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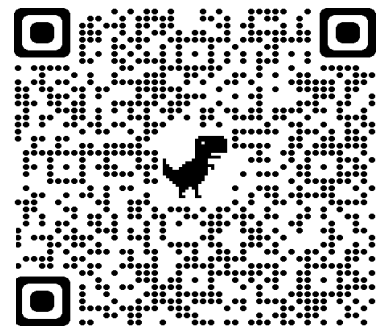
# READY HEALTHY EAT

*"Food is a vehicle for social good..."*

## The Social Impact of Ready Healthy Eat Programme 2020-2023

Final report, May 2023

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## About this report

This report sets out the findings of research on the social impact of the Ready Healthy Eat (RHE) programme over the period Feb 2020 – Feb 2023, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, and coordinated by The Real Farming Trust.

The key insights and learnings in this report will be of relevance to a range of audiences, including the RHE partner organisations, other community food initiatives, community development practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and funders interested in empowering and transforming the community food provisioning sector in the UK such that healthy, nutritious, affordable and sustainable food is available to everyone.

A summary report of the key findings is available online.

[Ready, Healthy, Eat! | Coventry University](#)

To read the summary report and this report online, please visit the research project webpage using the link above, or by scanning the QR code on the cover page. For a printed copy, contact Dr Lopa Saxena at [lopa.saxena@coventry.ac.uk](mailto:lopa.saxena@coventry.ac.uk)

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The photos used in this report have been taken by the research team or provided by the partner organisations.

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

Full name	Abbreviation/ acronym used in the report
Brighton & Hove Food Partnership	BHFP
Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, Coventry University	CAWR
Centre for Business in Society, Coventry University	CBiS
Cyrenians FareShare Central & Southeast Scotland, Edinburgh	Cyrenians
The Hornbeam Centre, London	Hornbeam
NOW Group Northern Ireland	NOW
Ready Healthy Eat	RHE
Real Farming Trust	RFT
Social Impact Assessment	SIA

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# Executive Summary

This report sets out the research findings on the social impact of the Ready Healthy Eat programme, February 2020 – February 2023, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, and coordinated by The Real Farming Trust.

Ready Healthy Eat (RHE hereafter) was a collaborative three-year programme that brought together four established local community organisations from across the UK to trial innovative models of community food provisioning. The partner community organisations<sup>1</sup> were Brighton & Hove Food Partnership (Brighton, England), Cyrenians (Edinburgh, Scotland), The Hornbeam Centre (London, England), and NOW Group (Belfast, Northern Ireland).

RHE's primary objective was to improve the nutritional quality of ready-to-eat meals provided in food poverty projects. It funded activities run by the four partner organisations that could lead to changing unhealthy diets disproportionately accessed by vulnerable groups in their communities. The aim was to show that community organisations can produce cost-effective and nutritious meals to break the cycle of fast unhealthy food dependence by disadvantaged families. Among the four participating organisations in RHE, the activities included: training programmes focused on cooking, health, and nutrition; procurement and (re)distribution of local and/or surplus food; preparation and delivery of ready meals; and facilitating spaces of food consumption (e.g., community cafes, social eating).

A research team from Coventry University's Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR), and Centre for Business in Society (CBiS)<sup>2</sup>, (Coventry, UK) led the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) of the RHE programme. In the final year of the programme, they also carried out in parallel a reflective evaluation of the programme with the four partner organisations and peers in the community food provisioning sector. This process enabled them to reflect collectively on the broader impacts of the RHE programme as well as the key learnings (including successes and challenges) that had emerged during the RHE programme.

It is important to preface the findings, reflections, and recommendations from our research in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The launch of the RHE programme activities (in February 2020) coincided with the breakout of the pandemic and subsequent national lockdown restrictions that began on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, and lasted in various guises and intensities for more than a year. For the partner organisations, due to the nature of their 'frontline' work, their organisational priorities, capacities, and resources were diverted towards the emergency response for meeting the needs of food (and other forms of support) for those most vulnerable to the unfolding crisis. The restrictions and regulations issued by the governments in the four nations also had a considerable impact on the partner organisations, in relation to carrying out some of the initial planned RHE activities. They

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<sup>1</sup> They are referred to as partner organisations or partner projects interchangeably throughout the report.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Lazell from CBiS has since then moved to the University of Essex.

influenced, to a varying extent, the nature and level of RHE related activities throughout the duration of the RHE programme. For the researchers, consequently, these circumstances also affected the processes of data collection for monitoring and tracking outcomes of RHE. Nonetheless, despite the many challenges faced during a period overshadowed by a global public health crisis, the RHE programme provided a unique context that brought together four organisations from different parts of the country to focus on improving the nutritional content of the food eaten by some of the most vulnerable members of our communities.

In this report, we present RHE's social impact in two primary outcome areas: (1) Impacts on trainees and employment; and (2) Nutritional benefits of meals produced and their impact on beneficiaries. We also include findings from two additional outcome areas that became evident during the RHE programme: (3) Impact on volunteers; and (4) Impact of RHE partnership.<sup>3</sup>

## Key findings

### Impact on trainees and employment

1. Across the RHE programme, 178 people completed training (against a target of 176), and 56 of them (31%) consequently found employment, which is a remarkable achievement considering the pandemic-related disruptions.
2. Not all participants who entered training programmes intended to become fully employable in a matter of weeks. There was a greater emphasis in some cases on building confidence and increasing wellbeing than employability *per se*.
3. Feedback from trainees was strongly positive in terms of improved confidence and self-esteem, wellbeing, and mental health, as well as gaining new and/or enhanced skill levels (both practical and 'softer' social and personal) and increased awareness of healthy food and nutrition.
4. Although some partner projects conducted post-training follow-up of trainees, a lack of sufficient data on the starting points of trainees and post-course evaluation across the RHE programme made it difficult to evidence longer-term impacts.
5. Expecting all trainees to go straight from training to employment may not be a realistic or achievable outcome in all cases. Instead, relative to the starting position of a trainee, other measures of 'success' were significant in terms of levels of confidence, self-esteem, and wellbeing, acquiring skills for independent living, and the 'comfort' of a safe space for personal and social development through making new connections and friendships.

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<sup>3</sup> A summary report of the key findings of RHE is available online at [Ready, Healthy, Eat! | Coventry University](#)

## Impact on nutrition

6. The partner projects delivered 573,009 meals in total, roughly 60 times more than the target set; most of this increase was the result of providing emergency food support to the increased number of vulnerable households during the pandemic. Each of the partner projects surpassed the number of meals target.
7. Without RHE's activities, especially during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant number of people who relied on the partner organisations would have been at a higher risk of food insecurity and social isolation. They include the elderly, people with long-term health issues, people with mobility issues, people in financial hardship, people with poor mental health, people with learning disabilities, and people with intersecting vulnerabilities.
8. The meals provided were generally healthy and nutritious aligned with national dietary guidelines, and there was some evidence of improvement in beneficiaries' diets. Questions emerged over how the nutritional impact of meals could be consistently defined and measured, which takes into account the wider context of individual food consumption practices (i.e., what people had at other times of the day/week), the 'enjoyment' aspect of eating food together, and their lifestyles more broadly.
9. Evidence of impact on the ability to make healthier food choices in practice by the direct recipients of meals, as well as the trainees, outside of RHE was mixed. However, increased awareness of the significance of cooking healthier meals was evident. Partner projects highlighted the need to focus on improving the knowledge/skills of the kitchen staff (chefs and volunteers) and trainees involved as being as important as looking at the nutritional content of the meals overall.
10. Evidence of the influence of beneficiaries on menu development and meals provided by the partner projects was limited; some were anecdotal in nature (e.g., phone-call check-ins with some beneficiaries who received meals, verbal feedback), and some more detailed (e.g., use of QR codes, phone texts). A less *ad hoc* and more systematic approach is required to capture how partner projects seek, respond and act on feedback (e.g., in menu design), to adjust for example, calorific value and macronutrient content of meals, and cultural acceptability.
11. Except for one partner project (NOW) which used conventional food supply chains, the other partner projects relied to a varying extent on surplus food. It is estimated that over the three years, they sourced nearly 314 tonnes of surplus food. They became innovative and resourceful in sourcing, collecting, and using surplus food in various ways from diverse sources, and saw themselves as playing a key role in preventing waste in the food supply chains. At the same time, they showed a desire for sourcing food from local producers (e.g., farmer's markets and local farms). However, the costs (and logistics) of sourcing non-surplus food were a common barrier.



12. While there was a heavy reliance on food surplus supply for reasons of affordability and/or environmental impact, the partner projects identified the need for high-quality (i.e., in terms of freshness, nutritional content, and cultural diversity) in the surplus supply chains.
13. RHE's emphasis on improving the nutritional content of meals led the partner projects to recognise the need for embedding nutrition monitoring more thoroughly and systematically into their work.
14. The impact of the training programmes and provision of ready meals on the physical and mental health of a wide range of beneficiaries (e.g., recipients of the ready meals, trainees, and chefs and volunteers), was positive, including through social eating opportunities provided by the partner projects. In the wider context of the adverse repercussions of the pandemic on peoples' overall wellbeing, this positive impact cannot be understated.

### **Impact on volunteers**

15. Although not initially considered as an outcome of RHE, the impact on volunteers who carried out a wide range of roles (e.g., sourcing food ingredients, and preparing/delivering meals) was considerably positive. Among the reasons for their increased wellbeing were developing/acquiring new skills; gaining valuable experience; reduced social isolation; new relationships and connections; and progression to employment.
16. By creating volunteering opportunities, the partner projects effectively supported their local communities to have a stake in the success of their project in achieving the aims, thus widening their reach, and amplifying their local impact.

### **Impact of RHE partnership**

17. Partnership working was central to each of the four partner projects in their operational practices before their engagement with the RHE programme. The programme made this stronger through a widening and deepening of relationships and connections with a diverse range of organisations and agencies that they worked with (which included local and national government departments and statutory agencies, voluntary and community groups, resident groups, housing agencies, schools, hospitals, etc.).
18. Despite their different organisational objectives, geographical locations, characteristics, and the different RHE funded activities that they delivered, the partner projects gained from sharing their experiences over the three years. They formed an 'informal' learning network, which facilitated a sharing of key learnings and good practices amongst themselves. This also led to influencing attitudes, values, and practices within the organisations concerning food provisioning and increased awareness of strategic innovations in the sector.

19. The partner projects started developing plans to work together in the future, including their intent to continue with focusing on the nutritional aspects of ready meals beyond their engagement with RHE. This is a particularly strong legacy of the RHE programme.

### **Additional reflections**

20. In addition to using RHE funds, the partner projects pooled funds from other sources that enabled each of them to operate in a reflexive and agile way to meet a multitude of complex and emerging needs amongst their respective communities and to reach out to diverse groups. Understanding, quantifying, and attributing social impact to a specific activity or an individual programme was problematic, considering the highly networked approach that the partner organisations employed to work with a diverse group of partners.
21. All four partner projects were driven by the belief that food is not just for satisfying the needs of nutrition, but food was also a social conduit/vehicle for bringing people into community spaces, and that a holistic model of care was needed that addresses the wider social and cultural dimensions of food deprivation.
22. Outside of navigating the specific complexities of the wider context of major disruptions caused by the pandemic on the overall project implementation and data collection for SIA, our research highlights the need for greater consideration of processes that enable the co-design of stronger collaborative evaluation approaches.

## **Recommendations**

In the spatial and temporal context from which the above research findings emerged, we propose five recommendations. These recommendations, we hope, will not only enable the partner organisations to plan their future projects but will also be relevant for other community-based organisations and stakeholders, such as policymakers and funders who are interested in building the capacity of community food projects to achieve a greater societal impact.

### **R1. Invest in cross-sectoral collaborations and partnership working to amplify the impact**

Encouraging community food organisations to identify and build connections across diverse stakeholder groups for establishing collaborative relationships that enable the mobilisation and sharing of necessary resources is important to amplify impact. These relationships also hold the potential for nurturing innovative approaches that can address concerns over nutrition, health, and social justice in community food provisioning.

### **R2. Invest in sourcing food from diverse food supply chains**

Community organisations that prepare ready meals need greater support and resources to give them more control over procurement and meal preparation that improves people's health and nutrition, instead of being pushed to depend on unpredictable/unreliable food surplus supply chains. Along with R1, investment in building organisational capacity and resources is required for sourcing affordable, nutritious food from diverse, sustainable short food supply food chains.

### **R3. Secure long-term funding to sustain the impact**

Securing long-term funding is key to trialling innovative ideas and enabling learning from these trials to be used for improving practices in a way that short-term/uncertain funding does not allow. Long-term funding, especially in the community food provisioning sector is necessary not only to directly achieve specific project aims, but also to build community capacity, community empowerment, and community ownership. These are key ingredients for moving away from short-term solutions to longer-term community food resilience.

### **R4. Embed systematic, but flexible, processes and systems to track and report social impact**

Community organisations, most often time and resource-poor, are not always able to monitor systematically their impact longitudinally. Yet, good evidence of social impact improves the prospects for securing long-term funding (R3) and it is crucial to build the evidence base needed to inform changes in policies at a range of scales. Allocation of resources into embedding systematic, but flexible, processes and systems to track and report social impact also provides scope for self-learning towards developing new strategies and practices in response to changing circumstances.

### **R5. Share good practices and key learnings**

Many key learnings emerged over the course of the three-year RHE programme aimed at meeting RHE's objectives on nutrition, training, and employment. Also, while RHE did not set out to be a network where mentor-mentee relationships were cultivated, the collective learning and reflection that occurred influenced attitudes, organisational values, and practices. Community organisations will benefit strongly from more direct, one-to-one coaching and mentoring relationships where deeper insights and solutions to specific contexts could be elicited. The sharing of good practices and key learnings will be crucial for capacity building and empowerment of community food projects.

To sum up, as our research has shown, community-based organisations are vital spaces that are well positioned to use food as a vehicle for social good for improving the lives of people in their local communities. From being a 'lifeline', they can be and have been 'life-changing' for some of the most vulnerable members in our communities. However, these organisations also face significant challenges in meeting the needs for food and other support from increasing numbers of people turning to them within their already restricted budgets. Adequate and sufficient resources from national, regional, and local governments that could support such organisations to scale up their positive social impact are sorely missing. This is a critical area that requires urgent attention, more so now in the wider context of the 'cost of living crisis' and the economic recession in the country. Furthermore, from a transformative and socially just stance, it is also important to sustain the pressure for making systemic structural changes (e.g., in household incomes, welfare benefits, public support services, sustainable food supply chains, etc.) such that people are not pushed into seeking crisis support in the first place, and nutritious, affordable, and sustainable food is available to everyone.

## Headline data (RHE 2020-23)

Output Indicator	RHE (2020-23)	Target (2020-23)
<i>Number of people trained</i>	178	176
<i>Number of people who gained employment</i>	56	Not set
<i>Number of healthy meals provided</i>	573,009	9,650
<i>Amount of surplus food intercepted and redistributed (in tonnes)</i>	313.5	Not set



# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Context

Many different types of community food initiatives have emerged that address concerns over the consumption of unhealthy food. These include some that focus on making healthy food directly available to people at home (e.g., vegetable boxes scheme) and/or promoting skills for growing food, cooking healthy meals at home, and increasing awareness and knowledge of food and nutrition (e.g., community allotments cooking classes, etc.). However, these do not always support the needs or concerns of some vulnerable groups for various reasons, which may arise from accessibility, affordability, limited access to cooking facilities at home, or limited abilities to prepare and cook for themselves because of health issues/disabilities. These conditions make them reliant on ready-to-eat meals.

Studies show that fast food and highly processed ready-to-eat meals disproportionately accessed by the most vulnerable people in society are also often the least nutritionally balanced (PHE 2018, Bahadoran et al., 2015). These meals are high in sugar, salt, saturated or trans fats, and have many processed preservatives and ingredients. They often lack some of the essential nutrients. There is also growing evidence of the link between health inequalities and the consumption of fast/ultra-processed food among vulnerable groups in the UK (Food Foundation 2022, POST 2022).

## 1.2 Ready Healthy Eat (RHE) programme

Ready Healthy Eat (RHE, hereafter) was a collaborative three-year programme delivered during February 2020 - February 2023, funded by National Lottery Community Fund and coordinated by the Real Farming Trust. RHE's primary objective was to improve the nutritional quality of ready-to-eat meals, especially for vulnerable groups at risk of food insecurity/poverty. To this end, it brought together four established community organisations from across the UK to trial innovative models of community food provisioning. The four partner organisations were Brighton & Hove Food Partnership (Brighton, England), Cyrenians (Edinburgh, Scotland), The Hornbeam Centre (London, England), and NOW Group (Belfast, Northern Ireland).

Among the four participating organisations, RHE funded activities include: training programmes focused on cooking, health, and nutrition; procurement and (re)distribution of local and/or surplus food; preparation and delivery of ready meals; and facilitating spaces of food consumption (e.g., community cafes and social eating). The aim was to show that community organisations can produce cost-effective and nutritious meals to break the cycle of fast unhealthy food dependence by disadvantaged families.

A research team from Coventry University's Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR) and Centre for Business in Society (CBiS)<sup>4</sup> (Coventry, UK) led the Social Impact Assessment (SIA) of the RHE programme. In the final year of the programme, they also carried out in parallel a reflective evaluation of the programme with the four partner projects and peers in the community food provisioning sector. This process enabled them to reflect collectively on the broader impacts of the RHE programme as well as the key learnings (including successes and challenges) that had emerged during the RHE programme.

### **1.3 Report structure**

We start by introducing the RHE partner projects, followed by the outcome areas identified at the start of the RHE programme. Then, Section 2 describes the Social Impact Assessment approach and methods used for data collection and collation, followed by the ethical approval process for the research. We describe the key findings in Section 3. Section 4 includes reflections on five key aspects of RHE. This section also includes limitations of the research arising from challenges faced by the partner projects and the research team in data collection. Finally, Section 5 puts forward five recommendations.

### **1.4 RHE partner projects**

The four partner organisations are remarkably different in their core vision, mission, operational scale, and the communities that they work with [See Appendix 1]. However, what is common to them, forming the basis for their participation in the RHE programme, was their work around community food provisioning and their interest in the additional opportunity provided by RHE to trial innovative ideas around community food interventions. These ideas were based on, first, the feedback they had received from their beneficiaries and/or participants of programmes they ran; and second, their response to strategic local needs that they had identified around the provision of healthy and nutritious cooked meals through providing meals directly and/or training on cooking/catering programmes.

A brief overview of each of the four partner organisations and the primary motivation(s) behind their engagement with RHE is given below.

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<sup>4</sup> Dr. Lazell from CBiS has since then moved to the University of Essex.



### Brighton and Hove Food Partnership

Sustainable food networks and city food system development.

Supporting the growth of community food provision, addressing food insecurity.

### The Hornbeam

Working in solidarity with communities in Walthamstow. Sister project to an organic vegetable growers co-op.

Supporting mutual aid from a welcoming community cafe, supplied with rescued food.

### NOW group

Experts in social care and social enterprise, supporting adults with learning difficulties and autism in Belfast.

Providing specialist food training to create employment

### Edinburgh Cyrenians

Working with homeless people, who are welcomed into training kitchens.

Something to eat and someone to eat it with.

## Brighton & Hove Food Partnership (BHFP)

Through their existing community cookery classes at their Community Kitchen, since 2018, BHFP had been working with several groups. The feedback from participants was that they would like to take part in more skills-based training programmes, including those that would help people find work. BHFP also supported several networks. Their surveys of emergency food providers, lunch clubs and community gardens that share a meal had indicated a high level of interest in offering more shared eating opportunities. The city's food strategy includes the ambition to be a city that 'cooks and eats together'. Part of this work involves supporting volunteers to gain food hygiene certificates and other cooking skills. BHFP's interest in joining RHE was to develop within the city more opportunities for eating healthy meals in shared settings and support the development of a delivered meal option for people not able to get to lunch clubs. They also wanted to offer people a skills-based training programme along with support to find volunteering, further education, or employment.

## Cyrenians, Edinburgh

Cyrenians had found that many prospective and existing member organisations of their local FareShare network did not have the necessary facilities to cook food from scratch at their sites, but many of them could reheat batch-cooked food to be shared or given out as "takeaway". Furthermore, their local authority had been referring groups to the Cyrenians, and there was a waiting list of local community organisations seeking prepared/cooked food. RHE, therefore, offered Cyrenians the opportunity to meet some of this demand for prepared meals, as they were perceived to be more dignified and more appropriate than food parcels.

Cyrenians also ran Community Cook Clubs, and they found out that members of these clubs preferred to take home-cooked meals instead of just ingredients. These clubs had become safe and inclusive community spaces for people from different backgrounds to get together, improve their sense of well-being, and gain confidence in seeking out and accessing other support services. Cyrenians joined RHE to sustain these clubs and provide the cooked meals option to the members.

## The Hornbeam Centre, London

At their Community Café, Hornbeam offered meals that catered to people from different backgrounds and with varying support needs. They included people who had no/limited access to cooking facilities at home and those with limited ability to prepare and cook for themselves because of health issues. The Centre also provided a safe and inclusive space for people to feel part of a community and support each other. Hornbeam had found that in addition to the meals taken at the Café, there was an increased demand from those who also came there for the "take out" meals (to eat later at home). For many, those were the only nutritious meals that they could have. The RHE programme offered Hornbeam the opportunity to meet this demand for nutritious hot cooked food. It also helped them to develop their training programme aimed at various groups running community kitchens to supply food in their local neighbourhoods, as part of the local council's Food Poverty Strategy to which Hornbeam had signed up.



## NOW Group, Belfast



Although NOW's work does not centre on food *per se*, they found out from their focus group discussions that food and cooking were an issue for people with learning difficulties and autism with whom they work directly. They had identified a need for developing their beneficiaries' skills in cooking and budgeting and improving their understanding of how to make healthy eating choices. They wanted to support them with improving their food and nutrition knowledge, food growing, and cooking skills for developing self-confidence and a greater sense of independence.



The RHE programme offered NOW the opportunity to provide cooking training opportunities. It also provided the trainees and other users of NOW Group's services with a healthy meal option to take home with them, thereby increasing their independence and enabling their families to access better food.

Identifying these four partner projects' motivations behind participating in RHE and understanding their expectations set the context within which the outcomes of RHE were assessed.

### 1.5 Outcome areas

Although RHE's funded activities delivered by the four partner projects took different forms, at the start of the RHE programme, the Real Farming Trust (RFT) broadly identified four key outcome areas. These outcome areas were: (1) Trainees and Employment; (2) Nutritional Benefit; (3) Cross-subsidy and Income Generation; and (4) Local Economy and Supply Chains, and the respective descriptors for impact as shown in Table 1 below.

RHE outcome areas	Outcome description
<p><b>Outcome 1</b> <i>Trainees and Employment</i></p> 	People who have found it hard to gain employment are mentored and trained with transferable skills in catering, and are helped to use those skills to improve their employment prospects.
<p><b>Outcome 2</b> <i>Nutritional Benefit</i></p> 	People at risk of food poverty or insecurity have benefitted from healthy, nutritious meals.

<p><b>Outcome 3</b> <i>Cross-subsidy &amp; Income Generation</i></p> 	<p>The potential for a cross-subsidy of delivery of meals to vulnerable groups through commercial sales has been explored and trialled.</p>
<p><b>Outcome 4</b> <i>Local Economy &amp; Supply Chains</i></p> 	<p>The project will have a positive impact on the local economy and environment by supporting localised supply chains and producers, and through the reuse of food that would otherwise be wasted.</p>

The research team focused on the analyses of the first two outcome areas, which form the basis of this report. The other two outcome areas are acknowledged in the wider context of affecting the delivery and implementation of RHE but they are not dealt within RHE’s social impact framework in this report. However, unintended outcomes in two additional areas emerged as significant for assessing RHE’s social impact: first, the impact on volunteers, and second, the impact of the informal learning ‘network’ and the ‘partnership’ that had developed amongst the RHE partner projects. Those are also included in this report.

## 2. Social Impact Assessment of RHE

To track and assess the social impact of the RHE programme, the research team based their framework on a Social Impact Assessment (SIA) toolkit, developed and used by them in previous collaborative projects with RFT.<sup>5</sup> Social Impact is understood here as “... the effect on people and communities that happens as a result of an action or inaction, an activity, project, programme or policy”<sup>6</sup>. SIA matters because “Good social impact evidence can help organisations to improve their services, compare achievements with similar organisations and communicate the difference they are making to be able to attract investment.”<sup>7</sup>

The RHE programme was designed to gain a deeper insight into the social impacts of the innovative community food provisioning models. It also sought a broader understanding of the impacts the partner organisations had through various activities: namely, the procurement and preparation of ingredients and meals; interception and (re) distribution of surplus food; and the training programmes around cooking and catering. In this report, we present RHE’s social impact in two primary outcome areas: (1) Impacts on trainees and employment; and (2) Nutritional benefits of meals produced and their impact on beneficiaries. A set of indicators as measures of “success” in these outcome areas were developed (See Appendix 2). We also include in this report, the impact of RHE on two additional areas that became evident during the course of the RHE programme: (3) Impact on volunteers; and (4) Impact of RHE partnership.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to SIA of outcomes, a parallel reflective evaluation of the impacts of RHE on all four outcome areas was conducted in the final year of the programme. This enabled the four RHE partners and peers from outside these organisations working in the community food provisioning sector to reflect collectively on the broader impact of RHE and to share their key learnings and experiences.

### 2.1 Research phases

The research tasks included three main phases: Baseline, Monitoring, and Monitoring & Assessment (see Appendix 3). Baseline phase, in particular, required information/data to be collected at the start to establish a baseline for assessing subsequent impact. However, with the onset of the pandemic, which coincided with the start of the RHE programme in February 2020, the partner organisations found themselves on the frontline focused on meeting immediate and urgent needs in their local communities. The research team also faced specific challenges, which overall affected the processes of data collection and management (Section 4.4). In retrospect, this led to a limited systematic analysis of comparable evidence across the four partner organisations. Nevertheless, the available database

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<sup>5</sup> [Social Impact Toolkit](#)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.goodfinance.org.uk/>

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> The impact on RHE of cross-subsidy and income generation, and food supply chains, both of which had a direct bearing on the operational delivery of the partner organisations, is not included in this SIA report.

provided a strong foundation for an analysis of the changes, including both the intended and unexpected impacts of RHE.

## 2.2 Methods for data collection and collation

The data production and data collection process involved two parallel streams.

One stream was *partner-led*. That is, the data was generated internally by the partner organisations, which was then reviewed and analysed by the research team at Coventry University. The four partner projects provided quarterly reports to the RHE Programme Coordinator at RFT and shared them with the research team.

The research team at Coventry University led the other data production stream. The research was primarily inductive, drawing on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, surveys, field visits, and interactive workshops with key stakeholder groups (i.e., participants/beneficiaries, trainees, volunteers, and staff connected to each of the partner projects). This served to *supplement* and *complement* the partner-led data stream. The research team also developed a simple Social Impact Tracker spreadsheet tool that enabled the research team members (from the two research centres, CAWR and CBIS) and RHE programme coordinator (at RFT) to collaboratively manage and collate data over the course of the programme.

However, quite early on it became challenging to gather consistent and robust data in the outcome areas across the four sites. The response rates to online and hard copy surveys designed for various beneficiary groups, for example, were lower than anticipated. Instead, some of the partner projects found it easier to use methods that suited their beneficiaries better. For example, they found that an informal chat with the beneficiaries regarding their experiences was welcomed more, instead of filling in online or hard copy surveys. In another instance, the volunteer cooks and nutritionists, who knew the beneficiaries/client group closely, opted to collect the relevant data. Aligned with the participatory/collaborative approach adopted for tracking Social Impact, the research team encouraged the partner projects to use data collection methods that worked best for them and supported them in the use of those methods. This had the added advantage of enabling the partner projects to use the data/feedback collected to benefit their operations in real time over the course of the RHE programme, instead of data being stored and used at the end of the assessment period. However, this process also had its challenges. Reflections on the challenges faced in data collection are presented later (Section 4.4).

For an overview of the various methods used to collect and collate data over the RHE programme period, which inform the findings in this report, see Appendix 4.

## 2.3 Ethics

Research participants across the four partner organisations were briefed before engaging with the research team about the aims of the research. They were provided with Participant Information

Sheets. They gave their consent to the use of the data collected for this report in an anonymised form to the extent possible. Coventry University's Research Ethics Process approved the ethical aspects of the research in 2020.



## 3. Findings

While the first half of the RHE programme was overshadowed by pandemic-related restrictions and constraints on activities that could be undertaken by the partner projects, by the end of 2021, they had started moving away from the emergency response mode to focus attention on RHE outcomes more broadly.<sup>9</sup> By the end of the programme, they had achieved their targets, surpassing them in some areas, while other targets remained challenging, as the following sections will show.

### 3.1 Outcome 1: Trainees and employment

<b>RHE Outcome 1</b> <i>Trainees and employment</i>	<b>Indicators</b>
People who have found it hard to gain employment are mentored & trained with transferable skills in catering & are helped to use those skills to improve their employment prospects	No. of trainees who complete the courses (→ Trainees gain skills)
	Outcomes of the three-month post-training mentoring programme (→ The skills trainees acquire improve their prospects for employment)
	Distance travelled (entrance and exit interviews) (→ The trainees report an increase in self-esteem and confidence)

An overview of the dataset used for Outcome 1 across the four partner organisations is provided in Appendix 6.

As Table 2 shows, by the end of the RHE programme, the partner projects had achieved their respective targets for the number of trainees. Across RHE, 178 trainees completed training, which is a remarkable achievement against the backdrop of the pandemic-related disruptions. Although no target was set for the number of trainees going on to paid work, by the end of the RHE programme, 31% of trainees had found employment.

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<sup>9</sup> For an infographic on RHE's achievements in Year 1 (2020-2021), see Appendix 5.

Outcome 1 Indicator	RHE (2020-23)	Target (2020-23)
<i>Total number of trainees who participated in RHE-funded courses/ programme 2020-2023</i>	178	176
<i>Total number of trainees who were employed following training programme/course</i>	56	Not set
<i>% of trainees who were employed following training programme/course</i>	31	Not set

Table 2: Data from all four partner projects on trainees

As we show later, the trainees were not evenly spread across the partner projects, and a comparison across the four will not be meaningful given the context-specific embeddedness of the projects. In the following sections, we look at each partner project and highlight the key points that emerged from understanding RHE’s impact on trainees and employment, including the pros and cons of tools used for monitoring and tracking the progress.

### 3.1.1 Impact of training programmes

Although onsite and face-to-face training sessions were considerably disrupted by the pandemic until mid-2021, the partner projects continued to run some sessions, including training sessions that moved online when required. In those instances where volunteers continued with cooking for emergency meals onsite, they became spaces for peer mentoring and informal training.

By the end of the RHE programme, trainees were in place in all four partner projects, and they were being provided with support tailored to their individual needs and aspirations. While some trainees progressed to secure jobs in the commercial catering sector, some opted for part-time work in local food businesses, and some opted for volunteering in the organisations they were working with.

The impact of the training programmes was described as ‘**empowering**’ by many of the trainees. We look at this in each of the partner organisations next.

## NOW Group

RHE Outcome 1 Indicator	Total	Target
Number of trainees who participated in course/programme 2020-2023	73	54
Number of trainees who were employed following training programme/ course	23	Not set
% of trainees who were employed following training programme/course	32	Not set

Table 3: Trainee data from NOW

As Table 3 shows, by the end of RHE, NOW Group had trained 73 adults with learning difficulties, and one-third of the trainees (i.e., 23 adults, 32% of trainees) had been supported into paid work. The primary goal of their training programme, however, as described by NOW staff, was not necessarily to get all participants straight into employment. Rather, it was about improving their level of confidence, developing independent living skills, and encouraging them to follow healthy and active lifestyles, as a foundational base for employability if they opted to progress in that direction.

In Sept 2022, a thematic analysis of data from focus group sessions at NOW led by the research team identified the impact of training on trainees/participants of the Cookery Club/Cookery Class, along three key dimensions as described below.





We intersperse the findings with examples of the impact on trainees as evidenced in the quarterly reporting by NOW.

### **Building independence and confidence**

The focus group participants all indicated (either verbally or supported by their support worker) that the Cookery Club programme had helped to build confidence and independence, not just about cooking activities or food preparation, but in a wider social sense (e.g., one participant had started independent travel to/from NOW Group).

In another case, a trainee had lost his job, which had affected his confidence adversely, affecting his mental health. However, joining NOW boosted his level of confidence and self-esteem. Not only he excelled in picking up skills but he also secured a job in the local community with the support of NOW's Employment team. The transformative impact this had on him is illustrated by the quote from him given below:

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*'I can't believe this, I would never have thought I could do it, it has changed my life'.*

*[NOW trainee, Quarterly Report, Oct-Dec 2020]*

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### **Increased social networks and relationships**

When participants were asked what they liked most about the programme, the majority of them stated that it was the new connections and relationships that they had established with others in their cohort, as well as with the staff. They liked this 'fun' aspect of the Cookery Club activities as that made the learning sessions on healthy and active lifestyles/behaviours engaging and interesting for them.

### **Improved understanding of healthy eating and exercise**

The participants found the 'Let's Get Fit Now' (LGFN) activities (which were included with the Cookery Club programme) useful for improving their physical fitness, and saw it as a safe and supportive space to do physical exercises. One participant stated that they had never been to a gym before and that LGFN was an enjoyable way to stay fit.

In another focus group session with participants from the cohort preparing for employment, we found similar evidence of the benefits for trainees. The key themes that emerged here mirror the ones with the other cohort of trainees described above.

### **Improved confidence, enthusiasm and employability**

All the participants stated that the training programme (called the Loaf Academy) had a positive impact on their lives (further validated by Outcome Star<sup>10</sup> data shared by project staff). One participant explained that it had motivated them to cook at home and to plan their meals better, whereas before joining the Academy they “would go 1-2 days without eating properly.” There was a consensus view amongst the participants that they benefited from their involvement in the Academy in three ways: through work experience (e.g., at Loaf Café); getting a qualification at the end (e.g., food safety certification); and acquiring self-confidence.

### **New knowledge and skills acquired**

All the participants expressed that their capability to cook had improved since their involvement in the Academy. As one participant described, “... before Loaf (Academy) I would not cook, but now I can.” The participants reported that the online cooking sessions held during the peak of the pandemic over Zoom helped develop their skills, including encouraging family members also to join the sessions.

### **Changes in diet and healthier eating**

All except one of the participants self-reported an improvement in dietary outcomes since being involved in the Academy. The participant who did not report a change in diet admitted to eating unhealthily at times but acknowledged that their knowledge about healthier eating had improved. Another participant stated that they were already on a journey to healthier eating before entering the Academy, but the programme “keeps me on track” and encourages them to forward-plan meals.

### **Impact on staff/support workers**

An unexpected positive impact of the training programmes was found on the consumption practices of the staff and support workers on the training programmes. Two of the three staff/support workers who participated in the focus group discussion (led by the research team in Sept 2022) stated that they had also acquired new knowledge about healthy eating while supporting the trainees in the training sessions. For one, it had led to improvement in their repertoire of healthy recipes, and they found that their engagement in the Academy had “influenced the way we eat and cook at home.” Another support worker reported their increased awareness of the importance of taking healthy snacks and healthier lunches during the day.

A similar sentiment was shared by a staff member at the Loaf Café & Bakery who found the experience of supporting trainees through their placement in the Café as “*very, very rewarding*”.

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<sup>10</sup> See section 3.1.2 for Outcome Star

Staff described the positive impacts as arising from the **horizontal and values-based approach** of NOW as an organisation, and the non-judgemental approach adopted by everyone towards each other. We found that the positive impact on health, well-being, knowledge and skills, and relationship building experienced by the trainees followed from NOW's holistic, dynamic and flexible approach to training and skilling, which is reflected in their **follow-up and employment support** after the completion of training. The trainees were registered on NOW's Employment & Training Programme, *Verve*, where they stayed until they either left the programme or up to six months into employment. This programme provided them with access to further training on employability skills and other essential skills aimed at improving their chances of finding employment. Furthermore, once employed, the support provided to trainees was then individually tailored to meet their specific needs in the workplace for up to a year, and it had components such as:



- One-to-one help from a job coach to help the newly employed and their colleagues adapt to the needs of the job
- Extra training for the employer
- Disability awareness training for the employer and work colleagues

As an illustration of the multi-dimensional nature of the positive impact of the training programme, a **vignette** on a young man with ADHD as he progressed from his time at Loaf Catering Academy until his success at finding employment is presented below.

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*...He was anxious about joining the course and meeting new participants, so his Employment Officer [NOW employee] accompanied him to the first couple of sessions and gradually withdrew support as he settled in. He enjoyed the group work and practical activities and throughout the course, he grew in confidence and self-esteem and developed friendships with other participants who were interested in music. During this time, he also applied for a Further Education course at Belfast Met and was delighted to be accepted onto the course. Alongside this, he worked with his Employment Officer to look for a part-time job to support himself while he studied. He applied for several jobs without success. Then he joined the virtual job club run by NOW Group and through this, he applied for two jobs simultaneously, was successful at both interviews and was able to choose his favourite. He has settled well into his new role.*

*[Adapted from NOW Quarterly Report, July-Dec 2021]*

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## Brighton & Hove Food Partnership (BHFP)

The KPIs for Outcome 1 (Table 4) at the end of the RHE programme show that BHFP had trained 59 people in total, exceeding their target of 50.

RHE Outcome 1 Indicator	Total	Target
Number of trainees who participated in course/ programme 2020-2023	59	50
Number of trainees who were employed following training programme/course	10	Not set
% of trainees who were employed following training programme/course	17	Not set

Table 4: Trainee data from BHFP

To track progression, BHFP carried out follow-up online surveys and calls with everyone on their 5-week trainee courses, called 'Food Foundations'. Their latest survey conducted in early 2023, which received 45 responses, showed that 10 trainees had found paid work, 14 had begun volunteering (6 of them at their Community Kitchen), and 23 people had attended another course or class at the Community Kitchen. This shows the positive impact of the training course on people's journey to employment.

Earlier in 2022, in a case study that involved BHFP conducting an in-depth interview with a trainee participant of the Food Foundations programme,<sup>11</sup> the testimony from the participant indicates the transformative impact that the training course had on her. The impact was not just in terms of **employability and health**, but also in building **connectedness and networks**, as the following quote shows.

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*Since the course, I've secured a job related to food and eating. I can now consider a new career and I can see possibilities where I couldn't before, which is mentally powerful for me. Physically, I am also healthier as I am more in tune with what I eat. But at the heart of the course was the people, the care, the warmth, and the sense of community. I feel part of a lovely community now, and that I can help others. There is a special value in that.*

*[Stella (pseudonym), Food Foundations Participant, 2022]*

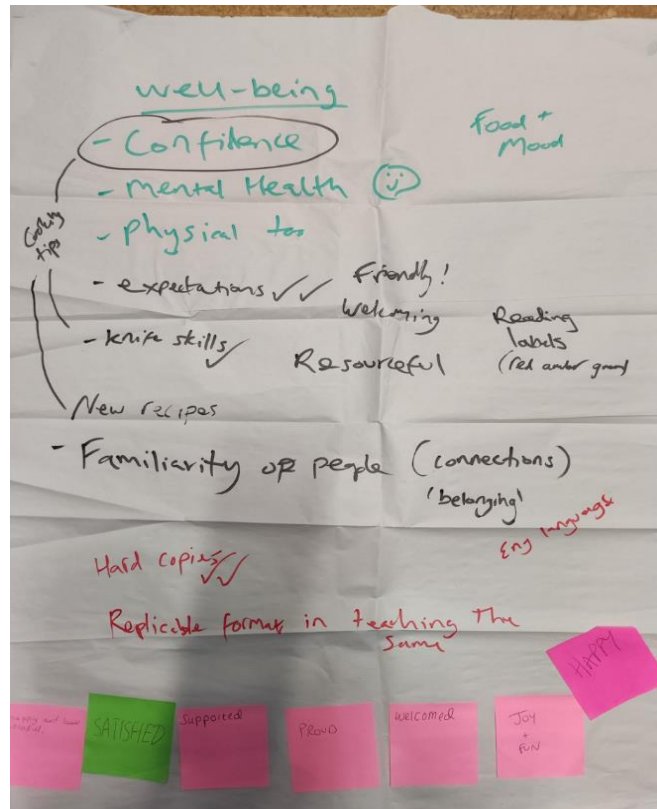
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<sup>11</sup> This case study testimony can be read in full on BHFP's website: ['My kitchen: I learnt how to make a meal out of nothing'](#).

The positive impact of the training sessions was also evident from the findings of the focus group sessions held with trainees at BHFP's office in Brighton in February 2022.

The following key themes emerged on the impacts of BHFP's training programmes on their participants:



### Confidence building and sense of well-being

There was a strong consensus among the focus group participants that engagement with the Community Kitchen (where the training programmes were delivered, and people physically participated) had improved their sense of *confidence*.

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*I feel a lot more confident and just a bit more settled when I've been around people. Just a nice feeling because you just... I'm at home, and I'm like a carer for my father and I don't really get out much. So, actually, I feel like it has benefited me a lot, definitely.*

*[Trainee, Focus Group, Feb 2022]*

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One participant explained that even if at times they did not feel like going to the Community Kitchen, they also knew that they always felt uplifted and positive at the end of it, which had a positive impact on their mental health. The reasons cited for this positive sense of well-being included “pride” and the satiation of eating a meal they had contributed to preparing, and the lively general “atmosphere” of the physical space.

When participants were asked to summarise in one word how being part of Community Kitchen made them feel, they used positive words such as 'satisfied', 'proud', 'welcomed', 'joy', 'fun', and 'happy'. This reinforces Stella's point (in the quote above) about the 'warmth' and 'care' felt as part of a community embedded into the training programmes.

### Positive connections

All the participants described BHFP and the Community Kitchen as safe and supportive spaces that facilitated interactions between members of different communities in and around Brighton; thus, enabling positive connections to form that would otherwise not materialise. One participant described the positive outcomes that this environment had:

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*I wouldn't have spoken to a lot of people that were on the same course in my everyday life, so it's nice to speak to people of different backgrounds because I think you kind of go, in your everyday life... you're met by people of similar age... similar background all the time. So, it's nice to be around people from different kinds of backgrounds.*

*[Trainee, Focus Group, Feb 2022]*

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### Improvement in skills and knowledge

All the participants described an improvement in knowledge and skills related to food preparation and cooking as an important outcome of the training programme. They described a range of skills such as knife skills (e.g., chiffonade and julienne techniques) as well as a higher level of confidence in cooking with new ingredients and using new recipes. This is reflected in the comment below:

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*...it's just like knowing the basics of what goes into something and so that again ties into confidence, because then I'm like, "well, I know what the basic start of things I would want to make up are" and then I can kind of build on that...*

*[Trainee, Focus Group, Feb 2022]*

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Towards the end of 2021, the trainees were introduced to the new 'dehydration' technique BHFP had started trialling it as an innovative method using the excess fresh produce to create rehydratable meal packs for many of their beneficiary households that had no fridges or cookers. After completing the course, the trainees were invited back to develop their **skills and confidence** further at the 'Chop and Chat' sessions. As described by BHFP,

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*We have held 3 x Chop and Chat sessions with 8 former participants attending – this format is being used to get the trainees back into the kitchen to help prepare food for the dehydrator, and to do a catch-up with them and help them with any onward plans for work, volunteering or training but mainly just to stay in touch with some of the more vulnerable trainees.*

*[BHFP Quarterly Report, July-Dec 2021]*

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The **post-course evaluation surveys** regularly conducted by BHFP provided another set of data on trainees' level of wellbeing and confidence. In the last of such surveys (for the cohort in Nov 2022 and Jan 2023), data from 16 trainees (out of the 18 who completed training) shows:

- All of them agreed with at least one of the wellbeing outcomes (I've made new friends; I feel more connected to people; I feel less lonely; I feel more confident; I feel happier)
- 72% agreed with both 'I feel more confident, and 'I've made new friends'
- 90% scored themselves as 5/5 for agreement with the statement 'I've been learning new skills and knowledge' while the other 10% gave 4/5

Post-course feedback from earlier cohorts shows similar results. This aligns with the findings from the focus group sessions, as stated by trainees:

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*This is a really relaxed and fun course; I was amazed by how much we cooked each week. It's been a great way to learn more skills, meet people and try new recipes.*

*[Trainee1, BHFP, Quarterly Report, Oct'22-Feb'23]*

*It was a genuine pleasure, increasing my confidence in cooking from scratch and socialising with others in the community at the same time.*

*[Trainee 2, BHFP, Quarterly Report, Jan-Apr 2022]*

*I do feel that when I was there for a course, I was more grounded and focused, and grew more confident in my ability to cook. I had a high level of energy, and I was being more mindful. Also, the ongoing connection with the kitchen, through courses and volunteering, is keeping me motivated to look for that time to cook and look after myself. I know that even if I cannot see results now, they will come if I keep that motivation alive.*

*[Trainee 3, BHFP Quarterly Report, Jan-Apr 2022]*

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A similar positive impact on wellbeing is seen from the findings on progression feedback from 45 trainees collected by BHFP for their last quarterly reporting (Oct'22 -Feb'23), collected at least 3 months after the course ended and in some cases 18 months after, as shown below:

- 30 trainees (66%) reported feeling happier
- 22 trainees (48%) made new friends
- 15 trainees (33%) felt less lonely

The social impact on trainees, therefore, included a range of positive emotions in addition to the development of skills, more community connections and peer support, contributing to a greater sense of wellbeing.

The **vignette** below illustrates the journey of change as experienced by one of the trainees.

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*G found out about the kitchen via his probation officer. He came on a ‘Cooking on a Budget’ course. Because he is keen to remain engaged with people and is very interested in catering activities whilst he is waiting for his hospital appointment, he asked to sign up for the Flavour Kitchen Trainee Course. The session leaders and volunteers have noticed that G is becoming much more confident in the kitchen (especially knife skills). He tells us how welcome he feels when he comes to classes (and when he walks past and waves at us). He tells us when he has cooked recipes at home, often bringing in photos. He won’t be going on to employment because of his operation but we will work with him to find regular things to engage with.*

*[BHFP, Quarterly Report, July-Dec 2021]*

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## Cyrenians

The KPIs for Outcome 1 in the case of Cyrenians by the end of the RHE programme as presented in Table 5 show that they had trained 22 people, and 12 of them (55%) found employment.

RHE Outcome 1 Indicator	Total	Target
<i>Number of trainees who participated in course/programme 2020-2023</i>	22	36
<i>Number of trainees who were employed following training programme/course</i>	12	Not set
<i>% of trainees who were employed following training programme/course</i>	55	Not set

Table 5: Trainee data from Cyrenians

Cyrenians had designed 13-week training courses, and during the RHE programme period, they had completed five cohorts. The trainees were found to have learnt many different cooking skills such as



knife skills, making pastry, plating dishes, and a variety of cooking methods such as roasting, sautéing, making canapes, mains, starters, and pie making. In addition to the practical skills, there were other intangible benefits from the team exercises and interactions between staff and trainees.



Homemade pasta and ramen dishes prepared by the trainees (Cyrenians)

Key themes as shown below describe the positive impact on trainees that emerged from the interviews with staff at Cyrenians and focus group sessions with the trainees. The findings are similar to that found in the other three partner projects.

### **Improved self-confidence and building of trusted relationships**

The participants described the training courses as having provided them with a safe and supportive environment for everyone to be themselves without “being judged”, which allowed them to overcome anxieties about their abilities and improve their confidence. This is significant considering the diverse backgrounds the trainees came from, ranging from BMA, LGBTQ, and refugees to locals from Edinburgh.

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*When I first set foot in the cook school, I lacked confidence and was extremely reserved. I completed the Food Preparation & Budgeting Skills programme with Cyrenians. As a trainee, I benefited enormously from the structured programme that has allowed me to build my knowledge, and learn different styles of cooking which in turn built my confidence. It has also helped with employability and has opened a new pathway for me. I now work in the kitchen delivering my own classes to high school pupils, which I really enjoy and look forward to every week.*

*[Cyrenians Trainee, Quarterly Report, July-Dec 2021].*

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One participant described the “relaxed” approach adopted by the staff as central to their positive experience:

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*Yeah, I think if I came on the course, and [the trainer] was like, a 100% regimented, you know, as if I was going into like, an apprenticeship, say, I would have been very much... it would still have been structured, there probably would have been a lot more black and white. [The trainer] is fairly relaxed, and laid back, but I needed that. I think, if [they] had been a lot 'harsher' I'd have struggled a lot more. I'd have felt like I had been thrown in at the deep end, but it was like a gradual change from the cooking classes here and then moving on to learning much more technical things in the kitchen as well.*

*[Interview, Former Trainee, Cyrenians, 2021]*

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There were also “non-tangible benefits” from the relaxed approach to training as emphasised by one of the course leads:

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*I think as the course has gone on for me, I've realised at the start I was very much like 'teach people how to get into catering and get in kitchens, learn the skills', you know, 'learn a good work ethic, be on time'. You still learn good work ethic, and to be on time, but as it has gone on, I realise [the course] offers more than that, sort of like... non-tangible benefits. It's a place where people can, you know, experiment, be themselves, get a bit of confidence. And that's been quite a nice shift for me to see that there's actually a lot more impact from the course, you know, the confidence to go and apply for a job or a place to be yourself is, really good. And I'm glad that I've seen the change, and it's not just 'teach people about cooking now'.*

*[Interview, Training course Lead, Cyrenians, 2021]*

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As the partner lead further described,

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*... many of the trainees are very shy, self-doubting and lacked self-esteem when they join, and the course has given them a safe space to socialize and be themselves without judgement or prejudice. For one of the trainees, the course was a lifeline during a very hard time in their life. They lacked support outside the course, and we were the only safe space that they had. The course gave them the opportunity to realise they could achieve more than they thought and also a safe environment to boost their confidence and meet new friends in a time of need.*

*[Cyrenians, Jan-July 2022 report]*

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## **Change in mindset**

While meeting new people added to the self-confidence of trainees, it also led to a desire to further and better their skills. As the partner lead described,

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*In some of the trainees, you can noticeably see a change in mindset with the desire to progress more. This relates to not only progressing their skills and abilities but also progressing their social skills and having a positive impact on their local community.*

*[Cyrenians Jan-July 2022 report]*

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## **New skills and qualification**

The trainees reported learning many new skills during their time on the course, including getting formal qualifications (e.g., in food safety and hygiene) on completion of the course. As the partner lead described,

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*We have focused on lots of practical skills such as knife skills; cooking methods; balancing flavours and creating new dishes; menu planning; production cooking; plating; stock management systems; entrepreneurship in catering and much more. The trainees have also completed REHIS Elementary food hygiene training and they should all have their qualification by the end of the course. This is a huge help for them in progressing in the industry as employers look for new staff with an understanding of food safety procedures.*

*[Cyrenians Jan-July 2022 report]*

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Another aspect of learning relates to trainees being encouraged to come up with proposals on what they wanted to learn. This facilitated trainees, as a collective, to learn about diverse cuisines connected with their diverse backgrounds, as the following quote indicates:

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*Each week we ask the trainees what they would like to learn how to cook. Among some examples of trainee's requests are Mussels, Thai food, Sushi, Cullen skink and Kimchi.*

*[Cyrenians, Quarterly Report, Apr-July 2022]*

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Staff and volunteers in the kitchen (Cyrenians)

Some ex-trainees joined as volunteers or employees within the project. The progress to **financial independence** by some of the trainees was a significant impact of the training, which was supported through providing a high level of personalised care and opportunities created by Cyrenians as the following quotes indicate:

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*A trainee from the first cohort is now teaching her own cooking class to high school children through our [Key to Work programme](#). She has had some fantastic feedback from the kids as well as their support workers and the referring agencies.*

*[Cyrenians, Quarterly Report, March-June 2021]*

*A trainee has enrolled on a [five-week hospitality programme](#). This trainee has been in the Royal Edinburgh Hospital for the past 5 years and is currently transitioning to his own home. The stability that the Ready Healthy Eat programme has given him has allowed him to demonstrate his readiness for this transition... his follow on training programme will allow him to focus on his move before then beginning the search for employment.*

*[Cyrenians, Quarterly Report, March-June 2021]*

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## Hornbeam

By the end of the RHE programme, Hornbeam had trained 24 people, of which 11 (46%) had found employment (see Table 6).

RHE Outcome 1 Indicator	Total	Target
Number of trainees who participated in course/programme 2020-2023	24	36
Number of trainees who were employed following training programme/course	11	Not set
% of trainees who were employed following training programme/course	46	Not set

Table 6: Trainee data from Hornbeam

Hornbeam’s approach to **training intersected with volunteering**. Their training programme was set out as a flexible programme where trainees were identified from their volunteer pool. It consisted of attending volunteering shifts (led by a trainer from the cafe team), workshops of their choice, completing a food hygiene certificate (Level 2), and being a lead kitchen coordinator for a day. The rationale for integrating training into their volunteering programme, as described by the partner lead, lay in difficulties faced in resourcing training in the context of finite funding streams. This was also to ensure long-term sustainability (i.e., when RHE funding ran out, they could use other funding to run workshops), as reflected in the quote below:

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*... the training is absorbed into our volunteering process. We had to think about it this way -- for the long term, once the funding runs out.*

*[Hornbeam, Partner Lead, Interview, 2022]*

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Hornbeam used their existing volunteer recruitment system to find trainees (especially vulnerable and/or unemployed people) looking for employment in the community food sector or hospitality. This made their approach more sustainable long-term, where they did not have to recruit two separate streams of people. The adaptability of their training programme, thus, allowed them to co-create training to suit each trainee’s needs, making it **person-centred**.

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*We have transitioned many of our volunteers into trainees. Our trainee programme is co-designed with each trainee: we offer a basic structure to their training and they can pick and choose which of the training workshops they would like to attend. This helps tailor the training to each individual’s needs and wants, while still providing all trainees with a similar experience and skills which will improve their employability and/or broader life skills.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, March-June 2021]*

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Data from Sept 2022 [Quarterly Report Jul-Sept 2022] shows that 60% of trainees had moved on to paid work in the community food sector and 40% in commercial hospitality/catering work. This indicates the high success rate for trainees from Hornbeam in finding employment in both community and commercial sectors.

A thematic analysis of findings using data from Hornbeam’s Wellbeing Log (described later in section 3.1.2) from Nov 2022 yielded two main themes as described below.

### New skills and knowledge

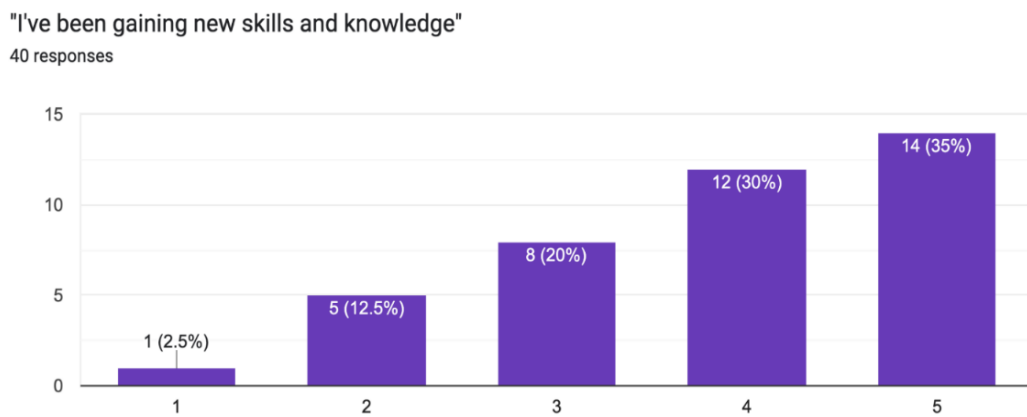


Figure 1: Hornbeam Wellbeing log, 2021-22, New skills and knowledge (1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

As Figure 1 shows, 65% of 40 respondents (n=26) agreed or strongly agreed that they had been gaining new skills and knowledge through their training with Hornbeam. This was almost the same response from a survey carried out by Hornbeam in November 2021, wherein 63% of the 27 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had been gaining new skills and knowledge. This indicates consistency in the positive impact generated by the training. Only 15% of respondents (n=6) reported disagreement over learning new skills and knowledge.

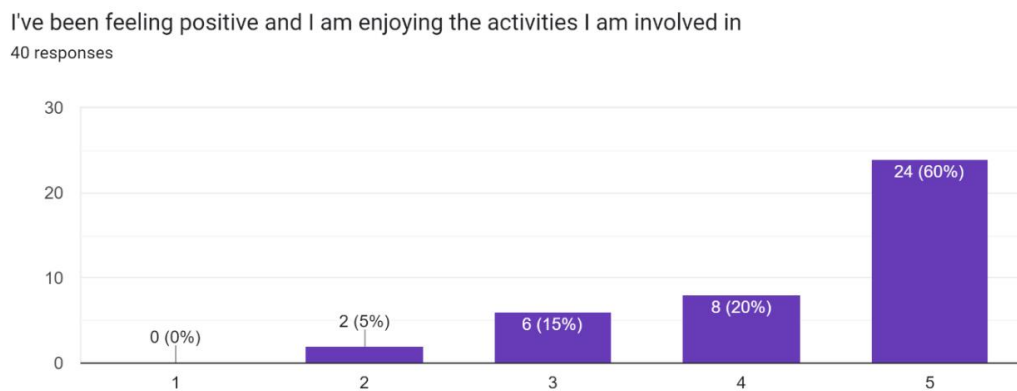


Figure 2: Hornbeam Wellbeing log, 2021-22, Feeling positive and enjoying activities (1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

As Figure 2 shows, 80% agreed or strongly agreed with feeling positive and enjoying the activities in which they were involved. Nearly 78% agreed or strongly agreed that they had been able to connect with people around them (Figure 3).

"I have felt able to connect to the people around me"

40 responses

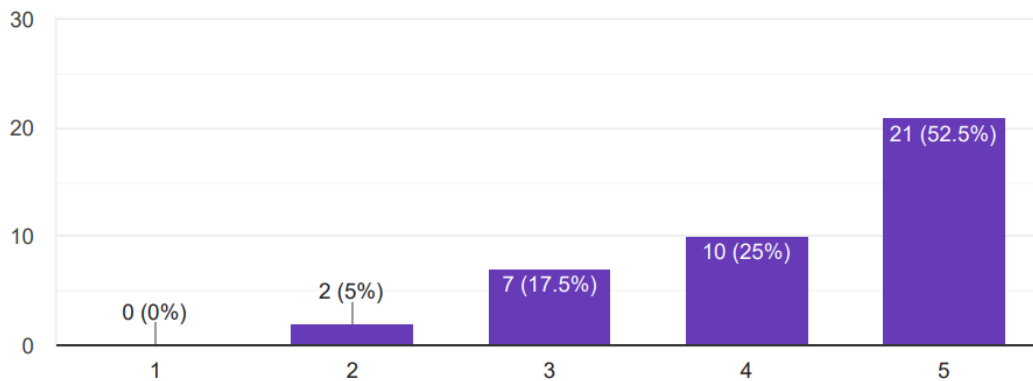


Figure 3: Hornbeam Wellbeing log, 2021-22, Connected to people (1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

## Employment

Data at the end of Dec 2021 shows that 5 trainees had been employed as sessional workers on a rota for batch cooking and for delivering cooking workshops for a local charity. Two of these trainees had also joined the community cafe's workers co-op as members (RHE Report, July-Dec'21). This reflects Hornbeam's 'solidarity' model of working, as described by the partner lead, wherein the staff, volunteers, and trainees came from the same pool of local people, and at times included beneficiaries too.

The following data (Box 1) illustrates the various routes that many of the RHE trainees at Hornbeam took while seeking/finding employment in the food sector, and playing active roles in food and nutrition-based interventions in the local community:

- 1 found employment as a community cook at the local homelessness charity, where they initially ran cooking workshops (funded by RHE)
- 2 previous trainees were employed in the Gleaners workers' co-op (the team who runs the community cafe on site)
- 1 trainee secured employment at the local bakery for a temporary period before going back to complete their studies
- 1 trainee found employment at the local bakery initially and then went on to become the cake baker at a different local cafe (he specialised in vegan cakes)

- 1 trainee became the lead on cooking for 2 other charities on a monthly basis
- 1 trainee who was working in the cafe and on food redistribution work went on to start a small business in mushroom growing
- 1 trainee went on to start a successful local food co-op of 12 members
- 1 trainee found work in a music charity
- 1 trainee went on to head a new health and wellbeing programme with partner organisation at OrganicLea
- 1 trainee found work in an unrelated field (COVID-19 outreach team) but as described by her, it was her community work with Hornbeam that helped her application

Box 1: Employment of trainees, Hornbeam (Source: Quarterly Report, Jan-Apr 2022)

The integration of trainees into the community cafe workflow (where they cook food alongside a team for the meals served in the cafe and the meals delivered to recipients) serves as a key impact pathway for Hornbeam. As another illustration of this, the ESOL trainees help with cooking food collectively with a trainer at their partner organisation, OrganicLea, both for themselves and for all the volunteers at OrganicLea.

The progress to **financial independence** by the trainees, as we also observed in Cyrenians, was a significant impact of the training, which was supported through providing a high level of personalised care and opportunities created by Hornbeam.

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*A trainee has decided to continue his vegan baking business in addition to his work at Today Bread – he has started by taking orders for vegan cakes from The Hornbeam volunteers and now sells into our community café (The Gleaners) subscription scheme.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, Oct-Dec 2020]*

*We are paying a few trainees to run cooking workshops with residents at a local homelessness charity*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, Mar-June 2021]*

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Data from Hornbeam’s last reporting period [Quarterly Report, Oct’22 -Feb’23] illustrates the success achieved by allowing trainees to join as **sessional workers**. While one trainee moved to a paid work opportunity with Hornbeam as the cooking lead for their free community meal (funded by the local authority), another trainee joined their Cafe team as a paid coordinator once a week. Hornbeam found sessional work for trainees as an effective progression route into employment, as the following quote shows:



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*We have found that the most organic, natural next step for some of the trainee volunteers who are interested in staying involved in community food/finding paid work in it, is to join our rota of 'sessional workers' who are kitchen leads for community meals or other projects, day coordinators for the café, etc. We share this rota with other community organisations that are looking for sessional workers to run workshops or community meals for their own projects. This development, made possible by RHE funding, has led to us looking to develop this further into creating a network of community meals & training for people to run more free community meals in Waltham Forest, reaching more people in need of a social eating experience.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, Oct'22-Feb'23]*

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### 3.1.2 Tools for monitoring/tracking progression and impact

In this section, from the perspective of understanding how impacts are monitored, tracked and assessed by the organisations, we looked at the tools used by them, specifically for training and employment, and assessing the opportunities/challenges faced.

In the case of NOW, the delivery of training programmes and, crucially, monitoring their impact has long been a systematic part of their operations. As they described, “progression” is key to every participant’s journey. They use the **Outcomes Star**<sup>12</sup> as a systematic and comprehensive way of monitoring and tracking change and ultimately assessing the social impact of their interventions and programmes on the quality of life and employability of participants/service users. The Outcomes Star they use includes three types: Work Star- for employability, Life Star - for creating independence (see Figure 4) and Family Star Plus - for supporting parenting.

The Outcomes Star approach is typically deployed in a one-to-one encounter between, for example, a participant and a support worker/trainer. The utility of using Outcome Star was apparent in enabling the organisation to monitor and track the progress of trainees, as described below:

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<sup>12</sup> The Outcomes Star is a licensed set of evidence-based tools that can be used for measuring and supporting change when working with people. More information about this tool can be found at <https://www.outcomesstar.org.uk/>

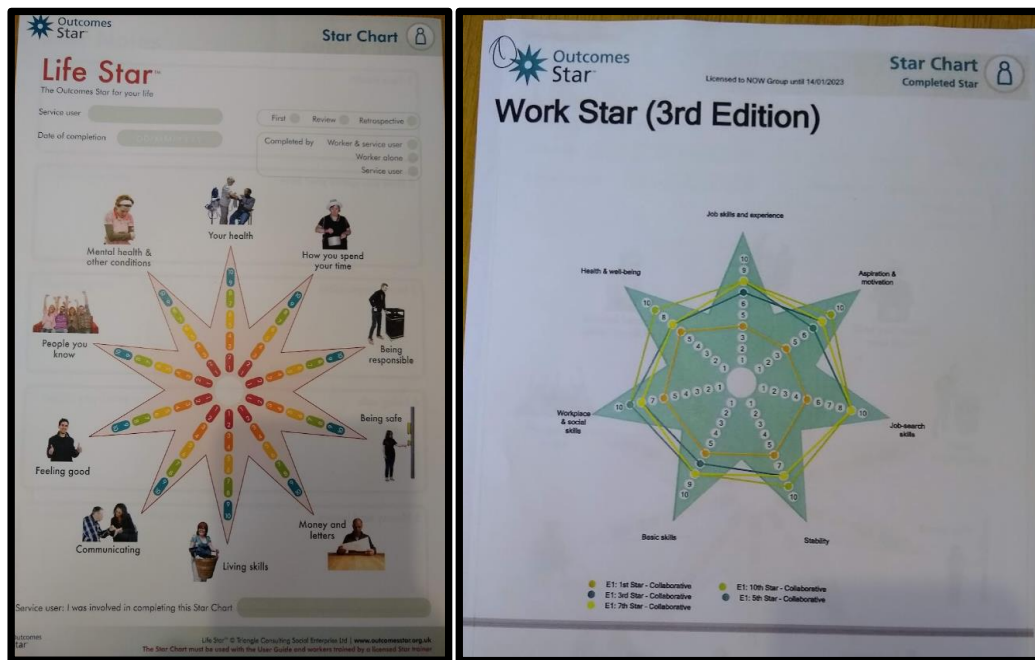


Figure 4: The Life Outcome Star and Work Outcome Star used by NOW Group

*We have used the Outcomes Stars which are a suite of evidence-based outcomes measurement and key work tools, which drive an ‘enabling help’ approach to service delivery. They support a person-centred, collaborative and trauma-informed approach and give service users, workers and managers vital information about needs and progress.*

*[NOW, Quarterly Report, Apr-July 2022]*

However, Outcomes Star has a licence fee. for use, requires specific skills and time, and sufficient data to be collected to make use of the software effectively. This limits its use, especially for smaller community organisations with limited resources and organisational capacity. Even NOW which uses the tool effectively alluded to the time commitment needed to optimise the data and framework of the Outcomes Star:

*It [The Outcomes Star] works, but there’s lots of administration involved.*

*[NOW Staff, Interview, Sept 2022]*

The Cyrenians were using the Outcomes Star at the start of the RHE programme for monitoring the progression of trainees. However, towards the beginning of 2022, they stopped using it. The reasons for this included the small cohort of trainees they had and the “rigidity” of the tool as a limiting factor; and the need that they recognised for a more qualitative and flexible approach to evaluating trainee progress, as the following quote shows.

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*That's more how we work than this kind of very rigid way... You know, we've tried it [the Outcomes Star], but we feel like it's just not really useful ... what's the point of doing something if you don't really feel that the kind of outcome actually meets your objectives of doing it in the first place?... the thing is, we check in with [trainees] all the time. You know, when you've only got four [trainees] you chat with them all the time...*

*[Cyrenians, Partner Lead, Interview, 2022]*

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The Cyrenians then moved on to using their customised database for monitoring the progression of trainees, called **Lamplight**. This involved asking those who joined their cooking classes, for example, a series of questions at the start of the course (baseline data) and then after its completion. Their responses to changes in their level of confidence in cooking techniques, reading recipes, etc. were organised on the Lamplight database to generate progression reports.

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*... everybody who comes to volunteer with us, everybody who comes to kind of access a service with us... it's all on Lamplight... It's a relationships database. We have had Lamplight for many, many years, so all our attendees at our community cook clubs will have at one stage been on that Lamplight. So, we could tell you that we've had X number of volunteers, X number of volunteer hours because our marketing at the end of the year will ask us for those numbers and that will go into our Impact report.*

*[Cyrenians, Partner Lead, Interview, Sept 2022]*

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Hornbeam also found the process of monitoring the progression of trainees over all three years challenging because of how their training programme was structured, and tailored to each trainee's availability and aspirations.

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*... it became quite difficult to monitor each trainee as each of their journeys was unique and varied in duration... However, this quarter, we've held some 1-to-1 chats with past trainees.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, Oct'22-Feb'23]*

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Hornbeam experimented with using a **Wellbeing Log** developed in collaboration with the research team. It was used to gather responses from volunteers and trainees throughout 2022. This survey asked a series of questions linked to the wellbeing of trainees (and volunteers) when they first joined Hornbeam and then at different intervals throughout their time with the organisation. The survey follows a Likert scale format, whereby respondents were asked to rank their answers to a set of

statements. The format and structure of the statements and questions are based on the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale<sup>13</sup> (WEMWBS) for added rigour to the data collected.

During the later part of RHE, Hornbeam held one-to-one informal meetings with trainees to reflect on their experiences. During the last reporting period (Oct'22 -Feb'23), the feedback received was generally very positive, with trainees stating that they had gained confidence and crucial experience of working in a community environment before moving on to work elsewhere.

BHFP undertake a systematic collection process of gathering follow-up data on their Community Kitchen sessions (including their Food Foundations training) three times a year over **online meetings and telephone calls**. This means that people were followed up somewhere between 3-6 months post-course and they were asked a range of questions about what they were doing/how they were feeling. They also used the feedback as the basis to reintroduce people to activities if they were interested.

Overall, across the RHE programme, getting **comparable post-training course data** was challenging, in comparison to feedback data on individual training sessions. While instant post-training reflections and evaluations were valuable, a longer-term perspective is needed to understand if/how trainees are 'converting' the learning and skills they gathered into concrete employment or professional work. To this end, the research team developed a post-training template for the partner projects to gather information from the trainees 3-6 months after they finished the course. This tool was shared with the partner projects in Spring 2022, but there was no engagement with the tool. However, this was not because of a lack of interest, but a lack of organisational capacity and constraints on learning and implementing a new system for monitoring and tracking progression data at that stage of the RHE programme.

Another key discussion point was on the limitations over using post-training employment as a proxy for a successful outcome of training when it was not necessarily the most appropriate or relevant for some trainees. For example, BHFP and Cyrenians indicated that improving the level of confidence, skill set, and mental health of an individual experiencing a personal crisis at the time was in many cases far more relevant *vis-a-vis* employment as an outcome in the longer term. RHE training was valuable in this context for providing a vital **stepping stone towards employment, rather than employment *per se***. RHE funds were deemed valuable to deliver these essential outcomes through the training programmes, even if post-training employment figures remained 'low' or unknown. RHE partner projects went beyond the instrumental nature of training and employment to an approach that started with identifying 'where people are at' and then working towards outcomes (like improved confidence, new skills, etc.). These outcomes were realistically achievable in a relatively short training programme and were also important for securing and maintaining employment in the longer term.

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<sup>13</sup>More information about WEMWBS can be found here:  
<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/>.

### 3.1.3 Summary Highlights: Trainees and Employment

- Across the RHE programme, 178 people completed training against a target of 176. Of these, 56 (31%) found paid work.
- Two partner projects (NOW and BHFP) went beyond their respective target number of trainees who completed their training programmes. In terms of the percentage of their trainees who found paid work after completing the training courses, Cyrenians and Hornbeam had a higher proportion.
- Not all participants who entered training programmes intended to become fully employable in a matter of weeks. There was a greater emphasis in some cases on building confidence and increasing wellbeing, than employability *per se*.
- Feedback from trainees was strongly positive in terms of improved confidence and self-esteem, wellbeing, and mental health, as well as gaining new and/or enhanced skill levels (both practical and 'softer' social and personal) and increased awareness of healthy food and nutrition.
- Although the focus on post-training follow-up of trainees yielded valuable data, a lack of sufficient data on the starting points of trainees and post-course evaluation across the RHE programme made it difficult to evidence longer-term impacts.
- Expecting all trainees to go straight from training to employment may not be a realistic or achievable outcome in all cases. Instead, other measures of 'success' relative to the starting position of a trainee are significant, in terms of level of confidence, self-esteem, and wellbeing; acquiring skills for independent living; and the 'comfort' of a safe space for personal and social development through making new connections and friendships.
- Outcomes Star is a useful method to monitor and track the progression of trainees. However, it can be costly, time and resource-intensive. Finding a systematic, but less time and resource-intensive, and flexible monitoring tool/system to accurately monitor and track the progress of trainees is a challenge, especially for smaller organisations.
- We found instances of trainees taking up volunteering in the partner organisations, and volunteers securing paid positions in their organisations. A lack of sufficient data on this made it difficult to assess the extent to which this happened as a consequence of the RHE programme. Where partner projects had the data, it was not comparable because they used different monitoring methods and their trainees had very different starting points. However, there is good evidence of the positive impact on volunteers' skills and overall well-being as revealed in interviews and survey responses (discussed later in Section 3.3.1).

## 3.2 Outcome 2: Nutritional benefit

RHE Outcome 2 Nutritional benefit	Indicators
<i>People at risk of food poverty or insecurity have benefitted from healthy, nutritious meals</i>	<b>No. of meals provided, the beneficiary groups, the nutritional content of a sample of the meals</b>  (→ Healthy, nutritious meals are provided to different vulnerable groups)
	<b>Composition of menu development groups</b>  (→ Recipient groups empowered to take control of their food)

For an overview of the dataset used for assessing Outcome 2 across the four partner organisations, see Appendix 7.

As shown in Table 7, by the end of February 2023, across RHE, the partner projects were significantly over their targets in terms of **number of meals** they were providing to people in various ways. They were delivered directly to people at their homes, delivered through local community partners, as meals in community cafes, distributed in pantries in the form of dehydrated meal packs, and meals taken home by the trainees themselves.

<i>Organisation</i>	<i>No. of meals (Feb 2023)</i>		<i>Surplus food use (Feb 2023)</i>
	<i>Total</i>	<i>RHE target</i>	
BHFP	1,67,201	2150	31.4
Cyrenians	2,43,327	3000	52.5
Hornbeam	1,39,345	3000	228.2
NOW	23,226	1500	n.a.
TOTAL	5,73,009		313.5

Table 7: No. of meals and surplus food use across RHE

It was during the early part of the RHE programme that the partner projects far exceeded their targets for the number of meals they provided, as they stepped up to become emergency food providers in response to the increased demand triggered by COVID-19. In the later part of 2021, however, as the emergency needs for food support receded and the partner projects started considering their original proposed plans under RHE, as shown by the quote below, the number of meals provided came down.

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*We wanted to get back to the alternative food provision models we had started prior to the pandemic, not enter into being a food bank indefinitely.*

*[Hornbeam, July-Dec 2021 report]*

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Nevertheless, the partner projects continued with preparing and delivering meals to varying extents to support those who remained vulnerable and dependent on ready meals for the rest of the RHE programme period.

Also, as shown in Table 7, except NOW which purchased food from the conventional food supply chains, it is estimated that the other three partner projects used nearly 314 tonnes of **surplus food** in total over the three years. Surpluses are food products (fresh, processed or unprocessed) from the food production, retail, manufacturing, and logistic sector that are no longer sellable but are still edible. Amongst the three partner projects, BHFP used relatively more non-surplus food (i.e., purchased from local producers) in their Community Kitchen training sessions, whereas food surplus was used for the Flavour packs containing dehydrated fresh produce to make meals. Their partner, East Brighton Food Co-op (see Section 3.2.3), who received RHE funding collected and cooked meals with a combination of surplus and purchased food.

On the one hand, relying on surplus food supply for making meals was found to be overall challenging by the three partner projects (Hornbeam, Cyrenians, BHFP) because of its unpredictable and unreliable nature (in terms of both quantity and quality). On the other hand, this also led to the partner projects becoming innovative and creative about using the surplus food that was available to them. This **resourcefulness** led to the development of new skills and more flexibility in menu development. BHFP developed a wide range of packaged dehydrated meals and vegetable packs from “surplus surplus” fruits and vegetables. Hornbeam set up community-run pop-up stalls to redistribute some of the surplus directly to people or shared it with their community partners. Cyrenians prepared and distributed both freshly cooked and frozen meals to a larger number of smaller community projects. There are thus two sides to dependency on surplus food by community food projects, which we reflect upon further later (Section 4.3).

Given that RHE’s primary focus was on improving the nutritional quality of food offered in ready-cooked meals, we looked at the specific ways in which the partner projects addressed nutrition explicitly in the work they did, and the outcomes. We identified four ways:

- 1) Nutritional analysis of meals, undertaken by the partner projects.
- 2) Partner projects worked with nutritionists embedded in their local communities.
- 3) Partner projects engaged with the meal recipients and trainees in finding out about their food preferences as a starting point for talking about nutrition.

4) Partner projects adapted meals to cater to the nutritional (and cultural) requirements of their target group.

These four points are explored further in the following sections.

### 3.2.1 Nutritional analysis of meals: impact on organisational culture and awareness

Towards the end of Year 1, the research team contacted a nutritionist based at Coventry University to analyse a typical meal prepared by each of the four partner projects. This **external nutritional analysis** led to a questioning of 'staple' or 'typical' meals that were being provided (e.g., the vegan meals were too low in protein). This helped instigate a more systematic look into the nutritional content of meals being prepared and provided. Interviews with partner leads indicate the significant impact the nutritional analysis had on their approach.

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*Talking to the people at RHE made me really think differently about what we are doing about nutrition.*

*[NOW, Partner Lead, RHE report, July-Dec 2021]*

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The results of the nutritional analysis and specific recommendations on how to improve and/or (re)balance the nutritional content towards a healthier option (if appropriate) were shared with the partner projects. Some of the changes recommended, for example, included altering portion sizes or adding pulses to vegan meals that were low in protein.

In their quarterly reporting, the partner projects were asked specifically to report on the nutritional aspect of meals and how they monitored it, which in itself led to a changed organisational culture and increased awareness, as also assessed by RFT and indicated in the following quote:

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*Being asked this question (on nutrition) regularly has influenced the development of a changed culture in some areas - nutrition training for volunteers, beneficiaries, trainees and cooks. It has raised awareness. Being on a low income or requesting food support does not mean that poor nutrition is acceptable or necessary.*

*[RFT Report, July –Dec 2021]*

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An expensive detailed nutritional analysis of individual meals was, however, not feasible on a regular basis. This was particularly so in the case of those three partner projects who used surplus food supply chains as the meals they provided varied quite widely from day to day. Recipes for meals were, most often, decided on the day depending on the quantity and quality of food surplus they had, on which they had no control. This led to the use of more easily accessible **online tools** to analyse meals, which



were used on the spot by the cooks and volunteers to check and adjust daily menus from a nutritional viewpoint.

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*We use the online analysis tool [Very Well Fit](#) to plug in ingredients and measure the nutritional value of a meal we've made. This is not done with every meal but is used as an indication of whether we are generally making food that is nutritionally good. This is because, due to us working from surplus ingredients and therefore not being able to plan the meal ahead of time, we don't often make exactly the same meal twice.*

*[Hornbeam, Partner Lead, 2021]*

*We used the Very Well Fit calorie and nutrition calculator to analyse the results...*

*Red Lentil Bolognese: This recipe was very high in fat so instead we used a low-fat spread which reduced the saturated fat by 48%.*

*Vegetable Noodle stir fry: This recipe had only 329 calories, so we added in a chicken breast to ensure a more balanced meal of 449 calories.*

*[NOW, Quarterly Report, Apr-July 2022]*

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Two partner projects (BHFP and Cyrenians) brought in dietitians/**nutritionists** to train the cooks and trainees on improving the nutritional quality of meals prepared and distributed. The added advantage of having nutritionists on site on a regular basis meant that they understood the local context better, including the specific needs of beneficiaries/diners, and the availability of food surplus, which made their recommendations more appropriate, practical and feasible. As described by the partner lead in Cyrenians:

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*We have taken advice from a nutrition student currently on placement with us and we adapted meals to improve their nutritional values. Examples include adding chickpeas and spinach into the sauce of our lamb curry and switching out the white rice for more nutritional brown rice or quinoa. Instead of meatballs, we have replaced them with falafels, increasing the protein level whilst reducing the fat content.*

*[Cyrenians, Quarterly Report, Apr-July 2022]*

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Similarly, BHFP and their partner East Brighton Food Co-op recognised that many of the beneficiaries of their meals were older citizens and low fibre intake was a particular nutritional issue in that age group. They worked with a registered dietitian who looked at the recipes and made suggestions to improve their nutritional content. She also held online nutrition training aimed at helping kitchen staff (including volunteers) to become more confident in basic nutrition/healthy eating practices. This

training led East Brighton Food Co-op to introduce changes in their meal offer, for example, to have pudding only once a week and fresh fruit on all the other days. They also developed simple posters for the kitchen wall to increase awareness of the kinds of foods that needed to be included in making balanced meals to address nutrition risks for different groups.

A key finding that emerged is that while it is possible to assess whether an individual meal is deficient or had an excess of calories or proteins, the composition of individual meals is significant only in the larger context of food consumption practices (i.e., what people had at other times of the day/week) and also their lifestyles more broadly. The issue is then more about supporting **healthy diets**, rather than focusing on individual meals. Beneficiary surveys were shared with partner projects in Year 1 of RHE to help them find out what people ate when they were *not* having the meals supplied by them. However, the response rate was low (see Section 4.4 for challenges faced). Nonetheless, an appreciation of the significance of improving the nutritional aspect of meals because of its strong links with health and wellbeing led to positive outcomes:

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*It is hard to evidence but overall ... this has helped **shift attitudes, skills and procedures** in the right direction because responsibility and awareness were taken back to the kitchen. It's still hard to set criteria or benchmarks (e.g., everything wholemeal/ including oily fish, etc.) with random waste food ingredients.*

*[RFT Summary Report, Jan-June 2021]*

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### 3.2.2 Food Diaries: a visual insight into diets

NOW used the app '[See How You Eat](#)' as an innovative way to engage participants and understand more about their daily and weekly diets in the form of 'food diaries'. Five participants (in the Loaf Catering Academy training programme) took part, recording their food intake visually on the app every day across Monday-Friday in April 2021. Two of them documented their intake every day, another two participants recorded for 2 days across the week, and one participant recorded 1 day. Figure 5 is an example of one participant's record.



Figure 5: Images from the 'See How You Eat' phone app used by a NOW participant  
(Source: NOW Quarterly Report, 2021)

It was found that not only was the food excessively high in sugar and fat, but none of the participants ate any fruit and vegetables during the reporting period, and they were rarely eating proper meals (i.e., they had snacks instead). This pushed NOW to pay attention to increasing awareness of healthy diets among their trainees and to engage them in cooking healthy meals for themselves that they could take home as well as for NOW's cafes.

The use of food diaries thus influenced partner projects towards increasing knowledge, awareness and skills among trainees/beneficiaries which could support changes in food habits in addition to RHE's focus on improving the nutritional content of ready meals.

### **3.2.3 East Brighton Food Co-op Case Study: an impactful partnership**

Another instance of the impact of RHE is illustrated in the partnership that was established between BHFP and East Brighton Food Co-op (EBFC), potentially widening the reach of RHE's impact.

EBFC was one of the community food projects that developed in response to the impact of COVID-19. They were delivering seven days a week meal service across the city for vulnerable groups of people, supporting on average 200+ households each week. The meals delivered were cooked and chilled to be microwaved/reheated at home. The beneficiaries included people discharged from the hospital and people with long-term health conditions who did not have the financial means to get food deliveries. It was entirely volunteer-led, operating in one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the city (and the country). BHFP started supporting this initiative as they found it a better approach that resulted in building community capacity, in comparison to establishing a ready meal service with their trainees. Working with them to ensure that the meals were nutritious and ensuring that the volunteers were well supported and trained were key aspects of BHFP's partnership.

The impact of this partnership on getting healthy meals to vulnerable people was positive. In collaboration with BHFP, EBFC generated their own nutritional analysis that was valuable, but the appropriateness and 'healthiness' of meals remained a challenge. For example, EBFC acknowledged that "There is a balance between having a nutritionally balanced meal and having a meal that is enjoyed, and that gets eaten", which captures the "dilemma facing RHE partner projects in the context of food re-distribution, social isolation, loneliness, food poverty and rising precariousness and vulnerability in contemporary British society." [RFT Report, 2022]

### **3.2.4 Impact on beneficiaries**

In this section, we look at the impact on beneficiaries in the four partner projects, specifically on the ways by which those at risk of food poverty or insecurity benefitted from healthy, nutritious meals.

#### **NOW and beneficiary nutrition impact**

The Loaf Academy at NOW (that received RHE funds) aimed at enabling the trainees comprised of people with learning difficulties to gain or move close to gaining employment and/or independence. NOW held workshops for trainees on healthy food choices, the importance of eating healthy food, and learning about food safety and hygiene.

A focus group session held by the research team in Sept 2022 with trainees from the T1 cohort (the group closest to work placement) revealed key findings as described below.

- Most of the trainees had no prior experience of cooking, but they had learnt to cook during the course of the training programme at NOW. Some felt motivated and confident enough to cook those dishes also at home (with the support of household members).
- The trainees learnt to make a range of food in the training sessions (e.g., soups of different types, and pies), including 'healthier' versions of some of the traditional dishes cooked at home (e.g., vegetable stroganoff to replace beef stew).
- Most reported eating more vegetables overall.
- They described an increased awareness of making healthy eating choices (e.g., being aware of the difference between tinned/canned soups and freshly made soups in terms of nutrients, and taste/flavour).
- They influenced what they learnt in the training sessions. For example, two trainees expressed that they wanted to learn how to make sandwiches and the NOW team responded by organising sandwich-making sessions.

The influence of the **home environment** on determining the impact on trainees, specifically on how the trainees took the learning and practices outside of the training sessions at NOW emerged as a key point. The positive impact on trainees depended quite strongly on the extent to which household members (specifically parents) supported them by providing them with the space, time, and resources to do cooking at home. The trainees described their parents as generally supportive and NOW supported this by holding joint sessions with trainees along with their families to discuss the trainees' progress. They also stressed the key role that households play in getting the best out of the services provided by them to the trainees.

The development of **independent living skills and social skills** as a result of the training sessions was also significant. As NOW staff explained, this required the content of training sessions in many cases to be designed keeping the interests and aspirations of the participants in mind.

During our observation of a practical training session involving the T1 cohort (the group closest to placement), which involved the participants making a fruit salad from scratch, we found the participants actively enjoying the **hands-on learning** on nutrition and the skills needed to prepare the salad. This included the safe use of knives, chopping boards, aprons, gloves, etc. and knowledge also about food safety and personal safety during cooking. After the session, while some had the fruit salad they had prepared during lunch, others preferred to take it home.

The impact of training sessions on **fostering skills for independent living** by the trainees was validated by the Outcomes Star data shared by the staff with the research team. The trainees during their 'journey' with NOW learnt about all the different aspects of food and nutrition, which are part of everyday living starting from shopping for healthy ingredients, preparation of vegetables and fruits, use of equipment safely, food hygiene awareness to following recipes for making healthy meals and reducing food waste.

The training sessions were also designed with the aim of encouraging the trainees to make **slow and steady changes** towards cultivating new habits for making better food choices independently. Making

‘big changes at once’ (i.e., giving out lots of information in one go), as the training staff described was “overwhelming” for some trainees. The ‘small’ changes, for example, included advice on what to buy and what to avoid, information about different nutrients and their specific role for an active and healthy life, portion control, the importance of sleep for health, and selecting healthy recipes.

In addition to increased nutrition knowledge and awareness, and acquiring cooking and preparation skills for healthy eating as having significantly positive impacts, the trainees described the **physical fitness** sessions that they were taken to after the food and cooking sessions as also having a positive impact on their wellbeing.

Project staff worked closely with the parents of the trainees to help the parents organise the support needed at home for the trainees to practise the cooking they had learnt also at home. However, as described by project staff, some families found it challenging, especially when it involved a change in home routines (changes in what families normally had for meals, for example) or when there was not enough kitchen space, or options to follow safety and hygiene practices at home. On the other hand, we also heard from the facilitator at the training session how some parents reported being delightfully surprised by the high level of confidence in cooking shown by their children at home as a result of the training sessions. By integrating the key **role of parents** and the home environment more broadly into the training programme, NOW had effectively enhanced the potential for greater impact on young adults with learning disabilities.

The **role of peer support** was also integrated into NOW’s training. While some of the trainees knew each other before they came to NOW, others expressed how exciting it was for them to meet new people and make new friends at the training sessions. Doing things together as a group (e.g., going to a restaurant for a meal after the training session) supported them in getting confident.

When staff were asked about how the trainees and/or beneficiaries influenced the meals, how **feedback** was received from them and how it was used, the quotes below from the partner project lead illustrate that they took into account their trainees’ needs and interests in various ways.

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*We work closely with the participants to ensure they are involved in our services. We operate a co-design ethos. We also encourage participants to try our foods.*

*Participants give us verbal feedback on a weekly basis, and we use this to inform our menu plan for the following week.*

*Our trainees (with learning difficulties) tried out the recipes when we were planning what to serve in the cafes.*

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The social impact of NOW was thus multi-layered for nutritional outcomes - extending beyond a narrow focus on nutrition to a more holistic model of care centred on their trainees’ needs and aspirations.

## Hornbeam and beneficiary nutrition impact

Towards the latter part of 2021, Hornbeam had started winding down their emergency food provision (hot meals and groceries to whoever turned up) to resume eat-in meals in their community café (Gleaners Café). They also continued with regular delivery of ready meals for a smaller group.

Beneficiaries of the ready meals that Hornbeam delivered fall into four main categories: elderly people, some with health issues, people with mobility issues, people in financial hardship, and people with poor mental health who struggled to leave their homes. Most of the recipients had complex needs arising from a combination of different vulnerabilities (e.g., health, food insecurity, poor mental health). A mix of people from the local community took community cafe meals. They included rough sleepers, the elderly, people from low-income households, and those looking specifically for vegan food. Their community meals at OrganicLea involved free lunch for the volunteers and guests on-site on Wednesdays and Fridays, which included vulnerable adults, adults there for therapeutic purposes, ESOL learners (migrants and asylum seekers), and people volunteering for horticultural interest.

The feedback from an online survey of Hornbeam’s recipients, as shown below, illustrates the extent to which access to meals made a massive difference to the lives of the beneficiaries.

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*We are so grateful and appreciative of this hugely helpful project and the meals that we received. It was amazing and made a massive difference when different members of my family had Covid or other health problems and were shielding. It was the first time we had prepared healthy meals... And our cooking skills were very hit-and miss, so Hornbeam food was ideal and inspirational for us to start a new way of food preparation and appreciation.*

*[Hornbeam, Recipients Online Survey, March 2022]*

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Data from Hornbeam’s Wellbeing Log for 2021-22 yielded key findings, which capture the changes in beneficiaries’ diets. Out of 40 responses, as shown in Figure 6, nearly 68% agreed with having tried out new fruits and vegetables.

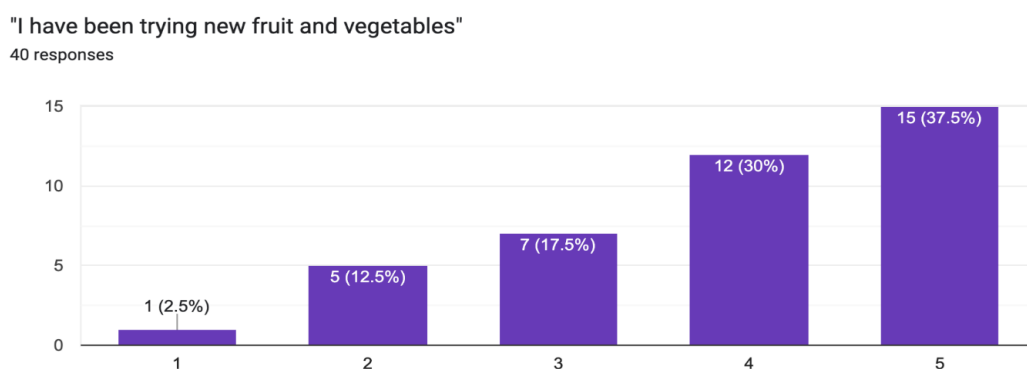


Figure 6: Hornbeam Wellbeing Log, 2021-22, Tried new fruit and vegetables (1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

Data from the 'diet-in-context' interviews conducted by Hornbeam earlier in 2021 with 10 people who collected food from them regularly<sup>14</sup> revealed that the reason they provided for their increased consumption of fresh produce was their easy availability and affordability. This illustrates the influence of the food environment on people's food practices. As summarised by the partner lead,

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*[Beneficiaries] all noted that they came to access food from us because we provided a variety of fresh produce which wasn't as readily available from other food aid services.*

*[Hornbeam, Partner Lead, Interview, 2021]*

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Although it was on a very small scale, the findings from their Wellbeing log earlier in March 2022, which had 6 responses from beneficiaries provided some early findings on their experience of the meals, as shown below (see Figure 7)

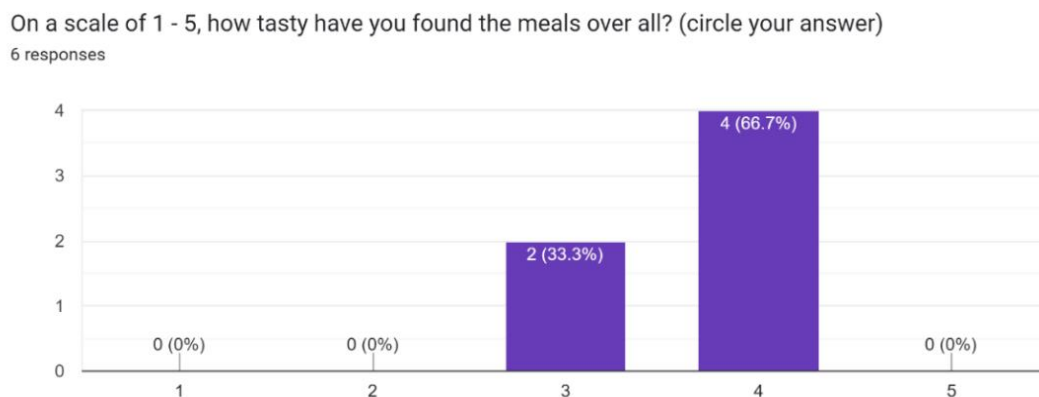


Figure 7: Hornbeam Wellbeing Log, March 2022, Taste of meals  
(1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

All six recipients considered the **meals as tasty**, although there was relatively more variation in the responses when it came to how **healthy and nutritious the meals** were, and the variation in the meals themselves, as the following two figures show. Five recipients agreed or strongly agreed with the meals received as healthy and nutritious (Figure 8). In response to the variation in meals, while three recipients agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that the meals were varied enough for their preferences, two disagreed with the statement and one chose to stay neutral (Figure 9) Their responses to 'topping up' meals if they found them lacking showed a variation (see Box 2).

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<sup>14</sup> To be noted that these interviews were conducted on a day when Hornbeam was offering groceries from its premises and most of the people were there primarily to pick up groceries and not necessarily to have a meal.



On a scale of 1 - 5, how healthy & nutritious have you found the meals over all?  
6 responses

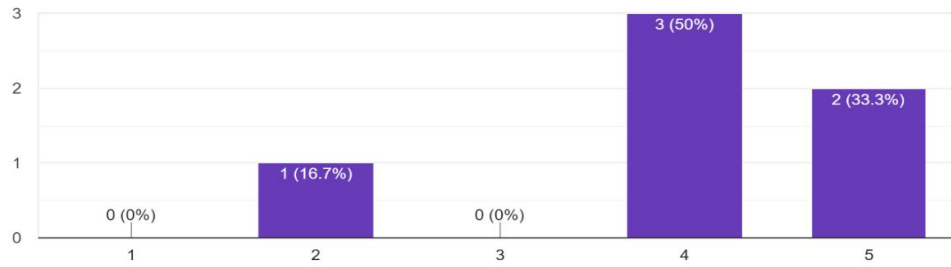


Figure 8: Hornbeam Wellbeing Log, March 2022, Healthy and nutritious meals  
(1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

Are the meals varied enough for your liking? I.e. are the meals different enough? (circle your answer)  
6 responses

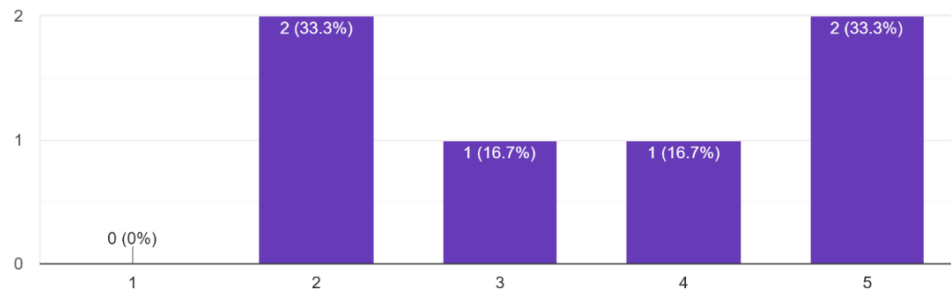


Figure 9: Hornbeam Wellbeing Log, March 2022, Variation in meals  
(1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree)

As Box 2 shows, the responses from the six beneficiaries varied in relation to whether they **topped their meals up** with anything else.

- Not for lunch but might do if it was for a main meal
- My top-up meals are vegetables, also some bread
- Top up if something in the fridge needs to be eaten (random veg etc.) but otherwise, the meal is sufficient and filling enough for a hearty lunch
- No, we eat it as is
- No, but could do with more pasta or stew as a side dish

Box 2: Topping up meals, Hornbeam

When asked how **culturally appropriate** the meals were, some found the meals not the 'usual' type that they had at home, whereas most people were pleased to try something new (see Box 3).

- Yes, I enjoyed the spicy ones, the Thai green curry and the curry that begins with an M, that was nice.
- It is culturally appropriate for me, and I would like to eat vegetables, chicken and eggs, etc. But not pork.
- There were no issues regarding the meals as my family, and most of those I shared with are interested in foods from everywhere and anywhere.
- It was different but I loved it all the same.
- No. I would like meat or chicken sometimes.
- Okay, sort of Middle Eastern.

Box 3: Cultural appropriateness of meals, Hornbeam

In response to whether the meals provided by Hornbeam had **changed their diet**, the results were mostly affirmative (Box 4).

- Yes, I'm eating more veg which my GP said I should, and less carbs, etc.
- Yes indeed. It improved my diet and health.
- The meals coincided with our family's general commitment to eating more veg, carbon neutral, seasonal, local produce and aiming for zero waste. Having the Hornbeam food was very helpful in transitioning and probably kept us much more on target and motivated.
- Yes, it has, we eat more veg now at home and I feel better in myself
- No, not really
- Good effect on diet.

Box 4: Changes in diet, Hornbeam

In terms of **how dependent they were** on the Hornbeam meals, while four revealed a high degree of dependency, two stated that they would have no option but to search for other options if they did not get the Hornbeam meals (Box 5). This indicates the high degree of dependency on the meals.

- I am very dependent on them and really missed them last week as I had a GO appointment and didn't go to the food bank.
- I need to wait for my cousin to come to my flat to buy food for me and I depend on your food because she is not coming often.
- This is a chicken and egg question - if we didn't have the meals we would have had to improvise and compromise. Because we did have the meals, we adapted and were able to spend less, eat better, have improved portion control, and free up time for our volunteering, campaigning and community activity.
- I am very dependent as well as my kids; if I don't have the money, I know the kids can still eat.
- Would have to find other ways.
- Dependent

Box 5: Dependency on meals, Hornbeam

When staff were asked about how the cooks, trainees and/or beneficiaries influenced the meals and how they received and used the **feedback** from them, we found that Hornbeam was **proactive** in seeking feedback to shape the meals, and feedback was given in different forms.

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*The community cafe asks two customers for verbal feedback on the meals once a week. This isn't systemically recorded but feeds back into the core cafe team and influences the type of food they prepare (for example, less spicy food in general or what type of meals were particularly appreciated - katsu curry was a favourite this quarter).*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, Oct'22-Feb'23]*

*We got a poor response to the written survey, but we talk to people and get to know them. Upon delivering meals, one of our regular recipients had kept back the lids of her preferred meals (the lids have the labels on them) so that she could show us which meals she really enjoyed the most.*

*... four of the ten people ... mentioned that they had tried the vegan hot meals from Hornbeam before but found that it hadn't agreed with them because the food felt too 'oily'. This has been fed back to the kitchen team who are looking at adjusting their oil quantities. It was also mentioned that the food was quite unfamiliar – being Asian-inspired and vegan.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, Mar-June 2021]*

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In another example, Hornbeam delivered a few non-vegetarian meals to **meet the specific requests** of their beneficiaries, despite them being a vegan cafe.

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*Another recipient requested a bit more variety in the meals (he gets two meals twice a week) and said he would love a bit of meat, so we send him a couple of meat meals from The Felix Project once a week.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, July –Sept 2022]*

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A recognition of the need for addressing food needs along with **wider social and contextual issues** was also observed in Hornbeam's work, as illustrated in the quote below:

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*They provide ESOL practice lessons as part of cooking together on an organic farm, where participants cook and eat meals together. Had Hornbeam provided the same nutritious food without this social context, perhaps it would have been differently received.*

*[RFT Report, Jan'21-July'22]*

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Community meal at Hornbeam

### Cyrenians and beneficiary nutrition impact

The Cyrenians first started working with FareShare in 2014 to run cooking classes for people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness as a kind of early intervention strategy. The local council funded the programme and those completing the classes were given a certificate. A series of food conversations then held in the city in 2015-2016 brought together different stakeholders, service users, and the general public together, and a key point that emerged was the complex needs associated with food insecurity.

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*... what came out of it was that it wasn't so much about just having food when we are talking about food insecurity, but it was having somebody to sit and enjoy that food with. Actually, food is so much more than just a plate of food or ensuring that someone didn't go hungry.*

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That led Cyrenians to the idea of starting **Community Cook Clubs**.

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*...a very simple idea was to take food from FareShare and go out into the community, and bring people together to cook together and to eat together... When you get people around the table, if they've got a problem, you can support them. And if you've got the right people there, they can signpost them, they can help them to do various things that are needed.*

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However, during the pandemic, Cyrenians provided **ready meals** cooked onsite by volunteer chefs directly to people, and through local community organisations. Their '**direct**' beneficiaries included those who would have earlier attended their community cook club onsite but were confined to staying at home because of the pandemic-related restrictions.

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*There was this recognition that we couldn't sit around a table and enjoy food together anymore but people still needed food. So, we delivered food out to people, but we deliberately kept the runs quite short so that people could build a relationship with people on the doorstep in the same way as they did around the table.*

*...the first meals went to people we already had a relationship with. Obviously, then word spread and more and more people got food. But that's how we managed to hit the ground actually running because we had an existing relationship with these people.*

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The other route to deliver meals, to reach out to a larger number of people, was through their relationships with **local community partners**:

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*... there was this idea that we could only deliver a certain number of meals ourselves. Whereas if we sent them to community groups, like the Ripple project, Gracemount Primary, GoodTrees, Brunstane nursery, if we could give them like 200-300 meals each, that meant that we could reach many more people...they would take the last mile sort of thing. They knew in their community rather than us trying to find out who needs meals in that community..., they were the experts in the local community.*

*...we also have an in-house team in the local hospitals -- they are going in and engaging with people who might be homeless or at risk of homelessness before they went into hospital. The hospital cannot release them because -- where are they going to release them to? They're not going to a home. So, how are they going to be cared for and things like that? So, we have a hospital-in-reach team that could engage with those people, so that they can get out of the hospital much quicker.*

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Cyrenians prepared and delivered a combination of refrigerated meals and frozen meals with the idea that the recipients would have the refrigerated meal on the day, and the frozen meal could be taken

on the following days. This also reduced the number of times that they needed to go to drop off the food while giving beneficiaries a choice of different meals over many days.

Evidence of the positive impact of meals during the pandemic from a consumer survey conducted in 2020 showed an **improvement in diets**.

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*The meals provided have improved people's diets, for example, 62% of consumers agree or definitely agree that they waste less food since receiving food from Cyrenians, 38% said they agree or definitely agree that without the food they receive from Cyrenians, they would be hungry. 85% strongly agree or agree that they can rely on Cyrenians to receive food, 85% strongly agree or agree that the food is of good quality, 77% strongly agree or agree that the food is tasty, 69% agree or definitely agree that they have improved their diet since receiving food from Cyrenians.*

*[RFT Report, Oct-Dec 2020]*

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The survey responses also showed the **positive emotional impact** that the service offered by Cyrenians had on the beneficiaries.

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*The women dropping off food each week for myself and my daughter were my only point of contact throughout our shielding; both myself and daughter were over the moon each week to see them just for the conversation, they both helped maintain my mental health. The adult conversation was extremely limited for myself after going into shielding with my four-year-old. I'm grateful for the support.*

*[Consumer survey respondent, Cyrenians, 2020]*

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At their Thursday Lunch Club onsite, volunteer chefs prepared meals on the day for the Club members, and any extra food cooked (depending on the availability of food surplus) was frozen for deliveries to those who needed them. During the research team's field visit to the Cyrenians in Sept 2022, FareShare volunteers from just across the road, and other people had come to the Lunch Club. Interviews with the two volunteer chefs for the day (who were retired professional chefs), revealed the considerably **positive impact on them from cooking** at the Cyrenians, in terms of reducing social isolation, as revealed in the following quote:

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*...well, if I wasn't doing this, I would be sitting in the house drinking... I'm being truthful...I have very bad circulation in my legs. So, I'm not, like, keen to go out and walk... And as I say, the longer you come here, the more you build up friendships. You look forward to Thursday to see how the other guys are.*

*[Interview, Chef 1, Cyrenians, Nov 2022]*

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The chefs felt uplifted by the positive responses they received for the meals they prepared, and from the social aspect of cooking and eating together, as the following quotes show:

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*I personally think that food has progressed as time goes on, and you listen to the guys from across the road, "That was nice, thanks" – that has increased; they obviously see a difference, they taste the difference... And you know, it progresses every week.*

*[Interview, Chef 2, Cyrenians, Nov 2022]*

*I think the standards kept going up because we began to know each other better, and then you start to work better...*

*[Interview, Chef 2, Cyrenians, Nov 2022]*

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The positive impact of meals was attributed by the chefs to preparing food which does not take into account only nutrition, but also taste and appearance.

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*... there should be a healthy percentage of all these things... you eat with your eyes, if it doesn't look attractive, you're not going to eat... it doesn't matter what it is. You trust your instincts... you basically go with the eyes and then eat...*

*[Interview, Chef 1, Cyrenians, Nov 2022]*

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Since Cyrenians primarily relied on **surplus food**, and meals were prepared depending on what they had in stock on the day, the chefs acknowledged the importance of a good level of skills/knowledge required for turning surplus food into healthy, balanced meals. However, despite the unpredictability and unreliability of surplus food availability, the chefs and other project staff acknowledged the value of saving food, especially when it is of high quality, and preventing it from ending up in landfill. Although they had adequate storage and infrastructure facilities, they described the lack of such infrastructure in many smaller community organisations, which led to much food ending up as waste.

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*Shaws Fine Meats donated 5000 frozen pheasant breasts to us that would have gone to waste had we not had space to store and utilise them in our meals. We have turned them into terrines, stews, and casseroles and it is now known as 'wild chicken' at the cook school.*

*[Partner Lead, Quarterly Report, Jan-June 2021]*

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Similar to the other partner organisations, Cyrenians received and used **feedback** in various ways. It indicated the extent to which the beneficiaries influenced the meals and also recognised the diversity of needs in their beneficiaries group.

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*Periodically throughout the 13 weeks, the trainees are asked what they would like to learn how to cook. We then write up on the board all their suggestions and work our way through the list. The list usually gets bigger as the course goes on as some of the trainees become more confident in their abilities and more adventurous in their food choices.*

*[Project Partner lead, Quarterly Report, July-Dec 2021]*

*We have a wide range of cultural and dietary needs with the recipients of the meals. For example, we have a large number of elderly people who have traditional tastes and enjoy meals like mince and tatties or macaroni cheese. We also provide meals for vegans, vegetarians, and specific allergies such as onions, and halal dishes.*

*[Cyrenians, Quarterly Report, July-Dec 21]*

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A survey conducted in 2020 to understand the diets and nutritional intake of the beneficiaries of Cyrenians yielded the following responses.

- 69% (9 respondents out of 13) agreed or definitely agreed that their diets had improved since receiving food from Cyrenians.
- Nobody felt that their diet had not improved (4 neither agreed nor disagreed).
- 46% (6 respondents) agreed or definitely agreed that they ate more fresh produce; whilst 54% (7 respondents) disagreed or neither agreed/disagreed that they ate more fresh produce. Similarly, 31% (4 respondents) agreed or definitely agreed that they cooked from scratch more often, whereas the same number definitely disagreed or disagreed. This suggests that it was difficult to attribute improvements in diet and changes in cooking practices to Cyrenians specifically, although there was some impact.
- Only 23% (3 respondents) reported that they consumed *more* than the recommended intake of '5 a day'.
- The mean (average) intake for Cyrenians consumers was 2-3 portions of fruit and/or veg per day. This was lower than the mean for Cyrenians volunteers (where 3-4 portions were the average) and lower than the BHFP and Hornbeam volunteer cohort (where 4-5 portions were the average).
- 38% (5 respondents) said they agreed or definitely agreed that without the food they received from Cyrenians, they would be hungry.
- 85% (11 respondents) strongly agreed or agreed that they could rely on Cyrenians to receive food from them.
- 85% strongly agreed or agreed that the food was of good quality.
- 77% strongly agreed or agreed that the food was tasty.



The impact of Cyrenians was thus considerable indicating the important role played by them in meeting the food needs of vulnerable groups in their local community through the provision of healthy and nutritious meals.

### **Brighton & Hove Partnership (BHFP)**

During the early part of RHE, the beneficiaries of BHFP reported appreciating the care and friendliness that came with the food deliveries, as it was often brought over by neighbours or volunteers. This was especially relevant for many of those people who had never needed to seek help with food before. This included some who were in employment but unable to afford food. The following responses from the beneficiaries indicate the positive impact that receiving the meals from BHFP had on them:

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*Thank you for the recipe kits, I am a single parent with 3 children aged 3-11. We have been supported by the Turner Childrens' Centre Food Bank who have helped me get lots of things sorted but we love getting the recipe bag each week. X (the youngest) loved the Veg Face Mask and I've been impressed with how simple they are to cook.*

*If I hadn't gone on to Facebook and seen the message, I would have been without food.*

*Can't put into words what a burden has been lifted from me... I don't know what I would have done without this.*

*It made us feel really looked after, so much so that it often made us cry.*

*Absolutely brilliant, so friendly and kind. It makes such a difference. Been ill for some time. It's as much human contact as food. When they come, you can't see their faces, but their eyes are smiling, just seeing a human face, it's a lifesaver.*

*So grateful for everything, from the bottom of my heart. You have kept me alive.*

*[RFT Report, Oct-Dec 2020]*

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By mid-2021, BHFP had exceeded the RHE target for meals. In the latter part of 2021, no meals were produced by BHFP themselves. Instead, they had passed on funding to their partner, East Brighton Food Co-op, to work with a nutritionist to improve the nutritional content of their delivered meals (described earlier in Section 3.2.3).

When asked about how the cooks, trainees and/or beneficiaries influenced the meals and how they received and made use of the **feedback** from recipients of meals, a noteworthy illustration is the production of a **Low/Slow/No cook recipe booklet**. This developed from the feedback that some of their beneficiaries had no kitchens and had difficulties paying energy bills. Another instance relates to

the **Flavour packs**. These contained dehydrated vegetables that could be used to add nutritional content to meals, and the aim was two-fold - first, it was a better use of excess food surplus, and second, provide the benefits of consuming vegetables to those households with no fridges and limited cooking facilities so that they could produce full meals from the dry ingredients more easily.



Flavour packs made by BHFP

During the trial phase, the Flavour packs were distributed via six of the city's affordable food projects. Some were distributed as standalone items and some as part of meal packs. They collected feedback from those projects over several weeks. They also used a QR code to get people to provide feedback online. From the 39 responses received, the feedback was mainly positive – 91% of people said they liked or really liked it. Most of the positive feedback mentioned convenience, food waste reduction, and a good way of boosting vegetable intake. Ultimately, the participants/beneficiaries were given both slow cookers and Flavour packs to take away, which required less energy to be prepared. As BHFP stated:

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*Key feedback about meal packs that we have implemented is to include cooking instructions for hob, slow cooker and microwave on packs so that whatever people have they can use.*

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Towards the end of the RHE programme, in addition to Flavour packs distributed via pantries and food banks to people experiencing food poverty, the other meals provided by BHFP included meals that trainees were taking home and the monthly 'Brunch bunch' meals for adults with a mild/moderate learning disability.

In their last post-course evaluation surveys of trainees (Nov 2022 and Jan 2023 cohorts), the data on **diet changes** shows impact along different dimensions as a result of what the trainees learnt in the cookery course, as shown below:

- 45% were eating more vegetables
- 27% were eating less meat

- 45 % were wasting less food
- 50% were consuming less unhealthy/pre-packaged foods
- 64% had tried a new food

It is evident that the impact of BHFP on nutritional outcomes resulted from the changes in food practices. Even if the extent of change in some cases may not be significant, as the following quote from a trainee at a focus group session shows, they could demonstrate achievable broader changes in future.

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*...I haven't made huge changes. I'm not, you know, cooking every night, but I do make better health choices...I'll have you know different things that you know, improve [my diet], I will try and do a meal from scratch, which I would never have done before.*

*[BHFP Trainee, Interview, 2022]*

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### 3.2.5 Summary Highlights – Nutritional Benefit

- Each of the four partner projects significantly exceeded the target number of meals provided to members of their local communities who were food insecure or at risk of food poverty. They delivered 573,009 meals in total, roughly 60 times more than the target; most of this increase was the result of providing emergency food support to the increased number of vulnerable households during the pandemic.
- Without RHE, especially during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant number of people who relied on the partner organisations would have been at a higher risk of food insecurity and social isolation. They include the elderly, people with long-term health issues, people with mobility issues, people in financial hardship, people with poor mental health, people with learning disabilities, and people with intersecting vulnerabilities.
- The impact of the training programmes and provision of ready meals on the physical and mental health of a wide range of beneficiaries (recipients of the ready meals, trainees, chefs and volunteers), was positive, including through social eating opportunities provided by the partner projects. In the wider context of the adverse repercussions of the pandemic on peoples' overall wellbeing, this positive impact cannot be understated.
- The meals provided were generally healthy and nutritious, aligned with national dietary guidelines, and there is some evidence of improvement in beneficiaries' diets as shown in periodic survey responses. Questions emerged over how the nutritional impact of meals could be consistently defined and measured, which recognises at the same time specific nutritional requirements as well as cultural acceptability and the 'enjoyment' aspect of eating food together.

- Evidence of impact on the ability to make healthier food choices in practice by the direct recipients of meals, as well as the trainees, outside of RHE was mixed. However, increased awareness of the significance of cooking healthier meals was evident. Partner projects highlighted the need to focus on improving the knowledge/skills of the kitchen staff (chefs and volunteers) and trainees involved as being as important as looking at the nutritional content of the meals overall.
- Evidence of the influence of beneficiaries on menu development and meals provided by the partner projects is limited. The common methods used for getting feedback were phone-call check-ins with recipients of the meals, verbal feedback during the interaction, or texts on phones while one partner project used a digital method (i.e., QR codes). A less *ad hoc* and more systematic approach is required to capture how partner projects seek, respond and act on feedback (e.g., in menu design) to adjust for calorific value and macronutrient content of meals, for cultural acceptability, etc.
- Training workshops on food preparation skills improved the capabilities of participants in the majority of cases to make healthier food choices.
- Except for one partner project (NOW) which used conventional food supply chains, the other partner projects relied to a varying extent on surplus food for making ready meals. It is estimated that over the three years, they sourced nearly 314 tonnes of surplus food in total. The use of surplus food for making healthy meals was challenging, although it led to innovative recipes despite no regular menus and a changing pool of volunteer cooks.
- While there was a heavy reliance on food surplus supply for reasons of affordability and/or environmental impact, the partner projects identified the need for high-quality (i.e., in terms of freshness, nutritional content, and cultural diversity) in the surplus supply chains.
- There is some evidence that the social setting of the partner projects had an impact on changing dietary habits. For example, many people who were not vegan started having vegan meals at Hornbeam because they enjoyed the company of others present there.
- The nutritional analysis of a typical meal conducted in Year 1 was found to be useful in acknowledging the need to adopt and follow dietary recommendations for healthy meals. However, it was found to be an expensive process and not fully appropriate on a regular basis, as the meals dependent on surplus food deliveries varied from day to day and they needed to be specific for groups with specific dietary needs. The partner projects experimented with simpler online nutritional analysis tools, kitchen wall posters, etc.
- RHE's emphasis on improving the nutritional content of meals led the partner projects to recognise the need for embedding nutrition monitoring more thoroughly and systematically into their work. The use of online tools, photo diaries, surveys, employing local nutritionists, nutritional guides/posters, and direct conversations with beneficiaries and their support

agencies were considered important to gain a better understanding of how to improve the nutritional content of meals, while still providing food that people desired and enjoyed.

- The impact of individual meals in the context of daily/weekly diets and on the broader consumption practices amongst vulnerable groups requires further research. For example, a meal when examined in isolation from a diet can appear to be overly calorific or imbalanced in macronutrients. However, for some beneficiaries who may have little or no access to a cooked meal throughout the week, the meal provided by partner projects through the RHE programme became an invaluable source of freshly prepared ingredients (as well as an opportunity to eat socially in some instances). It is, therefore, important that the meals provided through programmes like RHE be placed *in the wider context* of the diets and consumption practices of recipients who consume them.

### 3.3 Additional outcomes

#### 3.3.1 Impact on volunteers

Volunteers were not initially targeted as beneficiaries of the RHE programme as the focus was on trainees/participants/recipients of meals. However, as volunteers became critical to their operations during the pandemic for delivering timely food support to vulnerable communities, the positive impact of that work on the volunteers became evident. The partner projects recognised this quite early on.

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*We worked with up to 150 volunteers during this time, many of whom were mentored through volunteering in the community kitchen onsite - learning to prep food, cook, ferment, and pickle food as well as learn crucial skills about working in the community, often with people with complex needs. We hosted a few workshops around de-escalation and cooperative working. Many have also gained a certificate in food hygiene.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, Oct-Dec 2020]*

*Volunteers often thank me for giving them something to do whilst I on the other hand insist it is us who should be thanking them! This has been a truly community effort and everyone benefits from being part of something meaningful... especially when so many people have been struggling for so many reasons it is uplifting and humbling.*

*[Staff, Bevy Bites group, BHFP Oct-Dec 2020]*

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Across the three years, the number of volunteers fluctuated, aligned with peak time operations. The quarterly reporting by the partner projects indicated the wide range of roles they carried out and the

significant impact that volunteering had on them. Two key findings stand out which are described below.

### **Improved wellbeing**

Survey responses and focus group discussions show evidence of improved wellbeing and mental health through the process of volunteering. 75% of the BHFP volunteers, in a survey conducted by the research team in 2021, described a discernible change in their sense of well-being.

The reasons for the positive impact attributed by the volunteers centred on reduced social isolation and an opportunity to stay 'active' during the pandemic lockdowns, as the quotes below illustrate.

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*I feel that I am doing something worthwhile during the Covid crisis.*

*[RFT Report, Oct-Dec 2020]*

*I am grateful to be a part of this wonderful charity and I look forward to seeing what projects they will bring to the community in the future.*

*[Doorstep delivery driver volunteer, Cyrenians, Quarterly report, Oct-Dec 2020]*

*I sometimes think volunteering with you has been as important for my well-being as it has been for the people we deliver to!*

*[Volunteer driver, Cyrenians, Quarterly Report, Oct-Dec 2020]*

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It is important to note that many volunteers during most of the first two years of RHE were often those furloughed, and many were new to volunteering. The latter group gained a new understanding of the needs of vulnerable groups in their local communities and became aware of wider issues around the scale and nature of food poverty experienced in their local communities.

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*During Covid, a new audience has come to understand and value the voluntary sector. The volunteers' mental health was protected by their volunteering. They were surprised to learn about disadvantaged areas on their doorstep, places they had never seen. They made caring relationships across the usual divides and found meaning in this. ... In some cases, they have established volunteer help groups that will continue to address this ongoing need in the long term.*

*[RFT Report, Oct-Dec 2020]*

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*I have learned that people in all areas and of all backgrounds might struggle with food security.*

*[Cyrenians, Quarterly Report, Oct-Dec 2020 report]*

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Research into volunteer experiences shows that in some cases they also brought in new understandings from their experiences on the frontline which led to changes in organisational practices.

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*At first, we just thought of them as doing a job, driving the meals out as fast as possible. Now we spend time with them, listening to feedback and explaining how the organisation works. They have changed our practice. For example, now we do less drop-offs per run so that there is time to chat.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, Jan-July 2021]*

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Volunteers valued their experiences particularly when the partner projects listened to their feedback, and included them in wider organisational decision-making, instead of it just being about them delivering meals.

Responses to a survey conducted by the research team in 2020, completed by 11 volunteers for BHFP indicate the positive impacts from volunteering, as given below.

- 64% agreed that they waste less food since volunteering
- 82% said that they felt more connected to people
- 82% felt they were doing something worthwhile
- 100% said they looked forward to volunteering
- 73% agreed or definitely agreed that they felt relaxed when volunteering
- The top 5 reasons given for volunteering with BHFP were:
  - support a local initiative
  - meet new people
  - improve my sense of well-being
  - feel part of a community
  - to do something positive during the Covid-19 crisis

Later focus group sessions with some of the volunteers in 2021 indicated that the positive impact continued to be felt beyond the lockdowns.

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*I've had struggles with mental health for quite a while. And part of the reason that I went for this, to do the volunteering, was that some of what really helped me as I was kind of learning how to do basic self-care for myself was learning how to cook properly and take care of my body. And it made me feel so much better being able to kind of, you know, be in classes with people, and help them to learn some of the*

*skills that I learned that I know are kind of once you have them, you have them forever, it's just massively helpful... And it's just really gratifying to be able to pass it on and see other people getting it as well.*

*[Volunteer, Online focus group BHFP, 2021]*

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The responses from Hornbeam's Wellbeing log on volunteers (2021-22) and Cyrenians' volunteer survey revealed that the relationships volunteers were making during food deliveries were as important as the food deliveries.

*I have long-Covid and have found volunteering with Hornbeam helpful for that, as it gets me doing something active (but not too active!) outside my house and interacting with new people.*

*[Volunteer, Hornbeam, 2021]*

*I live on my own so you know, being in lockdown, it could potentially be a pretty lonely experience, but going into the kitchen two days a week was just amazing, you know. It almost felt wrong to be looking forward to doing something... It's hard to describe because you wanted to do it for the right motives, but selfishly, there was a part of me that felt the benefit of being around people both in the kitchen and also in the delivery of the packed lunches that I did the other days because you worked in pairs. So, when people, you know, spoke of loneliness [during lockdown], and maybe they hadn't seen people, I wasn't in that place because I've thankfully been surrounded by people. It made such a difference to me, so, I'm pleased I could benefit in some way, but selfishly, it did benefit me greatly as well.*

*[Volunteer, Online focus group, Cyrenians, 2021]*

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However, as lockdown restrictions became more relaxed, and the spread of COVID-19 declined due to effective vaccination and social distancing measures, partner projects were able to revisit their core aims that had been put on hold during the crisis intervention period. As one partner put it, this was about them moving away from the narrower model of emergency response and crisis intervention and considering some of the more progressive ideas and activities associated with addressing food insecurity and poverty.

*We wanted to get back to the alternative food provision models we had started prior to the pandemic, and not enter into being a food bank indefinitely.*

*(Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, 2022)*

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Hornbeam, for example, then began to take more of a community lead role and started to develop a few of the pop-up Mutual Aid support groups into longer-term organisations that could address



ongoing food poverty. They also considered how to remain accessible to the new kind of volunteers they had acquired during the pandemic, who were typically people on furlough with comfortable lifestyles and new to community action. Hornbeam realised that this section of their local community was willing to offer their time and expertise and integrated them into delivering their activities. Consequently, they could extend their reach in their communities, thereby increasing their impact.

### Progression to employed positions

Another key aspect of impact relates to volunteers who went on to secure paid work within the organisations. They reported a positive impact arising from the capacity building (from acquiring/developing new skills, gaining confidence, and gaining valuable experience) and also from the new relationships and connections established.

The following quotes from volunteers at Cyrenians allude to how the volunteering, training course and subsequent employment led to the building of confidence that they lacked when they first engaged with the organisation:

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*I was volunteering, and then I heard about the position that was the Real Farming Trust training [i.e. RHE funded course]. So, then I started that course and when I finished that, I started working with Cyrenians, doing admin. Now I actually do my own teaching of the cooking classes on a Friday, which, prior to [the RHE course], I looked up at [the trainer] and I thought, "Wow, what an amazing course, you know, I'd love to do that one day", but completely didn't have the confidence back then at all. And so [the RHE funded] course has just really helped me.*

*[Interview, Staff member, Cyrenians, 2022]*

*Oh definitely. 100%. Yeah, I am so grateful to them [Cyrenians], because if it wasn't for them, then I would still be in that space [unemployed]. And then, you know, it makes me think, well, when would I get out of that? Would it be another 10 years down the line? You know, and then 10 years down the line, because you're so consumed by that... Would I have done this change so easily? I don't know...*

*[Interview, Staff member, Cyrenians, 2022]*

*I have gained an understanding of the procedures and policies in place to help the clients that use the Learning and Work service. My knowledge of online databases, data input and data analysing has been acquired through working for Cyrenians.*

*[Survey respondent, Staff, Cyrenians, 2020]*

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At Hornbeam, the journey from ‘beneficiary’ to a long-term volunteer is built into their work. Many beneficiaries (recipients of meals, trainees) found positions in the Hornbeam itself, or with other community organisations with whom Hornbeam had links.

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*Ten recipients who were receiving meals from us during the pandemic are now participating in our weekly community meal project and volunteering at The Hornbeam regularly. This helps community cohesion through a solidarity model where recipients aren’t stigmatised as ‘beneficiaries’ but can participate in different aspects of The Hornbeam with dignity.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, Jan-July 2022]*

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It was estimated by Hornbeam that around 60% of their trainees who moved on to paid work were working within the community sector and 40% moved on to the commercial hospitality/catering sector [July –Sept 2022 report].

NOW also employed trainees in their own social enterprise cafes.

In addition to acquiring/developing skills and gaining valuable experience along the way, the positive impact on volunteers was also experienced in terms of their general well-being through the relationships and connections established.

By creating volunteering opportunities, the partner projects had effectively widened their reach and strengthened local impact by supporting their local community to have a stake in the success of their projects, alongside the advantages of linking up with other local organisations and initiatives (such as those that some volunteers were associated with). On the other hand, heavy dependence on volunteer input also raises questions of uncertainty and precarity vis-à-vis the sustainability of community food provisioning.

### 3.3.2 Value of RHE partnership

Before their engagement on the RHE programme, partnership working had already been central to each of the four partner organisations in their own operational practices. However, the RHE programme made this stronger through a widening and deepening of relationships and connections with a diverse range of organisations and agencies that they worked with (which include local and national government departments and statutory agencies, voluntary and community groups, resident groups, housing agencies, schools, hospitals, etc.).

Furthermore, all the partners found it a positive experience working together over the three years, whereby they got to know about each other’s work (even inspiring each other!). Having formed an ‘informal’ learning network, it enabled them to create further impact through sharing good practices

amongst themselves. They have emphasised learning from each other in unexpected ways, including the potential of working together in the future beyond RHE.

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*Being able to work in partnership with the other three partners ... is invaluable, it enables us to share not only ideas but also problems that are then solved together. We all work in different areas of the UK and different contexts but share a deep commitment to making sure that everyone has access to nutritious food.*

*[Cyrenians, Quarterly Report, March-June 2021]*

*I think RFT has been a really great project coordination partner... Regular communication means that we feel on track and heading in the right direction with our work. We're able to explore new opportunities and additional elements of the project that will benefit it and the overall work we do long-term. The way RFT ... has linked up all the partners has been really helpful and beneficial to the project.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, Jan - March 2021]*

*RHE has helped us develop a strategy for getting food, in different forms (meals, fresh veg) out to the community on a borough-wide scale. This has helped us shape the Food Partnership plans for Waltham Forest, working with the local council, OrganicLea and members of the Food Redistribution Network.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, Jan - Apr 2022]*

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The impact of the RHE partnership was evident in two specific ways as described below.

### **A) Informal learning and sharing of good practices**

Informal learning took place in the sessions that the partner projects organised for each other. BHFP, for example, ran a session about dehydration. NOW ran a session about wraparound support into employment and another about Jam cards. In addition, the regular meetings held by the partner organisations over Zoom provided the space for them to discuss their work in their respective local contexts. In more practical ways, they visited each other to look at essential infrastructure, such as kitchens, cooking equipment, etc.

It also led to sharing of good practices. Cyrenians, for instance, learnt about distributing 'Grab and Go' meal packs from BHFP, as a useful option for encouraging families to cook together; Hornbeam learnt about income generation from NOW, and following free training from NOW, also learnt about working with neurodiverse participants.

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*...when we did the meal packs, we tried to get people involved in cooking. So, we would put everything together in a bag... And that was an idea that came out of*

*working in partnership with Brighton & Hove Partnership. So, we shared all of those sorts of ideas about how we could move on from ready meals.*

*[Cyrenians, Partner Lead, Interview, 2022]*

*... many learnings from Cyrenians in terms of running supper clubs (which our community cafe is now trialling as additional income generation) and from BHFP in terms of everything that they do! Especially the income-generating cooking workshops, which we will trial!*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, Oct'22 – Feb'23]*

*The visits to partners were all inspiring and we have reflected that it is some little things you see when you visit, the conversations you have over a cup of coffee that are so valuable that you don't get on Zoom. Having said that, the Zoom sessions that brought others into the conversation were also a source of inspiration and information. When you work in a single place it can be hard to lift your head up to see what others are doing and yet it is vital to look, listen and learn from others if you want to be the best you can be.*

*[BHFP, Quarterly Report, Oct'22-Feb'23]*

*The main impacts of working with the partnership were about sharing best practices and resources.*

*[NOW, Quarterly Report, Oct'22-Feb'23]*

*The enormous amount of learning from other projects; being able to bounce ideas off each other in a supportive environment.*

*[Cyrenians, Quarterly Report, Oct'22-Feb'23]*

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Sharing of learning amongst the partner projects led to plans for developing toolkits, e.g., BHFP on the dehydration technique for making use of excess surplus, and NOW on guidelines for working with adults with learning difficulties.

## **B) Changes in organisational culture and practices, leading to new directions in work**

The influence of working together on the RHE programme was also evident in examples of changes in organisational culture and practices. As an instance of this, NOW acknowledged the significant impact of RHE on their approach to nutrition. The nutritional analysis done in Year 1 made them much more aware of nutrition issues faced by their trainees.

RHE's emphasis on improving the nutritional content of meals led the partner projects to recognise the need for embedding nutrition monitoring more thoroughly and systematically into their work. The use of photo diaries, surveys, employing local nutritionists, and direct conversations with beneficiaries and their support agencies led to a better understanding of how to improve the nutritional content of meals while still providing food that people desired.

Furthermore, although it was not a requirement of participation in the RHE programme, the learning and partnerships supported by RHE have enabled the partner organisations to develop and fund new work beyond the RHE programme. We reflect on this further later (Section 4.5) as a particularly strong legacy of RHE.

As one of the partner projects summarised the benefits of the partnership,

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*We've really enjoyed and learnt from being in this partnership... Everyone has been generous with their time and experience, and supportive (I particularly remember some of those COVID lockdown meetings talking about really practical challenges regarding delivering meals but also a feeling of emotional support from others whose pandemic experience was similar). One of the nice things is that all the people who were involved at the start are still there now meaning we have been able to develop as a team...*

*[BHFP, Quarterly Report, Oct'22-Feb'23]*

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## 4. Reflections

RHE's primary objective was to improve the nutritional quality of ready-to-eat meals provided in food poverty projects. It funded activities that could lead to improving unhealthy diets accessed by vulnerable groups in their community. The aim was to show that community organisations can produce cost-effective and nutritious meals to break the cycle of fast unhealthy food dependence by disadvantaged families. We have presented earlier the evidence on the positive social impact that RHE has generated by linking the provision of good, ready-to-eat food with training (and volunteering) opportunities. Reflecting further on the key research findings, we highlight here five key dimensions of the RHE programme.

### 4.1 Community focus: Care and empowerment

Care and empowerment came across as key themes in the RHE programme. All four partner projects were driven by the belief that food is not just for satisfying the needs of nutrition, but **food is also a social conduit/vehicle** for bringing people into community spaces. A holistic model of care is needed that addresses the wider social and cultural dimensions of food deprivation. Notwithstanding challenges faced over limited resources and capacity, their work was **person-centred**, involving a personalised level of care and support for beneficiaries.

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*...it's about looking at the whole, not just sticking a roof over somebody's head, you know, or not just putting a plate of food in front of somebody or making sure somebody's not going hungry. It's about a holistic look at people.*

*[Cyrenians, Partner Lead, Interview, Nov 2022]*

*A big lesson learned has been the ability of community organisations and people to address nuance and complexity in a way that councils and government cannot.*

*[BHFP Volunteer, Quarterly report, Oct-Dec 2020]*

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The experiential **progression from crisis to capacity building** was evident amongst the different beneficiary groups across all the partner projects. For example, some participants who entered training programmes did so from a 'low' baseline position, and the primary goal in such instances was not necessarily to get them 'employment ready', but rather to focus on building confidence, developing skills and improving their sense of well-being. Building this foundation, therefore, is critical to *then* working towards employability. Thus, **valuing social (and in most cases intangible) benefits** as much as vocational skills (particularly for those participants who experienced social isolation or lacked confidence and self-esteem) came across strongly in the partner projects.

Reflecting on their solidarity model of working, Hornbeam’s integrated approach to volunteering and including beneficiaries in their work ultimately created a de-stigmatized environment, as the following quote suggests:

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*... we have seen that there is not a real division between staff, volunteers and beneficiaries. Most of our beneficiaries helped many of our projects in numerous ways. They’ve helped us sourcing surplus supplies, finding other beneficiaries. Being local they pointed us to the vulnerable and at-risk beneficiaries whom we now regularly send meals to.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, Oct-Dec 2020]*

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There is no question that socially excluded groups were represented in the RHE work and the partner projects adapted activities in response to needs and feedback from beneficiaries. This reflects a more **holistic model of care**, which is person-centred, compassionate and impactful at different levels; formal evaluation processes must find effective ways to capture these multi-level impacts.

## 4.2 Partnership and aggregated funding streams for wider reach and impact

There is a tendency amongst funders in the community development sector to seek or demand a specific, quantifiable sense of the impact that can be attributed to a particular funding stream for targeted community-scale interventions. However, all four partner organisations acknowledged the difficulties they encountered when asked to identify and describe the impact of one stream of funding (e.g., RHE in this case). Partners sometimes were unable to distinguish/differentiate between RHE-specific funded activity, and non-RHE funded activity/outcomes. As they described it, ‘the money is all in one pot’ – that is, funds received from different sources (including from local authorities and community fundraising) had been pooled and used across all their activities and programmes. This was particularly evident during the first half of the RHE programme, which coincided with spending more money than they had ever done to fund one activity (i.e., COVID-19 emergency food response) and pooling resources together was the only way to do it.

We found all the partner projects operating on the principle of pooling resources and working collaboratively and flexibly with other programmes delivered by them. As NOW described it, this was crucial for them to ensure participants had a “seamless journey” and the use of multiple sources of funding for different interventions enabled them to achieve that.

However, the partner projects acknowledged that without the RHE funding, they could not have developed and pursued their ideas and activities that they successfully carried out over a period of three years, and this had a significant impact on sustaining their work.

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*Trying to take RHE out of it would dilute the value of it ... and what we do...*

*[NOW Partner Lead, Interview, Sept 2022]*

*Without RHE funding, we wouldn't have had the funding or even been mentally prepared to provide ready meals at such short notice. We provided over 40,000 meals over the two years of the pandemic. But it is also about how we made and distributed these meals - we always had long-term sustainability in mind and were identifying ways to create longer-term solutions, which we are now exploring and developing, like food pantries and co-ops, like tiered payment schemes for ready meals.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, Oct'22- Feb'23]*

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The partnership-based value of RHE has undoubtedly been about achieving a wider reach of diverse groups across different contexts as well as sustaining the impact of food interventions over a longer period, than what could have potentially been achieved otherwise. Attributing specific, quantifiable impact to a single funding stream or intervention, however, can be problematic, and to some extent undesirable. This is an enduring thorny issue in the area of impact measurement in the wider context, especially when multiple funding streams are involved.

### **4.3 Surplus food innovations and dilemma**

Sourcing of food ingredients – in terms of both adequate quantity and good quality – was central to the preparation and delivery of meals by the partner projects. Except for NOW, the other three partner projects (Cyrenians, Hornbeam, and BHFP) relied to a varying extent on using surplus food for the RHE-funded activities. It is estimated that over the three years, the partner projects sourced nearly 314 tonnes of surplus food from organisations like FareShare, the Felix Project, Real Junk Food Project, and some independent outlets. As described above, this underpinned the huge number of meals (far exceeding their targets) that the partner projects were able to provide to people in need who reached out to them, either directly to them or through other community partners/groups over three years. This required specific skills and a great amount of flexibility on the part of community organisations, including effective coordination and collaboration among various actors along the food supply chain.

The interviews with the partner project leads revealed that they were able to (re)act in an agile, nimble and 'real-time' way to procure and prepare food for meals because of their networks, and physical proximity with suppliers in some cases. For example, Cyrenians and FareShare staff and volunteers described "popping across the road" to each other's physical office, storage, and kitchen space to solve logistical issues almost instantly. However, when this proximity and the relationships built/developed are compromised (as with FareShare's plan to relocate to a bigger warehouse), Cyrenians anticipate higher risks to operating effectively in a real-time and agile way.



Similarly, for BHFP, who coordinate the Surplus Food Network, the nature of their office space occupied by multiple organisations working with communities and food access, afforded them opportunities to communicate and operate in real-time in a collaborative, cross-partnership way.

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*The gleaning network share office space with us because what we do here is we basically sublet to a load of other food projects to really facilitate this cross-partnership working, and so [my colleague] who sits just there and who works for the food partnership is also gleaning coordinator.*

*[BHFP Staff, Interview, 2022]*

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For Hornbeam, working with the Waltham Forest Food Redistribution Food Network had a significant influence. The use of mobile phones and WhatsApp was an effective means to facilitate the movement of surplus food throughout different hubs within the network and local communities. Therefore, effective communication was fundamental to ensuring the successful redistribution of food, as the following quote shows:

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*With [this supplier], definitely WhatsApp and calls on the phone work. And then there are people who collect from us weekly. We found that it was easiest to have regular collections [with certain organisations]*

*[Hornbeam Staff, Interview, 2022]*

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While the partner organisations became innovative and resourceful in sourcing, collecting, and using surplus food in various ways, and generally saw themselves as playing a key role in preventing waste in the food supply chains, we also noted a degree of discomfort among them about being perceived as giving 'leftover' food to people in need. There was also discomfort about supporting a food system that overproduces, leading to considerable food wastage in the first place.

There was a preference for sourcing food from local producers (e.g., farmer's markets, local farms), although the costs (and logistics) of sourcing non-surplus food remained the most common barrier.

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*We do not, at the moment, have a need to purchase additional fresh produce, as we get enough in surplus. However, when we are low on produce, we do put in an emergency order with OrganicLea/Sarah Green Organics. This has only happened twice this quarter. Where we do purchase food, it's for staples we don't have and spices. These we either buy from local independent shops in our community or in bulk from the co-op, Infinity Foods.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, 2021]*

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Although there was no data on the different *types* of food surplus that were used across the three partner projects, there were concerns over dwindling supplies of surplus food of adequate quality and increased competition among food projects themselves to procure enough to meet their respective needs.

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*In our recent emergency food survey (which was completed by all 41 of the city's food projects) 54% said that they were struggling because supplies of surplus food had dropped... Whilst we know that there is still enormous amounts of waste in the system, actions such as ending Best Before Date use and 'wonky boxes' are possibly impacting surplus supply (good things when looking from a waste perspective).*

*[BHFP, Quarterly report, Apr-July 2022]*

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Our research shows that where there is a reliance on food surplus supply, redistributors, like Fareshare and similar organisations, were well-placed to distribute certain kinds of food surplus from the food industry, but fresh fruit and vegetables were difficult to source in sufficient quantities in the mainstream food surplus supply chain. However, there were times when there were gluts in a specific item, posing problems for adequate storage and for using them to make meals quickly enough to avoid wastage. This had motivated BHFP's work on the dehydration of excess vegetables, and Hornbeam and Cyrenians set up community-run pop-up stalls for redistributing some of the surplus to smaller local community groups/projects, making pickles and fermenting produce, etc. However, a wastage of some of the surplus was also unavoidable when they were of low quality when received, and/or there was a lack of capacity (storage, skills for using the excess, etc.) as we noted from our field visits. The partner projects concur with the view that there need to be more high-quality food ingredients (i.e., in terms of freshness, nutritional content, and cultural diversity) in the surplus supply chains if they remain a primary source of food and nutrition for large numbers of people in the country.

Also, in the wider context, with an increasing number of community food projects (and an increasing number of people turning to them) highly dependent on surplus food supplies, over which the community projects have very little or no control, it raises questions on how this affects people's diets, and hence, nutritional and health outcomes in the longer run.

Overall, it was hoped that as the emergency food response brought on by the pandemic receded, RHE partner projects would be able to focus more on sourcing from diverse local food producers, but this remained challenging. The consensus view amongst the partner organisations was that they (and community food provisioning more broadly) needed greater support and resources to ensure that community organisations and people who prepare food and who need the food have more control over what they can cook and what they get to eat.

## 4.4 Challenges in data collection

### 4.4.1 Challenges faced by RHE partner organisations

The partner organisations varied in terms of the existing level of in-house expertise and experience, ranging from using specialised software to the use of simple methods, for monitoring, documenting, and reporting data on changes /outcomes of RHE-funded activities. Furthermore, since Year 1 of RHE, the partner projects faced challenges brought on by the pandemic, including compliance with restrictions (e.g., Rule of 6 limiting how many people they could have in the kitchen), or staff/volunteer issues with either sickness or close contact isolation, or shielding.

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*Everything taking longer/more staff time than planned was a theme for us, e.g., Recruitment – we began recruitment for our courses prior to 1-to-1 services returning for many other organisations. This meant our established routes to reach those who would most benefit from attending the course were much less accessible during this time. As such we relied more on self-referrals, as opposed to those from referrers working in the local area e.g., social/support workers. Attendance – various factors impacted upon attendance on the day for trainees. Transport often presented an issue, being unreliable or inaccessible to some due to cost. Other individual commitments also presented, i.e., access to childcare, medical appointments, general wellbeing/mental health on the day and other life disruptions...*

*[BHFP, Quarterly Report 4, Oct'22-Feb'23]*

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The pressures eased over the three years, but difficulties remained for all partner projects in prioritising data collection for demonstrating impacts. Our interviews with partner leads indicate that this was more due to a lack of time, resources, and organisational capacity rather than a lack of interest.

Except for NOW (which had been using the Outcomes Star over a long period), the other partner organisations acknowledged that although their 'light touch' approach to monitoring and evaluation was beneficial in that it enabled them to focus on delivery, they valued the significance of demonstrating the benefits/impacts from their activities more systematically and rigorously.

Not surprisingly, the partner organisations generally found it easy to track output/activity measures (e.g., number of meals, number of trainees, etc.). However, in terms of monitoring and assessing outcomes (actual changes brought about by the intervention), data collected by the partner projects was limited. In the case of training programmes, for example, one reason put forward was that once the trainees completed the course and moved on, it was difficult to track them or communicate with them as they became busy in their new roles.

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*We have limited data about the situation of the first cohorts of trainees in the months following their training. Ex-trainees are difficult to track.*

*[RHE Report, July-Dec 2021]*

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Another reason was the customised training provided to trainees which was person-specific in response to their particular needs and aspirations.

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*... some of the monitoring around the training was tricky to keep track of because of the nature of our training programme (which was very flexible to each individual, so people were starting and ending at different times and some people chose to stay on for longer).*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, Oct'22 – Feb'23]*

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Although the partner organisations in most cases continued to support trainees in various ways, it was *ad hoc* in nature. Engagement with the research team helped them examine the need to be more systematic where possible, and as the following quotes illustrate, they increased their efforts to obtain post-training data.

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*We have all this anecdotal information and we now need to quantify it/put it into a format that can be monitored as part of the reporting. ... (CAWR) has provided a standard post-traineeship form, which we still need to adapt in order to get all the meaningful, qualitative data from trainees who have left.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly report, Apr-July 2022]*

*We stay in touch with trainees informally once they leave (through texts and calls and they do on occasion return to visit and/or volunteer). We are aware of needing to record this feedback more formally so we will devise a follow-up survey with trainees to ask them to complete 3 months after leaving.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly report, July-Dec 2021]*

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In another instance of the type of challenges faced, BHFP had set up the initial trainee surveys to be anonymous to encourage more people to respond. However, it made it then impossible for them to compare the trainee's post-course data with tracking their progression. While both data were valuable in their own right, they did not help with tracking progression. The following quote reveals a general reflection shared by the partner projects:

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*... we've struggled to know what to capture/monitor and how to share that. The research team were helpful with ideas on how to go about this, but we've struggled with the capacity to systematically capture evidence/data/ feedback. A big learning is to integrate more of this monitoring into the core of our work - much as the NOW Group do.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, Oct'22 – Feb'23]*

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Addressing the challenges in data capture and data sharing processes and in maintaining an accurate database could be areas where more attention is required for both internal and external monitoring and evaluation purposes. A sharing of experiences and good practices in the systematic monitoring of activities by community food organisations could be a useful learning opportunity for future projects.

#### 4.4.2 Challenges faced by the research team

During the first year of RHE, the research team attempted to gather consistent and rigorous data from the partner projects. However, as the impacts of the pandemic unfolded (along with regulations and restrictions on face-to-face interaction, in-person visits, and fieldwork) partner engagement became sporadic, and engagement by the research team was also disrupted/slowed down, which created moments of project drift. Attempts were made to produce and collect remotely. Nonetheless, response rates to surveys (both online, and paper copies), for example, from beneficiaries were quite poor and it did not allow for systematic analysis and comparison. A common reason was that much of the communication with recipients of meals by the partner projects was over the phone or through people's referrers (social workers, independent living officers, etc.). Other barriers in some cases were issues of language; access to computers; beneficiaries who were elderly or had learning difficulties; and the overall lack of organisational capacity and resources to oversee the data collection process.

As the project developed, the research team started working more alongside the partner organisations, advising and supporting them on suitable methods or using the data that they were already collecting for their own purposes (e.g., Outcomes Star) for social impact. However, this also meant that maintaining consistency in the amount and rigour of the data collected across the partner organisations became challenging. Balancing data production (i.e., the research team generating the data) with data collation (i.e., harvesting data that was already there) in a targeted, systematic way, specifically for the RHE funded activities, became challenging.

Standard data collection methods proved ineffectual, especially when engaging with vulnerable groups (e.g., people with learning difficulties and autism). The need for relying on facilitators (from the project staff) came to the fore during the data collection phase. This highlighted the need for greater attention much earlier in the research cycle on co-creating more effective research methods with partner projects. The use of creative research methods, for example, could have been more relevant. There was also a degree of confusion in some instances over who was collecting the required data, how frequently, and from whom, which is attributable to some extent to a lack of regular and consistent communication and coordination between the team and all the partner projects. These

created obstacles to sharing of data, stories, and other information, not least identifying how best to ‘measure’ the impacts arising from the programme.

Impact assessment is rarely straightforward and acknowledging that there are gaps in the research undertaken is important. It is also fair that we do not underestimate the impact of the major disruptions caused by the pandemic on the overall project implementation and evaluation, and how that also meant taking a more realistic approach such as not overburdening the partner organisations.

Outside of navigating the specific complexities of the wider context within which RHE was delivered, our research has highlighted the need for wider reflection among key stakeholders (including funders) on how to design stronger collaborative evaluation approaches. This will include, for example, paying more attention at the very start to clarify the expectations among all stakeholders, establish a collective commitment, ensure open communication and engagement, encourage effective practices, and follow specific guidelines to support collaboration that makes the evaluation process run optimally.

## 4.5 Legacy of the RHE Programme

Ensuring that RHE addressed the primary goal of improving the nutritional quality of ready-cooked meals provided to vulnerable groups did not turn out to be a simple process. Nonetheless, all four partner projects indicated that their participation in RHE had led them to pay increased attention to nutrition in their work, and importantly, they have expressed their intent to continue with focusing on the nutritional aspects of ready meals beyond their engagement with RHE. This is a particularly strong legacy of the RHE programme, as the following quotes show.

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*The biggest legacy from this [RHE] project is what we have learnt on nutrition, it has been an eye opener in terms of what the value of food is, and the nutritional value of food and we need to be teaching people.*

*[NOW Staff, Interview, Sept 2022]*

*We are looking to replicate, at least in part, some of the project, in the Scottish Borders as part of a proposal for the UK Community Investment fund. We are already working with local communities in the Borders with funding from Borders council and so believe that the training and meals aspects of the RFT project could be very successfully applied in the Borders. Links between rural and urban areas are more developed and there could be broader scope for sourcing local ingredients; links with local farmers are being established.'*

*[Cyrenians, Quarterly Report, Apr-July 2022]*

*We've really enjoyed and learnt from being in this partnership. All of the partners have an approach that shows what it means to support and believe in people in moving towards the work/skills/leisure destination they want to go to. This has*

*helped our confidence that this approach (which is what we also seek to do) is the right one... One of the nice things is that all the people who were involved at the start are still there now meaning we have been able to develop as a team. So many partnerships have never-ending personnel changes which makes that trust development harder. I have no doubt that we will continue to engage with all of the organisations.*

*[BHFP, Quarterly Report, Oct'22-Feb'23]*

*The work we did through RHE helped us build a strong food resilience network, made up of small, independent food 'hubs' and mutual aid groups. This meant we were in a very good position to be commissioned by the local authority (London Borough of Waltham Forest) to work on long-term food resilience in response to food insecurity locally. As part of this, we are setting up a Food Partnership (learning from our Brighton & Hove partner). This is the legacy of the RHE funding.*

*[Hornbeam, Quarterly Report, Oct 22- Feb 23]*

Notwithstanding the diversity in their business models and the size/scale of operations, the partners found the collaborative nature of sharing knowledge, key learnings, and good practices useful in strengthening their strategic positions locally. Hornbeam, for example, leveraged their RHE experience to successfully apply for a local government tender to develop a food insecurity plan for their borough (as the above quote shows).



## 5. Recommendations

RHE partner projects were – and are -- acutely aware of the demands that the pandemic and the cost of living crisis placed on their operational delivery within already tight budgets, as well as the tremendous pressure that the vulnerable members in their local communities were under for meeting their essential needs of food and other support. Their beneficiaries were mainly from disadvantaged groups (e.g., those on benefits or low incomes, the elderly, people with long-term health issues, people with mobility issues, people with poor mental health, people with learning disabilities, and people with intersecting vulnerabilities) who are at greatest risk of food and nutrition poverty. The challenges that they saw ahead concerns the the lack of necessary resources (financial, infrastructure, capacity, etc.) that would be necessary for community organisations like them to continue with their work. As one of the partner project leads put it,

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*The challenges would be the cost of living and the increased costs, and the reduction in our revenue coming through because people have less disposable income. So, it's not only we are being squeezed through our energy costs... that is the worrying thing... that is a worry. I can see the Cafe slipping when the [increased] cost of energy bills do come in.*

*[NOW Partner Lead, Interview 2022]*

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In the spatial and temporal context from which the above research findings emerged, we propose five recommendations. These recommendations, we hope, will not only enable the partner organisations to plan their future projects but will also be relevant for other community-based organisations and stakeholders, such as policymakers and funders who are interested in building the capacity of community food projects to achieve a greater societal impact.

### **R1. Invest in cross-sectoral collaborations and partnership working to amplify the impact**

Existing cross-sectoral alliances and partnership working by each of the partner organisations in their respective communities were key to delivering RHE funded activities alongside other funded programmes in many instances. Encouraging community food organisations to identify and build connections across diverse stakeholder groups for establishing collaborative relationships that enable the mobilisation and sharing of necessary resources is important to amplify impact. These relationships also hold the potential for nurturing innovative approaches that can address concerns over nutrition, health, and social justice in community food provisioning. However, partnership working is not without its challenges, and understanding barriers to collaboration and overcoming them is critical.



## **R2. Invest in sourcing food from diverse food supply chains**

The interception, (re) distribution and/or use of surplus food for making healthy and nutritious meals was an important consideration for three out of the four partner projects. This had its limitations (in terms of adequate quantity and quality, and overall unpredictability of food surplus supplies). On the one hand, this led to innovative and creative ways of utilising surplus food, but on the other, it did not lead to utilising other food supply chains for fresher, healthier, diverse and sustainable food as expected. By the end of the RHE programme, some of the partner projects had started developing new links with local food producers, which hold potential for the future. Community organisations that prepare ready meals need greater support and resources to give them more control over procurement and meal preparation that improves people's health and nutrition, instead of being pushed to depend on unpredictable/unreliable food surplus supply chains. Along with R1, investment in building organisational capacity and resources is required for sourcing affordable, nutritious food from diverse, sustainable short food supply food chains.

## **R3. Secure long-term funding to sustain the impact**

Access to RHE funds up front by the four partner projects gave them the flexibility and agility to respond to the emergency need for food support for the most vulnerable during the pandemic, and later on, the sustained funding enabled them to continue their work in a much stronger strategic position. Securing long-term funding is key to trialling innovative ideas and enabling learning from these trials to be used for improving practices in a way that short-term/uncertain funding does not allow. Long-term funding, especially in the community food provisioning sector is necessary not only to directly achieve specific project aims, but also to build community capacity, community empowerment, and community ownership -- key ingredients for moving away from short-term solutions to longer-term community food resilience.

## **R4. Embed systematic but flexible processes and systems to track and report social impact**

Community organisations, most often time and resource-poor, are not always able to monitor systematically their impact longitudinally. Among the partner projects, there were instances of improved monitoring practices, for example, the use of photo diaries, the nutritional analysis of community meals, and the tracking of the employment status of trainees. Allocation of resources into embedding systematic, but flexible, processes and systems to track and report social impact, therefore, provides scope for self-learning towards developing new strategies and practices in response to changing circumstances. Furthermore, good evidence of social impact improves the prospects for community organisation to secure long-term funding (R3) and it is crucial to build the evidence base needed to inform changes in policies at a range of scales.

## R5. Share good practices and key learnings

The RHE programme supported activities by partner projects that fostered active participation by beneficiaries, volunteers, and engagement with food suppliers, (re)distributors, and other key stakeholders. Many key learnings emerged over the course of the three-year programme aimed at meeting RHE's objectives on nutrition, training and employment. Furthermore, although RHE did not set out to be a network where mentor-mentee relationships were cultivated, the collective learning and reflection that occurred influenced attitudes, organisational values, and practices. Community organisations will benefit strongly from more direct, one-to-one coaching and mentoring relationships where deeper insights and solutions to specific contexts could be elicited. The sharing of good practices and key learnings will be crucial for capacity building and empowerment of community food projects.

## 6. Conclusion

As our research has shown, the social impact of using 'food as a vehicle for social good' by community-based organisations is considerable in terms of a multitude of positive outcomes for both individuals and the wider local communities. This strongly supports other studies from across the country that show the vital role played by such organisations in improving the lives of local communities. From being a 'lifeline', they can be and have been 'life-changing' for some of the most vulnerable members in our communities (Saxena et al. 2022). However, these organisations also face significant challenges. On the one hand, large numbers of people are turning to them for support because of increasing energy and food insecurity in the country; while on the other hand, rising operational costs (e.g., increased utility bills, rent, and reduced income-generating capacity) are making them unviable. Adequate and sufficient resources from national, regional, and local governments that could support such organisations to scale up their positive social impact are sorely missing. This is a critical area that requires urgent attention, more so now in the wider context of the 'cost of living crisis' and the economic recession in the country. Furthermore, from a transformative and socially just stance, it is also important to sustain the pressure for making systemic structural changes (e.g., in household incomes, welfare benefits, public support services, sustainable food supply chains, etc.) such that people are not pushed into seeking crisis support in the first place, and healthy, nutritious, and affordable food is available to everyone.

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### **Luke Owen**

Formerly, Assistant Professor at the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience based at Coventry University. Luke is a social scientist with a research background in Human Geography. His work involves exploring the sociology of Alternative Food Networks, Community Food Businesses and Short Food Supply Chains. He has worked extensively to co-produce quantitative and qualitative datasets and deepen understanding about how these types of initiatives contribute to rural development and social impact outcomes.

### **Jordon Lazell**


Lecturer of Marketing at Essex Business School, at the University of Essex, and former Research Assistant at the Centre for Business in Society at Coventry University. Jordon is a social scientist with a background in consumer behaviour and sustainable consumption. His work focuses on the problem of food waste, in particular the everyday practices that contribute towards the waste of food by households and businesses. He has considerable experience delivering research projects on topics including surplus food redistribution within the community sector, social innovation in the bioplastic sector, food waste within retail supply chains, the challenges of creative freelance work, the lived experiences of people experiencing financial precarity, amongst other work in circular and convivial economy. Jordon is a co-editor of the Routledge Handbook of Food waste and co-founder of [foodwastestudies.com](http://foodwastestudies.com), a platform that facilitates knowledge sharing between practitioners and academics working in the field of food waste and food loss.


## Appendices

### 1. Profile of RHE partner organisations

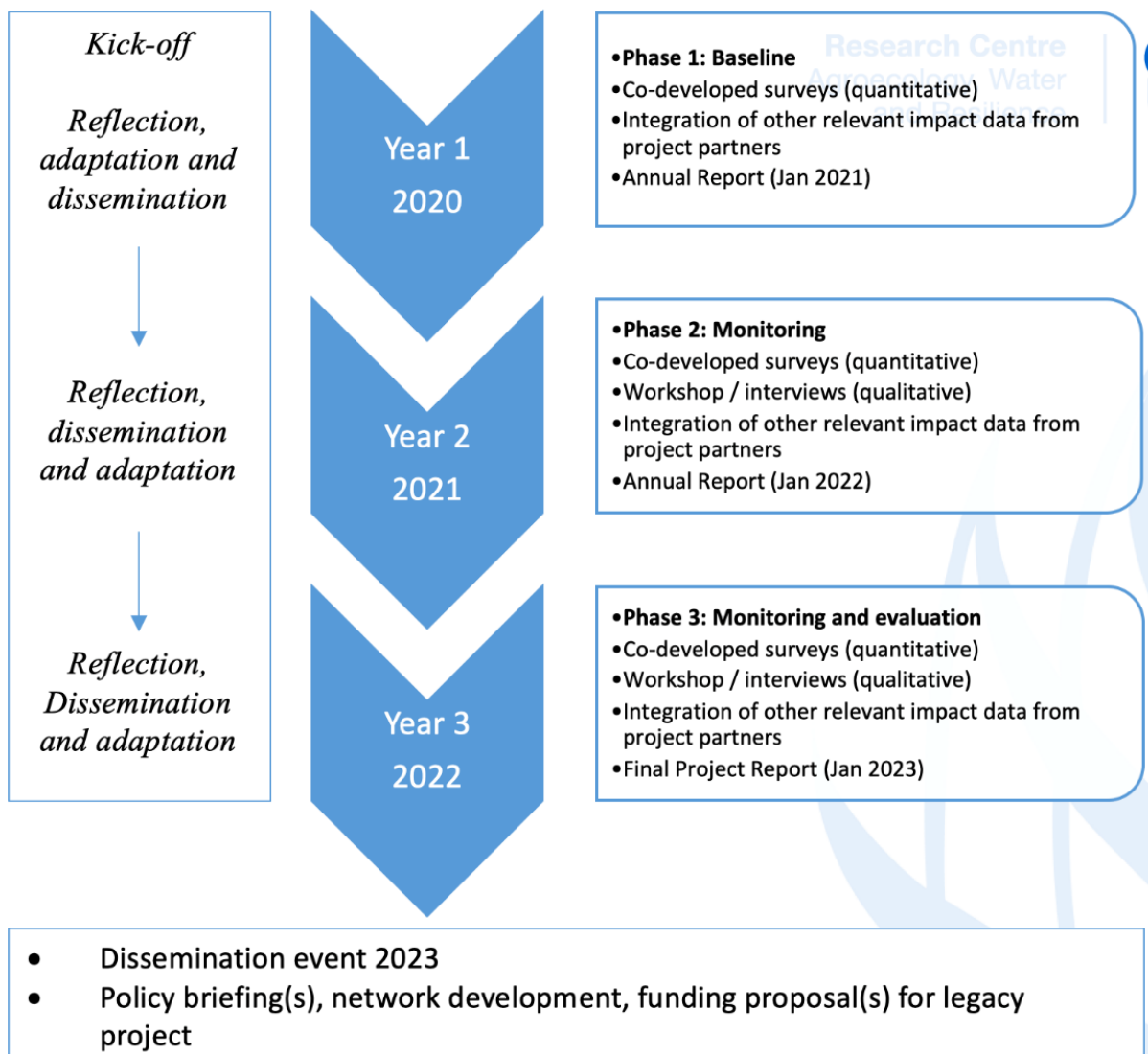
RHE Partner	Location	Date est.	Type of org.	Mission statement and core aim(s)
NOW Group	Belfast, Northern Ireland	2014	Social enterprise	<i>We provide a range of services that support people with learning difficulties and autism to realise their full potential and change their lives for the better. Our services focus on supporting people into employment, training, transition and volunteering. We also offer a family service to support new and expectant parents with a learning difficulty or autism.</i> <a href="#">(NOW Group, 2022)</a>
The Hornbeam Centre	Walthamstow London, England	2019	Workers' co-operative	<i>Our vision is to build an inclusive, mixed community eating space which is socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable. We work to play a small part towards building a healthy, sustainable food system in which people and the planet are respected from seed to plate, and communities have more power over the food available to them.</i> <a href="#">(The Hornbeam Centre, 2022)</a>
Cyrenians	Leith, Edinburgh, Scotland	2014	Charity	<i>At Cyrenians, we tackle the causes and consequences of homelessness. We understand that there are many routes into homelessness and that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to supporting people towards more positive and stable futures. That's why all our work is values-led and relationships-based... We believe that everyone has the right to dignified access to good food. Our projects remove food insecurity and build community, connection, and resilience through the sharing of food.</i> <a href="#">(Cyrenians, 2022)</a>
Brighton & Hove Food Partnership	Brighton, England	2003	Not-for-profit	<i>The Brighton &amp; Hove Food Partnership puts food at the heart of all we do working for a healthy, sustainable and fair food system for the city. Growing food, cooking and eating together have demonstrable impact on health and wellbeing. For over fifteen years, we have been working with food to engage with people. We are at the forefront of a global place-based food movement, which aims to bring people back to the basic message that good food is a right for all, brings power and energy to everyone and is a joy to be shared.</i> <a href="#">(Brighton &amp; Hove Food Partnership, 2022)</a>

## 2. Detailed table of outcomes, indicators, measures of success for RHE

Outcome	Outcome description	Indicator	Measure of success	Timescale for completion
<b>Outcome 1</b>  <b>Trainees and employment</b>  	<b>People who have found it hard to gain employment are mentored and trained with transferable skills in catering and helped to use those skills to improve their employment prospects</b>	<b>Indicator 1a</b>  Trainees gain skills We will know we are achieving this by monitoring the number of trainees who complete the courses	At least 176 trainees have acquired transferable skills	End of project
		<b>Indicator 1b</b>  The skills trainees acquire improve their prospects for employment. We will know we are achieving this by monitoring the outcomes of the three-month post-training mentoring programme	All trainees complete their post-training mentoring programme and have secured or have improved options for future employment	At the end of each post-training mentoring programme for each group of trainees
		<b>Indicator 1c</b>  The trainees report an increase in their confidence We know we are achieving this through monitoring distance travelled (entrance and exit interviews).	All trainees complete the course and mentoring programme and the exit interviews indicate improved self-esteem and confidence amongst the trainees	At the end of the training programme for each cohort

<p><b>Outcome 2</b></p> <p><b>Nutritional benefit</b></p> 	<p><b>People at risk of food poverty or insecurity have benefitted from healthy, nutritious meals</b></p>	<p><b>Indicator 2a</b></p> <p>Healthy, nutritious meals are provided to different vulnerable groups across the community. We will know we are achieving this outcome by monitoring the number of meals provided, the beneficiary groups they are provided to and through monitoring the nutritional content of a sample of the meals</p>	<p>Partner organisations will have provided at least 8,650 healthy meals to recipients from a range of vulnerable groups e.g. Foodbank users, elderly people, refugees, school children, people with mental health issues/learning difficulties.</p>	<p>By the end of the project but monitored yearly</p>
		<p><b>Indicator 2b</b></p> <p>Representatives from recipient groups are involved in menu development empowering them to take control of their food. We will know we are achieving this through monitoring the composition of the menu development groups</p>	<p>The meals get good feedback from recipients and support services and meet the cultural as well as nutritional needs of the recipients</p>	<p>Monitored as part of yearly reporting</p>

### 3. Flowchart of the main phases of the research process





#### 4. Overview of the dataset by method used for Social Impact Assessment

Method	Number delivered (2020-2023)	Number of participants involved (2020-2023)	Types of participants involved
Interviews with participants	2x trainee interviews 1x Supplier interview 2 x volunteer chefs	5	Trainees, beneficiaries, volunteers, suppliers
Interviews with partners	4x supply chain interviews 5x staff interviews 2 community partner interviews	11	Partner Leads, Staff Community partner leads
Focus group sessions with participants	4x trainee focus group sessions 1x beneficiary focus group session 1 volunteer focus group sessions 1 trainee focus group session	34	Trainees, Volunteers, beneficiaries, staff
Observation	1x Food preparation Workshop 1 Food Hygiene Session		
Staff Surveys	2x staff surveys	8	Staff
Consumer surveys	2x consumer surveys	15	Consumers
Volunteer surveys	3x volunteer surveys	52	Volunteers
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>16x interviews 7x focus sessions 7x surveys</b>	<b>125 respondents</b>	<b>Trainees, partners, beneficiaries, suppliers, staff, consumers, volunteers</b>
Nutritional analysis	4x nutritional analysis conducted by Coventry University	All 4x partners	Indicative/typical meal analysed for each partner
Quarterly reporting	1x report per quarter per partner (12 quarterly reporting periods)	All 4x partners reported quarterly	Partners reporting on trainee progress, nutrition, income generation, their own organisational evaluation / monitoring activities

## 5. What RHE achieved\_2020-2021 infographic

# READY HEALTHY EAT

A partnership to develop great ready meals  
for people that need them



## What we achieved in 2020-2021

We served

**500,000 MEALS**

which were delicious and nutritious  
to people that need them



We used **200 TONNES OF  
SURPLUS FOOD**



from shops, farms, restaurants  
and wholesalers

**50 TRAINEES**

learnt catering skills and are  
on their way to employment



### What we believe

Everyone should have  
access to a good  
nutritious diet, every day.

Food should come with  
care, dignity and  
kindness.

Given the chance,  
communities do want to  
help and work together.

Food systems should be  
part of a thriving  
biosphere. That means  
agroecological farming  
and no food wasted.

## 6. Overview of the dataset used for Outcome 1

	<b><i>NOW</i></b>	<b><i>Hornbeam</i></b>	<b><i>Cyrenians</i></b>	<b><i>BHFP</i></b>
Partner-led evaluation survey	Outcome Star data produced by partner (2020-2023)	Wellbeing Log (2021 – 2022)	Outcome Star used 2020-21 but shifted towards an alternative approach (2022-23)	Trainee cohort evaluations at the end of the course and follow-up at 3-6 months after the end of the course (2020-2023)
Partner-led interview				1x interview with trainee (2022)
Research-led Interview	1x interview with Partner Staff (2022)	1x interview with Partner Staff (2022)	1x interview with trainee (2021)	
Research-led focus session	3x focus sessions with current and former trainees (Loaf Academy) (2022)	No focus session with trainees	1x focus session with former trainees + trainer (2021)	1x focus session with trainees (2022) 1x online focus group with volunteers (2021)

## 7. Overview of the dataset used for Outcome 2

	<b>NOW</b>	<b>Hornbeam</b>	<b>Cyrenians</b>	<b>BHFP</b>
Partner-led nutritional analysis	Reporting feedback from beneficiaries and menu development (2020-2023)  Food diaries (2021)	Reporting feedback from beneficiaries and menu development (2020-2023)	Reporting feedback from beneficiaries and menu development (2020-2023)	Reporting feedback from beneficiaries and menu development (2020-2023)  Partnered with EBFC (2022)
Research-led nutritional analysis	Nutritional analysis by Coventry University (2020)	Nutritional analysis by Coventry University (2020)	Nutritional analysis by Coventry University (2020)	Nutritional analysis by Coventry University (2020)
Partner-led survey with beneficiaries		1x survey (6 participants) (March 2022)  1x survey/micro-interview (10 participants) (2022)  Wellbeing Log (2022 – 2023)		BHFP's in-depth case study on East Brighton Food Co-op (2022)
Research-led focus session with beneficiaries	1 focus group session (n=4, part of the T1 cohort)  Observed Nutrition workshop for students (T1 cohort) delivered by staff Observed a food hygiene session, delivered by staff, for students working towards their NVQ level 1 in catering	Focus group session (n=4), inclg. 2 beneficiaries, and the other 2 both beneficiaries and volunteers  (Nov 2022)	1 focus group session (2022)	1x focus group (2022)
Research-led interview	Interview with project staff (2022)	Interview with project staff (2022)	Interviews with 2 community partners who were indirect beneficiaries (2022)	No interviews