



COMMUNITY FOOD HUBS

YEAR TWO IMPACT REPORT

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ROTHSCHILD
FOUNDATION



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Overview

In 2021, Rothschild Foundation funded ten community fridge groups to expand into food hubs; running new activities at their spaces centred around bringing people together to share food.

Initially the plan was to put this funding towards establishing a new community fridge which would then evolve into a hub. It quickly became clear this might be an unnecessary burden on groups and a more staggered approach would work best. This is why we chose to support existing groups who wanted to do more.

The creation of community food hubs has been a natural transition for Hubbub's [Community Fridge Network](#). Many of the 450 community fridges are evolving into social spaces where visitors come to learn more about food, growing their own and eating on a budget.

Over the past two years, Hubbub has supported 104 community fridges to evolve into food hubs. This has been made possible by support from the Rothschild Foundation, Starbucks and Co-op. The aim is not to keep growing the Community Fridge Network but to deepen the impact of community fridges which are already open.

Food hub groups and their activities



Community meals



Cooking workshops



Growing workshops

Lancaster West				Kendal Larder			
Charles Burrell Centre				Stonehouse			
Eat That Frog				Hole in the Wall			
Denton Island				The Old Bathhouse			
Kyle and Lochalsh				Social Action Hub			

These groups have worked closely with Hubbub over the last two years in an open and collaborative way, enabling us to test, learn and identify where support is best directed.

Across the board, groups have seen visitor numbers grow and it's an on-going challenge to secure a reliable supply of food to meet local need. Often the hubs will rely on a number of funding sources to deliver the range of activities at their centres.

Engagement



Monthly call

Hubbub ran an optional monthly ‘drop-in’ over lunchtime, where food hub coordinators could come together to share news and ideas. Through this valuable peer-to-peer support, groups hear from others who understand and share their experiences, helping to boost their confidence in what they are doing. Coordinators proactively offer advice on accessing additional funding, recruiting volunteers and access to food. Food hub coordinators are under immense strain, so it also provides a valuable outlet to feel heard, celebrate their hard work and foster solidarity with other groups around the country.



Monthly reporting

Food hubs report to Hubbub via an online form with their monthly attendee and volunteer numbers, as well as qualitative insights such as quotes, photography or any challenges they are facing. This is adapted regularly to reflect ideas and requests raised in the drop-in sessions.



Resources and training

As most of our hubs are running cooking activities, Hubbub has provided a cooking class guide with 12 recipes specially designed for attendees with varying abilities. After the hubs cited issues with retaining volunteers at our monthly drop-ins, we ran a brainstorming session where groups shared ideas for best practice. They also have access to a shared folder where their reporting is easily accessible for funding applications, along with any useful templates such as surveys or marketing materials shared by hubs to save them time.

Impact

 **175**

staff or volunteers trained

 **1062**

guides, leaflets and recipe cards distributed

 **434**

growing workshop attendees

 **1987**

cooking workshop attendees

 **4661**

community meal attendees



Our community food hubs



Charles Burrell Centre

 Norfolk

Since opening in 2019, the community fridge team at the Charles Burrell Centre noticed some types of vegetables were regularly left behind at the fridge. Visitors were nervous about trying unfamiliar foods or lacked confidence in cooking a wholesome meal from scratch.

The Charles Burrell Centre created a cooking course for adults and children in their training kitchen. This was a natural next step for the space, as they already run daily community meals. The cooking classes have brought children closer to where their food comes from and they relish sharing the food they've spent time making. The children were amazed to see oranges transformed into orange juice and cheese become melted cheese on a pizza.



In a typical month, this group could host roughly 100-150 people for cooking courses and up to 350 for their community meals. The group have also experimented with QR code cookery lessons available to scan at the centre on how to use leftover food and prevent food waste.

Denton Island Community Fridge

 Newhaven

Through a community consultation, Denton Island discovered that 30% of users of the Community fridge said they primarily came to visit to socialise. Staying for a tea or coffee had become an unintended but welcome outcome of their food-sharing model and something they were keen to more proactively support.

They decided to run a series of informal, drop-in cooking sessions, alongside affordable, healthy community meals every week. This has been well received by visitors who appreciate the 'accepting, friendly atmosphere' at the space. Spurred on by the success of the events, volunteers were inspired to go further and set up a friendship station for those who come alone to the meals and would like to get to know more people.



Eat That Frog Community Fridge

 Paignton

In a survey to visitors, Eat That Frog found that locals were interested in learning more about how sustainability can be used to support a household budget; namely how to reduce waste, save money and cook healthy meals. The team felt passionately about debunking the idea that doing things for the environment needs to cost you more or is a luxury that 'isn't for people like them'.

This inspired a host of workshops from growing your own vegetables, composting and cooking healthy and veg-focused meals. The group has seen the long-lasting impact of these sessions. The growing group have taken away seeds to set up their own planters and a participant who enjoyed the cooking sessions has been set up at home with the equipment to start baking herself. Three refugees who attended coffee-making sessions were supported to apply for a job opportunity at the local Costa.

Hole in the Wall Community Fridge

 Shirebrook, Mansfield

The Hole in the Wall team have used this funding to provide affordable meals to those experiencing hardship and loneliness. They've seen a huge upsurge in visitors in Mansfield triggered by the cost-of-living crisis and wanted to try and find a holistic approach which would make the most of food and help alleviate some of the stress their community is facing.

They provide allotment-grown nutritious and affordable meals weekly, seeing approximately 30-40 people attending. The team say it's a 'highlight' of the week for visitors. Volunteers' lives have also changed from being involved, saying it has helped their well-being and mental health. They enjoyed interacting with visitors and taking ownership of individual responsibilities e.g. collecting food from supermarkets.



Lancaster West Community Fridge

 West London

In early 2021, Lancaster West Community Fridge piloted a series of community breakfasts using leftover food from the fridge. They then used the food hub funding to expand into community lunches as well as workshops on cooking and growing in the estate allotment and running English lessons (ESOL).

Rising food costs put enormous pressure on Lancaster West residents and they found their numbers skyrocketed. They decided to shift their focus directly to community meals over ESOL lessons to address the increased need.

This funding has enabled the group to deliver an average of 111 meals per month. The team estimate attendees save roughly £5 per meal and there is always fresh fruit on offer for them to take away.

The group believe the space has become a vibrant, welcoming and sociable community focal centre; an important social space alongside a hot meal. People from a variety of backgrounds and ages are brought together, including to mark occasions such as Black History Month.



Kyle and Lochalsh Community Fridge



📍 Kyle of Lochalsh

Lochalsh is a very remote and rural area and while visitor numbers are low compared to other fridges, the community fridge plays a huge role in supporting a deprived area.

The team were keen to find ways to promote the richness of local food heritage. Public access to local land was found to be low so they wanted to provide a green space open to all and develop activities to help people learn to grow, connect with nature, food and their neighbours.

The food hub grant funded a new outdoor cooking area to host community events around growing and cooking surplus food from their fridge. They faced a number of setbacks including lengthy planning permission and staff illness. Nonetheless, the group have been able to get some sessions underway, with more planned this year and have set their sights on a community tool-sharing shed to bring even more people to the space.



Kendal Community Larder



📍 Kendal, Lake District

Similar to other community fridges, Kendal Larder found certain food items were being left behind at the space. They wanted to explore ways to empower visitors to try new food and equip them with the skills to make a delicious, nutritious meal at home.

This funding went towards their 'waste into wellbeing' cooking demonstrations which sit alongside the community larder, showcasing more 'adventurous' ingredients such as beetroot - especially when they received a glut from a local farm. They have also run family cookalongs and created a library of recipes focusing on health and wellbeing. This range of options appeals to different types of learners and confidence levels. Kendal have seen visitors inspired to try their new skills out for themselves at home.



The Old Bathhouse Community Fridge

Milton Keynes

The Old Bathhouse team were interested in supporting families to cook from scratch and gain confidence in trying new ingredients through a six-week cooking course.

Adults and children had a space to come and enjoy cooking together after school. The sessions were designed using Hubbub's recipe cookbook. Following the end of the six-week course, the next course was already oversubscribed. The group also found sharing weekly updates on the community Facebook group was an effective marketing tactic and created a buzz around the activity.



The Bathhouse also ran an end-of-course survey which demonstrates the skills the group have taken forward. 83% said they now cook more from scratch than they did before and that their children have become more involved in cooking since beginning the course.

Stonehouse Community Fridge

Plymouth

The Stonehouse Community Fridge put the funding towards a range of activities with the aim to bring people together around food. The team ran six cooking workshops on family outdoor pizza making, slow cooker and stew skills sessions as well as five outdoor long-table community events. Their gardening workshops have also been a hit, with themes including 'seeds in the city' and 'window sill boxes' to teach skills relevant to people with or without a garden.

Despite huge pressures including staff bereavement, the team have worked hard to increase their volunteer pool by ten new people. The group also carried out semi-structured interviews with attendees and found Stonehouse had been hugely beneficial to attendees' well-being and was seen as vital part of the community. Classes had 'transformed people's confidence' and they felt it was a space where people from 'all walks of life' are welcome.



The Social Action Hub

Nottinghamshire

The Social Action Hub is based in an ex-mining village that has high levels of people claiming benefits and on tight budgets. The group applied for the funding to support their wider aspirations for the organisation: to provide more opportunities to gain life skills in cooking, build confidence and career opportunities.

The cooking sessions sparked huge interest, particularly their after-school cooking sessions. The team have seen first hand the impact of food poverty locally and food available at the space is often a lifeline for struggling families. It has also been a chance for children to connect with where their food comes from, for example the group enjoyed identifying ways to use up their pumpkins at Halloween. Cooking classes can be attended by as many as 280 people in a given month. Children have mentioned looking forward to the cooking course as they aren't able to try cooking at home or there isn't enough food to make a meal.



Hear from food hub visitors

“A gentleman who is in his seventies was persuaded to come for the first time. He is living in one room in his house and rarely ventures out as he has no discretionary spend. He said how much he enjoyed the noise and bustle of the dinner - particularly the children. More importantly he said it made him dress and wash and take a walk to the centre.”

“Everyone takes and gives. I’m always bowled over by the people who are really in need... and the next day they come with loads of donations and give back to everyone.”



“We are having to provide more tables for community dinners as people are not just eating the food and leaving, but staying and chatting; making new friends. A single mother who came to the space had been reluctant to share her story and found a kindred spirit in another young family and now feels less alone.”

“Our over 12's have been coming up with recipes and meal ideas on their own!”

“I’ve eaten more veg today than I have eaten in my whole life. Never had cauliflower, mushrooms or sprouts before.”

“I rely on these meals a bit. It’s good to know one hot meal is happening.”



“ My highlight was watching my child eat wholewheat pasta and vegetables and seeing them chop independently”

“It’s so enjoyable working outside in the lovely gardens. Great knowledge, techniques learnt and therapy!”

“ Thank you for the event, remarkable to see what can be grown on a bracken-riddled hillside and the stew was delicious.”

“I used the mushrooms from the larder to make the dish and mushroom omelettes the next day.”



“It was really interesting to hear from members on how they save food from being wasted. We had lots of comments about using 'your senses' rather than going by best before dates.”

“I love it here, it’s really good for my mental health.”

“This is a lifeline. Every volunteer is so, so friendly and welcoming. I am made to feel comfortable. The freezer foods are amazing. The salads and pasta are amazing.”



What have we learned?



Bringing people together around food

Cooking courses and community meals were by far the most popular activity for groups applying for food hub funding.

Groups consistently mentioned they were motivated to run additional activities to bring people together (and into a warm building) because of long queues of visitors outside the community fridge before opening hours. A hot coffee

handed out in the queue may then evolve into a more sociable, coffee morning.

Access to a hot meal has also proven a lifeline when many visitors aren't able to afford to cook at home. Socialising also often comes at a cost, but these spaces provide a free or pay-what-you-feel activity that helps alleviate the loneliness felt by people in the community.

Lastly, low confidence around cooking comes up regularly from groups. Low energy appliances such as slow cookers or air fryers have grown in popularity due to the energy crisis, but visitors want more ideas for meals at home.



A joined-up approach

When groups run more than one activity, this strengthens the knowledge and skills they gain from the other activities. For example, food grown in the on-site garden and used in the cooking course can help create the community meal which then brings everyone together. It gives visitors a further sense of ownership over the space and the value of food.



Resilience

Despite the immense pressures they face, groups are coming up with creative ways to go above and beyond to enrich their communities every day. We consistently hear there is a lot of crossover between attendees becoming volunteers to spend more time at the space and give something back. Cooking class attendees are upskilled to then run the sessions themselves for the next round of cooking classes. Groups are finding ways to keep their doors open and sustain funding and staff for the long term.

Challenges

Securing a premises

Finding extra space to deliver additional activities has imposed the biggest delays on our food hubs getting off the ground e.g. lengthy planning permission. The groups are resourceful and often borrow spaces in local schools or community centres.

Food availability

Many food hubs have cited issues with procuring enough food to meet demand, especially ambient stock. They've said this is down to waning supply from local supermarkets or from having to compete with local food banks or community pantries.

Increasing need

All hubs have said attendee numbers are rising and anxiety over food insecurity is also felt. Food hubs have mentioned big queues forming hours before opening times.



Sustainable funding

While these spaces have the infrastructure, equipment and policies in place, their main barrier is a reliable funding stream to finance their activities. They meet visitors facing a multitude of issues beyond food insecurity including fuel poverty, debt and poor mental health. Food hubs have already identified what more they can do in their communities but are limited in what they are able to offer. Hubbub are prioritising ways to keep supporting these spaces for the long term.



What's next for food hubs?

Using the insights from this pilot group, we will be broadening food hub funding to a further 100 groups by the end of 2023. The pilot group are eligible to apply for this funding to either continue or expand their activities. Support from Hubbub will be on-going and as the network grows, we are looking to set up regional groups or 'hubbles' for food hubs to continue to benefit from peer-to-peer support and share their experiences with newer food hubs. It's with huge thanks to the Rothschild Foundation for supporting the food hubs and making this possible.



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