



Supporting people to thrive through access to affordable fresh food

Community-led interventions to increase health, wellbeing and social inclusion

The number of food insecure households has risen to 10% and lower-income groups are less likely to meet the government's dietary recommendations for a healthy diet.¹ It is predicted 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.²

This report highlights research by the FoodSEqual-Health project. The primary research aim was to discover the most effective way to embed the Fresh Street Community Scheme within local food systems in areas of high deprivation in Reading and Plymouth working with local suppliers and community centres.

Among the secondary research aims, the team wanted to determine the impact of the Fresh Street Community on social connection, health inequality, self-reported dietary behaviours and wellbeing status, and the availability and affordability of fresh fruit and vegetables.

“ The poorest 10% of people in the UK consume 42% less fruits and vegetables than recommended.”

United Kingdom Food Security Report 2024

The primary aim was to discover the most effective way to embed the Fresh Street Community Scheme in areas of high deprivation.

¹ [United Kingdom Food Security Report 2024](#)

² [The Health Foundation](#)



How Fresh Street Community worked



Box scheme

Whitleigh, a suburb of Plymouth, Devon

2 streets / 300 households close to Salvation Army Hall

1 street received fortnightly £10 vouchers + community hub activity programme

1 street received community hub activity programme only

Food and Wellbeing Chat in months 1, 10 and 32

Biomarker assessment using hair and urine samples



Market stall

Whitley, a suburb of Reading, Berkshire

11 streets / 300 households close to Whitley Community Development Association (WCDA)

5 streets received fortnightly £10 vouchers + community hub activity programme

6 streets received community hub activity programme only until month 8, when they also received vouchers

Delayed intervention group

Food and Wellbeing Chat in months 1, 10 and 32

Biomarker assessment using hair and urine samples

Attend NHS health checks

Key learnings from our work in Plymouth and Reading

- The funding of vouchers is key. Improving physical access to fruit and vegetables alone is not enough to increase uptake.
- Participants who were only given access to the community hubs didn't spend significant amounts of their own money on the produce. However, in Reading, once these participants started to receive vouchers at month 8 (the delayed intervention group), they also started using the stall.
- Having some of the team embedded in the community is fundamental to success.
- The fruit and vegetable supplier's operating model influences the delivery of the intervention.

About the Food and Wellbeing Chats

These included an Intake24 dietary recall from the previous 24 hours plus selected questions from the Edinburgh-Warwick Wellbeing Survey, the NHS Wellbeing Survey and the FSA Food Affordability Survey.

Working with the community is crucial

FoodSEqual-Health believes that research should be done *WITH* the community, not *TO* the community. Working with community researchers (CRs) and hub leaders was fundamental to the success of the scheme. Employed by FoodSEqual-Health, the CRs were integral members of the project team. Their lived experience and awareness of the areas contributed to decisions about the location of the intervention streets and the design of engagement activities. They advocated for the scheme and engaged residents.

Collaborating with a community organisation can enhance the reach and impact of the intervention. A community hub provides a physical setting for activities that support social connection and the sharing of food experiences. It's a space that the community may already trust and know how to access.

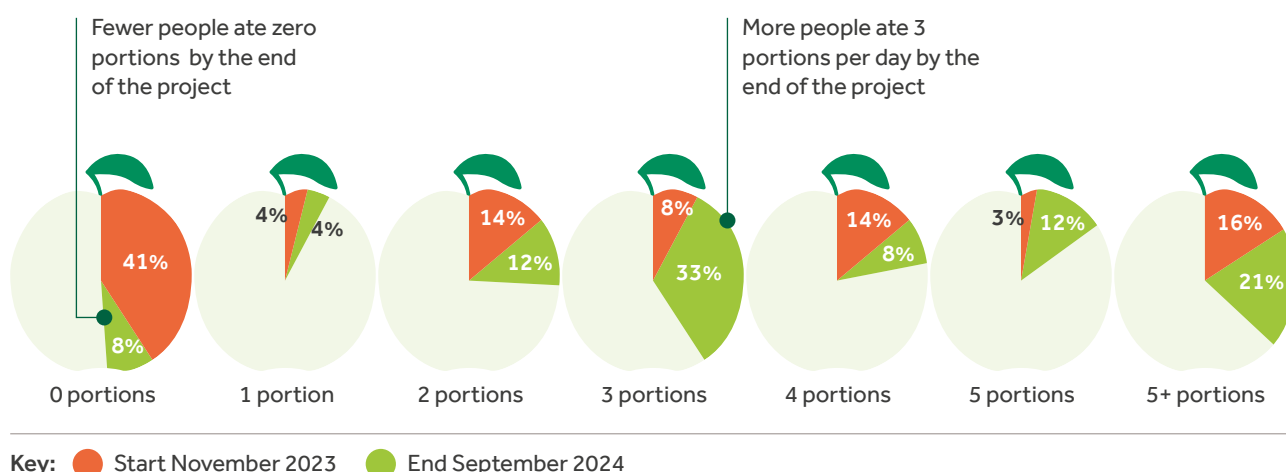


Fresh Street Community in Plymouth

In Plymouth, Fresh Street Community scheme ran from January to September 2024. For more details about the intervention, see the [FoodSEqual-Health website](#).



Greater fruit and vegetable consumption



Enhanced social connection

- The Salvation Army Hall provided a space where participants could share ideas for using produce
- People enjoyed chatting at the market stall with fellow participants and the stall holders
- Activities at the Salvation Army Hall offered risk-free opportunities to try new foods and meet others
- Encouraging participants to stay and chat helped to build social connections

“ It’s nice to be a part of this community; it has encouraged me to participate in things I wouldn’t have earlier.”

Plymouth participant



Healthier diets

- Reported outcomes included weight loss, increased wellbeing and social connection

“ Before I used to buy £1 ready meals ...now I cook from scratch regularly.”

Plymouth participant

Due to its success, Fresh Street Community Plymouth extended its activities. A fortnightly pop-up fruit and vegetable stall ran at Salvation Army Hall for a further four months from November 2024 to February 2025 while the local monthly community market ran in spring and summer 2025.



Fresh Street Community in Reading

In Reading, the Fresh Street Community scheme runs from November 2023 to September 2025. Visit the [FoodSEqual-Health website](#) for more on the project.



Greater fruit and vegetable consumption

F&V consumption increased by 1.2 portions per day from the baseline to 12-month follow up

F&V consumption increased by 0.5 portions per day from the 8-month to 12-month follow up



Intervention

Delayed intervention

Key: ● Baseline ● 8-month follow up ● 12-month follow up

“ It's prompted us to eat more veg and we even do vegetarian days now.”

Reading participant



Enhanced social connection

- The Whitley Community Development Association was a hub for events and a chance to engage with healthcare teams
- Cookalong sessions brought people together
- Participants supported others by sharing vouchers

“ You see people all the time in the local area but you don't say anything. But when you've got a local and common experience [you can say] 'Oh yeah, I saw you down there.' ”

Reading participant



Healthier diets

- 11 percentage point reduction in obesity ([NHS health check](#))
- 2 percentage point increase in healthy weight ([NHS health check](#))
- Self-reported outcomes include greater wellbeing, lower cholesterol, going down two dress sizes, lowered anxiety

The Fresh Street Community stall and data collection ran from November 2023 to September 2024. Additional funding from Reading Borough Council allowed the project to continue for a further six months, adding an additional 100 households to the study.

Through Fresh Street Community, residents had power of choice and access to high-quality fruit and vegetables.



How to build a fairer local food system

Creating a community-based fresh fruit and vegetable project

- Plan at least nine months for the intervention and identify a fruit and veg supplier, ideally one who supports your aims and ethos.
- You don't necessarily need a bespoke market stall – vouchers could be spent at easy-to-reach locations that sell the supplier's produce.
- Make sure your hub is located in the community you want to work with.
- Budget for supporting resources, such as voucher printing (if using physical vouchers) and marketing costs.
- There are different ways to measure diet and fruit and vegetable intake. See the section on Evaluating your scheme for ideas.
- Work with people and organisations from the target community to build trust and fully understand local issues.
- This is a flexible intervention so don't be afraid to adapt as you start to understand which aspects are most successful.

Practical things to consider

When setting up a market stall, think about:

- Staffing of the stall
- Equipment (market stalls / till/ weighing scales, etc)
- Capacity to store produce (refrigerators etc)
- Cover for inclement weather
- Food safety and hygiene training
- Relevant insurance, e.g. professional indemnity.

If setting up a fruit and vegetable/ scheme box:

- Bags are easier to carry than boxes – you may need to decant produce into bags for residents to be able to carry.

Another thing to consider:

- Make pricing as transparent as possible, e.g. per item, box or bowl rather than per kg.

Evaluating your scheme

By measuring uptake, you can learn what works for your community. There are a number of ways to capture and evaluate the success of your own scheme, depending on the resources available.

Basic evaluation

- Informal chats with residents
- Basic demographic info (e.g. age, gender)
- Ask questions on fruit and vegetable consumption in the previous 24 hours

In-depth

- All of the above plus [Food And Wellbeing Chat](#)

Advanced

- Although not essential for evaluating health outcomes, biomarker tracking can give a better understanding of eating habits when used in combination with Food and Wellbeing Chats. Urine samples can tell us more about individual nutrients while hair samples provide information on what participants have eaten in the past few months.

Identifying and communicating impacts

The FoodSEqual-Health team transcribed conversations with participants and coded them to generate key themes. These are used to clearly convey the impacts of the intervention.

Read our [Process Evaluation](#)



About FoodSEqual-Health

FoodSEqual-Health (FS-Health) is a daughter research project of Food Systems Equality (FoodSEqual).

The FoodSEqual project works with disadvantaged communities to investigate how to co-develop new products, supply chains and policy frameworks that deliver affordable, attractive, healthy and sustainable diets. The research brings together academic researchers, food industry representatives, voluntary sector organisations and policymakers.

FoodSEqual is one of the large-scale research projects in the £47.5M **Transforming the UK Food System for Healthy People and a Healthy Environment SPF Programme**. (TUKFS).

Delivered by UKRI, in partnership with the Global Food Security Programme, BBSRC, ESRC, MRC, NERC, Defra, DHSC, OHID, Innovate UK and FSA, TUKFS aims to fundamentally transform the UK food system by placing healthy people and a healthy natural environment at its centre, addressing questions around what we should eat, produce and manufacture and what we should import, taking into account the complex interactions between health, environment and socioeconomic factors.

Contact us

Find out more about FoodSEqual-Health and its parent project FoodSEqual

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

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