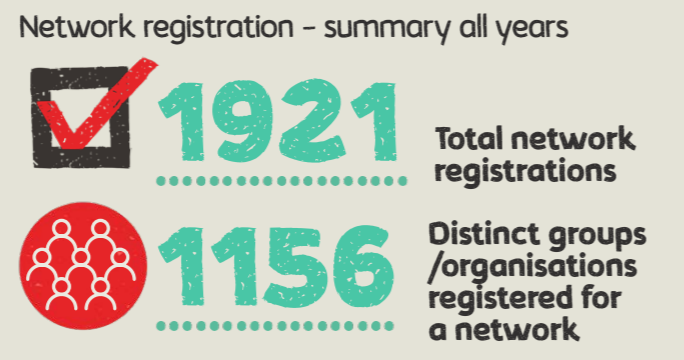


# Strengthening Networks for **Community-Based Action** on 'Good Food'

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

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

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

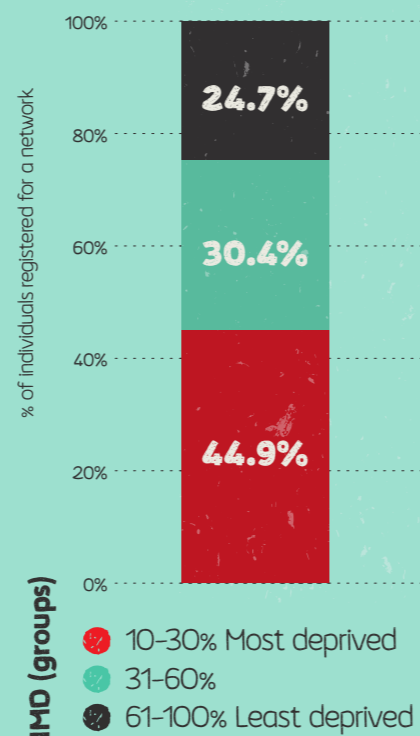


## Diversity and Inclusion

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

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

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



## Personal Value of Network Events for the Participants

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

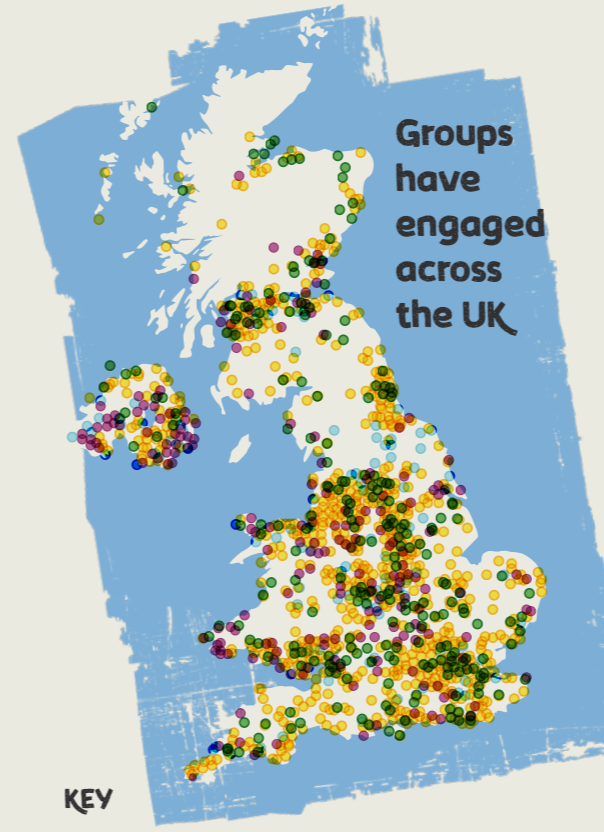
**50%** said that they made connections with others following Network Events, of which **13%** of 'super networkers' made more than **16** new connections out of events they attended.



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

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

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



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

## Approach to Network Building

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

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

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

## Building an effective Network and Partnerships

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

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

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

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

Prof Matthew Jones,  
University of the West of England



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

Kirsty – Edinburgh Food Social –  
Local Partner

## Value of Network Events for the Partners

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

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

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

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

Samantha – Eden Project Communities –  
National Partner

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

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

Hannah – Food Sense Wales –  
National Partner

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

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