Summary of activities, learning and challenges

June 2021 – November 2021
Bringing people together through food

Created in 2019 Food For Life Get Togethers (FFLGT) are regular community activities that connect people from different ages and backgrounds through food.

**Food brings people together.**
And right now, it’s more important than ever to stay connected with one another.

Funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and delivered with the support of **five national partners**, Food for Life Get Togethers are part of a bigger movement, supported by the Soil Association, to make good food the easy choice for everyone.

In the last three years Get Togethers has motivated, inspired and engaged 2424 community organisers across the UK to bring their communities together at over 2000 food activities, reaching around 100,000 people.

Get Togethers uses a **Theory of Change model** which aims to mobilise, build capacity and leadership in community food activities across the UK. We work collaboratively, test with evidence and continually learn.
Get Togethers in review –
June 2021 – November 2021

mobilisation

[Noun]: the action of organising and encouraging a group of people to take collective action in pursuit of a particular objective.

Mobilisation of new entrants into the programme has continued to increase. Year 3 of the programme marked a planned shift in mobilisation strategy, as we moved from on the ground Regional Engagement Officers to a digital focused, one to many user-journey.

New registrants begin a six-part automated email journey that welcomes them to Get Togethers and signposts to resources, networking and capacity building opportunities. This has seen positive results so far, with 950 people completing the registered activities journey and 95 completing the newsletter sign up journey.

There is evidence that awareness of the programme amongst the public is starting to break through. Research from Eden Project Communities showed that 20% who had heard of Food For Life Get Togethers, compared to 20% who had heard of their neighbours.’

Cook and Share Month was a key moment in programme to

CASE STUDY:
Middle of the Hill Community Group, Small Grant Recipient

The community garden was a new project for 2021, as Rachel explained – “we started this because one of the residents wanted to grow herbs but living in a flat didn’t have a garden of their own to do it in, so we turned a small area of green space on the estate into a community garden. A local vegan restaurant provides their veg peelings for us to make compost with and a disabled resident let us hook up a water butt to the drainpipe from his bungalow to store water for the plants.” It’s not all been plain sailing, with some of the veg going missing but: “people have come up to me and said how much they appreciate what we’re doing, that the area looks so much better now…” There can be a real buzz when the residents come together at the gardening group. It’s a good reason for people to come out of their flats and socialise with their neighbours.”

Mobilisation

[733 new groups engaged with programme since 1st June 2021 – 18.2% higher than in the previous 6 months (623) and 30% higher than in June-November last year (319). This brings the total engaged groups to date to 2624

Based on registration data alone, Get Together activities expected to reach 33,743 people taking the total for the programme to 99,804

Cook and Share Month was a key moment for engaging new audiences and deepening our connection with those already involved, with 440 groups registering their Get Togethers

Sign-ups for the Get Togethers newsletter reached 1,127 recipients during Cook and Share month, putting us on target to exceed our goal of 1,250 sign-ups by the end of year 3.

This UK wide reach was achieved thanks to the mobilisation efforts of our Local Commissioned Partners (LCPs) and National Partners via their networks, as well as targeting wider internal networks such as Sustainable Food Places and Soil Association supporter newsletters. Press advertising also helped us to broaden our reach, targeting specific geographical areas.

FFLGTs Community Advisors told us that Facebook was the best social channel to connect with community groups and during this six-month period the Facebook Community grew to over 1000 members.
This has been achieved in a number of ways.

- Adopting FFLGTs Community Advisors recommendations on the style and tone of voice that would resonate with community groups.
- Targeted Facebook adverts saw 1.4M impressions, 9,957 clicks and 112 conversions, with 83% of those conversions coming from the 30% most deprived communities.
- Commissioning Coventry University to research the motivations, enablers and barriers to participation in social food citizenship activities amongst diverse communities. This helped to develop insight and understanding, and this learning was shared at Eden Project Communities Festival of Discovery, a national network for community organisers.

FFLGTs local commissioned partners are playing a leading role in organising network events and a priority for 2022 will be to support them to continue to sustain these networks beyond the funding cycle of the programme.

Our Small Grants scheme continues to engage new registrations into Get Togethers as well as build capacity of groups to develop and sustain community food activities that bring people together.

**It’s really helpful to learn from other organisations and groups about what’s worked and what hasn’t. Increased knowledge improves confidence – it was also really inspiring to hear of all the brilliant work going on and being planned.**

Network Session Attendee

**LEARNINGS:**

1. Our online offer of cooking, growing and sharing training did not resonate as we would have hoped, with only a handful of sessions completing the training. There are several possible explanations for this. Our registration onto our learning platform can be complicated, with joining instructions often being sent to junk folders and ‘digital fatigue’ following Covid. A task and finish group has been established to review this offer and decide on the future viability of online training.

2. We have successfully focused on equity of access to resources from the programme, with 58% of the programme’s highly engaged participants — who receive the most input from us — coming from the 30% most deprived communities in the UK.

3. Relatively small grants of £150 can motivate collaboration and community food activities that continue well beyond the grants original purpose.

CASE STUDY: A small grant boost

**Soup, muffins and movies for Cook and Share Month.**

“Gathering around a table to share good food and conversation is such a simple thing but has an immeasurable impact on people’s lives.”

Incredible Edible Handbridge are a thriving community group in Cheshire. They have been holding regular Cook and Share events after securing vital funding as part of our Small Grants programme. Their autumnal soup and movie events have been a huge hit among the locals, attracting families of all ages and backgrounds.

Lisa Rossetti at Incredible Edible Handbridge, said: “This is the perfect opportunity to meet, especially after being isolated from each other during the pandemic. Getting out and meeting people is essential for our wellbeing whatever our age, especially at this time of year.”

90% of Get Togethers organisers agree that their activities created friendships, as well as supporting people’s health and wellbeing.

Cook and Share Month is the ideal opportunity to bring people together over good food and conversation, whether you’re serving up the soup or spilling the tea.”

The last round of Small Grants to support Cook and Share Month was our biggest yet with 153 Small Grants of £150 awarded. Additionally, FFLGT supported a Small Grants scheme delivered by Linking Generations Northern Ireland where funding was awarded to a further 23 groups.
FFLGTs is building leadership capacity of community food activity organisers. We have created a diverse network of LCPs spanning a range of sectors including arts, education, growing organisations and community benefit groups. This network is mobilising others and leading capacity building network events which transfers their specialist knowledge to communities across the UK.

Five of our current LCPs are also members of our new community food leadership programme, My Food Community Leadership Programme (MFC).

AT A GLANCE:
- MFC is an accelerated leadership programme for community food organisers which FFLGTs launched in September 2021. We recruited a cohort of 47 emerging and established food leaders from across the UK who use good food to bring people together in communities.
- MFC offers participants the chance to network and share with peers at monthly connect and share sessions, receive expert input from community food experts and engage in roundtable discussions on topics that impact their activity, such as diversity and inclusion.
- Additionally, our leadership specialist partner Koreo have delivered sessions on visioning for the future and arranged for all participants to receive a professional coaching call to ensure that members are supported to put theory into practical action and achieve their goals.
- MFC members have been organising their own Get Together activities and participating in the wider Get Togethers networks in this period.

The focus of the programme so far has been to encourage participants to develop a shared language and understanding of local food systems, to understand and reflect on their own sphere of influence and to connect with other members. My Food Community Leadership Programme will focus on putting the learning into action through developing community action projects funded by the programme.

LEARNINGS:
1. MFC is currently an online course, but members have told us that they would welcome the opportunity to meet face-to-face. This is being planned for February 2022, where we will bring members together to launch our funding round, which will support their community action projects, and encourage collaboration among members to ensure maximum impact for the projects.
2. Attendance has been an issue as members struggle to balance busy lives with being part of the programme and there has so far been higher attendance at food related sessions rather than the sessions that encourage the group to reflect on their role as leaders. Weekly sessions may have been over ambitious, and we will look to reduce the amount of contact time in 2022.
3. The need for network events and MFC was highlighted by our recent research from Coventry University, which pointed to the importance of building learning communities, networks, partnerships, collaborating on shared visions and supporting distributed leaders.

My Food Community has allowed me to connect, reflect and share the rewards and challenges with like-minded food champions who are tackling the same issues around food and sustainability. The programme of work has given me access to a breadth of viewpoints from experts and participants. It sometimes feels difficult to make time to pause and reflect, this programme has ensured time is protected to do this.

Francesca Vale - Nutritionist, Bury

"We used the grant to buy ingredients so that our brain injured clients could take part in online cooking sessions while they were isolating at home during Covid. We did not have resources to do this ourselves and so the grant was key to the project, helping remove barriers to participation (cost, access to shops during lockdown etc). Our clients have now returned to our centres and so we are no longer offering online sessions but plan to resurrect cookery/healthy eating on our timetable at the earliest opportunity.

Small Grant Recipient"
Looking ahead to 2022

We saw significant increases in engagement in FFLGTs during the last 6 months, despite a reduction in team size, with Small Grants, networks and partnerships playing a key role. These engagements lead to action in communities on food that’s good for people and planet.

Priorities for the next 6 months focus on programme legacy through our capacity building and leadership development activities and by sharing and embedding our learning internally and externally.

In My Food Community Leadership Programme as well as bringing our cohort together for the first time for face-to-face input, we will be turning theory into practice through their community action projects, co-designing version two and recruiting our next cohort of members.

We will embed leadership pathways for community organisers through opportunities to share their knowledge, experience and success at network events, coaching and mentoring our Local Commissioned Partners and connecting MFC alumni with emerging leaders to peer support and mentor.

As we approach the final year of the programme we will increasingly focus on ‘translating’, sharing and embedding our learning widely. FFLGTs impact and research outputs from the University of the West of England, Coventry University, internal thematic reports, and case studies or stories from partners and communities will be disseminated, focusing on themes linked to our Theory of Change.

We had a street party. We are a block of 38 who over Covid really came together to support each other. We are based in Deptford and are a very diverse community with over 20 languages spoken in just 38 homes. We were able to coincide our street party with the council approving the closure of our street with The Walk with Little Amal. This was an amazing day for Deptford and as the fun closed on the main square we started our street party. We were able to support this event with seating form the nearby brewery and a bbq from a nearby coffee shop and bar.

Small Grant Recipient