



Giving citizens agency over their wellbeing through affordable fresh food

The positive benefits of consuming fresh and healthy foods, including fruit and vegetables, on personal health and wellbeing are well known. However, barriers including access and affordability mean that people in the UK's most disadvantaged communities do not have the agency to make choices about the food they eat.

According to the [Food Foundation](#), the poorest fifth of UK households would need to spend 50% of their disposable income on food to meet the cost of the Government-recommended healthy diet. This compares to just 11% for the richest fifth of the population.

In the [National Food Strategy](#), an independent report for Government, Henry Dimbleby highlighted the strong correlation between income, educational attainment and consumption of fruit and vegetables. Around 3.3 million people cannot reach any food stores selling raw ingredients within 15 minutes by public transport.

Poverty is bad for our health. The [Health Foundation](#) predicts that over the next two decades, people in the 10% most deprived areas of the UK can expect to be diagnosed with major illness a decade earlier than people in the 10% least deprived areas.

An estimated 5.6 and 7.8 million premature deaths worldwide in 2013 may be attributable to a fruit and vegetable intake below 500 and 800 g/day, respectively. Source: doi: [10.1093/ije/dyw319](https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyw319)

Fresh Street – a project from FoodSEqual Health

Since July 2023, the FoodSEqual-Health team has been collaborating with two disadvantaged communities in southern England: Whitley in Reading and Whitleigh in Plymouth. The Fresh Street Community initiative is helping us to understand the impact and benefits of making it easier to access and afford fresh fruit and vegetables through a place-based intervention hosted at community centres (hubs) in each area.

More than a market stall, Fresh Street Community is a mechanism to:

- test the effectiveness of embedding a voucher-based scheme into each community
- understand the benefits of removing barriers to the access and affordability of fresh fruit and vegetables
- bring locals together to share food experiences and try new foods through cooking activities
- support those who wish to learn more about healthy lifestyles
- enhance community spirit and inclusion
- engage people in health, wellbeing and social care services



Helping communities to access fresh fruit and vegetables

The Fresh Street Community scheme has been adapted for each of the two areas we are working in.

How Fresh Street Community works

In each area, 300 households have been invited to participate in the study. A Community Researcher Team is working with these individuals and families to provide activities and support learning about fruit and vegetables at the community hubs.

150 households in each community have been issued vouchers worth £10 every two weeks to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables at the hubs via weekly online purchasing (Plymouth) or at a fruit and vegetable stall (Reading and Plymouth). A second 150 households are invited to participate in food-related activities at the hubs that are open to all, but they do not receive vouchers. The research is looking at the community engagement of these two groups in both settings.

Both stalls are open to everyone in the community, not just those participating in the research.

The project in numbers

- 2** disadvantaged communities
- 600** households in total
- 300** households regularly receive £10 vouchers
- 100%** of households invited to participate in activities
- 9** month project in Plymouth
- 10.5** months in Reading
- 2** supportive local produce suppliers

We've chosen to work with entire streets in order to understand the impact at community level.

The two communities

Whitley

a suburb of Reading, Berkshire

- Based at the Whitley Community Development Association (WCDA)
- Produce supplied by local wholesaler C A Belcher & Son
- Stall is open on Saturdays 9:30-11:30
- Customers can select what they wish to
- £1 pre-sorted bags are available
- Special requests are possible, e.g. produce important for different cultures
- Option to bank vouchers or overspend using cash or card
- Engagement activities include food testing and cookalongs
- NHS health checks available on market days

Whitleigh

a suburb of Plymouth, Devon

- Based at the Salvation Army Hall
- Supplied by local wholesaler Tamar Fresh
- Orders taken every other Tuesday
- Pre-selected £5 bags of seasonal fruit and veg available to order
- Residents return two days later to collect their orders.
- £5 pre-sorted seasonal bags available
- Option to bank vouchers or overspend using cash or card
- Those collecting orders can stop for a chat or participate in activities
- Monthly stall at Whitleigh Community Market

As part of the wider FoodSEqual project, households are invited to take part in a study on diet, health and wellbeing, and food affordability. This will measure the health impacts of having greater access to fresh fruit and vegetables.

How Fresh Street is benefitting communities



Community engagement leads to positive health outcomes

Mr A, a Whitley resident who has autism, says that his regular visits to Fresh Street Community at WDCA provide routine in his life as well as opportunities for socialising. After going to the stall a few times, he started to recognise people and would stop for a chat. Through his visits, Mr A heard about the NHS drop-in session. During his health check, he was found to have high blood pressure and is now attending a GP to address this.

Mr A feels very welcome when he attends the community hub and enjoys being asked about the produce he has consumed. He is comfortable answering our researcher's questions and is participating in the diet, health and wellbeing research. He says he feels better for eating the Fresh Street fruit and vegetables. Mr A also told us his participation in the study means he spends less time watching television.

“ One of the Whitleigh residents uses the fruit and vegetables to recreate his mother's recipes. He says it help to bring back old memories. ”

Jiang Pan, FoodSEqual researcher

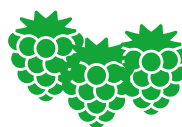
“ The uptake by the voucher holders is making such a difference. People tell us things like, 'I got my kids to stop eating Jaffa Cakes and introduced fruit and veg into their diet.' We see children coming along to the stall with their mums and dads, with the children choosing what they want to eat. ”

Trisha Bennett, WDCA Community Development Coordinator and FoodSEqual community researcher

The average voucher redemption rate in Whitley is just over 58% (20/01/2024 – 01/06/2024).



Vouchers provide a safety net for taking a risk on unfamiliar produce



Children have a chance to try 'luxury' items e.g. soft fruits



The local F&V suppliers have a new customer base



Residents are engaging with healthcare professionals while visiting the stalls



Participants feel more connected to their community through the activities



Households from different cultures have local access to speciality produce



WCDA's on-site café thrives on 'market days'



Residents are coming together to talk about food and learn cooking skills

Putting people at the heart of research

By being inclusive, we aim to:

- work with those embedded in the communities we are aiming to help
- facilitate engagement through activities that will enrich the lives of people in the community
- collect research data in ways that allow community voices to be heard, e.g. through conversations and photo diaries
- use inclusive language and be open to ideas from the community to create trust

About FoodSEqual

FoodSEqual-Health is part of Food Systems Equality (FoodSEqual), one of the research programmes in the **Transforming the UK Food System Strategic Priority Fund** (TUKFS SPF) funded by UKRI and government departments. The programme aims to fundamentally transform the UK food system by placing healthy people and a sustainable natural environment at its centre. FoodSEqual brings together academic researchers, food industry representatives, voluntary sector organisations and policy makers. The project focuses on working together with disadvantaged communities to co-develop new solutions that address a lack of access to healthy, sustainable food through co-development of new products, new supply chains and new policy frameworks that will deliver affordable, attractive, healthy and sustainable diets.

In 2024, the FoodSEqual team won the University of Reading Research Award for the Best Interdisciplinary Research Project in 2024. The Awards celebrate projects that address real-world problems using interdisciplinary approaches, are built on partnership and collaboration and engage a wide range of audiences.

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Find out more

research.reading.ac.uk/food-systems-equality/

www.freshstreet.uk/fresh-street-community/

