

The Role of Food in Building Connections and Relationships

Introduction

Ageing Better is a test and learn programme. It is collecting information and insights from across 14 partnerships to identify learning that will be useful for other programmes and organisations delivering activities aimed at reducing social isolation in people aged 50+.

Key messages about using food to build connections and relationships

It is clear that food can be one of the tools that can be used to help build connections and relationships but it will not suit or engage everyone. Using food, as with any tool needs some thought and consideration.

Our key learning is:

1. Food gives people something to talk about. This can be likes, dislikes and memories. For socially isolated people who are 50+ this can be an easy topic to begin connecting over.
2. Eating food can help create an informal environment. This can help relax people and help them interact - having a meal together gives people something to talk about.
3. Food can be a particularly useful tool to engage men. It can be used in a variety of different ways e.g. as a hook to attend and also as an activity, such as learning to cook. The key appears to be providing an activity for them to engage with so creating an environment where they are more likely to engage further.
4. Food can be closely connected to people's identity. This can be a positive but it can also exclude people if they feel something is not for them.
5. Including food in your programme can also be expensive and careful consideration should be made to the budget to ensure a good quality of food can be provided.