Eating Together: Exploring the role of lunch clubs and shared meals in Brighton & Hove

FULL REPORT

A SUMMARY REPORT IS AVAILABLE ON OUR WEBSITE

Brighton & Hove Food Partnership is a hub for information, inspiration and connection around food. We're a not-for-profit organisation that delivers a range of community projects such as:

- Cookery courses for beginners and those looking to teach others
- Helping people grow food with others in their community
- Tips and advice on reducing food waste at home
- Setting up community composting sites across the city
- Healthy eating advice and workshops
- Advice on food poverty and support for food banks
- Weight management programmes for adults and families

In 2012, we launched the city's second food strategy which sets out how collectively as a city we will achieve a vision of a healthy, sustainable and fair food system for Brighton & Hove. The strategy aims to tackle health inequalities, reduce food poverty, support local food businesses and reduce the environmental impact of the way we produce, consume and dispose of food.

The survey which informs this report was developed in partnership with a range of other organisations. These include the Federation of Disabled People, to complement the Citywide Connect project[1] (which helps people find support services and activities available to them in their area, and professionals work better together to reduce social isolation); public health commissioners; Community Works[2]; FareShare[3] and the Food Waste Collective (FWC)[4].

A big thank you to all the local projects that filled out the 'meals served in the community' survey and hosted visits.

Contents:

Introduction

This report is an attempt to better understand the role that shared meals play in the social and nutritional fabric of Brighton & Hove, and to look at the gaps and opportunities. We suspected that projects such as lunch clubs were doing something amazing but often quite hidden in our city – but even we were astounded by the sheer scale and variety of activity. We hope that this report will help to raise the profile of community eating, and celebrate the role of shared meals in our city.

Our survey, series of interviews and project visits also identified common challenges - including a clear **increase in demand** – and accordingly, we have made a series of recommendations to help shared meals to continue to thrive, and for individuals to access them.

The report will be used to inform the work of the Food Partnership and partner organisations in the delivery of the city's food strategy. The recommendations will also feed directly into the development of a city-wide action plan on food poverty.

Executive Summary

Our survey of projects across Brighton & Hove showed that **1,265 shared meals take place a day, or almost half a million a year (462,334).** This was based on the 68 projects that responded to our survey and which serve a shared meal – we estimate there are at least 85 projects serving shared meals in Brighton & Hove.

What is a 'lunch club'?

The basic model for a 'lunch club' is "the opportunity to have a meal, often an affordably priced meal, outside of the home and the opportunity to meet with others in a social setting." Some projects offer breakfast or supper, and they are located in a range of venues, from church halls to day centres or community centres. Many projects are aimed at a community of interest, from older people to people living with HIV, whilst some serve meals as part of a wider offer such as community garden projects or homelessness services. Some projects, most notably the Real Junk Food Project, focus on using surplus food and are open to the whole community. We were surprised to see the range of people attending these projects. Although many people think of lunch clubs as being for older people, we found projects were attended by people of all ages and by many people from vulnerable groups.

Benefits

This report started out as part of the Food Partnership's work to understand **food poverty** as we wanted to know whether community projects such as lunch clubs play a role in reducing longer-term or 'chronic' food poverty (see our recent blog for more on upcoming work on food poverty). Although we found plenty of evidence of projects supporting vulnerable people to access food, the research also

made clear the huge role of shared meals in **bringing people together and reducing isolation**. 100% of projects said companionship/ friendship/ socializing was very or quite important for service-users attending the project. We also found shared meals were contributing to good nutrition and health; offering formal or informal advice; offering valuable volunteer roles and acting as a gateway to other services.

Challenges

60% of projects reported either a big or small increase in demand and many were concerned this would increase further. With meal costs ranging from £2-6 or even free, projects were also trying to balance their own sustainability with ensuring those in need could access the meals. Despite the huge numbers of meals already served, many projects felt more vulnerable or isolated people could benefit – whether through help with transport, accessibility or improved promotion.

What next?

We saw how resources like surplus food, free venues, transport help and volunteer support were vital to projects' success. The report recommends that commissioners and large organisations with resources explore ways to offer in-kind resources, pilot funding for innovations and support with promotion. We also recommend that funding is sought to offer more support to these projects, such as promotion, training and networking, and specialist advice.

The Food Partnership is keen to work with partners to offer this support. After seeing all this inspiring work, we certainly plan to continue shouting about the role that shared meals are playing in improving the health, nutrition and mental health of the city – tackling isolation, food poverty and acting as a gateway to advice and support.

Brighton & Hove Food Partnership, June 2015

Why this report?

The project started out as part of the Food Partnership's wider work to understand food poverty and food access in the city, and in particular to understand what, if any, role community projects such as lunch clubs play. It was part of a conscious effort to move the food poverty agenda away from the current focus on food banks – which are meant for short term emergency use - to understand what is happening and what could and should be happening in relation to 'long term' or 'chronic' food poverty in the city.

However the report looks much wider than food poverty, seeking to understand more broadly the role of shared meals in bringing people together: how effective they are in reducing isolation; the role of surplus and donated food; whether or not communal meals are contributing to good nutrition and healthier residents; and whether they are acting as places for formal or informal advice; or as a gateway to other services.

There is currently relatively little national research into lunch clubs and other shared meals and they seem to have a low profile which could affect their ability to thrive or to argue the case if they are competing for funding[5]. This report seeks to celebrate the amazing variety and vibrancy of meals being shared in the city; but it also highlights gaps in provision; support needs that groups themselves identify, and the opportunities which may exist.

Background and methodology

The report is informed by desk research, an online and telephone survey, widely publicised by partner organisations; and a series of visits. There were 86 total responses to the survey, 68 of which served a meal. We estimate that there are around 85 'shared meal' settings in the city. Details of the survey methodology can be found in appendix A.

This report does not cover institutional meals, for example, in schools and nurseries; and meals taking place in residential settings such as care homes, unless these are open to non-residents. It is not an attempt to capture one-to-one activities e.g. where neighbours cook for each other; and small-scale informal get-togethers.

The blank survey can be found in Appendix E.

How many shared meals?

We were astonished at both the variety and the sheer scale of activity. We estimate our city serves well over 1,000 shared meals every day:

> *1,265 shared meals per day –Equivalent to 462,334 shared meals per year- or 8,875 shared meals per week*

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[5] Reid K.E; Mordaunt J. 2009. Sustainable funding for the Welsh rural voluntary sector, issues of networks, legitimacy and power, ARNOVA Annual Conference Paper, 19-21 November, Cleveland, Ohio.

So what is a shared meal?

Initially this research started by looking at the role of lunch clubs in the city. The basic model for a 'lunch club' is **"the opportunity to have a meal, often an affordably priced meal, outside of the home and the opportunity to meet with others in a social setting."** It quickly became clear that we should include the smaller number of breakfast and supper clubs. We then realised that shared meals play a role in a number of other community settings, so research was broadened to include activities such as gardening projects, day centres or residential settings which offer meals which are open to non-residents.

Many lunch clubs are aimed at older people but some are for communities with a common interest – see for example the case study of Lunch Positive which is for people with HIV. Some run at specific times in order to target an audience, e.g. offering lunch to children during school holidays

> *"The dictionary definition suggests there are two main models **of lunch clubs** - a social welfare model predominantly aimed at older people and a 'shared interest' model where groups of people get together to network.*
>
> *In fact [there are]… a whole range of models – from social networking opportunities for people working at home, to school lunch clubs, healthy lunch clubs, and office lunch clubs. The basic model is the same. **There is the opportunity to have a meal, often an affordably priced meal, outside of the home and there is also the opportunity to meet with others in a social setting.***"
>
> **From 'A Bite and Blether Case Studies from Scotland's Lunch Clubs'.** Community Food and Health (Scotland) (2011a) Consumer Focus Scotland. www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk/wp-

A closer look into community settings: Health-specific – Lunch Positive

- A weekly meal and space dedicated to a **specific health group (people living with HIV), offering specific support**. Run out of Dorset Gardens Methodist Church. Volunteer-run.
- Also serve a monthly Sunday meal – more intimate, and provides food provisions to people over the weekend gap (tends to be particularly lonely). Also offer a **Christmas meal.**
- Many people are **facing complex issues** such as isolation/exclusion, fear, anxiety, etc., as well as physical health issues. Working with other support groups to provide additional support (mental health, social therapy, etc.)
- Working on an Ethical Food Policy – moving towards environmentally sustainable food, emphasising nutrition and the importance of sharing meals (sit-downs, food-focused, familial). Focus: learning essential cooking and food skills.
- Emphasis on **creating a familial, enjoyable, and 'non-clinical' atmosphere**.

Some lunch clubs are run by faith groups (which may include a religious activity such as an opportunity to pray in church – or may not) however there are also a number which are secular and run by voluntary or community groups. The difference isn't always immediately apparent as some community-run lunch groups may use church halls. Lunch clubs may offer activities as well as food and company. Pricing varies widely.

A shared meal may be on offer but not the primary purpose of the project for example on several community growing projects the main activity is gardening but people come together to share a meal; sometimes made of produce picked on site, sometimes cooked over an open-fire.

A closer look into: Gardening projects

- Out of the 68 projects included in the survey, 6 were gardening/growing projects
- The **profile of people attending** is mostly **working age people,** with some **young people and children/**families. Further, many of the service users have **mental health issues, live nearby,** are **on low or insecure income** and/or are **unemployed.**
- They all offer a meal – most of the time cooked together on site (e.g. over an open fire), and sometimes brought in from home.
- The most significant factors behind people attending are **companionship (100%** - 6/6**), cost of the meal (83%), support and advice (83% - 5/6), a chance to get out (66%** - 4/6**), and fun/interesting activities (40% -** 4/6**).**
- When asked what additional services are offered to service-users, we heard; an **opportunity to socialize (100%), signposting to further advice/support (100%), talks or organised activities (100%), and advice or support from staff or volunteers (e.g. on health, finance, nutrition) (80%).**
- **100% of projects note an increase in demand**, 60% finding a big increase in demand.

Community and voluntary groups such as homelessness projects or day centres may include a meal alongside a programme of activities; there are breakfast and supper clubs e.g. fish and chip clubs which take place in sheltered housing; and also some meals which take place in residential settings such as care homes but which are increasingly open to non-residents.


A closer look into: Sheltered housing

- Out of the 68 shared meals we heard from in this survey, 5 were **sheltered housing**
- From wider partner work, we know that over **350 people** come to the **weekly, monthly or occasional shared meals at sheltered housing settings.**
- The most common meal of choice is **fish and chips** (at 75%). This is followed by jointly seasonal/festive meals and coffee mornings/afternoon tea (both just over 40%), and lunch clubs (16%).
- As the food is always bought in from the shops, everybody is charged the same amount.
- **100%** of the project-coordinators stated the **profile of people attending** is **unemployed, and insecurely housed;** many are on **low/insecure income, people with physical/mental disabilities, and lonely/isolated people**.
- When asked what the **very and quite important factors** behind attendance are, we found: **companionship (100%** - 5/5**), convenience – not having to cook (100% - 5/5), tastiness of meal (100%** -5/5**), cost of meal (80%** - 5/5**),** and **fun/interesting activities (60%** - 3/5**).**
- When asked what other services the projects offer, we heard: **83% (signposting, 83% talks/organised activities, 66% opportunity to socialise, 50% advice from staff, 33% advice from visiting professionals, 33% home delivery, 33% accessibility for people hard of hearing.**
- The projects do not find a significant increase in demand.
- 75% of sheltered housing meals say **nutritional balance** is 'very important'; 15% find it 'quite important'.
- Transport is not an issue, as most who attend are tenants.

Finally, an emerging model includes projects such as 'Foodcycle'[6] and 'The Real Junk Food Project'[7] which are responding to the issues of food waste. Foodcycle is a national franchise working to redistribute surplus in the form of three-course meals to those in need; it is established across England, but not in Brighton. Similarly, The Real Junk Food Project collects food 'surplus' and creates nutritious meals for the community as a whole (as opposed to being aimed at specific groups e.g. older people). Payment is on a 'pay-as-you-feel' (optional donation) basis, meaning that the meal can be free to people in need. There is a strong focus on engagement and celebration. This model is already established in over 8 cities across the UK, including Brighton.

Q2 How would you describe your activity (tick all that apply)

Answered: 68   Skipped: 0
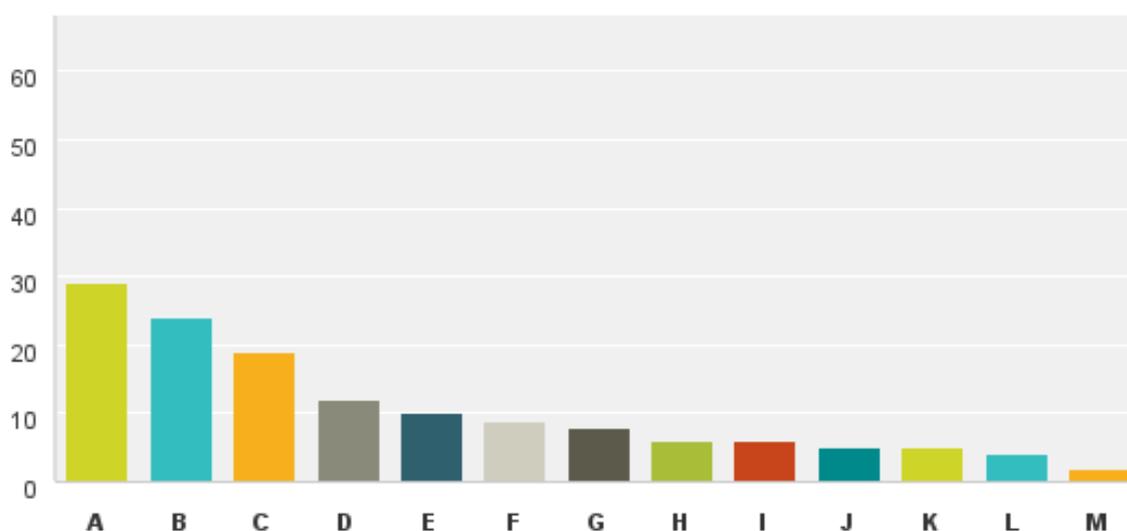
Key: **A**: Lunch Clubs, **B**: Community/ neighborhood groups, **C**: Church /faith groups, **D**: Group for people who have specific mental health of physical health issue or disability (exclusively or open to others), **E**: Service aimed at homeless people, **F**: Day Centre, **G**: Other, **H**: Growing/gardening project, **I**: Community Café, **J**: Food bank (also serving food), **K**: Housing project (e.g. sheltered, housing association), **L**: Residential centre or hostel, **M**: Care home *(out of 68 projects in total; groups could tick more than one option)*

There was a striking diversity. Some settings serve only a few people, while others feed over 50 at a time. Some activities meet every day, week, month, or only a few times a year. Certain projects are only open over specific times of the year (Christmas, school holidays). Some may be run by organisations with one or more paid staff, while others are coordinated entirely by volunteers and/or service-users. There was also a wide range of difference in areas such as the cost and type of meals; how food is sourced; and who the project is aimed at or open to.

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[6] http://foodcycle.org.uk/
[7] http://www.therealjunkfoodproject.co.uk/

Who attends and why?

Age of people attending

Who attends - age
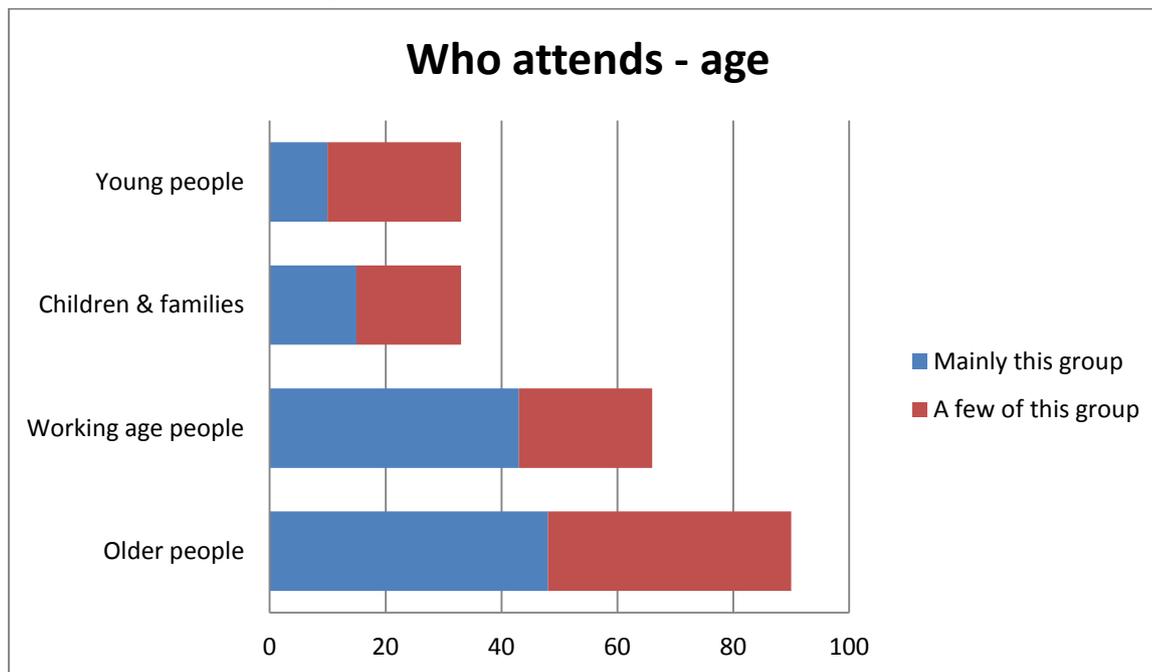
We found a wider range of age groups than we expected. **48%**[8] of all shared meals serve mainly **older people**, plus an additional 42% serve a few of these people (89%). Looking only at lunch clubs 59%[9] are aimed at older people. What we found more surprising was the number of places that serve mainly working age people, **43%**[10] plus an additional 23% serve a few of these people (63%)

- **15%** of all settings mainly serve **children and families**, plus an additional 18% serve a few of these people (34%)

- **10%** of all settings mainly serve **young people**, plus an additional 23% serve a few of these people (46%).

> "It's everything; I can get a hot meal, be around other people in my situation... I really look forward to these days" – Safehaven attendee

Reaching vulnerable groups

We found that whilst many shared meals are open to all; some are targeted at specific groups of people for example certain ethnic groups, faiths or communities; women-/men-only, or, for specific physical or learning disabilities, or health-related issues

- **29%** of settings mainly serve **people with mental health issues**, plus an additional 32% serve a few of these people (61%)

> "I know this is a safe space" – Lunch Positive attendee

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[8] 31 out of 65 settings
[9] 17 out of 29 settings
[10] 28 out of 65 settings

- **23%** of settings mainly serve **people with physical health issues**, plus an additional 37% serve a few of these people (60%)

- **9%** of settings mainly serve **people with learning disabilities**, plus an additional 37% serve a few of these people (47%)

- **37%** of projects mainly serve people **on low or insecure income** plus an additional 23% serve a few of these people (60%[11])

- **29%** of projects mainly serve **unemployed people** plus an additional 23% serve a few of these people (52%[12])

This suggested that many of those most vulnerable to food poverty – not just older people but also working age people including those with disabilities – are being reached by these projects.
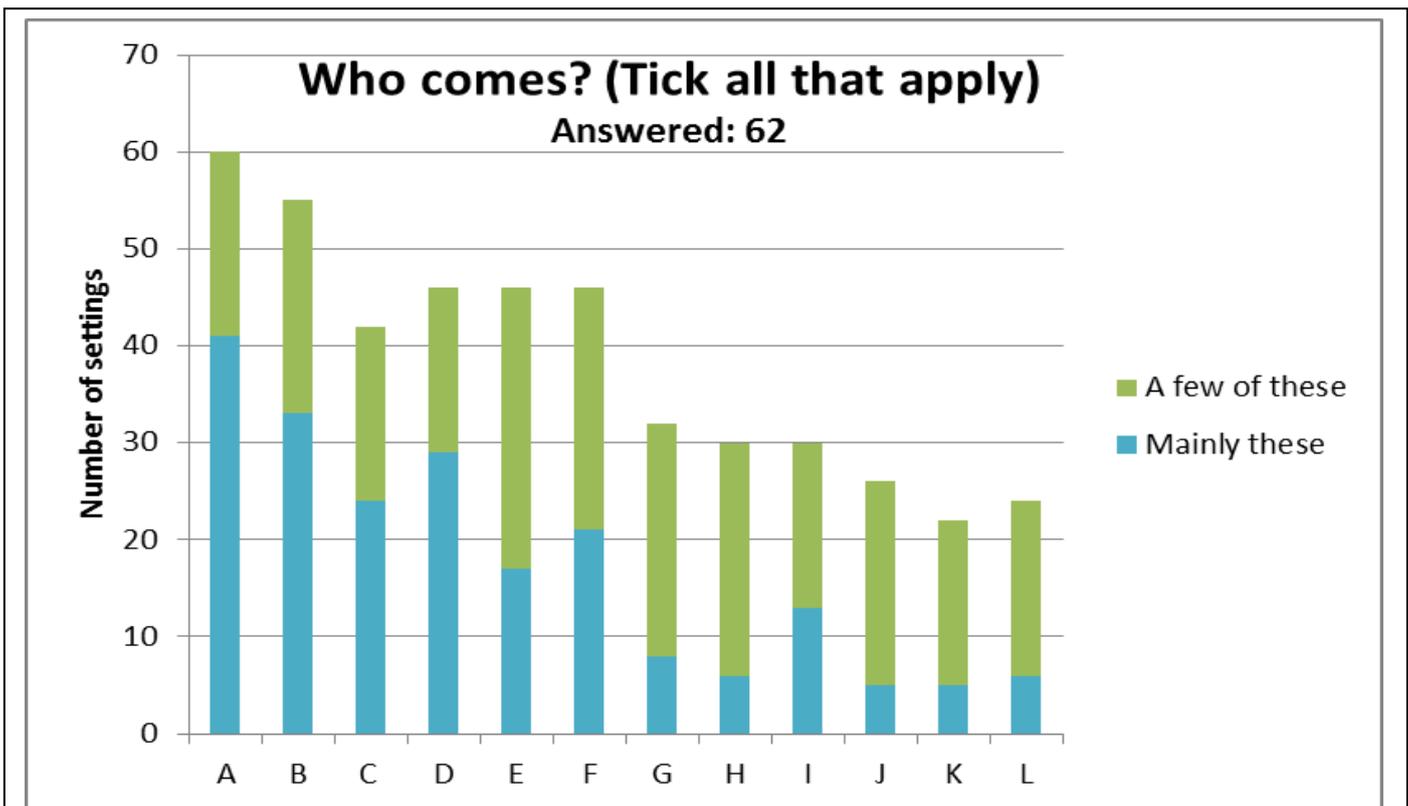
Key : **A:** People who live nearby, **B:** Lonely/isolated people, **C:** Unemployed, **D:** On low or insecure income, **E:** People with a physical or sensory impairment, or physical health issue, **F:** People with mental health issues, **G:** People with learning disabilities, **H:** Single parents, **I:** Rough sleepers/homeless/insecurely housed, **J:** Lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people, **K:** People from a particular ethnic group, **L:** People from a particular faith/ community *(Out of 62 responses - note that more than one category may apply)*

A significant group of people accessing and benefiting from these meals are the volunteers, as discussed in the 'Benefits of Volunteering' section

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[11] 37 out of 62 settings; 23 out of 62 settings
[12] 32 out of 62 settings; 18 out of 62 settings

Shared meals: Why do people come?

We asked the project coordinators to state what is important for service users:

Q11 What do you think is important to the people who come?

Answered: 61   Skipped: 25

Legend: Very important, Quite important, Neither important or unimportant, Not that important, Don't know/ doesn't apply

Key: **A:** Companionship/ friendship/ socializing, **B:** Support and advice, **C:** Convenience (not having to cook), **D:** Tastiness of the meal, **E:** Cost of the meal (affordability), **F:** Fun/ interesting activities, **G:** A chance to get out/ change of scene, **H:** Warmth/heating in the winter (*out of 61 answers; note that more than one category can apply*)

Tackling isolation

Before starting the research, we predicted a large percentage of people access these projects attend for reasons such as companionship, and this was clearly the most important function:

- **100%** of all projects said **companionship/friendship/socialising**[13] was very or quite important for service-users attending the project
- **74%**[14] of people using the whole range of projects come because of a **change of scene/opportunity to get out**
- **52%**[15] of all projects say they mainly serve **lonely/isolated people (**at least **75 %**[16] for growing/gardening projects, groups for people with specific mental or physical disabilities, homeless shelters meals, housing, and day centres)
- In visits to projects, we often heard that people came to see their friends, meet new people and to be around others.

> "I don't get depression now that I come here. I used to just sit at home, between the four walls in front of the telly – same in, same out... Now I come and see my friends every week" – Somerset Day Centre attendee

NB See appendix A for a more detailed breakdown of this data; and see Entrenched isolation: for isolation as a barrier to access.

A closer look into community settings: Non-faith based - Hove Luncheon Club

- A weekly meal run out of Hove Methodist Church – recently moved from previous YMCA location.
- With one paid member of staff, the project is supported by many volunteers (mostly from the Church).
- The project is unusual in that its funder requires them to keep costs especially low - **£2 including transport.** This low-cost proves important for many service users. Further, the fact that it is **open to people across the city** is valuable.
- By offering transport, many people who would otherwise struggle to access the club can attend.
- Most weeks, a few people blow out their birthday cake candles – arranged by the project, a celebration that many people wouldn't have otherwise.
- Many are **regulars**, coming each week **to eat a healthy low-cost lunch and meet friends**.
- Offer a **Christmas day meal**. Continuously well-attended throughout its 40+ years, serve traditional English Christmas meal (Turkey, stuffing, roast potatoes, etc).

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[13] 59 out of 59 settings
[14] 44 out of 59 settings
[15] 32 out of 62 settings
[16] See Appendix C

Food poverty, food access and reliance on projects

We wanted to understand whether shared meals play a role in alleviating food poverty, especially 'long-term' or 'chronic' food poverty where people are struggling to eat an adequate diet due to long-term low income and/or other factors.

> "I don't go to food banks, so this project is really important, even if it's only once a week" – Safehaven attendee.

Whilst there is no single definition of food poverty, definitions look beyond hunger, and should include ability to access a nutritious diet[17]. Whilst there is no accepted national measurement, research indicates that food poverty is increasing both nationally and in Brighton & Hove[18], with the November 2014 City Tracker Survey showing that nearly a quarter of people in the city anticipate difficulty paying for food/fuel, with the highest levels of insecurity in women, younger working-age people and those with a disability or long-term health condition[19].

Both service users and project-coordinators in some settings stressed that activities played an important role in helping some people to access nutritious food which they would not otherwise:

> "It may be the only hot meal they will have eaten all day"

> "Socialising is most important, food is a close second"

> "The project is addressing hunger"

> "I know I won't go to sleep hungry tonight" – Young People's Centre.

Additionally, it was clear that that some people rely on the projects:

- **42%[20]** of project managers said that their **service-users rely on the projects for food**. Another 13 settings said 'for some it's vital, some can access in other ways' (23%)

Comments included *"the service is 2 days a week, so they can't wholly rely on it but we do know that a lot experience food poverty",* and *"some people say it is the only healthy meal they eat in the week".*

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[17] The evidence review for the **Feeding Britain, the Parliamentary Enquiry into Food Poverty and Hunger** published in December 2014 *suggested*: "Food poverty can be defined as the inability to afford, or to have access to, foods which make up a healthy diet. Those experiencing food poverty may have limited money for food after paying for other household expenses; live in areas where food choice is restricted by local availability and lack of transport to large supermarkets; or be lacking in the knowledge, skills or cooking equipment necessary to prepare healthy meals." *Written evidence from the Public Health Nutrition Team, Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust.* https://foodpovertyinquiry.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/food-poverty-appg-evidence-review-final.pdf

[18] The reasons are complex: **Feeding Britain, the Parliamentary Enquiry into Food Poverty and Hunger** published in December 2014 shows that food, energy and housing prices have risen disproportionately in the UK compared to other European countries, and incomes (both benefit levels and wages) have not kept pace. Locally the increase in housing costs has been even greater, and we have a very high proportion of people in more expensive privately rented accommodation https://foodpovertyinquiry.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/food-poverty-feeding-britain-final.pdf

[19] See also Zora McDonald, Quantifying Food Poverty in Brighton and Hove (Food Partnership) October 2014

[20] 24 out of 57 settings

Q13 Do you think some people rely on your service for food?

Answered: 57   Skipped: 11
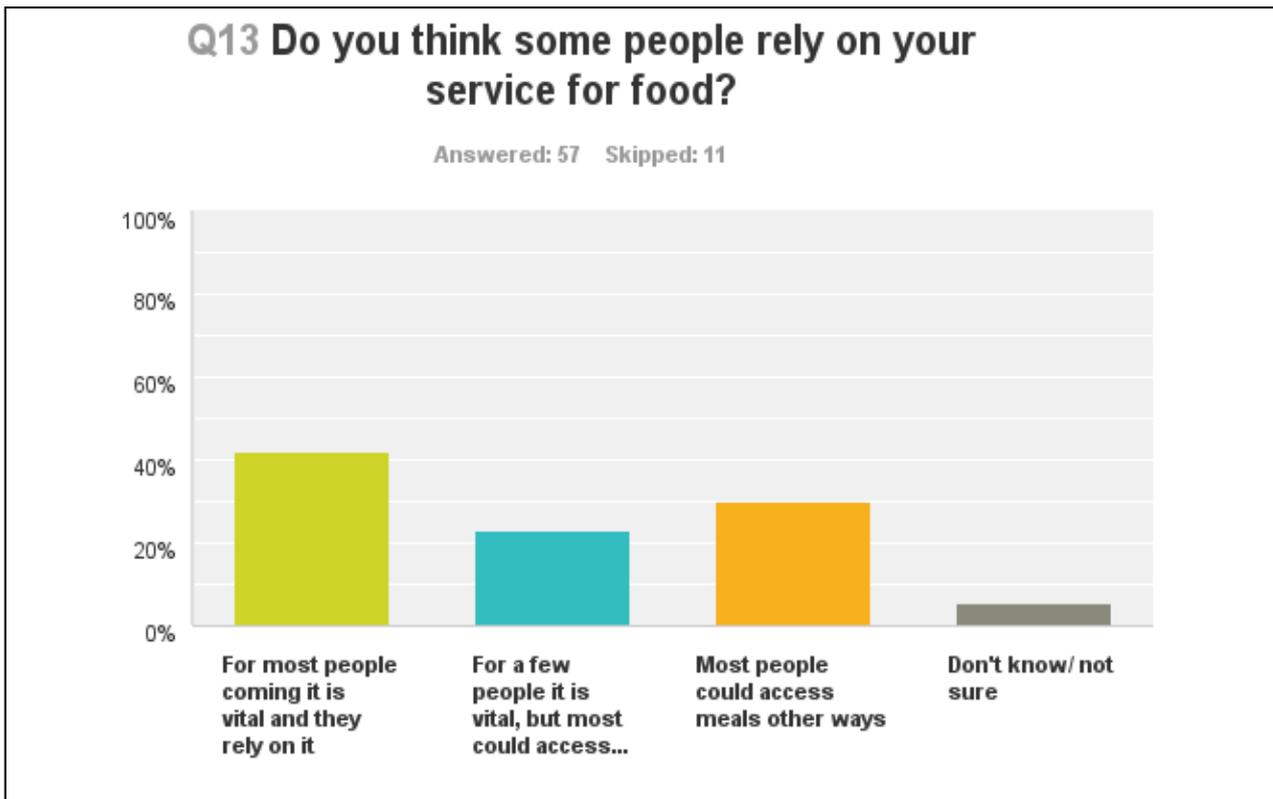
Changes in demand:

Given this reliance, and the external climate and increasing levels of food poverty, we wanted to know whether projects had experienced an increase in demand:

- **60%[21]** of projects note either a **big or small increase in demand**

- Only **34%[22]** note **demand has stayed the same**

- **0%** note a **decrease in demand**

- 25% of settings note a big increase, particularly concentrated in community settings, with smaller increases in day centres, care homes and housing

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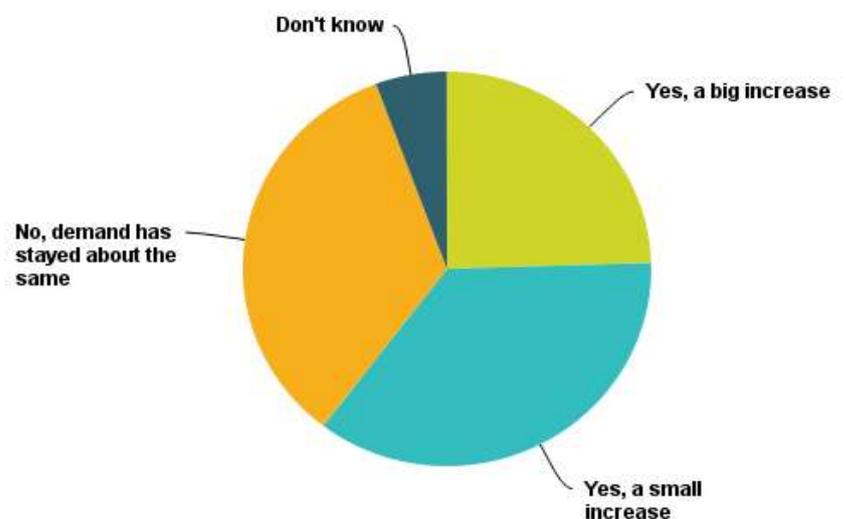
[21] 32 out of 53 settings
[22] 18 out of 53 settings

Some of the comments from the survey addressed this issue:

- *"We've reached capacity, there isn't any space for more people"*
- *"The limiting factor is more on the supply side, with getting enough volunteers".*
- *We'd like to have more clubs across the city to ensure we reach all those that are in need during the school holidays" – Chomp holiday project for disadvantaged children and their families*

Some project coordinators anticipate an increase in the near future:

- *"Expected to increase with ageing population"*
- *"We're waiting for more people – those affected by universal credit/welfare cuts".*

Where and when are meals offered?

76%[23] of people are accessed by people living nearby. From the map (see below), it becomes evident that the majority of shared meals are in the West and centre of Brighton & Hove. There is a significant lack of projects in outlying areas, especially in the East of the city, making it more difficult for people living in these areas to access shared meals especially if transport is not provided. As local provision is important, location is likely to be a barrier to

"I go to a breakfast or lunch club every weekday. Mind you, I have a car so I can get around" – Hove Methodist Church attendee.

access. This fact was echoed through project visits, with service users talking about travel across the city westwards to attend the meals – something particularly difficult for older people or those with mobility issues.

Key:
- Lunch Clubs
- Other Shared Meals

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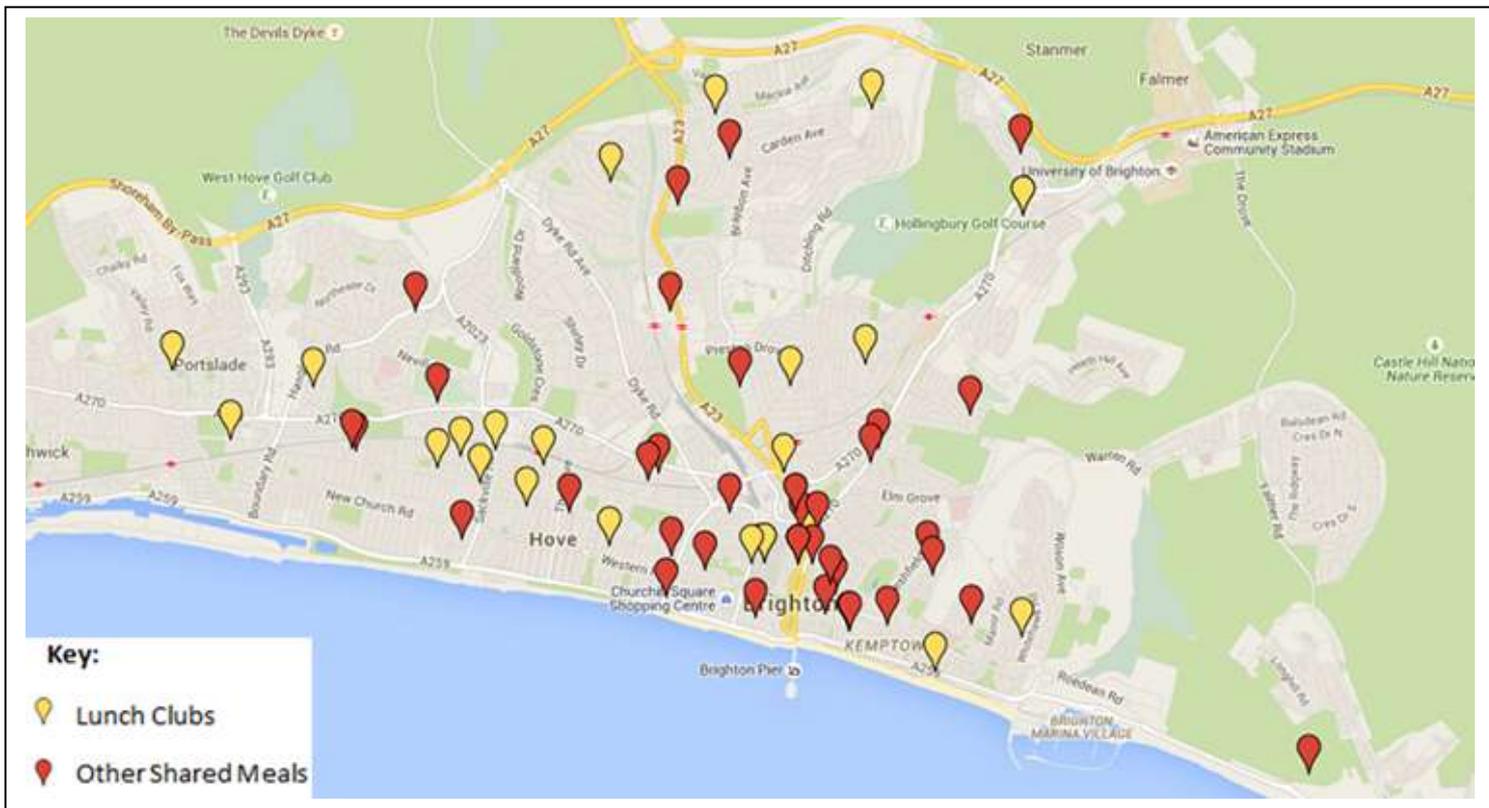
[23] 32 out of 62 settings serving mainly people who live nearby, 15 out of 62 serve a few people who live nearby (32%)

This lack of shared meals in certain areas of the city may also mirror where there is less access to food from local shops.

At the same time, local provision is not the only answer; some people are happy to or prefer to attend settings further away. The important point is that people should have access to settings – whether this means local providers or others which are easily accessible (good transport routes/alternatives).

A closer look into community settings: Community centre in an outlying neighborhood – St Richards, Hangleton and Knoll

- A weekly lunch club, run out of a thriving community centre. Very **neighbourhood based**.
- Supported by a **steering group** for people aged 50+ in the local community, whose input is greatly valued.
- Additional support is shared through a leaflet of activities in the local area specific to older people (distributed to churches, GPs, networking events, etc.).
- There are limitations in the number of continuous **volunteers** and in providing **transport** to people finding it difficult to access. This lunch club is regularly attended by around 10 people.

When do these projects offer a meal?

We found quite a disparity. Tuesdays and Thursdays seem to be the most popular days, especially for lunches. Interestingly these are the days with the lowest food bank availability in the city, although this may be coincidence or due to indirect factors such as competition for venues e.g. church halls.

Q9 When does your project offer meals?

Answered: 62   Skipped: 6

Legend: Breakfast (green) | Lunch (teal) | Evening meal (orange)
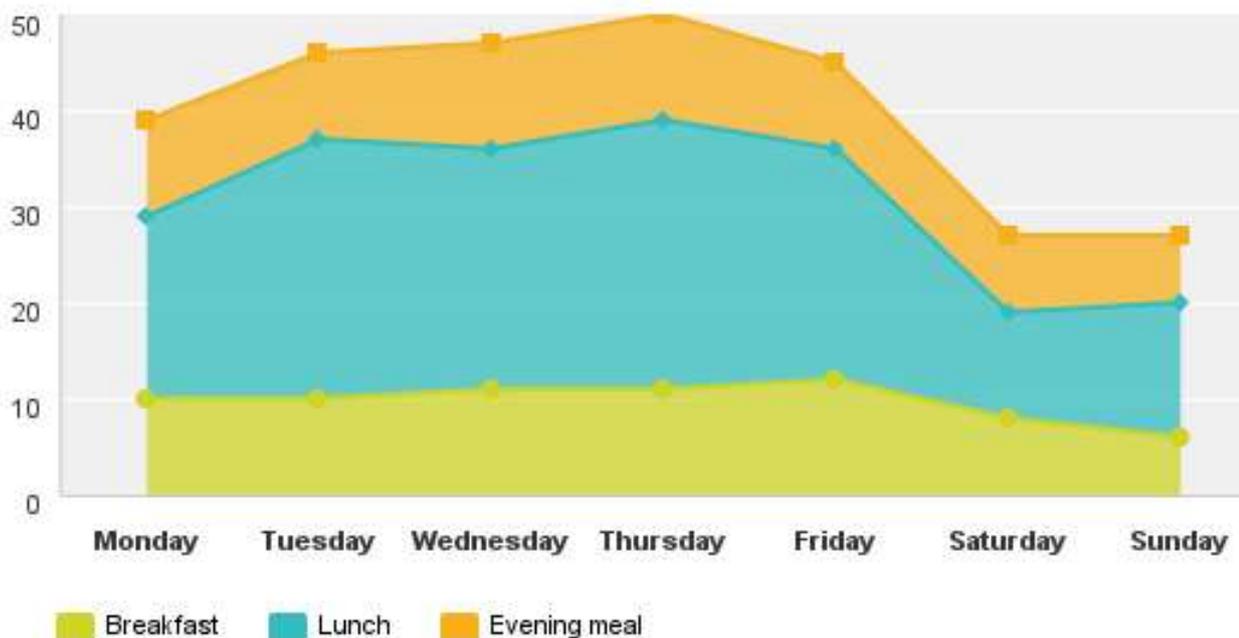
Saturday and Sunday offer considerably fewer meals (28 different projects on a Thursday, compared to 11 on a Saturday).

However when taking a closer look, the majority of weekend provision actually takes place in residential settings such as sheltered housing; and in care homes open to non-residents. There is a significant gap in provision at community/neighbourhood groups, gardening projects, church groups and lunch clubs. All have at least 50% more weekday meals than weekend.
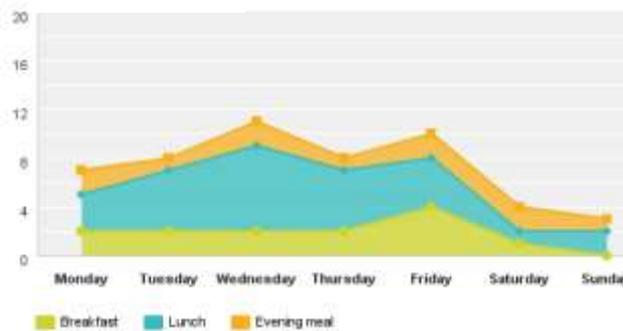
Gardening projects
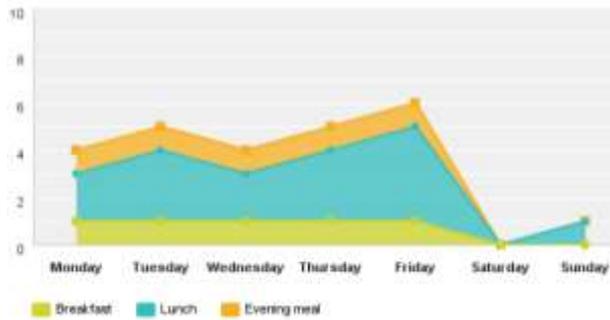
Community/neighborhood groups
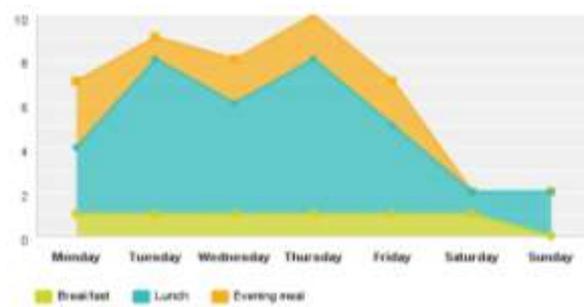
Church groups

Lunch clubs
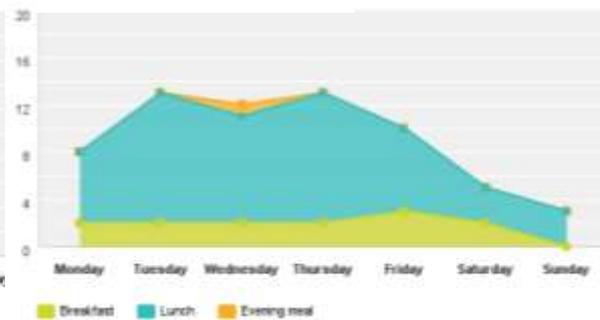
There are very few places offering meals at least 5-days a week; most offer one or a few meals per week. Whilst we have not made a specific recommendation to address this gap, it is useful data if further shared meal provision is planned.

Could Shared Meals provide an alternative to Meals on Wheels?

The context in which this research is taking place nationally includes a number of changes. In some areas of the country there has been a strategic decision to move away from 'community meals' or 'meals on wheels' delivery, for example Islington Council no longer provides meals on wheels as a council-run service but instead funds lunch club provision in the community.

Even without a deliberate strategic decision, changes to the way that social services funding is allocated means that currently – and this will increase in future – more people will be **self-funded or receive 'individual budgets'** from social services. They may choose to spend their funding on going out to a cafe or a lunch club rather than receive 'meals on wheels' or a community meals package at home.

The current set up would not be suitable for someone who is reliant on food; given that their need for food provision would be seven days a week and most people who get a meals on wheels service have limited mobility so would struggle to get to the lunch club setting.

More about the food

Benefits for nutrition:

96%[24] of projects **emphasise nutritional balance** as very or quite important in the foods they serve. There is a large range of food options at the various projects. **Over 90%[25]** of projects note they offer meals for **special dietary or cultural requirements** – whether this is vegetarian, gluten-free, halal, etc. Others, predominantly lunch clubs and services aimed at older people, also offer tailored meals for people with health-related issues (such as diabetes).

> "This is my only decent meal of the week. Other days I might just eat some toast and pate, or something simple" – Somerset Day Centre attendee.

From visits, we learned that shared meals often encourage people to eat more nutritionally, and may re-inspire some to eat who have lost their appetites, a particular issue with some older people who are more at risk of undernutrition. We also heard how shared meals can help to overcome barriers to good eating, whether that is cost; skills or effort. People said they would not go to the effort of making as many food options/ varieties of foods if just cooking for themselves and might for example eat a sandwich. At a few lunch clubs, we heard "I'd make a Sunday Roast for when the children and grandchildren come over, but never just for myself".

> "It's such a treat to get food like this…If you're living on a tight pensioners budget, there just isn't anything left to spend on good food" – Hove Methodist Church attendee.

This anecdotal evidence supports the current nutritional research; eating with familiar others can help to encourage healthier portion sizes; indeed energy intake increases 18% when eating with friends compared to baseline[26][27].

Culture:

Depending on the kind of project, there are different food options. For example lunch clubs often have traditional English meals, and the BME (Black Minority and Ethnic) groups offer food that relates to different cultures. We wondered whether the somewhat limited food variety (predominantly 'meat and two vegetables' model) could be a barrier to some cultural groups accessing the meals, though we don't have a definitive answer on this. We did hear that the desire of clients for comfortable, familiar food could be a barrier to using surplus food in these settings. For example one project had tried using Food Waste Collective donations but found that their clients

> "We organized some cultural celebration meals; people cooked traditional recipes from their native countries and shared it with everyone else… We even had one group sing us a traditional song before we ate. It makes people feel proud" – Migrant English Project attendee.

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[24] 54 out of 56 settings

[25] 48 out of 53 settings

[26] Burke, D; Jennings, M; McClinchy, J; Masey, H; Westwood D; Dickinson A. 2011. 'Community luncheon clubs benefit the nutritional and social wellbeing of free living older people', Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics, 24, 277-310.

[27] Wallace, C; Wiggin P. 2007. The Role and Function of Lunch Clubs for Older People, Welsh Assembly Government New Ideas Fund, University of Glamorgan/Concord Associates.

weren't keen to eat foods such as couscous.

Also the staff and volunteers confidence in using a range of food options is important as projects are finding it necessary to be adaptable and creative with donated foods, which are often less familiar.

We observed some interesting good practice in some settings for encouraging people to try food outside their comfort zone whilst still catering to people's expectations:

> "I like to come and eat a traditional roast, just like we used to when we were young. It brings back memories of childhood Sundays" - St Richards (Hangleton & Knoll) Lunch Club attendee.

- One setting has a funding requirement to charge no more than £2; which makes it hard to cover the cost of providing the meal. As such, there is a heavy reliance on donated 'surplus' foods. The three courses offered are somewhat creative alternatives (e.g. Moroccan vegetable tagine with couscous), and are still widely enjoyed - especially alongside the regular birthday cakes for service-users. The skill of the cook in using these ingredients is key at this project.
- A day centre setting offers 'food tasting' as an activity for people to try out completely new foods, like sushi.

With a strong emphasis on balanced nutrition, certain settings encourage people to eat different, healthy foods, and these strategies are proving successful as people start to experiment with new food choices for themselves.

Sourcing, surplus and more:

We were interested in understanding more about how the different projects sourced their food. Some significant findings include:

- 50% of projects use **surplus food** from FareShare or the Food Waste Collective,
- 31% receive other donations e.g. from volunteers, supporters or businesses
- 17% grew their own food
- 41% source from a wholesaler
- A large majority of 78% bought at least some of their food from shops and supermarkets.

Locally, there are different options for sourcing 'surplus' food (i.e. food that would otherwise go to waste). FareShare is affiliated with a national network, has paid staff, vehicles and a depot. They redistribute foods (fresh, tinned, etc.) collected from supermarkets and other sources and distribute them to non-profit groups. Groups normally pay a fee of a few hundred pounds per year which is well below the market value of the food supplied. FareShare tailors its deliveries to the needs of different groups however as they are themselves reliant on donations there is limited choice; and sometimes fresh produce which is reaching the end of its shelf life requires additional preparation time.

The Food Waste Collective is a local volunteer-led initiative that redistributes predominantly dried goods from a high-quality organic supplier on a quarterly basis. Some groups also make their own arrangements to collect surplus food from local shops or restaurants; or may receive donations from supporters.

Note that the figures relating to FareShare / Food Waste Collective might not be completely accurate as it became clear during visits that projects sometimes mixed these two organisations up.

Q17 Where is your project's food sourced from? (tick all that apply)

Answered: 55   Skipped: 31

There is currently a national debate around the role of surplus food as a response to food poverty[28]. Arguably, redistributing food waste to food poverty projects is simply tying loose ends of two wider systems (covering up one issue with another one), rather than creating a sustainable food system that eliminates both these outcomes[29]. Nevertheless, this connection of resources offers a valuable alternative that provides many people with nutritious food, and keeps costs down for projects which serve shared meals. Groups which filled in the survey were given the option of receiving information from FareShare and the Food Waste Collective, and half[30] chose to do so, demonstrating a demand for more use of surplus.

> "Part of why this project runs so well is because of the invaluable help from volunteers and donated food from FareShare" – Lunch Positive volunteer

Surplus food plays a role in keeping down costs, as well as helping to divert food waste, although using surplus is not a suitable option for all groups and care needs to be taken about seeing surplus as an easy 'answer' to food poverty.

It was interesting to note that projects create very little food waste themselves and are generally very effective at reusing or redistributing it:

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[28] **Feeding Britain, the Parliamentary Enquiry into Food Poverty and Hunger** includes recommendations on improving distribution of surplus food as a response to hunger and food poverty
https://foodpovertyinquiry.files.wordpress.com/2014/12/food-poverty-feeding-britain-final.pdf
[29] http://foodcycle.org.uk/
[30] 18 out of 36 settings

Q20 Do you ever end up with leftover food? If so, what do you do with it? (tick all that apply)

Answered: 58   Skipped: 10
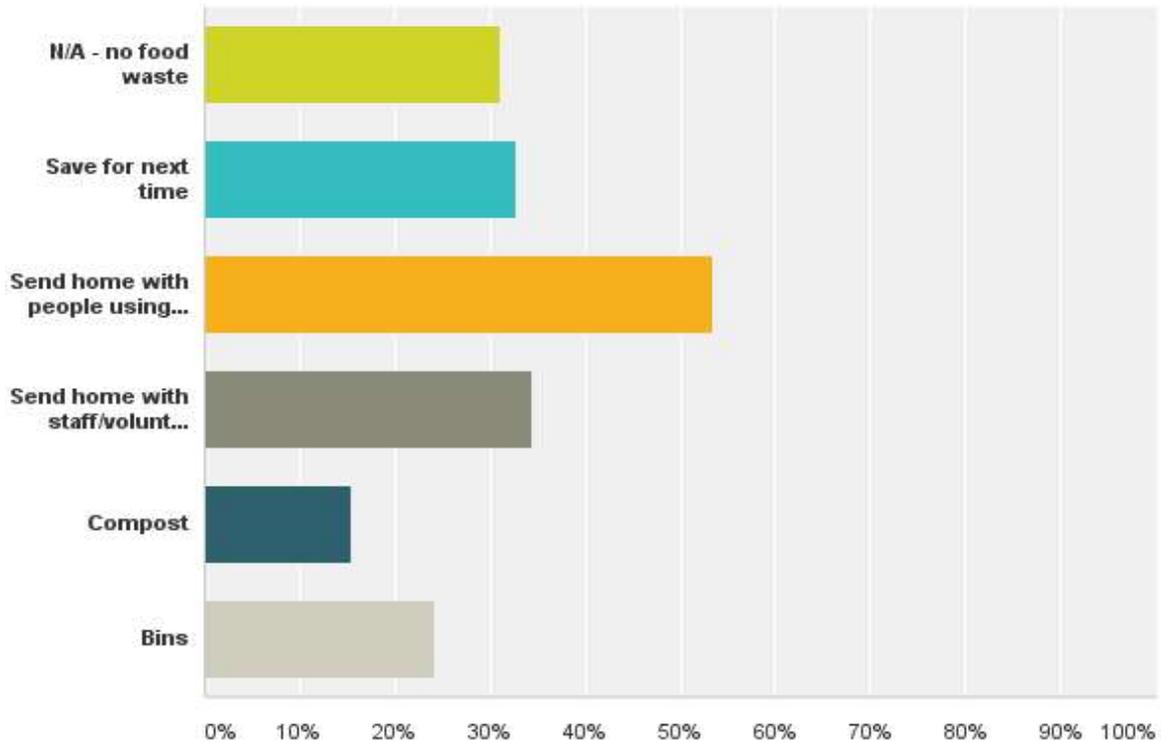
Barriers to accessing shared meals

Transport and Accessibility:

Some settings (mainly day centres and a few lunch clubs) offer organised community transport, either free or at an additional charge, to help people to access their projects, however the majority of shared meals do not have this provision.

The survey indicates:

- **61%**[31] of projects find **'transport'** the biggest barrier to people accessing the project
- **32%**[32] of projects find **'accessibility'** the biggest barrier to people using the project

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[31] 19 out of 31 settings
[32] 10 out of 31 settings

Through working with partners such as the Federation of Disabled People, we expected transport and access to be significant barriers to accessing the projects. When offered the chance to do so during the survey, 39%[33] of groups requested information about the Federation of Disabled People's improved Shopmobility scheme, offering delivery of electric scooters to convenient locations.

It is important to note the potential cross-over of transport and accessibility barriers. Accessibility includes disabled access toilets and ramps, as well as the process of arriving to the site; for example multiple settings mentioned the geographic surroundings (mostly hills) as barriers to access for some people (particularly those with mobility issues).

 Transport is the greatest barrier to access and whilst community transport is one method of helping people to access services, shared meal groups themselves also have found effective informal methods e.g. recruiting volunteers to help drive people. Groups should refer to the Federation of Disabled People's 'Out and About' guide for this and other useful examples and guidance on ensuring effective (free) insurance provision for volunteer drivers http://www.thefedonline.org.uk/citywide-connect

Information:

It is difficult to accurately know how many people do *not* access the services, but would like to. This is to say, we expect there are other people who are unable to access these projects due to a number of different barriers (e.g. access, transport), but also a number that do not know about them to begin with. Through project visits, we learned that people often hear about these projects through word-of-mouth but this knowledge is harder to share with isolated people.

The main directory which lists lunch clubs and other shared meals is the Federation of Disabled People's online database 'It's Local Actually'. Based on discussions with service users, it seems that many users of lunch clubs in particular did not know of this. Several had no internet access, or had basic internet access but are not comfortable with the search function; which means inputting a keyword (e.g. 'lunch') and postcode.

Some people felt that a paper-based listing would be much more widely used; however there are issues about resourcing, distributing and updating information in this format.

It was clear that some of those who would benefit from shared meals simply did not have the information.

Perception/ 'branding':

Another interesting barrier is preconceptions about the people or the place. Although it was harder to get clear data on this, it seemed that a preconception of place might prevent some people from using lunch clubs (It's "not for me").   From the initial survey, some responses by project coordinators include: "a perception that the place is intimidating", "nervous to come alone for the first visit", and "not wanting to be with our type of users" or "I'm too young to go to a lunch club". This suggests people have opinions about these shared meal projects which prevent them from accessing the settings, even if they might find benefit in them. In settings that are seeking to reach out to more people some quite subtle changes of wording (changing 'lunch club' to 'shared meal' or meeting people's 'interests' rather than providing 'activities') might help to do this

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[33] 14 out of 36 settings

Alongside more traditional provision e.g. lunch clubs, new shared meal providing organisations such as The Real Junk Food Project are introducing a high profile/ social media savvy profile to the sector.

Entrenched isolation:

Many coordinators of older people's projects such as lunch clubs and day centres picked up on what one called 'entrenched isolation' as a barrier. We heard several stories of people who were 'found' by chance having had no contact with services or other people sometimes for years. This could be for a range of factors that might include mobility and might well include depression, either as a cause or result of the isolation. It seems unlikely that even with more availability of information, it would be difficult for this extremely isolated group to access social activity.

Findings from this survey also illustrated the isolation people are facing in the city; a chance to get out/change of scene was particularly important in settings for people with specific mental health/physical disabilities and care homes, followed by day centres and lunch clubs.

> "Coming here might be the only time in the week that I leave my house" – Lunch Positive attendee.

'Entrenched' isolation is also in itself a barrier and needs more than just availability of information to overcome. Some groups have had success via working with befriending groups and commissioners should consider how via these and other methods they can best help services to reach the often hidden most isolated. There is a useful guide on reaching isolated people at http://www.thefedonline.org.uk/citywide-connect and it is important that staff and volunteers in shared meal settings are aware of resources like this.

Cost:

> "I don't eat this well the rest of the week. I try to come every week if I can" –Migrant English Project attendee.

It was clear that amount charged was an important factor for some people accessing meals. Even a small charge is a barrier for some people. **39%[34] of projects that charge for a meal find cost the biggest barrier to more people using the project** (29% for all settings), rising to 60% for those charging £4 or more. The amount charged for the meal is particularly important (over 85%[35] of settings) for day centres, homeless projects, and lunch clubs, followed by gardening projects and housing groups (at 80% and over). The following results demonstrate the **importance of cost in these meal settings**.

- **42%[36]** of projects serve meals that are **free for all**
- **72%[37]** of projects always, often, or occasionally offer a **free or reduced** meal if someone finds it difficult to pay
- On top of the meal served at the project itself, **66%[38]** of projects also offer leftover food for people to **take away** at the end of a meal. Depending on the setting, this might be the volunteers, service-users, or both.

It is also interesting to note, we found a big **variation** in charges: some are free or donation only; others charge £2 including travel, whereas others charge £6 or more for a basic meal. Exploring why charges

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[34] 7 out of 18 settings
[35] See Appendix C
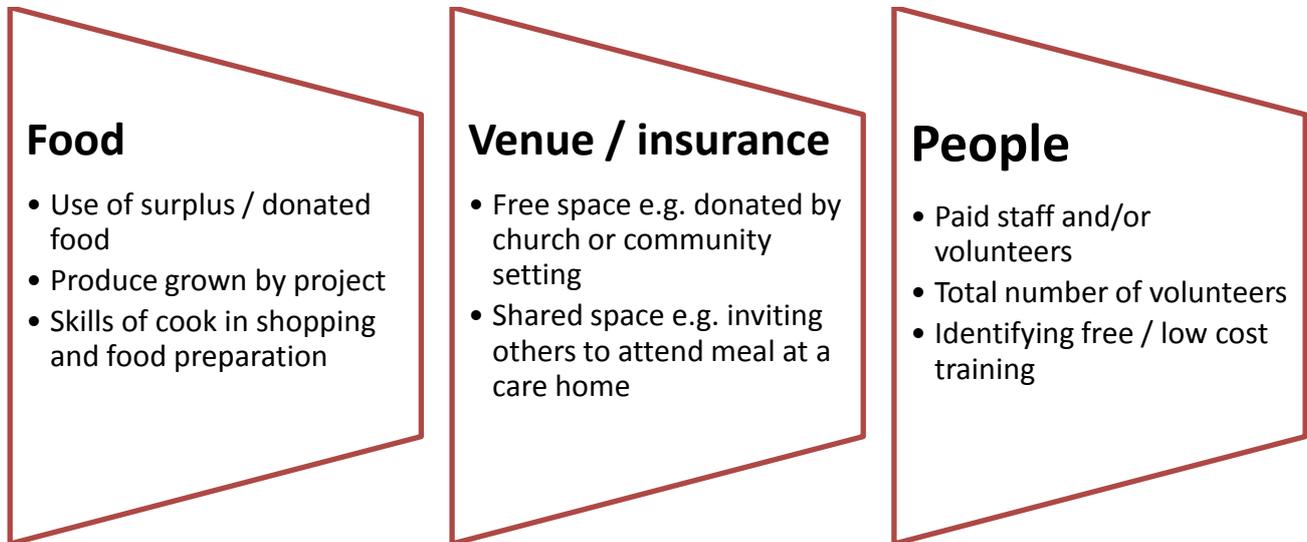[36] 22 out of 53 settings
[37] 18 out of25 settings
[38] 38 out of 58 settings

vary, we compared this range of costs to a variety of information, such as whether the setting has any paid staff, usage of donated foods, applications for subsidy, etc. See Appendix B for a more detailed look at these relationships. The following are some significant findings from the comparisons.

- There are 22 settings where food is **free for all or donation only.** These are quite varied (some offer a meal as part of a wider programme) so it is harder to generalise. They use a range of food sources but most receive some food donations; many from FareShare and the Food Waste Collective - over half receiving donations from volunteers and community, and others sourcing food from shops and wholesalers. Around 20% of settings use food they have grown. 60% of projects have at least one paid member of staff and 40% are entirely voluntary. These projects rely on funding and grant support for financial sustainability as the charge (or lack of) does not cover the cost of providing the meal.

- There are 5 settings that charge **under £2.** All receive surplus food donations from FareShare, or elsewhere, as well as buying food from wholesalers and shops. 100% of these settings rely on additional grant funding to keep costs low. 3 have at least one paid member of staff (NB this staff role may or may not include fundraising as part of the role) and 2 are entirely voluntary. These projects are entirely financially supported through grants and funding; the charge for the meal does not cover the cost of providing it.

- 17 settings charge between **£2-6.** They have a range of food sources, but predominantly purchase from shops and wholesalers. Around a third of settings apply for some kind of funding to support the cost of providing the meal. Around 70% of projects have at least one paid member of staff and around 30% are entirely voluntary.

- Two settings charge **over £6.** They both source their all their food from shops, and do not receive any surplus or other food donations. Neither of these projects apply for funding specifically to cover the cost of the meal (though they may benefit from other core funding). Both of these projects have at least one member of paid staff. Both projects reported that they were operating sustainably i.e. the charge for meals covered their costs.

- In 8 settings the **charge for the meal varies** (e.g. they offer a menu). Ingredients are most often bought from wholesalers; about a third buying from shops with some growing a proportion; only a few receiving food donations. This suggests these settings serve their shared meals more like a traditional café, where a pre-planned menu is served, thus food is bought according to specific needs. Further, 7 of these setting have at least one paid staff. Two-thirds of these projects report that the charge for meals covers the cost of providing them; otherwise they apply for funding.

In summary, the charge is a barrier to some people accessing meals. This reflects different models of provision, ranging from places like the St Johns Centre which is open 7 days a week and operated by paid staff; to a number of projects such as the Holland Road Baptist Church which runs weekly and are entirely voluntarily run; and models such as Hove YMCA which are largely voluntary but which also grant fundraise; use surplus food; and access a free venue (donated by the church) in order to keep costs down or to make their meals free/ low charge. It doesn't seem feasible to standardise charges - but it would be worth shared meal groups noting that this discrepancy exists, and thus affects the range of people who access the various settings.

Main costs in running a shared meal and ways that projects minimise these

Food

- Use of surplus / donated food
- Produce grown by project
- Skills of cook in shopping and food preparation

Venue / insurance

- Free space e.g. donated by church or community setting
- Shared space e.g. inviting others to attend meal at a care home

People

- Paid staff and/or volunteers
- Total number of volunteers
- Identifying free / low cost training

As well as any charge for the meal, groups apply for grant funding and this requires the skill and time of a person to submit an application and report on any grant given.

Looking at sustainability - it is important that groups are able to meet their running costs and not be dependent on uncertain grant funding. If groups are keeping costs down too low in order to maximise access but have not a stable way of covering the main costs involved in running the project (for example a free venue or strong volunteer team) then there is a danger they will not be sustainable.

It seems that groups which charge enough to cover their costs; but also offer an easy (i.e. non-obvious) way for people who are struggling to pay nothing are getting the best of both worlds, as they are allowing those people to access their service whilst benefiting from income from those who can afford to pay. However location may also be an important factor and we heard about some neighbourhoods where only a few people would be able to pay the 'full charge'.

Project Capacity:

From the survey and through project visits, groups were given the opportunity to identify other barriers. Groups raised concerns about capacity of the project, in particular whether it has room space, and/or volunteers to offer support. This is particularly important to note given that projects are experiencing an increase in demand for their services.

Added value – advice and signposting

The survey highlighted an unexpectedly high level of additional support from these projects serving meals in the community, whether informal advice from staff or volunteers; support and advice from peers (other services users) or advice from professionals. Crucially many also acted as gateways to further support. Examples of advice and signposting including financial or debt advice, information on how to access resources, cooking advice, and advice on nutritional needs.

Percentage of projects offering additional support

10%

■ Offer additional support

■ No not offer - only food

90%
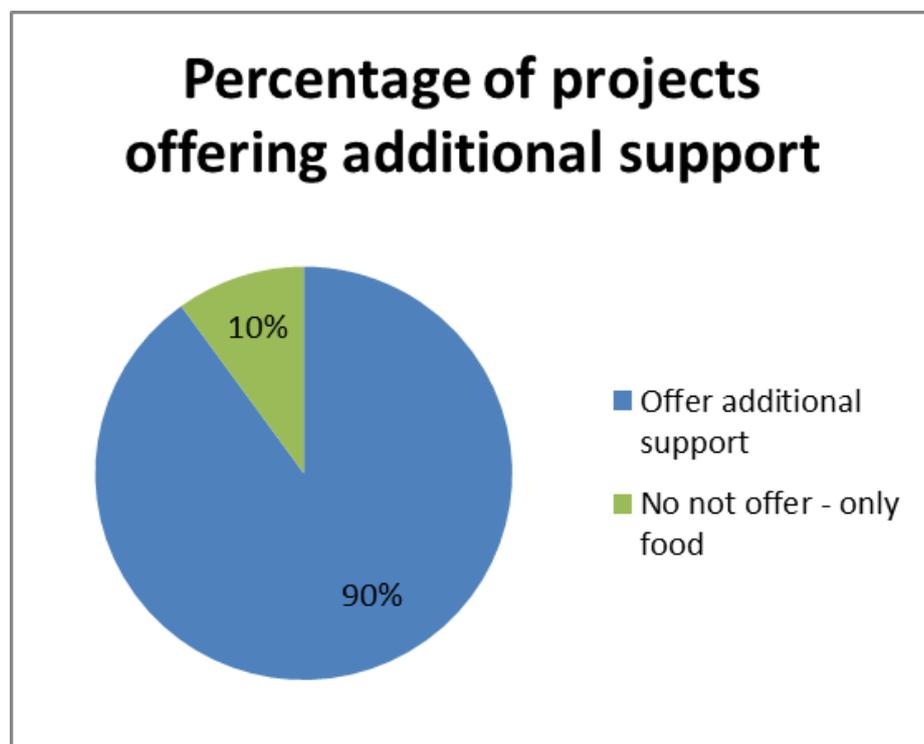
"Through coming here, I've managed to sort out debt and money worries; I've made friends through cooking for the community; now I even sing in the choir!" – Lunch Positive attendee

- **90%**[39] offer an opportunity to **chat/socialise**
- **74%**[40] offer **talks or organised events**
- **69%**[41] **signpost** the service users to support/additional projects
- **50%**[42] offer **advice** from staff/volunteers
- **48%**[43] offer **advice** from visiting professionals
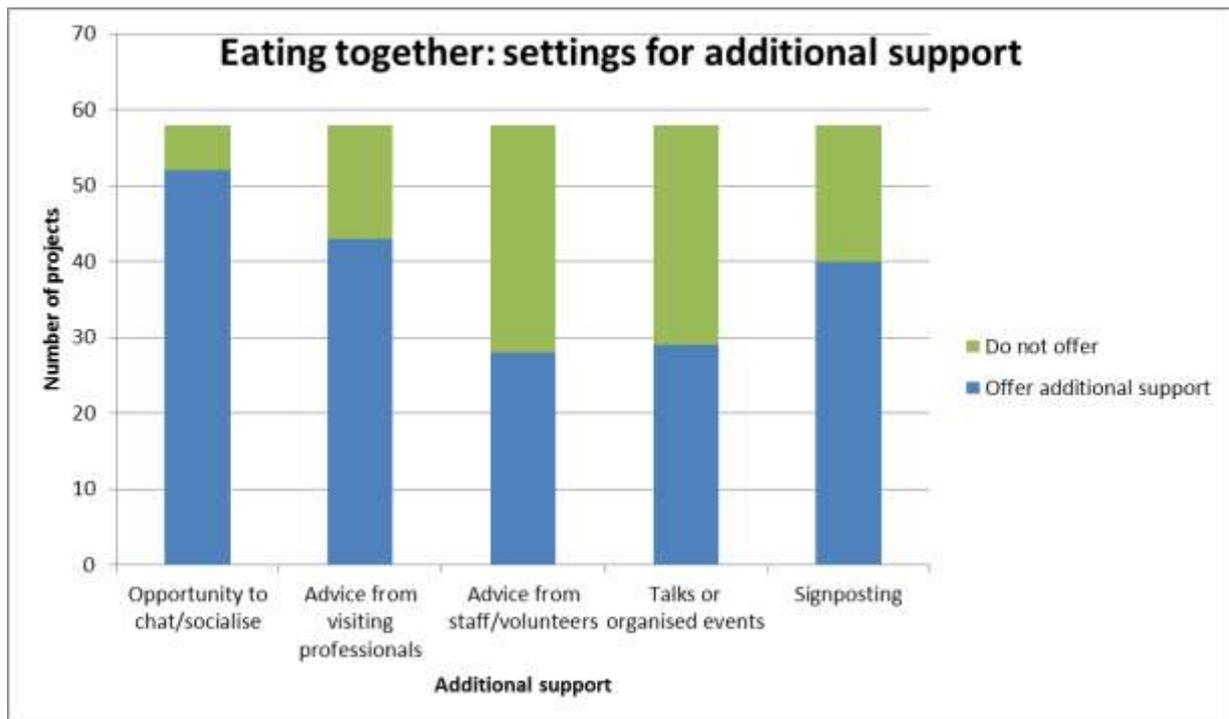- Overall, **90% of projects offer additional support**

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[39] 52 out of 56 settings

[40] 43 out of 58 settings

[41] 40 out of 58 settings

[42] 29 out of 58 settings

[43] 28 out of 58 settings

Eating together: settings for additional support

Projects also mentioned beneficial support that comes from spending time with others and making friends (casual conversation to one-to-one emotional support and encouragement), and an opportunity to get involved in projects (cooking, running the service, or offering any other additional support).

Benefits of volunteering:

Key to the functioning of many of these projects is the volunteer support; indeed 89% of projects reported that volunteers are involved in running their activities. There are different levels of participation of volunteers; at some settings, the service users are also volunteers. Many people reported high levels of personal satisfaction related to volunteering. Some enjoyed being able to give to the community in a practical way. Most settings offered volunteers a free meal. Additionally, there is often the option of bringing left-over foods home for another meal.

"Keeping going keeps you going" – Holland Road Baptist Church

Having a team of volunteers is essential to many settings providing a meal. In some cases, most often Church locations, there is a thriving team of volunteers ready to support the group. Many projects report a high turn-over of volunteers. Again, reflecting the number of volunteers offering their time, some projects find it difficult to maintain a continuous service because of the drop-off of volunteers

"The lunch club supports people who often have complex and higher levels of need. We successfully help people to feel less isolated, form supportive peer friendships & networks, improve access to regular healthy diet, enable uptake of specialist support, and increase people's involvement in meaningful volunteering and community activity" – Lunch Positive

(often as a result of finding work or – particularly with older volunteers – becoming ill or passing away). Through project visits, we heard how some projects, otherwise successful, have closed due to the lack of volunteers.

www.bhfood.org.uk

These volunteers are champions of these settings serving meals. They offer invaluable support in providing the service; equally, these settings offer an interesting opportunity for people from the community to volunteer their time and efforts.

A closer look into: Church groups

- Unlike the other settings, church groups are particular in that they are **faith-based**.
- Out of the 68 shared meals we heard from in this survey, **19** are **church groups.**
- Depending on a range of factors, attendance varies between projects (from 10 – 50+).
- When asked what the most important factors behind attending are, we heard; **companionship (100% - 15/15), taste of meal (100% - 15/15), cost of the meal (73% - 11/15), chance to get out (73% - 11/15), convenience (not having to cook) (66% - 10/15), and warmth/heating in the winter (66% - 10/15)**
- The **profile of people attending** is a mix of **older people, working age, children/**families. Further, **many** are **lonely/isolated people (76% - 14/17),** and **live nearby (76% - 13/17).**
- When asked what additional services are offered, we heard: **opportunity to chat (88%** - 14/16), **food to take away (63%** - 10/16), **talks or organised activities (50%** - 8/16), **and signposting (50%** - 7/16). Further, many projects often send food home to people using the project.
- Most projects offer a meal that is **free for all,** and others occasionally offer a free/reduced meal if someone finds it hard to pay.
- The project-coordinators note a **significant increase in demand** in recent times. 43% (6/14) find it vital & rely on it in way of food.
- There is a high rate of **volunteer engagement** in these settings (ex: older people involved at Holland Road Baptist Church; "keeping going keeps you going".

What would help these projects to thrive?

Our survey also explored some of the challenges projects are facing around meeting increasing demand, and asked what further support they would potentially be interested in. This survey question illustrated;

- **70%**[44] of all projects are interested in **food safety/hygiene training or advice**.
- **50%** of all projects are interested in help **finding volunteers.**
- **35%** of all projects are interested in **training/support with managing volunteers.**
- **33%** of all projects are interested in **training/advice on nutrition, menu planning etc.**
- **33%** of all projects are interested in an **email group for lunch clubs and other groups serving meals to share information with each other.**

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[44] 32 out of 46 settings

- **30%** of all projects are interested in **training/support around finance, fundraising or management issues.**

In visits to projects, it was clear that some groups could learn from each other – many were curious to hear how other groups operate and some were interested in visiting other projects. As there was a relatively low level of interest in a 'virtual' or email network, but high levels of interest in training – especially around food safety – this seems an ideal way to get groups together.

There was also a desire to network with and learn from each other, and it was clear to the researchers there was lots of good practice going on (e.g. creative use of surplus foods) that it would be useful for groups to be able to share with each other. Future planning around infrastructure support (e.g. finance, management, help finding volunteers) for smaller groups or food groups (by the Food Partnership, Community Works, and others) should take into account the needs identified by this report.

Recommendations and next steps:

Through identifying common strengths, challenges, and limitations, this report makes a series of recommendations to help shared meals thrive and for individuals to access them. This work will feed into the Food Partnership's **long-term food poverty action plan for the city**. We will share this information through the city, and wider; playing a part in raising the profile of these valuable shared meals, share good practice between settings and celebrate the role these meals have.

Policy makers, commissioners, funders and large organisations with in-kind resources should:

1. Recognise the major but largely unrecognised role that shared meals are playing in improving the health, nutrition and mental health of the city **for people of all ages** – tackling isolation, food poverty and acting as a gateway to advice and support.

2. Recognise that whilst "shared meals" cannot take the place of "community meals" (*"meals on wheels"*) there is potential for them to take a bigger role in helping **vulnerable people** access healthy food.

3. Use opportunities to share information with people about shared meals for example as part of **care assessments** or **hospital discharge**.

4. Consider investing in **micro-finance or pilot funding for innovations** within the shared meal sector in order to test new models of provision which can meet gaps or increase sustainability (e.g. provision in new geographical areas, at evenings and weekends, attracting vulnerable people who are not currently attending, testing new funding models etc) in order to support the long-term benefits and preventative effects of these projects.

5. Consider ways to provide or coordinate **in-kind support** for shared meal providers, e.g. premises, storage space etc. Where groups already receive in-kind support (e.g. free use of church halls), this should be recognised as a vital part of their operating model, without which many groups would cease to function sustainably or would need further support to continue.

6. Recognise that support for core costs or in-kind resources (e.g. use of premises) for organisations which distribute **surplus food,** such as FareShare and the Food Waste Collective, is an effective way of underpinning shared meal activities and helping to keep costs low.

7. Note that support for community **transport**, as well as for less formal methods of providing transport (e.g. volunteer drivers) can help overcome the crucial barrier of transport in helping people to access services. Befriending groups, personal budgets, direct payments and personal health budgets will also play a vital role in supporting isolated people or those with higher needs to **access** shared meals.

8. Consider investing in targeted **infrastructure, development work and promotion support** for the shared meals sector to help increase and maintain its reach and capacity to deliver and help realise the potential of shared meals.

Lunch clubs and others providing shared meals should:

9. Consider using posters or flyers to **promote** their services if they do not already; and engage with the wider discussion about whether paper-based sources and/or other channels such as radio, signposting by health professionals and information prescriptions, could be used.

10. Refer to the Federation of Disabled People's 'Out and About' guide for information about **informal shared transport options** and other useful examples and guidance on ensuring effective (free) insurance provision for volunteer drivers: http://www.thefedonline.org.uk/citywide-connect.

11. Consider new ways to reach **isolated people**, eg via working with befriending groups, and refer to the useful guidance on reaching isolated people in the 'Out and About' guide at: http://www.thefedonline.org.uk/citywide-connect.

12. Consider long-term **sustainability** when assessing costs and charges, and recognise the value of any in-kind contributions such as free venues, volunteer labour or donated food.

The Food Partnership and other voluntary sector infrastructure / community development organisations should:

13. Develop plans for **promotion** of the shared meals sector, and deliver if funded. This could include a public campaign alongside promotion of meal options with key services in the city, promotion of volunteering opportunities to members of the public, updating & producing resources (including paper resources if appropriate) and working with the Fed of Disabled People to simplify the categories for the online 'It's Local Actually' directory to make it easier for more people to find options for shared meals.

14. Develop plans for **infrastructure support** for the shared meals sector, and deliver if funded. This would include support for groups with recruiting and managing volunteers and advice for groups on issues such as funding models and fundraising.

15. Develop plans for **training & networking** for the shared meals sector, and deliver if funded. This would include food hygiene, training for volunteers on cooking for large groups with a limited budget including creative use of surplus foods, and opportunities to visit others' projects.

Appendix A: Constraints and limitations, methodology and calculating error

Methodology of this project:

The project started with initial conversations with partner organisations to gauge relevance and scope of this research. This included confirming mutual support – for example, including information about the FED's Brighton Shopmobility project as part of the survey.

The survey's questions were based on specific information we wanted to learn, e.g. who are they aimed at? how many people attend? what kind of food do the projects serve? what is their capacity, etc. The survey looked in parallel at the role of surplus and donated food in the city both in settings where meals are served and also where food is distributed, such as in food banks, hostels and homelessness projects, so that this information could be passed on to a partner organisation. See Appendix E for a copy of the survey.

The survey was designed to engage a wide range of projects. As such, built-in filters helped direct specific responses accordingly – for example, settings where all food is brought in were not asked questions about cooking facilities as this information was not appropriate.

The survey collected quantitative data. With the aim of achieving a holistic picture of access to food in Brighton & Hove, it was sent to over 150 projects the Food Partnership is aware of and working with. It was sent further by our partners at FareShare, Community Works, FED, BMECP, TDC, Environmental Health contacts, and Public Health contacts; and publicised through email networks and newsletters. In this way, a wider-range of projects could be contacted. About half of the settings who filled out the survey were also on the FED's It's Local Actually list, suggesting this survey was shared very widely. We estimate this survey was sent to about 80% of local projects which serve a meal, which estimate to be around 85 in total.

At the mid-way point, we collected some initial data to gauge a general direction the research was taking; we identified gaps, and highlighted key findings. About three weeks before the closing date of the survey, we called projects to ask the questions over the phone. We did not hear from the full scope of projects due to difficulty in contact (email, telephone). As such, we recognise there is still a percentage of projects we have not heard from, and therefore could not be picked up in the data and report. It is difficult to make assumptions as to how figures would be affected accordingly, thus we decided not to include them in final data, but to recognise there is still a significant percentage of projects serving shared meals that have not been included in this report.
On the closing date, we heard from a total of 86 projects, 68 of which shared a full or light meal. Data was exported from Survey Monkey, and raw data was processed in Excel.

Constraints and limitations:

Constraints and limitations around this survey were mostly time and access-based. The survey was open for a little under 2 months – from late-February to mid-April. In this time, projects from a wide-range of settings were contacted – asked to fill out the survey either via Survey Monkey, or over the

telephone. Although the scope of the projects was quite extensive, there are gaps in who we have heard from. For example, we tried to engage with BME groups but it was difficult to get in contact with them (especially through Survey Monkey). Only a few (3) BME groups filled out the survey, and we visited one (and attempted to visit others, but only one agreed to a visit). We recognise there is limited understanding of these groups, and it would be beneficial to engage more with them.

The survey's mode of questioning proved valuable in consistency: asking the same questions to each project, and for achieving qualitative data. However, it was limited in its ability to gauge more nuanced information – the survey's format restricted deep insight into the various projects. As such, case studies were necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the projects – of the service user's experiences with coming to a project, sharing a meal, being part of a community, and generally the role of food. These visits were invaluable, but much more time-intensive so we only did a limited number. The projects we visited were varied in their focus, including:

- St Richard's, Hangleton & Knoll
- Young People's Centre, Brighton
- Plot 22, Weald Allotments, Hove
- Somerset Day Centre, Kemptown
- Holland Road Church, Hove
- St John's Community Centre, Hove
- Hove Luncheon Club, Hove
- Safehaven, St Peters Church, Brighton
- Migrant English Project, Cowley Club, Brighton
- Lunch positive, Dorset Gardens, Kemptown

Calculating error:

After opening the survey for two weeks, we noticed early responses had a higher drop-off rate (full surveys were not completed). Accordingly, we added a reminder halfway through that if a question was not relevant/ the answer was unknown, to skip the question and continue onwards. This proved helpful as the drop-off rate decreased and we received more complete surveys. In order to get a better picture of the projects, those who stopped midway were called and asked the remaining questions over the telephone.

Another significant potential error is roughly 10 projects filled out the survey at least twice (one project even filled it out 4 times!). Sometimes with the same responses, and sometimes different. In order to achieve accurate information from the projects, we called each project and clarified the answers. All the information was compiled into a single form and multiples were deleted from Survey Monkey to avoid crossover.

Analysing and calculating specific data:

In order to calculate how many meals are served each day, each project was asked through the survey how many people attend and how often they serve meals (considering frequency of meals and weeks off for break). The question for how many attended was proposed with answers with a few ranges (5-10, 10-20,...50+) and as such, the mean number was used for calculations. The data presented in this report refers to number of meals served in the community as an average amount based on the projects we heard from; broken down from year into month, week and day.

Appendix B: A comparison of cost, food sourcing, funding and paid staff

	PAYF/donation	Free for all	< £2	£2-4	£4-6	> £6	Varies (menu)	Included in other activities	Other
Food source	5	22	5	11	6	2	8	4	19
Bought from wholesaler	0%	32%	40%	50%	40%	0%	88%	67%	36%
Bought from shops	80%	84%	80%	80%	60%	100%	38%	67%	82%
Grown	20%	16%	0%	10%	40%	0%	38%	0%	18%
Donated food from FareShare	40%	63%	100%	30%	20%	0%	13%	33%	27%
Donated food from FWC	20%	21%	40%	20%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Donated from volunteers/community	60%	53%	80%	20%	0%	0%	0%	33%	18%
Funding?	4	0	4	9	6	1	7	0	8
Charge for meal covers cost	0%	0%	0%	67%	67%	100%	71%	0%	63%
Apply for funding	100%	0%	100%	33%	33%	0%	29%	0%	38%
At least one paid member of staff	4	20	5	10	6	2	8	4	12
Yes	50%	60%	60%	70%	66%	100%	88%	75%	92%

*The numbers in the white columns refer to the number of responses per question

Appendix C: Why do people attend different projects?

Kind of project	Church group (19)	Lunch Club (29)	Community/ neighbourhood group (24)	Gardening project (6)	Group for specific mental/ physical disabilities (12)	Service aimed at homeless people (10)	Housing (e.g. sheltered, housing association) (5)	Day centre (9)	Care Home (2)	Residential centre/ hostel (4)
A chance to get out/ change of scene	73%	87%	78%	67%	100%	78%	20%	89%	100%	50%
Companionship/ friendship/ socialising	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Convenience (not having to cook)	67%	78%	72%	67%	60%	56%	100%	78%	0%	100%
Cost of the meal	73%	87%	78%	83%	70%	89%	80%	100%	0%	0%

(affordability)										
Fun/ interesting activities	33%	57%	78%	67%	90%	33%	60%	89%	100%	100%
Support and advice	33%	52%	67%	83%	100%	67%	40%	100%	100%	100%
Tastiness of the meal	87%	91%	72%	83%	70%	89%	100%	89%	100%	100%
Warmth/heating in the winter	60%	65%	50%	33%	50%	78%	60%	89%	100%	50%

Appendix D: How isolation influences people at different settings

Kind of group	Number	Lonely/isolated (mainly)	%	Lonely/isolated (total)	%	Companionship (v/q imp)	%
Church group	19	9	47%	14	74%	15	79%
Lunch club	29	15	52%	20	69%	23	79%
Com/nei group	24	10	42%	15	63%	18	75%
Growing/garden	6	2	33%	5	83%	6	100%
Physical/mental	12	7	58%	9	75%	10	83%
Homeless	10	7	70%	9	90%	9	90%
Housing	5	2	40%	4	80%	5	100%
Day centre	9	7	78%	7	78%	9	100%

Appendix E: Blank survey