing Personal Networks, Knowledge, Skills and Competencies

Significant improvements were reported by the participants in all the leadership competencies, knowledge and skills after six months of engaging in the MFC programme. The strongest areas of improvement were around **raising awareness, helping others to identify opportunities, inspiring others and actively connecting with others outside their local communities** in relation to healthy and sustainable food-related activities.

**My Food Community has been invaluable in gaining confidence to approach businesses, community leaders and individuals with my ideas. Previously I felt like the person with lots of, albeit great, ideas but perhaps without the confidence or knowledge that they were achievable. Since MFC I have had the confidence to know that they are, if I build the right network, I learned how to place myself and learn skills in listening, how to position myself and how to succeed. Two years ago, I think I would have struggled to get this project to be a success.**

**Eilish Blade, nutritional therapist, second cohort of the MFC**

Self-reported feedback showed that the participants:

- grew confidence and kudos from the programme,
- developed personal networks at a national level,
- increased knowledge in food citizenship,
- improved their ideas around leadership and their own aspirations.

## After taking part in MFC

**27%** developed 'extremely high' confidence in community leadership around food systems

**41%** had 'extremely strong' knowledge of food citizenship

**46%** developed 'extremely strong' skills to create change in food systems

**68%** regarded themselves as a community leader in food activities.



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

MFC participants were given the opportunity to put their newly developed skills into practice by implementing a food-based project in their local area with a small **Leadership Action Grant** provided by the MFC programme.

The grants were also useful in enhancing partnership working and were empowering in initiating and applying the knowledge and skills learnt from the My Food Community programme.

**73%** strongly agreed that the grant helped them to apply their learning from MFC

Data and feedback from the members provide good evidence that participants continue to derive value from MFC many months after they complete the online training. There is significant potential for participants to continue to benefit over time with the delivery of further programmes run and the growth a network of MFC alumni.

## Lightbulb moments and opening doors

Joy O'Neill, Director of Oxford Climate Alumni from the second cohort, didn't have a food background, MFC helped her with ideas around leadership: "I feel different and more confident, previously I felt like I was playing at food leadership and now I can say I am a food leader. My mindset has changed. Whereas before we would have tentatively asked academics to speak or ask for research, I think it felt like our group was an underdog but now people are approaching us. I am more knowledgeable; I sound more assured and more confident, and I think that comes across when I seek research and people now want to engage with us, and that is a result of My Food Community for sure."



# Get Togethers Campaigns for Community Enrichment and Engagement

Get togethers' **Cook and Share** and **Plant and Share** campaigns were launched to promote positive attitudes towards multigenerational and diverse community activities through planting, cooking and sharing events that would bring people together from a range of backgrounds and communities.

Since 2021 the campaigns substantially grew their reach and attracted a remarkable range of small-scale organisations and groups serving different communities of place and interest.

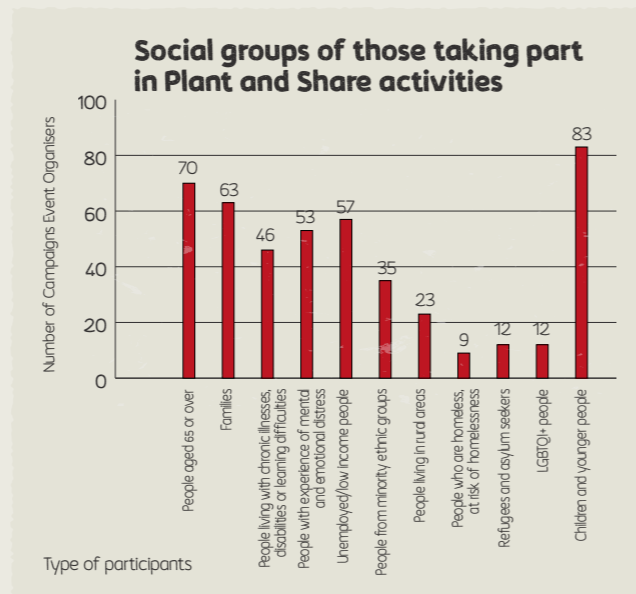
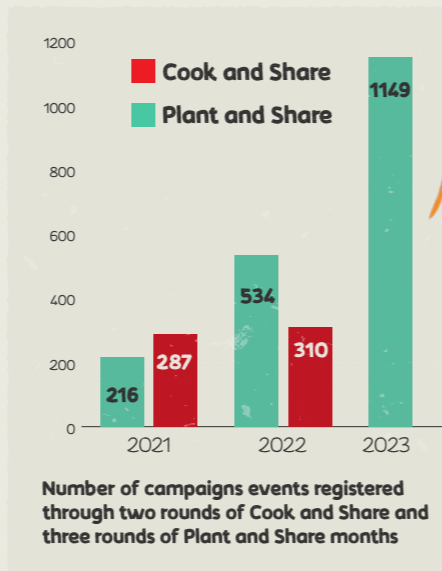
**2496** Plant and Share and Cook and Share events were organised to date! These events were often social occasions, with the estimated number of participants ranging from **10 to 400**, with an average of **39** participants per event, expanding the reach of events to thousands of participants per campaign month!

Get Togethers campaigns supported event organisers with themed resources. In total across all the campaigns run, these resources were downloaded on: **50,478** occasions during the Plant and Share months and **29,207** occasions during the Cook and Share months.

A wide range of different social groups were engaged in the campaigns' activities. While most groups of participants involved **multiple generations**, there was also strong engagement with people living with **mental health issues, emotional distress, long-term conditions, on low income**, or with other forms of **social and health disadvantage**.

- Food-based events provided opportunities to make conversation, find out about others, and generate ideas for other community activities.
- With varying cultural experiences and opinions about what makes food 'good', organisers provided a choice on what was grown or cooked at the events.
- Organisers varied the approach on how the link between good food was made to the environment, learning, local production, culture, and celebrations.
- For some groups, shared meals and growing activities were a way to provide nutritious food to those experiencing food poverty in a way that preserved the dignity of recipients.

\*Some of these changes involved including more diverse groups of people, involving new partners such as local businesses, training up volunteers and using different ingredients or cooking new dishes.



## Reflecting on their event campaigns event organisers reported:

**81%** sought to run their events on more than one occasion

**98%** decided to continue or grow their community food activities

**51%** stated that they intended to make changes to social food activities in future\*

## Get Togethers Microgrants to Support Community Capacity and Leadership Building

During the second round of campaigns (mid-2021 for Cook and Share and early 2022 for Plant and Share), £150 grants were made available by Get Togethers to hundreds of community groups to deliver cooking, planting, and sharing activities that would bring people together from disadvantaged and diverse communities.

The evaluation of Cook and Share and Plant and Share campaigns' small grants scheme provided a window into a rich field of over 900 community and voluntary groups across the UK.

### Evidence shows that small grants benefited organisers differently depending on their experience.

Some grant recipients used the initial grant as a catalyst to further successful funding bids or to attract in-kind funding.

- Tidemill Residents Group used their grant as a motivation to bring on board local businesses to meet the resourcing requirements not covered by the grant whilst for Penrose Root Community the grant was a way to bring in match funding to satisfy the requirements of their core funder.

Some gained experience and used creative means to make the grant funding stretch further.

- The Nigerian Catholic Community were able to multiply the benefits of this and other grants by purchasing at discount through the charity Project In kind, which enables them to make a grant of £150 translate into £500 buying power.

Aside from the financial benefit, the grant affirmed the ideas of organisers, helped them extend their ambitions and feel connected to other groups engaged in community and gave them a chance to extend their social networks.

- Friendly Faces of Kent used a portion of the grant to create 'legacy' resources such as recipe cards or plant give-aways.

Event organisers reported that the grant helped their group promote:

- the use of healthy food (**77%**)
- in-season food (**52%**)
- locally produced food (**50%**)
- sustainably produced food (**27%**)
- food with the highest animal welfare standards (**16%**)

Groups that were first time recipients of external funding stood to gain **basic skills in setting up community cooking events**, felt **an enhanced sense of the status of their group** and had **a new perspective on what the group could potentially accomplish in the future**.

Whereas those with more experience in running events set more ambitious goals to work on community food issues.

Following success with the small grant a minority had applied for further funding and almost all organisers reported going on to run further activities after their first event.

### LEARNING: grant givers can work with community food groups to grow the capabilities of people who get involved.

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." **Live Active Unst, Shetland**

**The 'Plant and Share' grant has meant we can purchase all our seeds, compost and pots for the community to all get together and learn together and that is what community is all about – the warmth of togetherness.**

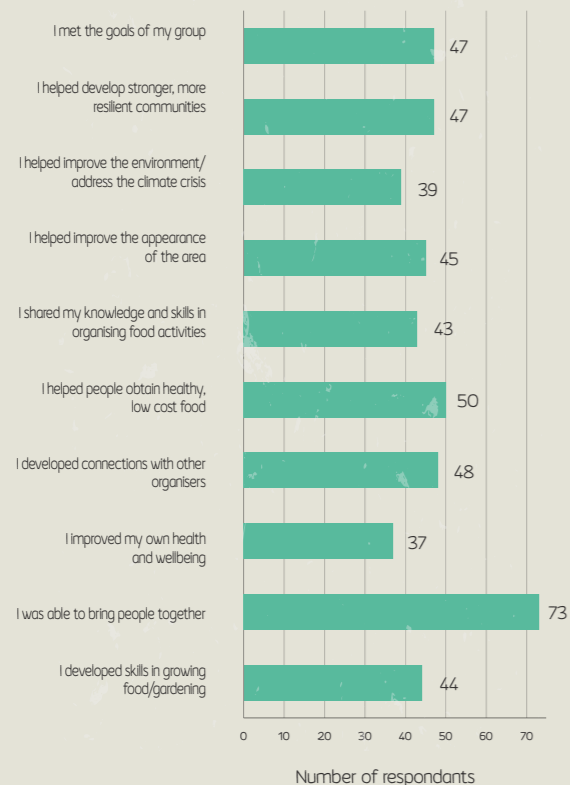
Friends of George's Park, Birmingham



## Impact of 'Plant and Share' Campaign

- 'Plant and Share' activities: helped participants connect with others in the community (97%)
- enhance positive attitudes towards diversity (60%)
- address isolation and loneliness (89%)
- improved attitudes towards ageing (53%)

Number of campaign event organisers who indicated what they got out of the Plant and Share event



Event organisers named growing a wide range of produce, including at least 61 different types of fruit and vegetables.

For most organisations, it was their first experience of running a Plant and Share type activity (81%).



## Linking communities through sharing flowers and vegetables

RainbowBIZ, a CIC based in the market town of Flintshire, has been incorporated as a Social Enterprise since January 2015. Sarah, one of the four Directors of RainbowBiz CIC said, "Some other allotment holders attended our Plant and Share event and brought flowers and vegetables to share with others which was really lovely. We had some drop-in visitors who were originally from Romania and Hungary. We hope that the links we have made will continue to come along to our projects in the future." It was the first time that RainbowBiz CIC had run an event like this.

## Friendships flourish through edible hanging basket community project

Nestled in four acres of land in Caerphilly, Groundwork Wales runs several projects, all based outdoors, and include a Wellbeing Project, a Kickstart scheme and one of the key projects is Routes2Life (R2L). Rachael, who has been with Groundwork Wales for nearly 20 years said "Plant and Share is such a good theme and gave us a platform and a way to direct people to the online Get Togethers, we shared the online 'how to' session on our website and it has been watched hundreds of times, which is incredible" She continued; "Plant and Share Month is so beneficial, you get to meet people, get out in the fresh air and it is so nice to be around people. All my volunteers love Plant and Share month, we are like a family now and we all look forward to it."

## Impacts of 'Cook and Share' Campaign

Organisers reported that by bringing people together their 'Cook and Share' events:

- enhanced positive attitudes towards ageing (64%) and diversity (68%)
- addressed loneliness and isolation (83%)
- helped people connect with each other (99%)
- almost all organisers go on to run further activities after their first event

## Bringing People Together Through Good Food:

Many of the volunteers live by themselves. Like myself – my husband died six years ago. We get more out of it than we put in really. We thoroughly enjoy it.

Balfon Lunch Club

Even though people have a language barrier or a different economic and political agenda, it doesn't matter when it comes to food...we can easily communicate through the food.

Women's Cultural Arena CIC, Buckinghamshire



A lot of what we do is very hands on and busy. I think that having the meal was good for was just people relaxing, and actually coming together and talking about what they've been doing.... There wasn't one person around that fire who didn't talk to everybody.

Helping Hooves Derbyshire CIC



Meals help people communicate





# A Lasting Legacy

Food is a fundamental part of life. Food growing, preparation and sharing express feelings of care, togetherness, and connection in ways that we sometimes struggle to convey otherwise. Food with its origins, tastes and meanings offers a unique social currency that cannot be matched by words and money. Yet, possibly because it is so fundamental, food is often overlooked in efforts to address important contemporary issues such as isolation, loneliness, and social division. Moreover, significance of those who work with food in community settings is often given little attention, possibly due to a lack of appreciation of the knowledge, commitments, and skills involved in such efforts.



Get Togethers networking, campaign activities and leadership empowerment programme indicated the potential for community-based food initiatives to gain traction, develop, broaden and deepen their impact through making regional and national connections with others working on similar issues. Grants for community food activities provided opportunities for organisation and groups which are remarkably diverse and have few or no affiliations – in the form of partnerships and networks – with other agencies, to think creatively and try new ideas. Grant holders demonstrated a wide range of achievements both around how to use food in social activities and how to create wider benefits for the communities they serve.



**One outstanding point of learning from the programme has been the scale, breadth and depth of activities across the UK that might be defined as 'Get Togethers'. Get Togethers programme evaluation also outlines the role of the Soil Association as the central facilitating entity, working with the partners to bring communities together through cooking, growing and sharing good food.**

Food for Life Get Togethers represented one of the most wide-ranging initiatives in the UK to elevate the importance of food-based community gatherings and leadership empowering. Over a four-year period, the programme has collaborated and provided direct support to amplify the work of thousands of community groups. Spanning the pandemic and beyond, this has been a timely initiative where the role of food in bringing people together has been the source of great public interest.





## Acknowledgement

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The Get Togethers team would like to thank the National Lottery Community Fund, partners, and everyone else who supported the delivery of the programme. We would also like to thank the University of the West of England (UWE) and all the interview and survey participants who supported the evaluation of the programme.

University of the West of England (UWE) has evaluated the Food for Life Get Togethers programme through a longitudinal research programme with multiple focus areas and the use of various methods. This impact report brought together a summary of the key points. You can find depth, discussion, and learning from the participants, partners, and supporters by reading the specific UWE evaluation reports on different aspects of the programme on:

## Our Impact and Research | Food for Life Get Togethers

**Designer:** Clare Daniels - csidedesign

**Photo:** Scott M Salt Photography

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