

Evaluating the impact of a sustainable kitchen supplying affordable surplus-food based meals to local communities in Winchester

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Background:

Community kitchens comprise of small groups of people who meet regularly to prepare meals, and are a means to develop kitchen skills, improve nutrition and diet diversity, and to reduce social isolation. FirstBite Café is a community kitchen based in Winchester, Hampshire founded in 2016 that has aimed to re-use food that would otherwise be destroyed, to produce high quality and affordable meals for its local community

Objectives:

We sought to evaluate the impact FirstBite has had on its customers, volunteers, and wider community. Concurrently we hoped to produce local data on the role of community kitchens and possible recommendations on the continued development of the Café.

Methods:

A questionnaire was developed to capture demographics, attitudes, and perceptions of customers towards the café, and the impact the café has had on them. Two volunteer focus groups were run, asking what values attracted them to the café, what prompted re-attendance, who benefits from the café, and where they see the café going forward.

Results:

Of the 67 respondents, the largest proportion of customers were aged between 55 and 75, and 41.7% lived alone; with the majority attending for over 12 months. The factors most appreciated were the food (87%), company (78%), affordability (75%) and core values of the kitchen (48%). The focus groups corroborated the greatest benefit came from developing social skills and confidence, giving a sense of purpose and community, and reduced social isolation in the elderly, those with mental health issues, and background of substance misuse.

Conclusions:

The results of this evaluation were overwhelmingly positive, with the impact of the café on reducing social isolation and providing nutritious and affordable food echoed throughout. The barriers that FirstBite is now facing revolve around infrastructure and accessibility, and a permanent location with greater space would continue to extend its effectiveness

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