

Interim Evaluation Report

Community Food Hub in Foleshill, Coventry



February 2021

Dr Lopamudra Patnaik Saxena, Dr Jana Fried,
Dr Luke Owen, Prof Moya Kneafsey

Centre for Agroecology, Water & Resilience
Coventry University

Research Centre
Agroecology, Water
and Resilience



Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Background	4
Expected outcomes- key findings	5
Challenges	7
Recommendations	9
Concluding remarks	9
1. Introduction	10
1.1 Community Food Hubs	10
1.2 Community Food Hub in Foleshill, Coventry	10
1.3 Foleshill Community Centre.....	12
1.4 Project Area: Foleshill ward in Coventry.....	13
2. Evaluation overview.....	14
2.1 Methodology.....	15
2.2 Ethics	16
3. Progress in Expected Outcomes	17
3.1 Outcome 1: Food Resilience	17
3.11 Membership.....	18
3.12 Access to affordable food	20
3.13 Procurement of food.....	25
3.14 Reasons for using the CSS	26
3.15 Satisfaction with food	30
3.16 Consumption of fresh produce	32
3.17 Changing food habits	33
3.18 Experience of CSS.....	35
3.19 Engagement with other food projects.....	37
3.20 Summary of key findings.....	40
3.2 Outcome 2: Training and Reskilling	40
3.21 New employment.....	40
3.22 New knowledge/new skills	41
3.23 Increased confidence and self-esteem	43
3.24 Summary of key findings.....	44
3.3 Outcome 3: Health and Wellbeing.....	44

3.31 Level of wellbeing	44
3.32 Physical, mental and social health	45
3.33 Relationship-building	48
3.44 Summary of key findings	49
3.4 Outcome 4: Regeneration of community asset	50
3.41 Community Gardening	50
3.42 Bare Necessities project	51
3.43 GrowBaby project	52
3.44 Community cultural events	52
3.45 Community-led group activities/programmes	54
3.46 Summary of key findings	54
4. Challenges	55
4.1 Membership and support services	55
4.2 Food-related	55
4.3 Data management	57
4.4 Coordination with other food hubs in the city	58
4.5 Financial Sustainability	58
4.6 Project management and governance	59
5. Final Reflections	60
5.1 Beyond food: social connections	61
5.2 Co-construction with stakeholders	62
5.21 Engagement between staff and volunteers	62
5.22 Engagement of members	63
5.23 Engagement with stakeholders	64
5.3 Overcoming setbacks	65
6. Summary and recommendations	65
6.1 Summary Table	65
6.2 Recommendations	68
7. Conclusion	71
Appendices	73
1. Evaluation Matrix	73
2. Members Survey	79
3. Interviews Schedule for Volunteers	80
References	81

Acknowledgements

The research team would like to thank all those who participated and facilitated the research. In particular, we would like to extend our thanks to the project management, staff, and volunteers at Foleshill Community Centre for generously giving us their time notwithstanding the intense pressures under which they have been working on the frontline during these challenging times. A special thanks to the Operations Manager for being incredibly supportive and for her enthusiastic participation throughout the process. We are grateful for the support extended by Feeding Coventry. We would also like to thank Mariana Simon for her help with translation. Credit for all the photos used in this report goes to the project team, Trustees of Feeding Coventry, and the research team.

Research Team

Dr Lopamudra Patnaik Saxena, Dr Jana Fried, Dr Luke Owen & Prof Moya Kneafsey
Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR), Coventry University

Citation

Saxena, L.P., Fried, J., Owen, L. and Kneafsey, M. (2021) Evaluation of the Community Food Hub, Foleshill, Coventry. Interim Report. Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience: Coventry University.

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of an interim evaluation of the expected outcomes from the Community Food Hub (CFH) project in Foleshill, Coventry, a pilot project delivered by Feeding Coventry and funded by Feeding Britain that started operating in March 2020.

The aim of the CFH model is to provide food support to people experiencing food insecurity while at the same time enabling them to move beyond immediate food crises in ways that are dignified, empowering and community led. This could be, for example, by supporting skills development and employment; providing support and advice on personal debt or benefit problems; reducing social isolation and promoting good health and wellbeing.

With the above aim in mind, the CFH project in Foleshill developed a unique approach that incorporates elements from several different models (Saxena and Tornaghi, 2018) while also adapting them to be appropriate for the local context. The project plan includes setting up Coventry Social Supermarket, a Community Café, and a Community Hub in the existing but long unused Foleshill Community Centre. While the Coventry Social Supermarket aims to provide food and wraparound support services to members meeting vulnerability criteria, the Community Café and the Community Hub are open to all. The Community Hub is planned to host a range of local support services, and community-led programmes and activities.

This evaluation draws on an evaluation matrix (Saxena, 2019) developed by a member of the research team who was part of the Evaluation Working Group set up by Feeding Britain in 2019. The evaluation matrix developed the specific outcomes and indicators for the CFH project in Foleshill in four areas:

- (1) Food Resilience (reduced need for emergency food provision)
- (2) Training and Reskilling (improvements in skills, knowledge, confidence)
- (3) Health and Wellbeing (physical, mental, social)
- (4) Regeneration of Foleshill Community Centre as a community asset (community engagement/community cohesion)

This evaluation draws on semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, social media feedback, project records, photo and video documentation, on-site observations, and conversations with staff, volunteers, and members that the research team carried out during on-site visits and online. Data collected covers the period from March – December 2020.

Background

After nearly a year of extensive renovation and restoration of the Foleshill Community Centre that had been lying unused and neglected since 2015, the building was opened to the public

with the launch of Coventry Social Supermarket (CSS) on 13th March 2020 as the first ‘social supermarket’ in Coventry. With a weekly CSS membership fee of £4, members are entitled to their once-a-week food shopping by choosing a certain number of items from nutritionally diverse food groups (such as cereals, meat and dairy products, condiments and spices, fresh vegetables and fruits) in a retail-like environment.

Barely two weeks into its operation, and with eight registered members, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the imposition of the national lockdown posed a major setback to the project. Instead of buckling under the pressure, CSS has remained open throughout, only closing for a week during the Christmas period, while many other community organisations in the city shut their doors. Many food banks had also closed because their volunteer base often comprised older people who were vulnerable and/or they did not have the capacity to operate under the COVID-19 restrictions. Under changing government regulations and restrictions over the entire period, the project team have had to rapidly adapt, expand, and even modify the operations in line with the increasing number of people turning to them for food support. The impact of the pandemic has led to delays in implementing the wraparound support services programme for the members and the establishment of the other two key components in the project plan, i.e., the Community Café and the Community Hub.

Notwithstanding the challenging conditions under which the project has continued with its operations, our evaluation of the project at this interim stage points to progress in the four key outcome areas identified in the evaluation matrix.

Expected outcomes- key findings

(1) Food Resilience

On average, from July to December, an estimated 135 members accessed CSS services each week, feeding an estimated 432 people (adults and children) in those households. By the end of December, membership had increased to nearly 300 active members. Although it is difficult to ascertain completely the impact of the project in terms of reducing the need for emergency food provision at this interim point of the evaluation, there is clear evidence of a positive impact on food resilience. Among the members surveyed, more than 80% worried less about food after joining the CSS, and for 80%, their household spending on food had decreased. Further, 19% of respondents reported that they would have resorted to foodbanks if the CSS had not been operating.

The respondents have overwhelmingly reported that their ‘overall experience’ of using CSS is ‘very good’ and that they are ‘satisfied’ with the quantity, quality, and range of food they have access to. More than 90% are satisfied with the fresh vegetables and fruits available and more than 60% reported eating more fresh fruits and vegetables at home. An equally significant

number have tried new food items, cooked new dishes (or tried new recipes) and more than half cooked more meals at home.

Food deliveries to households were not a part of the original plan for CSS, but the exigencies of COVID-19 have led to the addition of a delivery service which has become critical for supporting the most vulnerable members (such as those 'shielding', the elderly, and those with disabilities). At its peak during the first national lockdown, on average, CSS did 70-80 food deliveries a week, and it has since then stabilised around 40 per week.

In response to changing needs arising from the economic fallout of the pandemic, and the expectations placed on the community sector to reach out to those most vulnerable, the project's scope rapidly expanded to run local food projects/initiatives in partnership with other community partners, including Coventry City Council. Foleshill Community Centre hosted one of the ten 'emergency food hubs' in Coventry, participated in the School Holiday Breakfast Club programme, the October half-term 'free school meals' programme, and Winter Food programme amongst others. The feedback from the beneficiaries including members and those from the wider community has been most positive.

(2) Training and Reskilling

COVID-19 restrictions on physical distancing and the urgency of providing critical food support during the first few months of the first lockdown have stalled the process of wraparound support provision to the members, including opportunities for training and reskilling. However, at the time of writing this report, the project has started a 'support pilot' for 10 weeks in collaboration with Coventry Independent Advice Service to identify and understand the nature of support that the members need.

More significantly, a few of the members (at least 10-15) have started engaging in the project delivery as volunteers. From them and other volunteers, we found remarkable testimonies of acquiring work-based skills, new knowledge, making new connections, inter-personal and communication skills, and increased levels of self-esteem and confidence.

The project has created paid employment which includes the Operations Manager, Support worker, and volunteers who have moved on to organisational roles. The latter include two sessional workers (shift leader and volunteer coordinator), an apprentice and a finance coordinator. In addition to on-the-job training, the staff and a few volunteers have also undergone formal training in areas such as food hygiene, fire warden, and TasteLife (a course on recovery from eating disorders).

(3) Health and Wellbeing

The survey respondents have reported a positive impact on physical, mental, and social wellbeing. More than half felt it worthwhile to use CSS, more than 60% felt better both physically and mentally, and the same number of members felt 'more connected with people', 'part of a community', and 'more in control of life'. More than a quarter felt happier, reported a positive impact on their level of anxiety and made new friends. Some described doing their shopping at CSS as the 'highlight of the week'.

The volunteers interviewed reported an equally significant positive impact. They described a 'family-like' environment, and being valued for who they are which made their volunteering an uplifting and rewarding experience. They felt 'good' from helping those in need, especially during the unusually challenging times brought on by COVID-19, and in the process, they have experienced a noticeably improved sense of wellbeing.

(4) Regeneration of Foleshill Community Centre (FCC)

Within the period of two years since Feeding Coventry acquired the long-neglected building from Coventry City Council for the project, and particularly since the launch of CSS, the building has transformed into a vibrant and thriving Community Centre.

The project has developed several partnerships with local community groups and organisations, including Coventry City Council, Growbaby, Bare Necessities, and the Family Hub. Within the constraints imposed by the pandemic, FCC has hosted a few 'socially distanced' cultural activities – some supported by Coventry City of Culture 2021 funding – and a few community-led programmes and activities (e.g., ESOL classes, children's tuition, Pilates, martial arts) during that short period in between the two national lockdowns.

Onsite community gardening has taken off since the summer, with a group from the local community and a few members of CSS coming together to connect over food growing activities. By the end of the growing season in August-September, the community garden had produced small harvests of assorted vegetables, shared by the group with the members and volunteers at the CSS. The group also held social events, which involved sharing of meals together and a sharing of diverse experiences of living in Coventry.

Challenges

Continuing to run operations in the precarious context of COVID-19 has however not been without challenges. Finding the right balance between expanding the project's reach and sufficient engagement is a key challenge. For example, current membership includes a sizable number of non-English speaking members, especially from the Romanian community in Foleshill. Although there is a concerted effort on the part of the project staff and volunteers

to engage with everyone, language barriers remain an obstacle to move beyond the sole provision of food.

While there is good progress on tapping into food surplus in sufficient quantity and of a good quality (in nutritional content) from the main suppliers, without the purchase of basic staples, and without massive grants funding to cover the food costs, providing a nutritionally balanced food offering each week is a key challenge. A related challenge is the lack of sufficient quantity of food that meets specific dietary needs and cultural preferences. The logistics of sourcing and collection from numerous 'unpredictable' sources and the demanding nature of stock management are met by relying on a substantial number of volunteer hours and intensive coordination by staff.

The systematic collection and organisation of data in relation to members' use of the social supermarket (e.g., membership profiles, patterns of food use and preferences, support needs) has been noticeably delayed. Prioritising data management when coping with the logistics and demands of running the daily operations, which in itself had become an intensive process during the lockdowns, has been a key challenge.

CSS has joined an alliance of 'food hubs' in Coventry. Most of them have emerged over the COVID-19 period. The aim of the alliance is to ensure a fairer citywide distribution of food resources and an even access to food across the various food hubs. However, not all the food hubs operate in the same way; hence, coordination with all the other food hubs is an emerging challenge.

The self-sustaining social enterprise model for the project includes revenue streams from membership fees, the Community Café and from the commercial letting of additional spaces in the building. The breakout of the pandemic and its impacts has however affected the project schedule in a major way by slowing down the progress made in establishing the café. Opportunities for income generation have been at best sporadic and limited. On the other hand, the total burden of food costs been absorbed by numerous grants and COVID-19 funding, local and national, available for community food organisations. In the coming months, it is highly likely that the diverse funding streams will be restricted or no longer available. Managing a tight budget for meeting the operational costs will be a key challenge to the sustainability of the project and its future outcomes.

Continuing the project delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic has required an exceptionally high level of activity that needed to be coordinated and mobilised through timely, quick and nonetheless rigorous responses. This has put unusual pressure on the capacity of the project team, project management, and the Trustee board as Feeding Coventry refocused to respond to the pandemic, adversely affecting change control process. This poses a key challenge to project management and governance.

Recommendations

The main recommendations that emerged from this interim evaluation are in five areas.

(1) Diversify local food procurement for a stable and nutritionally balanced offering that increases food resilience. This would involve linking with and across local and regional businesses, local food producers, processors and distributors, with community food growing, and allotments.

(2) Develop wraparound support services for members, which will be even more relevant in the coming months when the economic fallout from the pandemic will add to existing vulnerabilities and disadvantage among the communities.

(3) Increase community outreach and engagement with the multiple ethnic groups in the community currently under-represented in the pool of volunteers and in the composition of staff. Reaching out relies on a longer time and additional capacity for the building of relationships and trust and to gain strong local insights. It also requires expanding relationships with local community organisations and groups.

(4) Secure longer-term funding for the project until operations become financially self-sustaining and engage with opportunities for income generation.

(5) Align project management and governance – a period of 'containment' whereby change controls and governance are clarified and consolidated, renew strategic priorities for achieving the four project goals, and to systematise data collection and management for effective internal monitoring and tracking of project performance.

Concluding remarks

For the final evaluation, which we will undertake at the end of the second year, we will continue with our observations and follow up with the participants of this evaluation exercise to assess the longer-term changes in their experiences. We will include more participants (members, volunteers, and local community partners) in our sample with the aim of understanding and assessing the outcomes from the project at the end of a two-year period. We will also deliver a short video made of video-clips that we have recorded of the experiences of members, volunteers, and staff, at various stages of the project and the transformation of Foleshill Community Centre into a vibrant community space.

1. Introduction

1.1 Community Food Hubs

Funded by the Big Lottery, the Community Food Hub (CFH) project piloted by Feeding Britain is an intervention to enable people experiencing food poverty to move beyond food crises in ways that are dignified, empowering and community led. As an intervention across the Feeding Britain network, CFHs aim at:

- Reduced demand for transactional emergency food provision evidenced by lower demand for crisis food services.
- Greater plurality of approaches driven by local needs, with an emphasis on sustainable, longer-term support to increase resilience to food poverty.
- Effective use of existing community assets and empowering community members to take ownership of the community food hub.
- Increased integration of specialist services within the community food hub, to help people move beyond immediate food crises.
- Learning about different models in practice, and what can be most easily transferrable.
- Learning about ways to increase the amount of quality surplus food that can be tapped locally to support food poverty projects and overcome some of the existing supply chain challenges.

1.2 Community Food Hub in Foleshill, Coventry

Community Food Hub (CFH) in Foleshill, Coventry is one of the two Community Food Hub Pilots that secured funding from Feeding Britain for a duration of three years starting in 2018-19. The other one is based at Chester.

CFH in Foleshill is delivered by [Feeding Coventry](#), an independent charity established in 2015 and committed to working with partners and local communities to tackle hunger and food poverty, to build food security and food sustainability, and to support people in crisis in Coventry. Its vision is to make Coventry a food resilient city where no one goes hungry, and the mission is to empower people and organisations in Coventry to design strategies and deliver activities to end food poverty, build resilience and influence change.



Feeding Coventry acquired 'Foleshill Community Centre' (which had fallen into disuse since 2015) in Foleshill, one of the most deprived wards in Coventry (see section 1.4) through a community asset transfer from Coventry City Council in April 2019. By piloting the CFH project in Foleshill, the broader aim was to develop and rejuvenate the Foleshill Community Centre to benefit the local community.

In order to meet the aim, the CFH project in Foleshill set itself four objectives:

- (1) To provide access to affordable good quality food in Foleshill
- (2) To provide wraparound support services (including training and reskilling opportunities)
- (3) To improve health and well-being (physical, mental, social)
- (4) By doing the above three, to revitalise the Foleshill Community Centre

To deliver on the objectives as described above, the project plan for the CFH in Coventry includes the development of three interconnected components: Coventry Social Supermarket (CSS), Community Café (CC), and Community Hub (CH), co-located in the Foleshill Community Centre.



The three components in the **project plan** are as follows.

(1) Coventry Social Supermarket (CSS)

Coventry Social Supermarket (CSS) incorporates elements of existing models of 'social supermarkets' in Britain (see Saxena & Tornaghi, 2018) while also adapting them to be appropriate for the local context. At its core lies the provisioning of access to good quality affordable food to people in the local community who meet vulnerability criteria in a retail-like environment. This is backed up by a 'wraparound' support offer that includes, for example, debt and welfare advice, employment support, training and reskilling, and broader support for health and wellbeing. People have access to the CSS on a membership basis, reviewed at six monthly intervals.

(2) Community Café

Membership of CSS provide access to a Community Café, offering cold and hot food prepared onsite. Unlike the CSS, it is open to non-members, as it is intended to generate a revenue stream. The café would utilise the surplus food stocked by the supermarket, other redistributed and donated food, and even food grown in the garden onsite to prepare healthy, nutritious and affordable meals. It would also be a space to host cooking programmes, for sharing and enhancing of cooking skills, and promoting healthy eating. Ultimately, it will be a shared community space for social interaction -- for members and non-members to come together, meet, eat and connect.

(3) Community Hub

Along with the social supermarket, and community café, the CFH project plan also includes space for a 'community hub' – to host a range of local support services (e.g., benefits, finances/debt, employment) and activities leading to skills training, and programmes supporting health and wellbeing of members. Membership of CSS includes a requirement to engage with such support services/programmes as the project aims to enable members to manage better the hardship and disadvantages they face, and eventually move beyond food crises. The community hub is also at the heart of generating income for the project, such as through the commercial letting of additional spaces in the building to local community groups and organisations for activities, events, and programmes benefiting the local community.

1.3 Foleshill Community Centre

The launching of the three components of CFH as described in the project plan above is fundamental to the revitalisation of the Foleshill Community Centre (FCC) as an important community asset for the local people. Photos, documents, and other bric-a-brac found in the building when Feeding Coventry took it over in 2019 revealed the history of the building as a vibrant and thriving community centre going back to the 1950s, but it had lost its appeal and had gone out of use over the last couple of decades. The project's broader aim is the regeneration of this community resource for the community to re-create a vibrant community centre for positive social interactions.

As a social enterprise, the project's aim is to be self-sustaining in the longer term. The project plan allocated the bulk of the budget for the initial set up costs and the running costs for the first year to support the launch of the different areas of operations. In the second year and beyond, the plan proposed income generation from the community café and community hub to sustain the project operations. At the end of the project period, the plan includes the community taking 'ownership' of the project – that is, run by the community for the community.

1.4 Project Area: Foleshill ward in Coventry



Foleshill in Coventry is known for a vibrant and diverse culture (multi-faith, multi-ethnic, and multi-national) and a strong local business sector. Foleshill has approximately 6,939 households with a population of about 19,939 (2011 census).¹ However, despite many successful existing community efforts, Foleshill also faces significant social and economic challenges. Based on the national index of multiple deprivation, Foleshill is one of the most deprived wards in Coventry. Data on foodbank use in 2017-18 suggests that while only about 6% of Coventry's residents live in Foleshill ward, around 15% of all people accessing Coventry Foodbank were from this area [Trussell Trust]. According to Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau, they receive more debt and benefit enquiries from the Foleshill ward than from almost any other ward in the city.

Deprivation and health and wellbeing statistics available from Coventry City Council also show that this ward has the highest level of deprivation and the lowest life expectancy in the city. As shown in Table 1 below, data for Foleshill ward reveals much higher levels of health- and other inequalities compared to other parts of Coventry or the country in general.

¹ <https://www.doogal.co.uk/AdministrativeAreas.php?district=E08000026&ward=E05001222>

Indicators	Foleshill	Coventry	England
% ward living in income deprived households	34	18	15
% ward children living in income deprived families	37	25	20
% ward older people living in income deprived households	51	22	16
% ward Black and Minority Ethnic (BME)	69	26	15
% ward cannot speak English well or at all	12	3	2
% ward reported to be Free School Meal Eligible (primary)*	21	16	NA
% ward reported to be Free School Meal Eligible (secondary)*	23	16	NA
Standardised Mortality Ratios - Under 65 and all causes of death	164.5	119.1	100
Standardised Mortality Ratios - Under 75 and all causes of death	157.2	117.6	100
Life expectancy at birth for males 2011 -2015 (years)	75.3	78.3	79.4
Life expectancy at birth for females 2011- 2015 (years)	80.8	82.2	83.1

Source: PHE Ward Profiles 2016, * Annual School Census 2017

Table 1: Foleshill ward

In the context described above, the CFH project has multiple goals targeted at supporting the Foleshill community as described earlier.

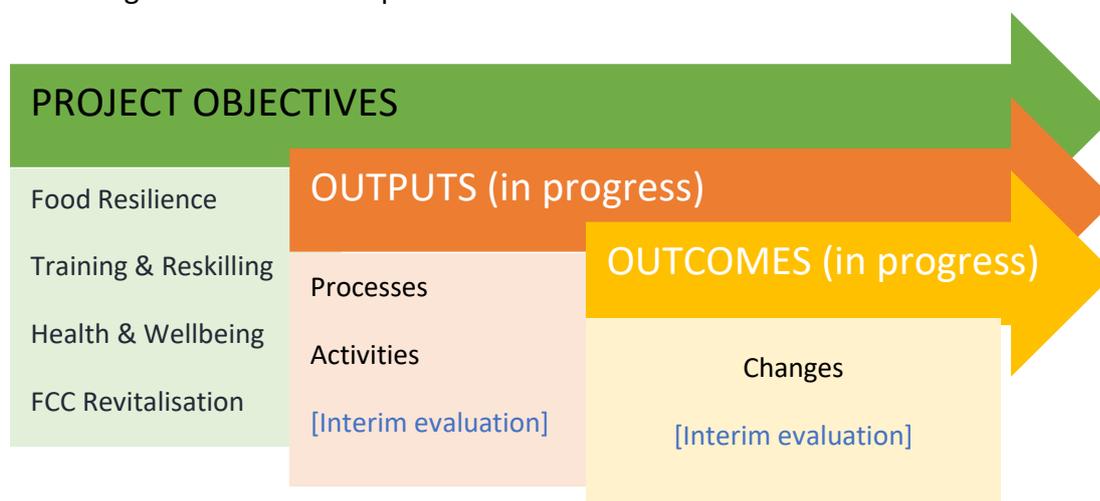
2. Evaluation overview

The research team at the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR) in Coventry University was commissioned in early 2020 to evaluate the project over a two-year period.

The purpose behind the evaluation was threefold:

1. To evaluate the key outcomes of the project
2. To identify the challenges/barriers faced in achieving the expected outcomes
3. To make recommendations

At this interim point, the evaluation focuses on the progress made on the expected outcomes. To do so, we reviewed the processes and activities in place to deliver those outcomes, and the changes in relation to expected outcomes.



2.1 Methodology

We used a mixed research methods approach for the purposes of the evaluation with specific objectives as listed below.

- To explore personal experiences of those engaging with the project – members and users, volunteers, staff, and community partners;
- To identify the benefits for members, their families, for volunteers, for community partners, and for the local community;
- To understand the processes by which the project is delivered;
- To identify challenges for members, volunteers, staff, and community partners, in terms of access, delivery and sustainability;
- To consider the support needs for continuing with the project

The evaluation draws on data and information collected in various ways and from various sources. These include:

- Questionnaires for members (n 44)
- Semi-structured interviews (n 14)
 - volunteers (n 5)
 - member-volunteers (n 2)
 - project staff + apprentice (n 4)
 - community partners (n 3)
- Feedback on social media (Facebook, Twitter)
- Site visits and observations
- Project records from project staff
- Email and phone correspondence

During Nov-Dec 2020, the research team distributed 87 survey questionnaires (which had both closed and open-ended questions) to members who came for their regular shopping at the Foleshill Community Centre. Questionnaires were also sent out with the food bags to reach out to those members who received food deliveries. The survey included questions in the five outcomes areas [see Appendix 3 for an outline].

44 surveys were returned, with consent from 26 for follow-ups. We plan to have follow-up conversations with them in 6 months' time to track changes over a longer time period. Survey respondents were already members for a varying length of time and had joined right at the start of the CSS or as recent as November 2020.

We held 14 semi-structured interviews online and over the phone. These interviews were conducted with project staff and volunteers at FCC to assess their experiences and gather their insights on the project. Some former volunteers included in the interviews had moved

on from working as volunteers to new roles within the project – working now as apprentice, shift-leaders, and financial coordinator. Two of the interviewed volunteers described themselves as members and provided unique insights into the process of how FCC was engaging with the community. We also conducted interviews with three community partners who are running, in collaboration with FCC, specific projects which are ongoing, *albeit* in an on-and-off manner because of changing government regulations. For the final evaluation, we have received consent by all 14 respondents for follow-up conversations, which will help with understanding project changes and impacts over a longer period.

We collected output data from project records. Other data sources include the social media accounts of FCC. [Facebook](#), in particular, provides a visual narrative of the staff and volunteers' engagement with the community and vice versa, along with feedback and comments on the various activities and events organised by CSS.

Given the COVID-19 context, we were unable to make as many site visits as was anticipated. Nonetheless, visits happened across several key periods during 2020 (on the opening days, during different 'adjustment' phases including the 'outdoor' CSS, after moving the CSS back into the building, during the Christmas Hamper hand-out). During FCC visits, we had many opportunities to meet and engage with staff, volunteers, and members. This helped understand and validate the information we had collected from various sources and helped identify any 'unexpected' outcomes or challenges.

We have taken photos and small video clips right from the renovation of the FCC building all the way through December and continue to capture the transformation of FCC into a vibrant community space and some 'stories' of change/impact at various stages of the project from those engaging with the project. These will form the basis for a short video for dissemination to complement our final evaluation report.

The findings presented in this report are thus drawn from a weaving together of data from the different sources described above after crosschecking for validation. By the very nature of the study undertaken where the questionnaires and interviews cover only a small sample of the members and volunteers who consented to take part in the evaluation exercise during these extremely challenging times, the findings must be interpreted accordingly.

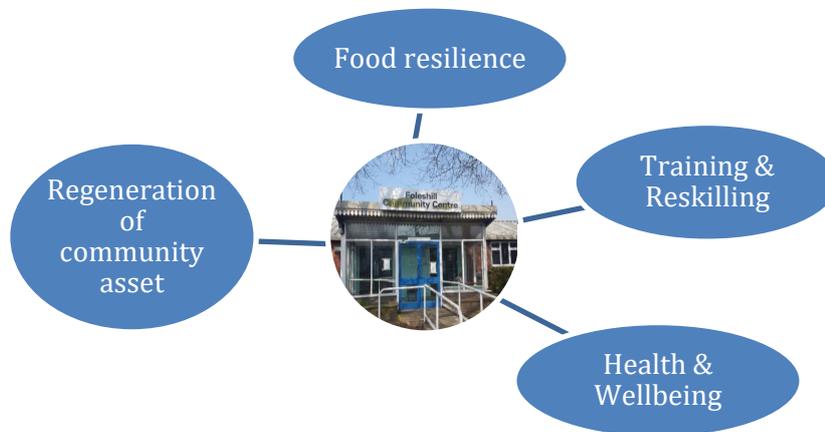
2.2 Ethics

Application for ethical approval was granted by Coventry University in February 2020. Prior to questionnaire- and interview-based data collection, all participants were provided with details of the research and their right for withdrawal, and written consent was obtained for the anonymous use of the provided information for reporting purposes.

All participants were offered the opportunity to contact the lead of the research team if they had any concerns or for further information. All data is processed and stored in accordance with GDPR regulations. Data is kept strictly confidential and stored in password protected computer files on Coventry University hard drive.

3. Progress in Expected Outcomes

Expected key outcomes from the CFH project in Foleshill, aligned with the evaluation matrix (Saxena 2019, see Appendix 1) and specific to the Foleshill CFH project, include changes in three interconnected areas: food resilience, training and reskilling, health and wellbeing, along with the regeneration of Foleshill Community Centre.



This section tracks the progress in the four outcome areas during March –December 2020.

3.1 Outcome 1: Food Resilience



3.11 Membership

In the first two weeks of March prior to the first national lockdown, a total number of 8 people had registered as members. By the end of the year, this number had increased to 676. However, in a review of the membership records and the attendance of members who were actually using the CSS in November-December, the staff found 296 members to be **'active'** (described as those who had been shopping at CSS at least once during the previous 8 weeks). Following this review, the project decided to take on new members. At the time of writing this report in February 2021, an additional 42 members have registered in January, bringing the total to **338 active members**. Since November 2020, active members have been given membership cards with 6 months validity.

The cumulative increase in active members during March-Dec 2020 is shown below (Figure 1).



Figure 1

In terms of the monthly trend in membership registrations, the biggest increase in numbers happened in April, October and November (Figure 2). These periods would appear to coincide with the national lockdown announcements.



Figure 2

In order to become a member of the SCC, potential members are required to sign up via a free registration process that includes filling an application form which provides important information about members' households and enables staff to assess the need for membership, which although not means-tested satisfied some basic eligibility criteria. At the beginning of the project, membership was extended to anyone living in the city, struggling with food, and experiencing financial and/or social difficulties. At a later stage, given the large rise in numbers, membership was restricted to residents in those postcodes adjacent to FCC, which are considered to have a higher number of disadvantaged households (CV6, CV1, CV7). Some members were also directly referred from the Job Centre, Citizens Advice Bureau, the local Council, and local support agencies within Coventry.

The aggregate membership data for active members from the project records shows **68% females** (n 142) among the 70% of those who had filled in the membership application form completely. The perception by staff and volunteers is that the gender balance is quite even. Further collection of data (from the 30% non-responses) by the project staff will provide an accurate picture than available at the time of writing.

Equally, there is limited information on ethnicity and nationality of the members. The available data and staff feedback suggests that the membership is **predominantly White British ethnicity and British nationality**, followed by Romanian ethnicity and nationality. This suggests two things – either that other communities (Foleshill itself being more ethnically diverse) are facing barriers in engaging with CSS or that they have alternatives.

Among the active members, nearly **60% (n 173) are from the postcode CV6** (which includes Foleshill), as shown below. Those members from other postcodes outside of priority geographic area, according to the staff, are most likely to have been referred to CSS.

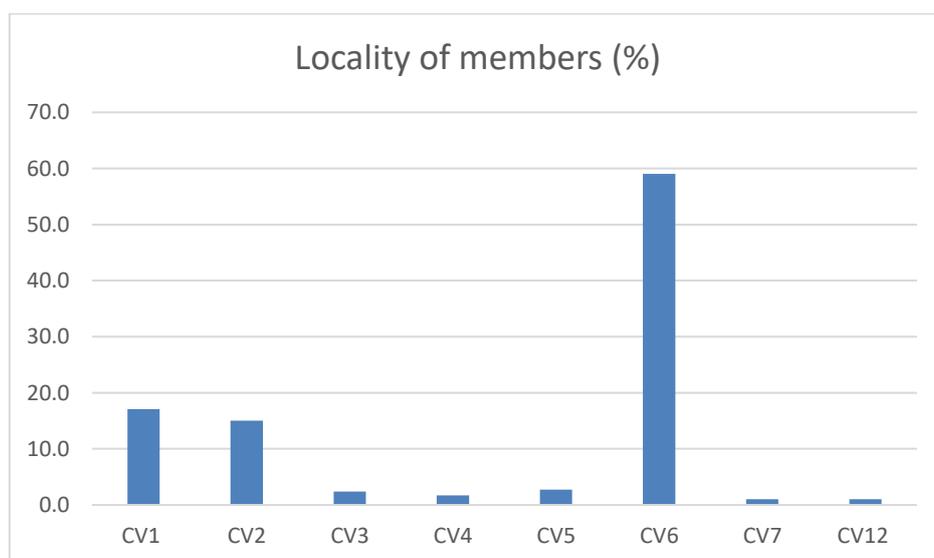
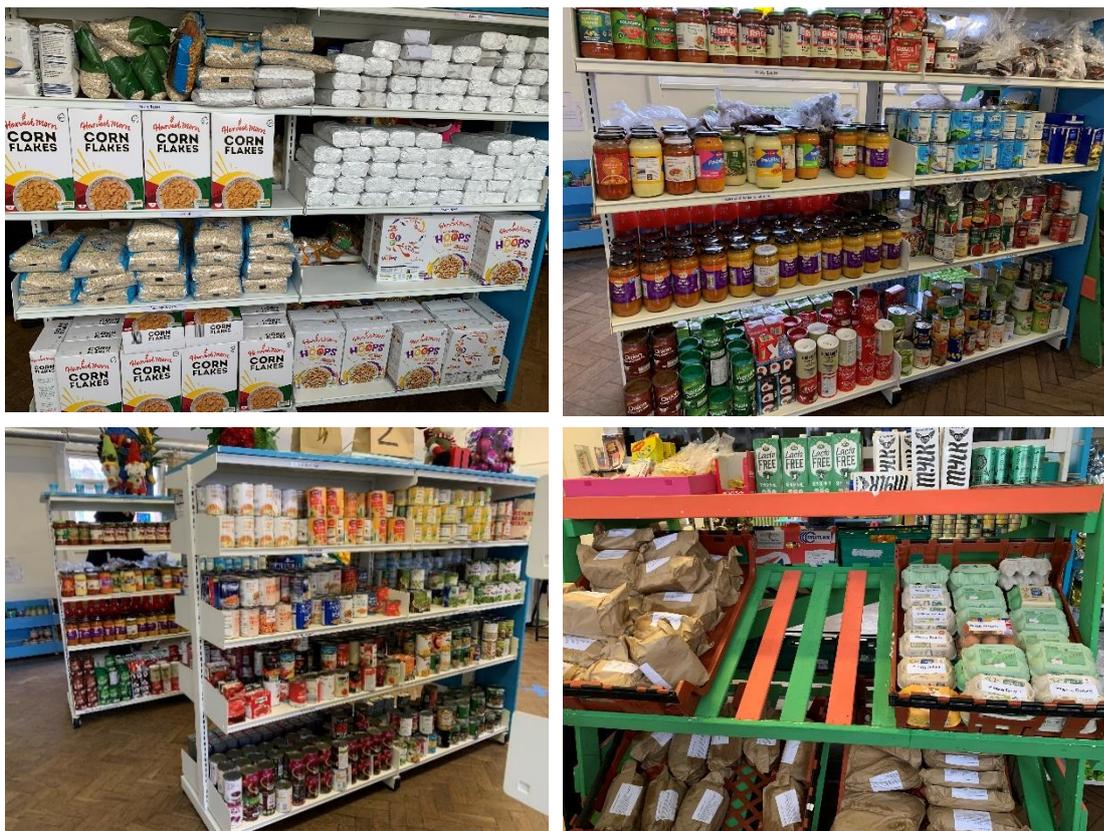


Figure 3

Since each membership represents a household, based on household size data provided by the active members (n 296), the estimated number of adults and children (under the age of 18 years old) is 596 and 430 respectively, totalling **1026 individuals, which represent the project's target beneficiaries.**

3.12 Access to affordable food

Members pay a **weekly fee of £4**, which provides them access to shopping at CSS once a week. Initially, CSS operated on Friday and Saturday mornings for two hours each, and then, with changing demand and scale of operations, it extended the opening hours and started additional household food deliveries on Thursday evenings. Furthermore, practices also changed to members being strongly encouraged to book time slots for their visits during CSS opening hours, enabling easier adherence to social distancing measures and government regulations restricting the number of people from different households mixing. At the time of writing this report, CSS is open on Fridays from 10am-3pm, Saturdays from 10am-3pm (with walk-ins from 1-3pm), and on Thursday evenings from 5.30-7.30 pm.



Coventry Social Supermarket

The original plan for CSS did not include **food deliveries to households** but this additional service was launched in response to the needs of members unable to physically come to FCC

during the lockdown, whether it was for health reasons or if they were ‘shielding’. In addition, CSS got referrals from social services and projects like [Good Neighbours Coventry](#) and in many cases, people in the local community directly contacted them for deliveries. At its peak during the first national lockdown, on average, CSS did 70-80 food deliveries a week, and it has since then stabilised around 40 per week. Although the delivery service was introduced in response to the pandemic to meet the needs of those most vulnerable, both the members and the staff expect it to remain a feature of CSS.

I think we will struggle not to do deliveries completely. I mean, it will reduce, but a lot of our clients that we've taken on, all are clients that can't get out, and they'll never be able to get out. So, a lot of the people that get deliveries are people that are disabled and elderly and can't get out. So, that need won't ever go away. I don't think. So, I think now we'll always have some deliveries... [Staff, Dec 2020 interview]

An important element of the specific approach at the CSS is ‘choice’ as it is the project’s explicit intention to create a shopping experience at the CSS that is dignified and empowering. Hence, food at CSS covers **eight different categories** and members are given the choice to pick up a certain number of items across the different categories, as shown in Table 2 below.

Food Category	Description	Quantity/Portions
Category 1 Carbohydrates	Cereal (cornflakes, porridge oats) Pasta, rice, mash, noodle, (other cereals: millet, bulghur, wheat) Bread	1x kg Cereal 1 x 500g Pasta/ 500g rice/other 1 x Bread
Category 2 Cans	Fish/meat Beans/tomatoes/spaghetti/soup/veg/pulses	1 x fish/meat 2 x other
Category 3 Everyday essentials	Milk Tea/coffee/sugar/Squash Eggs	1 x Milk 1 x Tea/coffee/sugar/ Squash 1 x 6 eggs
Category 4 Non-food sundries	Sauce/spice/herbs/ jams/marmalades/pickles/ condiments	1 x any of these products
Category 5 Fresh Meat/Fish	Fresh or frozen chicken/beef/sausages/fish depending on availability	1 x portion chicken/beef/sausages/

		fish depending on availability (e.g. 3 x chicken portions for a family or 2 x chicken portions for 2 people)
Category 6 Dairy	Cheese/yoghurt/butter	1 x portion cheese/yoghurt/butter AND 1x Other fridge item depending on availability
Category 7 Snacks/Desserts	Desserts/Chocolate/Biscuit/Sweet/Savoury Snacks/oil	1 x portion depending on availability
Category 8 Veg & fruit	All fresh vegetables & fruits depending on availability	2 x portions of fruit AND 2 x portions of veg/potatoes
NOT INCLUDED IN THE BASKET	Non-food items (hygiene, sanitary, toiletries, baby products, etc.) (from Bare Necessities project)	1 x cleaning/toiletry products 1 x Sanitary product or Nappies

Table 2: Choice of items across food categories



CSS offers each member a selection of food across the different categories to ensure that their food offering contains different food groups required for a healthy, balanced diet for all age groups, while at the same time limiting food high in sugar/fat content. According to estimates provided by the project staff, the value of the food per bag that each member gets is worth £20. Observations revealed that there was a degree of flexibility with the number of items per category or the size of portions that members could collect (as during the interim 'outdoor' phase) or can select, influenced by the number of household members, with large families receiving larger portions (e.g., of meat, dairy or snacks) and/or the availability of excess stock.



In addition, CSS has a **Special Diet corner** (see adjacent photo) where it stocks a selection of food for members who had registered their diet preferences (such as gluten-free, diabetic, celiac, or culture-specific). Staff and volunteers acknowledge that these food items are usually in short supply. The respondents in the member survey reported the same with The suggestion to stock more diet-specific food.



Figure 4 below shows the monthly trend in the number of food bags over the period April – Dec 2020. Data for the number of people provided with food (i.e., based on the number of adults and children in the members’ households) is available from July onwards.

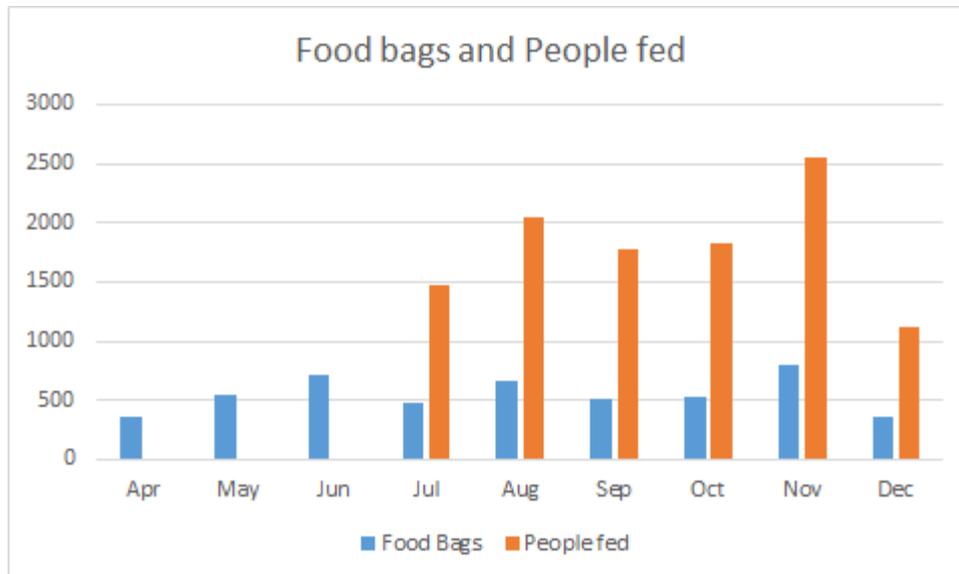


Figure 4

On average, between July and December, CSS has provided 135 food bags per week, which translates to food for 432 people in those households.

Overall, the trend shows an irregular pattern over the months, however, a steady increase can be seen in the initial months (April to June) which would explain the increasing demand as the number of memberships grew and more people learnt about the CSS. In many cases, individuals were also referred from schools and various local agencies, and many of these agencies were paying for their clients’ bags for several weeks during the first lockdown.

The month of November recorded a peak in the number of food bags with a corresponding peak in the number of people provided with food. This coincided with the implementation of the second national lockdown measures that came into force that month. A similar trend was reported across the other newly formed eight food hubs in Coventry, a point which was brought to the research team’s attention by the Operations Manager. This points to the demands on food provision met by such initiatives during the lockdowns. December records lower figures as the CSS operated for 3 weeks during that month and they had Christmas hampers for one week not captured in this data.

3.13 Procurement of food

CSS procures most of its food from the regional branch of [FareShare](#), a leading UK food redistribution charity. Other sources include donations from local supermarkets (like Tesco, Asda, Morrisons, etc.), local shops, schools, charities such as [Feed the Hungry UK](#) and [The Pod Café](#), local enterprises such as [Team Springboard and the Coventry Food Growing Network](#), local churches and also the general public. However, quite early on, it had become clear that neither FareShare nor donations reliably provided sufficient basic staples or essential items necessary for a nutritionally balanced offering every week. Therefore, CSS purchases the items needed from high street retailers (e.g., Aldi, Lidl, Morrisons, Tesco, Sainsbury's) and some items in bulk from wholesalers (e.g., Booker). Staff reported that these invariably include items like UHT milk, cheese, eggs, fruit and vegetables, and at times tinned items (e.g. meat, vegetables), gravy, jam, squash, coffee..

Over the report period, in line with the growing demand, the amount of food ordered from FareShare has more than doubled, increasing from an estimated 300 kg/week in March 2020 to an estimated 680 kg/week in January 2021. The 'top-up' purchases show a fluctuating trend. The total monthly expenditures for food purchased from these two sources from March to December are shown below (Figure 5).

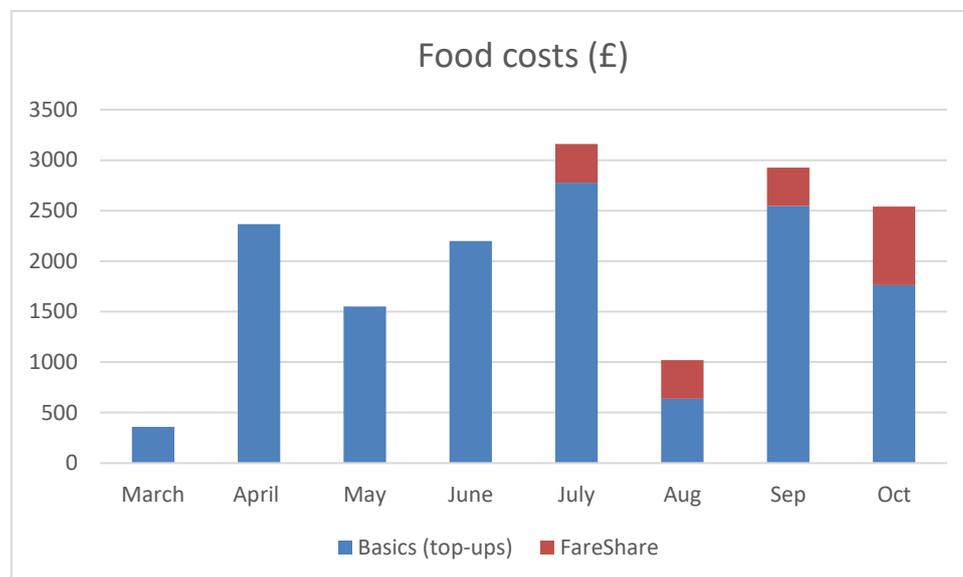


Figure 5

The data shows that costs for additional basics or essentials (directly purchased by CSS from retailers) have been the major component of food expenditures each month. Prior to July, FareShare had not charged any costs for the food it supplied to CSS on account of COVID-19 funding that it had received to cover its costs. However, since July, the food expenditures include FareShare costs which nonetheless remain very low in comparison to direct purchase costs.

When looking at the overall budget for the food offered at the CSS, it is significant to note that a large percentage of the required increase in food quantities needed to meet the growing demand has been paid for through additional grants funding received from Defra, Coventry City Council, and the Food Power Network. In the absence of or reduction in such grant funding in the coming months, meeting the food expenditures would be a key challenge.

3.14 Reasons for using the CSS

We asked members about their reasons for joining the CSS, giving them the option to select more than one reason. As shown below (Figure 6), the **top four reasons given by the respondents are financial** – ‘to spend less on food’, ‘to save money’, ‘change in economic circumstances’, and ‘a lack of stable/regular/sufficient income’.

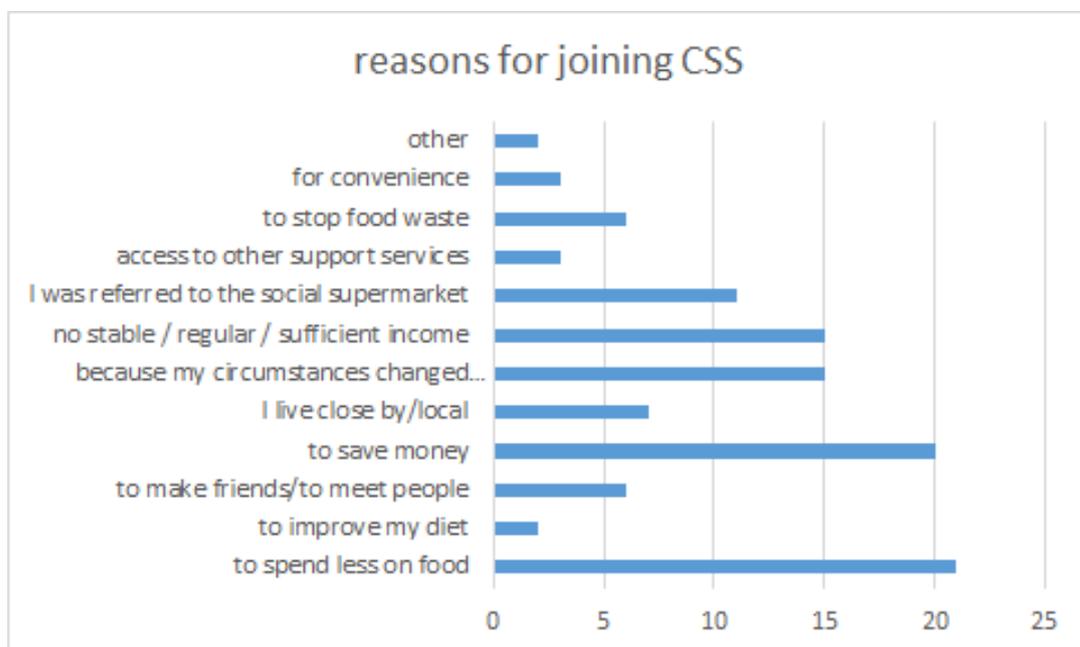


Figure 6

Financial hardship, unstable income, drop in income, also came across as the ‘main reason’ for joining the social supermarket in the open-ended question that we asked. The findings on the annual household income of the respondents throws further light on this, as shown below (Figure 7). Amongst the respondents, 61% (19 out of 31) were in the ‘less than £10,000’ income range. This group of people may thus include what the UK government terms as **‘just about managing’** who are trying to get by on very low incomes.

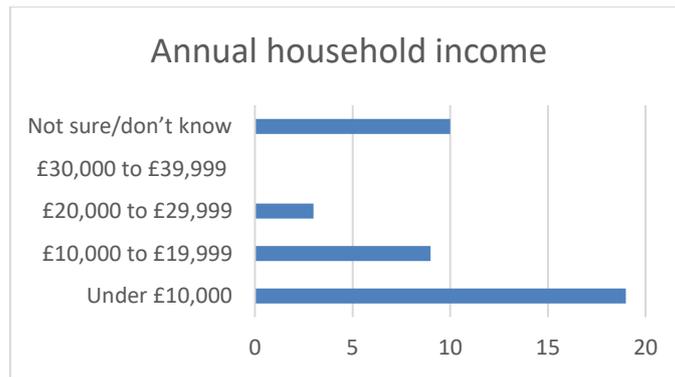


Figure 7

Other indicators also show the dependence on low income: 34% of respondents (14 out of 41) use free school meal vouchers. A further 81% (34 out of 42) received benefits. Among the respondents, 51% (21 out of 41) did not use school meal vouchers, and this could include members in those age groups who do not have school-going children.

A more specific question on the work situation, as shown below (Figure 8), reveals two important points: First, most of the respondents described their **work situation as falling into more than one of the possible categories** (i.e., those provided in the questionnaire). Second, predominantly, **one-third (12 out of 38) of the respondents were unemployed and looking for work, followed by homemakers (21%, 8 out of 38); and 11% (4 out of 38) were furloughed.** There were few who were working full-time (6 out of 38, 16%), three members were part-time (8%), four retired, five doing unpaid/voluntary work, and one self-employed.



Figure 8

When asked about how frequently they used CSS, 86% of respondents (38 out of 44) had used CSS every week, while the remaining mentioned using it infrequently, rarely, or with no regularity. **The majority of respondents therefore fall into the ‘active’ members** category as identified by the CSS. Most respondents are also in the group who **directly pick up their food at CSS** (38 out of 44, 89% or). Four respondents received CSS food deliveries at home, and an additional two rely on both these methods.

Apart from accessing food from CSS, the respondents also **depend on buying food from other sources** such as local shops and supermarkets (as shown in Figure 9 below).

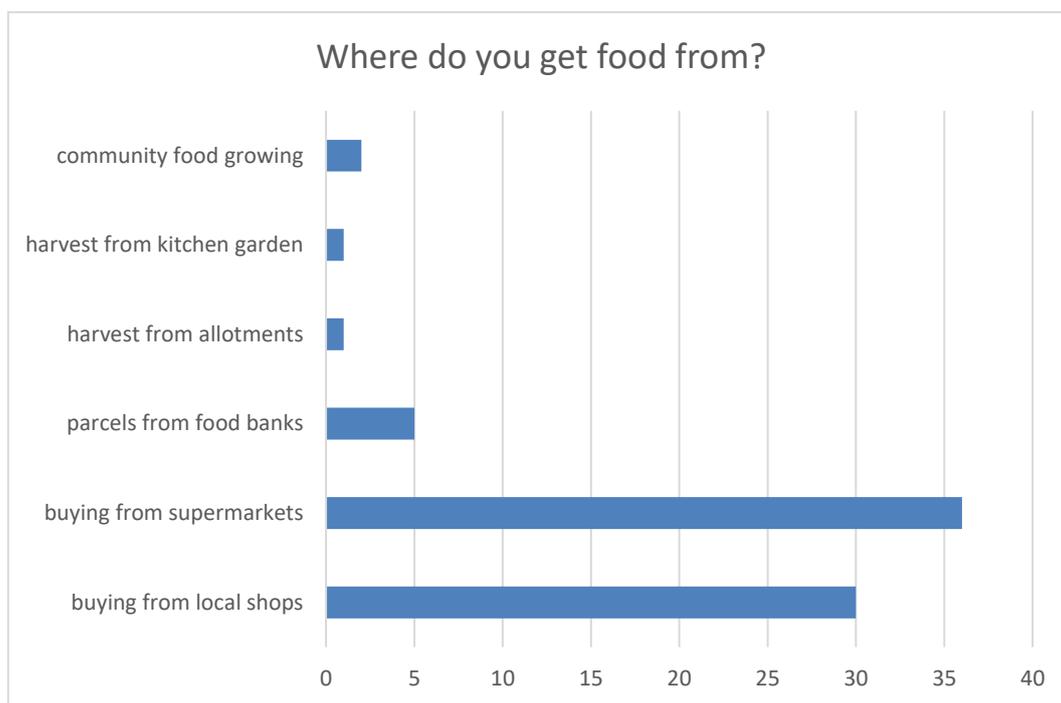


Figure 9

The main source was supermarkets (36 out of 44 responses) closely followed by local shops (30 out of 44). Five respondents also used **foodbanks**, while only one each used harvest from **allotments** and **kitchen garden**, and two used **community growing**. In the open-ended response to the same question, a respondent mentioned ‘other charities’ where s/he volunteers at as a place to receive additional food. These findings support other studies that show diversified coping strategies used by people for food resilience.

When asked about changes in **household spending on food** since joining the CSS, more than 80% of the respondents (35 out of 42) reported that it had decreased (Figure 10 below). It is worthwhile highlighting that this is happening across different household types, as shown in Figure 11. One-third of the households (13 out of 43, 30%) were ‘couple with child or children (under 18 years old)’, followed by single adults (28%), and single parent family (one adult with child or children) (23%).

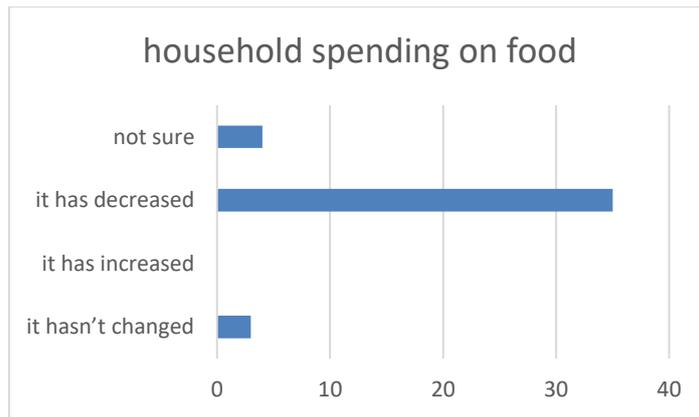


Figure 10

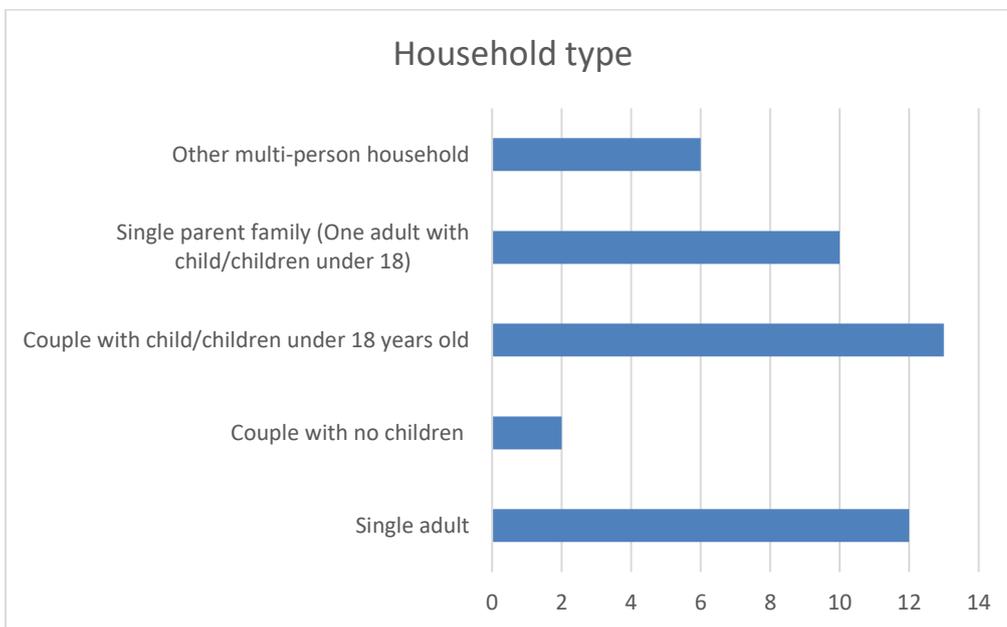


Figure 11

When asked what respondents **would have done differently if they did not get food from CSS**, the most cited response was that they would have spent more money on food, leaving even less for other purposes. The next most cited response was 'cutting down on food, in terms of quantity and consumption of fresh produce'.

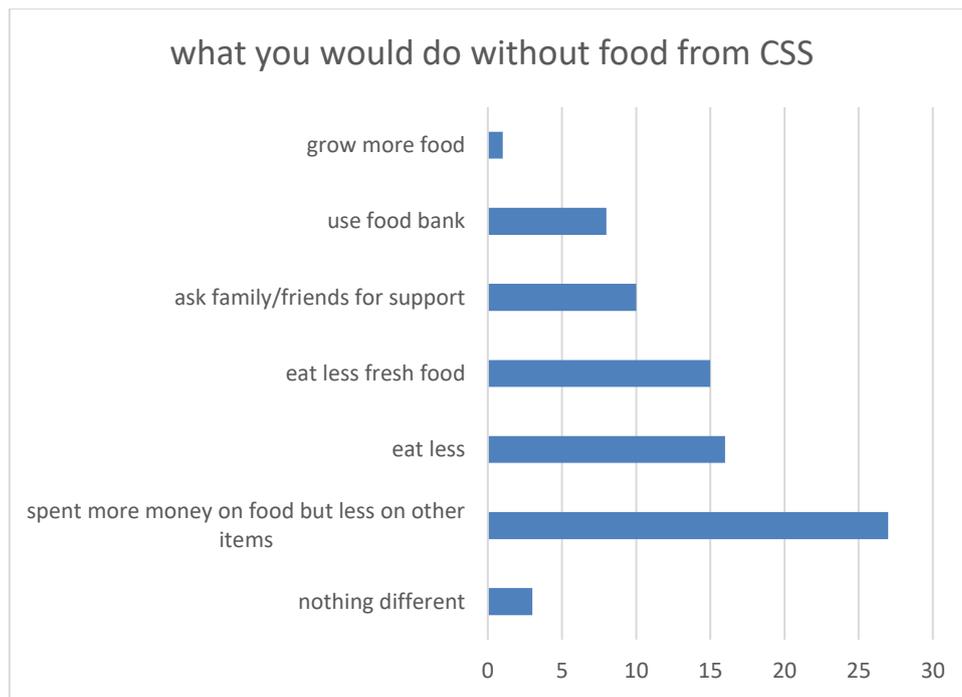


Figure 12

The findings also show that 19% of respondents (8 out of 43) said they would resort to using **food banks**. Although it is not a significant finding because of the small sample size, this suggests that at least potentially **CSS may have reduced the need to turn to emergency food provision** (i.e., food banks), a key indicator for the project’s impact. Anecdotal reports from the staff and volunteers suggest that many who previously used the emergency food hub co-located in the FCC (described later in Section 3.19) have moved to using CSS. As described earlier (Figure 9), five respondents in the member survey had reported using food banks in addition to using CSS. The intersection between the foodbank and CSS is clearly an issue to explore further to understand the project’s impact on reducing the need of foodbanks.

Figure 12 also shows that only one of the respondents considered the **growing of food** as an option. How is this related to the lack of growing spaces at home or in the community, or to a lack of time? Or, could it be associated with the high level of satisfaction respondents have reported over the ready availability, affordability, and convenience of getting fresh produce at CSS? These are issues to explore further.

3.15 Satisfaction with food

We asked members about their level of satisfaction with the food they buy from CSS. Their responses are presented below (Table 3).

	<i>Total responses</i>	<i>very unsatisfied</i>	<i>unsatisfied</i>	<i>not sure</i>	<i>satisfied</i>	<i>very satisfied</i>
The quantity of food you get for £4	42		1		11 (26%)	30 (71%)
The quality of food you buy (e.g., taste, nutrition)	37		1		17 (46%)	19 (51%)
The different types/range of food available	37		2	1	19 (51%)	15 (41%)
The amount of fresh fruit included in your purchase	37			1	20 (54%)	16 (43%)
The amount of fresh vegetables included in your purchase	37		1		19 (51%)	17 (46%)
The amount of food which is specific to your culture and you are used to cooking/eating	37		2	1	15 (41%)	18 (49%)

Table 3

The data shows that the majority of respondents is *very satisfied* with the **quantity of food** they get for £4, with the remainder (except one) being *satisfied*. In other categories, nearly all respondents (between 92%-97%) are either *very satisfied* or *satisfied* with the **quality** and different **types of food**, the amount of **fresh fruit** and of **fresh vegetables**, and with the amount of **culture-specific food**. Only the questions about the availability of different types of food and of culture-specific food received two 'unsatisfied' responses each.

The responses to the open-ended question on how they would describe the food available at CSS point to similar conclusions, as shown in Box 1 below.

- good variety
- food is on date
- very happy
- lot of help during desperate times
- so far so good
- it's very good
- more vegan food?
- very happy
- I'm happy
- lovely friendly supportive teams Fri/Sat; just more consideration for numbers
- add more to the supply of food to meet standard we started with
- thank you all
- almost like being in local supermarket, only thing different is you have a staff member with you
- just the expired date is near end
- meat alternatives would be nice sometimes

Box 1

The overall response shows satisfaction and a sense of gratitude for the access to food during these challenging times. The highlighted statements refer to concerns/issues over food such as the short-dated nature of the food and a lack of choice. We found them associated with respondents who receive food deliveries. 'Keeping to standards that the CSS began with' is an interesting response that acquires importance in relation to the **expectations being built around the CSS.**

3.16 Consumption of fresh produce

In terms of satisfaction over the availability of fresh produce, out of 37 responses received, except for one, all the other respondents were in the range of 'satisfied-very satisfied'.



The amount of fresh produce stocked by CSS, as reported by the staff, has increased over the nine months period, as a result of new relationships built with local enterprises such as

Coventry Food Growing Network and regular donations from retailers. This has made a marked difference to the **quality of food provision**.

... at the beginning of the project, it was difficult to ensure that we have exactly the same amount of fresh produce and vegetables for everyone... and now I feel that not only are we able to provide a really good offer to everyone but also, generally, the offering is of better quality. We have a really fantastic offer of fruit and veg meaning that every member gets one big bag of fruit and veg, bigger than the one we could offer before, but they also have the possibility to have extra fruit and veg.... When they come, they are able to pick like a considerable amount of extra food and veg – from oranges to potatoes, some onions, and some carrots depending on what they like. ... [Staff, Nov 2020 interview]

In our member survey, 48% (21 out of 44) reported collecting the additional fresh fruits/vegetables on all occasions and 27% (12 out of 44) did it sometimes. Those who did not collect them mentioned that they did not know about it or that they received food deliveries that did not include the additional free fresh produce.

In addition to the increased availability, the increased consumption of fresh produce is a key outcome for the CSS, along with broader change in food habits, as shown in the responses below.

3.17 Changing food habits

We asked members if joining the CSS had an impact on household food habits. The responses are shown below (Table 4).

	<i>Total responses</i>	<i>completely disagree</i>	<i>disagree</i>	<i>neither agree nor disagree</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>completely agree</i>		<i>not sure</i>
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(5+6)	(7)
I/we eat more fresh fruit at home	41	4	6	5	12	14	26 (63%)	
I/we eat more fresh vegetables at home	41	3	6	6	13	12	25 (61%)	1
I/we have tried new food items	37	2	3	4	15	13	28 (76%)	
I/we have cooked new dishes (tried new recipes)	40	1	8	5	11	14	25 (63%)	1
I/we cook more meals at home	38	6	4	4	10	12	22 (58%)	2

Table 4

More than 60% of respondents *agree* and *completely agree* with higher consumption of **fresh fruits and vegetables at home**. More than 60% have tried **new food items**, and cooked **new dishes** (or tried **new recipes**) from the food they buy from CSS. More than half (58%) **cooked more meals at home**.

An initiative by CSS to promote cooking and healthy eating is the ‘**Recipe Bags**’ priced at £1 each offered as an add-on to the food offering. These contain the instructions and all the ingredients necessary to prepare a particular recipe (e.g. a healthy meal), usually based on food items that are in excess stock. The recipes are often collected from [Groundwork West Midlands](#) and it is the staff and volunteers who put together the bags. Data on recipe bags shows an average of 10 bags sold each week.

We also asked an open-ended question on other changes in food habits that the members may have observed since joining CSS. The responses are shown below (Box 2).

- more variety
- learning to not waste food
- variety of food
- saved a lot; buy only few things at supermarket
- before furloughed, struggling to afford enough food
- feeling much better
- positive
- less wastage
- we try a lot of new foods
- use a lot more pasta & jars like sweet & sour sauce & bolognese
- got new food from them which I didn't buy before, now eating those
- better quality food

Box 2

These responses reinforce the positive impact in terms of variety, and the introduction to new foods that the members would not normally have purchased or consumed. This also came up in the interviews with staff and volunteers when they described the feedback they received from their members.

But, you know, there was some people saying, you know what, there were things in there (in the food bag deliveries) that I would never have dreamt of buying, but I've tried them and actually I like them & I will have them again. Some people have actually said it's positive, because it's like, widened the range of foods that they've tried and enjoy. [staff, Nov 2020 interview]

Two respondents in the members' survey, as seen in Box 2 above, stated that they experienced positive impacts since there is **less wastage of food** in their households-- a point to explore further in follow-up conversations.

3.18 Experience of CSS

When asked to describe their **overall experience** of using CSS, 88% of the respondents (38 out of 43) described it as *very good*, another 9% found it *good*, and only 1 respondent described it as *bad*.

Probing further on what the respondents liked about using the CSS, the most cited response was the availability of **low-cost food** followed by **'volunteers helping with shopping'** and **'freedom to choose food'**, as shown below (Figure 13). Other responses included 'volunteers are very lovely'; 'helping community'; 'friendly supportive volunteers'; and 'cost-effective way to try foods I won't normally buy'.

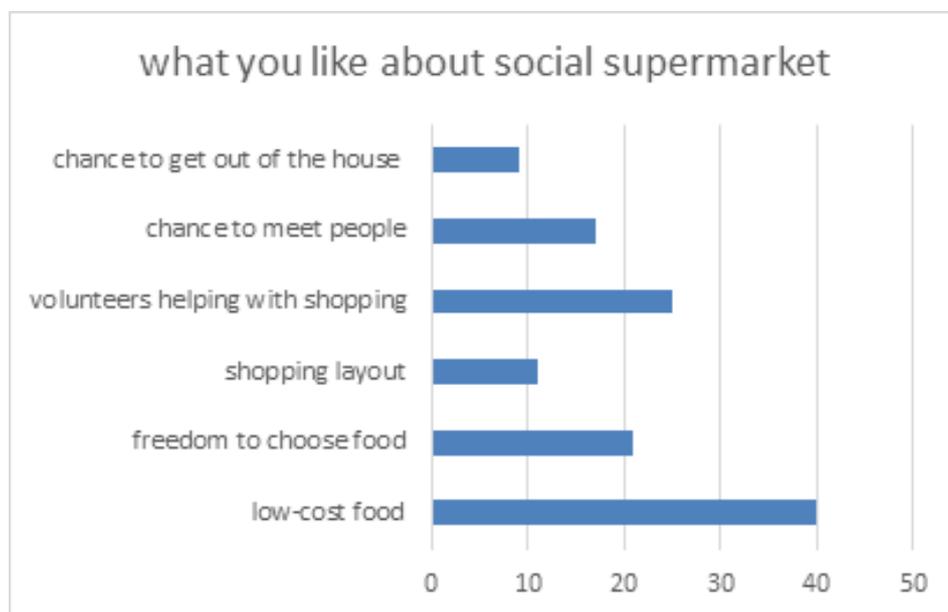
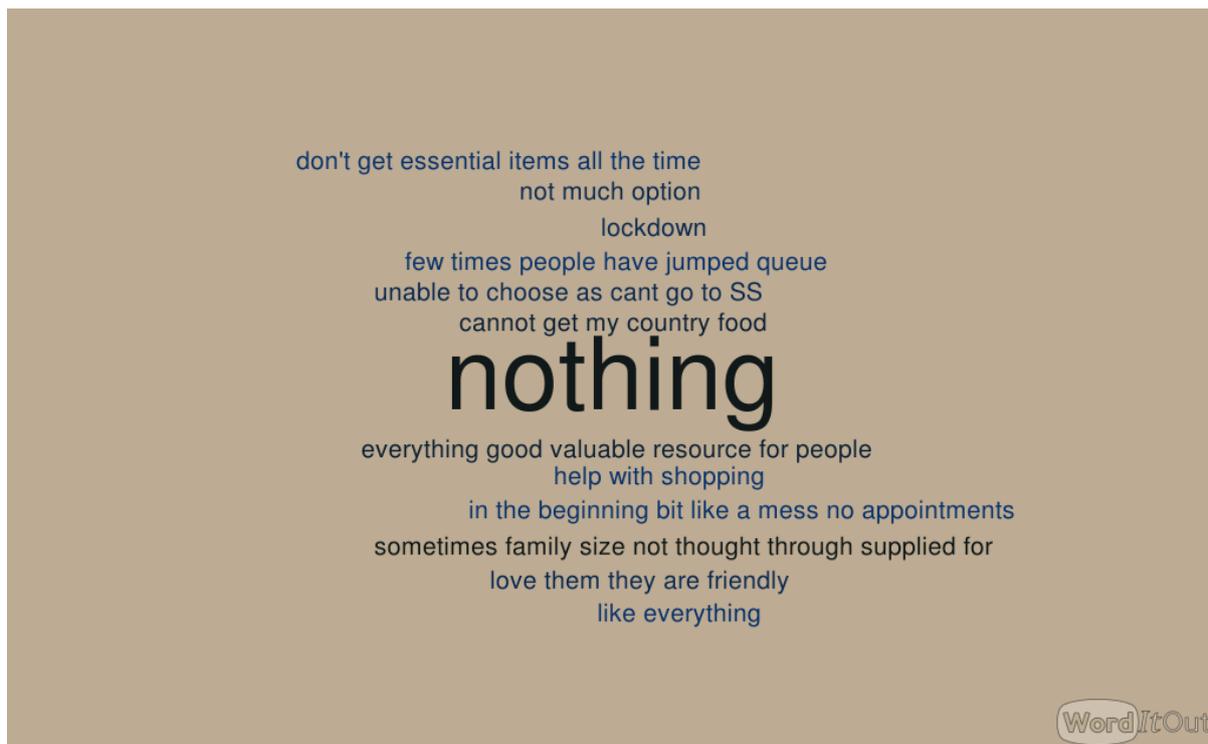


Figure 13

These findings reinforce **affordability, cost-effectiveness, element of choice, and the support of volunteers** at CSS as key to the members' experience of CSS.

Further, the most common response to our open-ended survey question about *what was not liked about the CSS* was 'nothing', as shown in the word cloud below made of the 18 responses received (Box 3).



Box 3

These responses clearly suggest a **high level of satisfaction**, which affirms the *very good* overall experience reported by the respondents as described earlier. During a period of financial precarity and uncertainty brought on by the pandemic on multiple fronts, this is a significant finding. This has also come across in informal conversations with some of the members by the research team on their visits to FCC.

Nonetheless, a closer look at the other responses reveals also a few **concerns and/or expectations** that the CSS did not fully meet. The main concerns relate to food -- in terms of essential items not available all the time; food that satisfies cultural-preferences not available; and food bought per food bag not enough for a larger household. This also came across in the interviews with staff and volunteers who mentioned the occasional dissatisfaction they observed in the case of members who received food deliveries. The staff ascribed the reason to those members not able to exercise the same degree of choice over food as those who shopped onsite. The other reason ascribed by them was that not all members understand that the food at CSS is essentially 'food surplus' from FareShare and donations, which are most likely to be short-dated.

When asked for suggestions on how CSS could be improved, out of 20 responses received, 8 expressed their satisfaction at how it is run, with feedback such as "nothing (*to be improved*) under COVID-19 circumstances", "everything absolutely fine, just continue", and "continue to help the community". The other responses are as follows (Box 4).

- all supermarkets should donate to CSS
- add food from other countries
- introduce a tea shop + books
- main issue was people waiting; but improved now, well-organised now
- better service
- more fresh food & veg
- consideration for larger family size
- maybe a list of available items & choice of different things to choose from (*in the case of food deliveries*)
- more food
- don't like having to mention my diet (don't eat meat) but rest of family do so, I don't often get alternatives

Box 4

3.19 Engagement with other food projects

Another aspect supporting the goal (expected outcome) of developing greater food resilience is the project's engagement with other food projects and initiatives in Coventry.

Since the first lockdown, one of the [10 emergency food hubs](#) set up and coordinated by Coventry City Council for vulnerable residents across Coventry has been operating from FCC following the [closure of foodbanks](#). At these hubs, prepacked food parcels (ambient and long dated food) obtained from Coventry Foodbank are handed out to people using food banks earlier and to those newly referred due to loss of work or other economic hardship. Although primarily designed to be a delivery service targeted at supporting people who found it difficult to get access to food during the pandemic, it soon added on a collection service once a week.

The uptake of food parcels from the hub over the nine months (Figure 14) was on average around 45 per month and the data available on households who benefited from them since July is estimated to be 100 people every week. At the time of writing this report, the emergency food hub continues to operate from FCC.

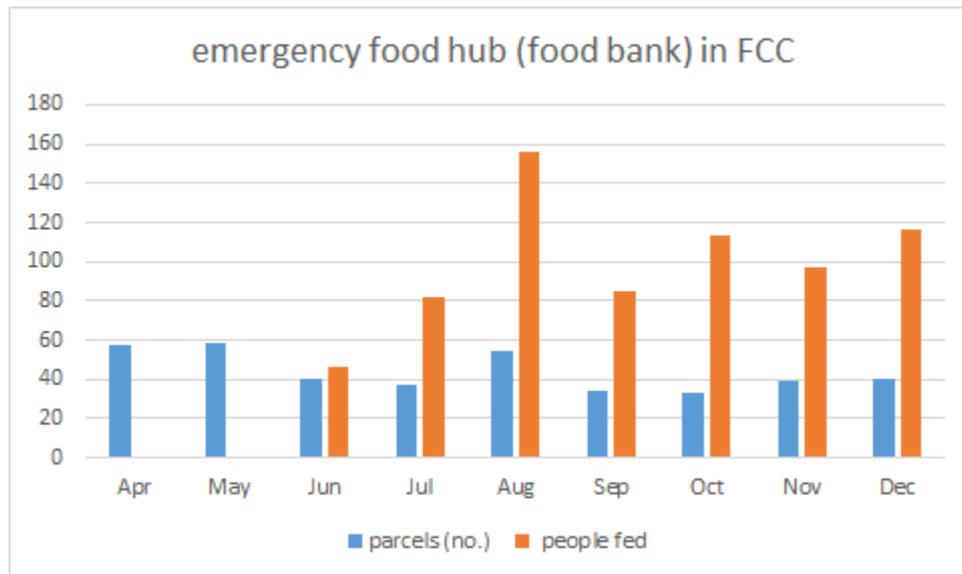


Figure 14

Despite the closure of the major foodbank in Foleshill, which had always had a high demand, the number of people who came to the emergency food hub set up in FCC did not increase as rapidly as it was feared during the pandemic. Interviews with staff and volunteers coordinating the emergency food hub revealed that people using their service had been given information about CSS and the benefits from using the social supermarket. One of the explanations offered for the fewer people using the emergency food hub was that they could have moved to CSS.

The other emergency food hubs in Coventry have reportedly also seen a decline in demand on their services. Instead, a growing number of [‘social supermarkets’² which have emerged in Coventry](#) in the last year, also referred to as ‘food hubs’ or ‘grub hubs’³ have faced increasing demand.⁴

The growing number of food hubs across the city could have taken the pressure off foodbanks. As one of the Trustees⁵ described,

I think at this moment the ‘food hubs’ or community supermarkets are running at about 457 parcels per week across the city whereas the food banks are running just shy of 200. So, the community supermarkets have taken over the food bank as the primary source of food provision for people in crisis across the city.

² The use of the term ‘social supermarkets’ for these initiatives as widely reported in media is debatable.

³ These include Aldermoor Food Hub, Canley Food Hub, Cheylesmore Food Hub, Henley Green Grub Hub, Hope Centre, Hope Community Project, Stoke Heath Food Hub, and Willenhall Food Hub.

⁴ Personal communication with a Trustee.

⁵ Personal communication, January 2021.

It would be worthwhile to explore the reasons for this. Is it because of a better choice at food hubs? Is it because it is easier to access in comparison to a food bank as there is no need for referrals and less of means assessment? If such newly emerging food hubs do not provide wraparound support – how do they address the roots of the food crisis? In the absence of data available to corroborate this **changing food provision landscape** in the city, it requires further exploration.

FCC also engaged with the [Summer Holiday Breakfast Club 2020 programme](#) co-ordinated by members of the [Coventry Food Network](#) using funding received from Feeding Britain via Feeding Coventry. The programme provided children with breakfast and activity packs during the pandemic-related pro-longed school closures in the summer. These packs were distributed to both CSS members and non-members of the local community who were eligible for the free school meals programme.



FCC also participated in the [October half term free school meals' programme](#) in collaboration with Coventry City Council and coordinated by the Coventry Food Network. This involved the distribution of food parcels to those eligible for the programme. For this programme, CSS made up the parcels from the food procured for CSS.

As part of the Coventry City Council-funded [Covid Winter Grant programme](#) (running since December 2020 until March 2021), the project is also engaging in supporting individuals and families with food during the winter period. CSS provides a bag of prepacked food (the same as provided to members) to those who come through referrals from the council.

In October 2020, FCC collaborated with a city-wide program led by [Digbeth Dining Club Coventry](#) by hosting [a street food event](#) where food was cooked onsite by local companies, Paneer Wrap Street Food and Libertine Burger, and offered for free to CSS members who needed the extra help over the half-term week.

Another example of a partnership is with the council-led initiative, [The Pod-Coventry](#). Each week, The Pod has provided free wholesome freshly cooked ready meals, on occasions also freshly baked bread, mixed salad leaves for the members of the CSS, often using ingredients from their own allotments. A similar partnership has developed with [Proof Bakery](#), a local artisanal bakery, which provides regular donations of bread.

3.20 Summary of key findings

- Average number of food bags per week (July-Dec) estimated at 135, feeding on average 432 people per week.
- Financial hardship is the 'main reason' cited for joining CSS
- Overall experience of CSS *very good* for 88%
 - Members' survey - since joining CSS
 - more than 80% worried less about food
 - for 80% household spending on food had decreased
 - 19% would resort to using food banks without CSS
 - 97% satisfied with quantity of food for £4 and with quality of food
 - 92% satisfied with range of food
 - 97% satisfied with fresh vegetables and fruits included I purchase
 - 90% satisfied with culture specific food
 - 63% eat more fresh fruits at home
 - 61% eat more fresh vegetables at home
 - 76% have tried *new* food items
 - 63% cooked *new* dishes (or tried new recipes)
 - 58% cooked more meals at home
- Engagement with local food projects -- emergency food hubs, School Holiday Meals programme, October half-term free school meals' programme, Winter Food programme, other 'food hubs' in Coventry

3.2 Outcome 2: Training and Reskilling

The project plan includes training and reskilling activities/programmes for members to help them tackle the root causes of food insecurity. However, the unusual circumstances created by the pandemic severely limiting the possibilities for group activities, and the urgency of food provision have not led to implementation of these plans. Nonetheless, there have been key developments that indicate progress on this project outcome.

3.21 New employment

The Project Manager had been in place since 2019 to oversee the entire project. At the time of the launch of CSS in March 2020, a core team comprising of an **Operations Manager** to oversee the day-to-day operations of CSS and a **Support Worker** to organise the provision of wraparound support to the members had formed. Since then, the project has created **new employment** in the process of widening the distribution of workload and responsibilities among the existing staff while responding to the 'new' demands brought on by the pandemic. Two volunteers moved on to organisational roles as **sessional workers**, one as a 'shift leader'

and the other as a volunteer coordinator. The role of shift leader is to lead the operational team of volunteers during the busiest periods, during opening hours, receiving deliveries, and managing the outgoing food deliveries. A **Finance Coordinator** came on board during the furlough period, a redeployee from Coventry City Council who had relevant experience and expertise to work on a part-time basis to support process improvement and policies and procedures at FCC. Another Council redeployee supported volunteer coordination and third-party engagement. The additional capacity provided by the Council redeployees not only contributed to making process improvements in areas such as data capture, statistical analysis, stock management, and financial management, but also enabled **volunteers to get trained informally in these areas**, which has ensured compliance of the processes put in place.

When the Support Worker reduced the number of his working hours, it created an opportunity to recruit an **apprentice**. One of the young volunteers who had been volunteering at FCC right from the beginning joined the Business Administration Apprenticeship Level Three scheme for 18 months. He is currently being trained to run the operation at FCC and could eventually be skilled as an operations manager. He divides 30 hours each week between studies and work, with 6 hours for off-the-job training and the remaining 24 hours for work at FCC.

3.22 New knowledge/new skills

From a handful of volunteers at the beginning in the month of March 2020, the project is now attracting a vast number of volunteers with a diverse set of experiences and expertise. At the time of writing this report, the **volunteer pool** comprises of nearly 50-60 people, and there are nearly 100 volunteer applications. During the first lockdown when the furlough scheme came into force, the number of volunteers had increased dramatically. Since the furlough scheme was changed in mid-September, these numbers dropped as many individuals returned to work or education. Volunteers includes local community groups like [GoodGym](#) who have engaged with the project from the very beginning when the building was getting renovated to helping with preparing food bags, stock taking, restocking shelves, building beds for community growing area, and other tasks over the entire period.

Quite early on, a **regular group of volunteers** (around 40 in number) had emerged which still forms the core of the CSS volunteer base and comprises a mix of age groups (from 16 to 69) and an even gender balance. Whereas some in this group had prior experience of volunteering with other initiatives in the city, for many others, joining the CSS project is new.

Volunteers engage in a diverse range of tasks. In food provision, for example, tasks include:

- the preparation of food (such as meat, chicken, cheese, etc. received in big packs/blocks which are required to be split up into smaller individual portions)

- stock taking and management
- the preparation of food bags for deliveries specific to dietary needs and preferences of members
- the coordination and dropping off of food deliveries
- balancing of the cash register at the end of a shopping day

Volunteers described '**on-the-job training**' they had when they were working along with the more experienced staff on all the different tasks, including also in administration, customer-facing and customer-oriented skills. As the Operations Manager described,

... volunteers are managing spreadsheets, responding to emails, customer emails, and supplier emails, responding to telephone calls, speaking to customers over the phone, registering them for membership. And even just producing membership cards, updating the system, because when the customers come into the supermarket, it's not just about serving them, it's also about recording the data accurately. Like, how much of what they had, and how much they spent, and recording all of that data accurately. So, it's a lot of ... managing administration, and recording data accurately. And people have had the opportunity to learn to put letters together, emails together - all these things take a lot of time.

The interviews with staff and volunteers reveal **co-learning and improved skills and knowledge** for volunteers. Two amongst the staff and volunteers undertook **formal training** on food hygiene and passed on the knowledge and skills to other volunteers on the food tasks, who had very little prior knowledge and skills before volunteering at FCC.

... the food hygiene one has definitely been really, really useful when preparing chicken, cheese and meat or food that comes in that need separating and having training has been really useful because I've been able to show other people how to do it.[volunteer, Nov 2020 interview]

As described below by the Operations Manager,

... as staff we have done food hygiene training... We train volunteers on the processes. So, most have been taken through the Volunteer Handbook now and included in the Volunteer Handbook are things like manual handling, training, and food hygiene training.

Another example includes one of the volunteers with professional experience of food preparation and cooking as a chef in another local food initiative who has helped train other volunteers, *albeit* informally, for improving their understanding and skills in food safety and hygiene. In October, FCC achieved a 5-Star ('very good') Food Hygiene rating from Coventry City Council. This rating indicates the highest standards achieved in three elements. These include: Hygienic food handling (including preparation, cooling and storage); Cleanliness and condition of facilities and building (including having appropriate layout, ventilation, hand

washing facilities and pest control); and Management of food safety (i.e., checks in place to ensure that food sold is safe to eat and evidence that staff know about food safety).

Other training provided to the staff includes fire warden, and TasteLife, the latter a course on how to support people who have eating disorders.

Another significant development relates to **members** (between 10-15 in number) **who have started volunteering**, some occasionally and some on a regular basis. Among the respondents in the member survey, four out of 16 stated that they have volunteered at the CSS at some point and 12 have expressed their interest to learn about volunteering opportunities.

Another instance of skills development was in interpersonal skills as described below.

... my interpersonal skills have increased in terms of how to behave, how to talk with different communities. It's a community with all types of people... Romanians, Africans...every, every society lives there. I have developed those skills as to how to interact with each of them. I even tried to learn a little bit of Romanian language. [Volunteer, Nov 2020]

The volunteers also demonstrated a greater appreciation and **awareness of food insecurity and food waste** as a result of engaging with the project. Many of them have made changes to their own practices, such as in food budgeting, trying out new food, and reducing food waste.

3.23 Increased confidence and self-esteem

A key finding from our interviews is the increased levels of confidence and self-esteem emphasised by staff and volunteers alike from their overall engagement with the project, on-the-job training, and new skills acquired. Volunteers described their experience as not only about doing something for the community, but also as getting something out of it for themselves. They described higher levels of self-esteem arising out of overcoming anxiety issues and finding the experience of volunteering at FCC fulfilling and enjoyable, as shown in the following quotes

It's really lovely being part of a team again. Because I obviously used to be part of a team at work. I was part of a team with guide dogs. And I actually get a lot from being part of a team. And this is probably one of the best teams I've ever been fortunate enough to be part of, a really, really good happy team. So, that's been a big sort of influence in my enjoyment of volunteering.
[Volunteer, Nov 2020 interview]

... all the volunteers are so friendly. It feels like a family unit if I'm being honest. I'm more confident. I feel like I've definitely contributed to the team. It's just a really nice feeling to be able to help people in such a weird way really... [Member-volunteer, Nov 220 interview]

... I didn't have any expectation at all... I didn't know what I was actually going into, to be honest. I just wanted to offer my help, especially because of the pandemic. And for me, I've grown as a person and I've had met some really nice people on the way. And I'm growing... And all I can say is that I won't stop ... I really like what I'm doing, makes me feel good. [Member volunteer]

Particularly in the case of member-volunteers, they described the opportunity of working with other volunteers and the staff in delivering the project as an enriching experience helping them not only to get new skills, but also because they felt connected, valued, and empowered. This has also benefited the project in that these member-volunteers have offered useful feedback on the service from the perspective of being a member and expectations from the project as members.

3.24 Summary of key findings

- Paid staff (employment created) including apprentice
- Staff and volunteers training on courses such as food hygiene, fire warden, Tastelife
- Volunteers on-the-job training leading to increased knowledge and skills, increased level of confidence and self-esteem

3.3 Outcome 3: Health and Wellbeing

In the overall context of COVID-19 regulations and restrictions, targeted activities and programmes for health and wellbeing for members have been on hold. However, the interviews with staff and volunteers and the members' survey revealed the indirect positive impacts on health and wellbeing.

3.31 Level of wellbeing

In the survey, we asked members about changes to their level of wellbeing in regard to different aspects of life since joining the CSS, using four adapted questions from the Wellbeing Survey used by the UK government to track the wellbeing of the nation. CSS members responses to these questions are summarized in the figure below (Figure).



Figure 15

More than 50% of the members felt that being involved in the social supermarket was worthwhile, 46% felt happier, 36% felt a positive impact on level of anxiety and 24% felt that CSS had influenced their satisfaction with life. This will be explored further in the follow-up interviews.

3.32 Physical, mental and social health

In terms of impact on physical, mental, and social health since joining CSS, the findings from the member survey are shown below.

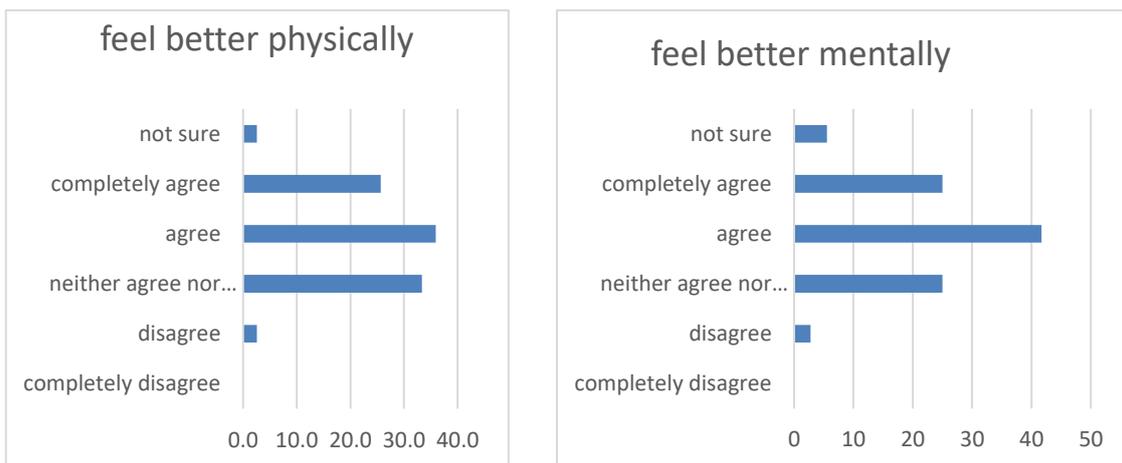


Figure 16a, 16b

While 26% of the respondents *completely agreed* with **feeling better physically**, 36% *agreed*. Put together, more than 60% of the respondents felt better physically.

In the case of response to statement ‘**mentally feeling better**’, it is a similar overall response. More than 60% felt better mentally (42% *agreed* and 25% *completely agreed*).

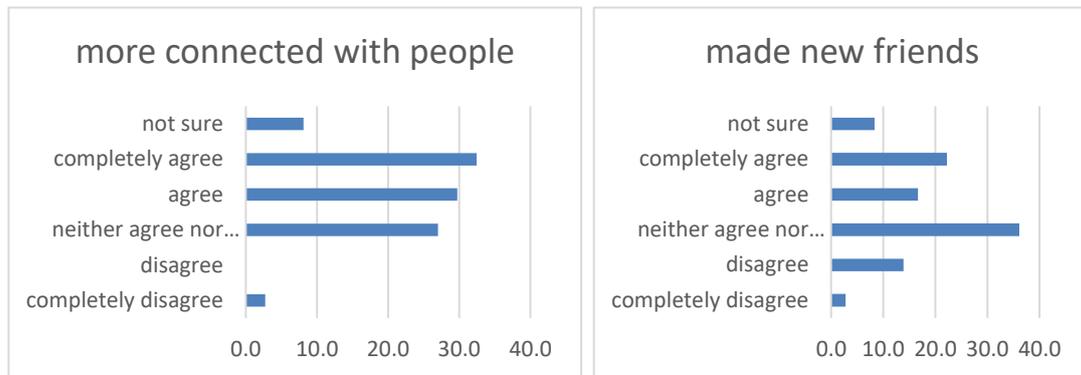
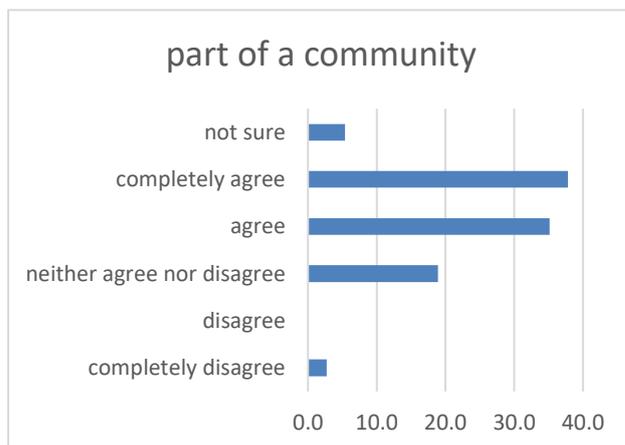


Figure 16c, 16d

In relation to **social connections** (Figure 16c), 62% of respondents felt ‘more connected with people’ (32% *completely agreed*, and 30% *agreed*). 27% neither agreed nor disagreed.

In relation to **making new friends** (Figure 16d), nearly 40% agreed (22% *completely agreed* and 17% *agreed*). However, quite a significant number (36%) chose to remain neutral, and more have disagreed to this statement in comparison with all the other statements.



More than 70% of the respondents felt they were ‘part of a community’.

Figure 16e



Figure 16f, 16g

Nearly 60% of the respondents agreed that they felt **'more confident'** (Figure 16f). However, an equal number (31%) remained neutral.

In relation to feeling **'more in control life'**, nearly 65% (37% agreed and 29% completely agreed) respondents felt more in control, while 29% chose to remain neutral.

The fact that in the above set of seven statements, many respondents chose to remain neutral (i.e. 'neither agree nor disagree' response) could suggest that these types of changes were not easily perceived within a short time period. Another plausible reason could be a degree of difficulty in answering such questions [which we will explore further in the follow up conversations with the members].

In relation to how they felt **connected with other members of CSS** (Figure 17), 31% (12 out of 39 responses) felt *very connected*, while 41% (16 out of 39) felt *somewhat connected*. Together, more than 70% felt connected with other members of CSS.

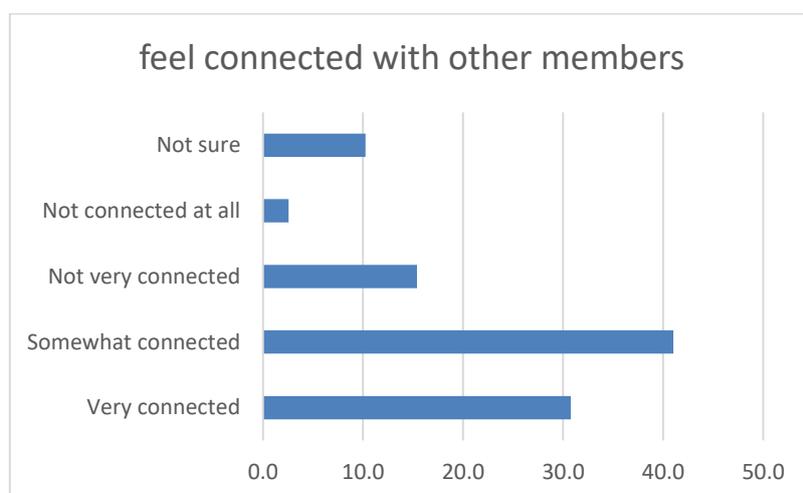


Figure 17

By putting the findings (as described above) together, we see that a majority of respondents have felt **socially connected** since joining CSS. This might appear contradictory in light of the 'social isolation' impact of the pandemic, but not so if we consider studies elsewhere which have reported some people having experienced more social connections during the pandemic from the increased formal and informal food (and medication) deliveries, and more contact with their neighbours. Beyond food, the emerging social connections between members, volunteers and members is a key finding, as discussed further below (section 3.33).

Interviews with staff and volunteers also reveal the positive impact of volunteering at FCC on their health.

I think it's helped a lot with mental health and things like that, being able to have a different, feeling, a lot safer and less stressed out by things. Because I've been able to talk about things with people here. And it's ... kind of turned into my safety bubble. I really got used to be in here. And it was a really safe environment for me where I didn't feel like I have to be like someone I'm not because I get really panicked by things...And so being here really calms me down. [Volunteer]

3.33 Relationship-building

The positive impact of relationships and social interactions on members, volunteers and staff came across also in the interviews. Volunteers described *new* relationships and *stronger* relationships with both members and staff as key to their wellbeing. By engaging with the members, they described being able to understand members' needs better and being able to do more for them.

It's just sort of getting to see the members from when they first registered, and then coming every week, you kind of build up a bit of a relationship. And I found, especially with the registration process, that people will really open up, you know, sort of about the difficulties they're facing. You know, it can actually... there have been times when, when I felt really emotional... because there were some really, really sort of poignant stories. And some really stay with you. [Staff, Nov 2020 interview]

...we had some people come along, who clearly felt really uncomfortable actually having to use the service. But they were just put into that position by COVID. And by the fact that they had lost their jobs. And then it was really nice, after lockdown had finished to see those members come in. One chap in particular told the team how grateful he was for the service and that it would be his last week because he was going back to work the next week and wanted to know how he could help...if he could donate anything. That's a really lovely moment to share really... to see how the service can help people who are temporarily struggling and obviously we've got other members who have been with us from the very beginning and are still having to come every week. [Staff, Nov 2020 interview]

Many of our members now know all the volunteers by their name. They have this kind of continuous exchange with them. When they see them, they ask about how they are doing or what is happening at the moment for them... quite a different experience from what it was earlier... And I think for me, this makes much more sense in terms of the project that was intended at the beginning. [Staff, Jan 2021 interview]

When asked to describe their **overall experience**, the volunteers used terms such as -- rewarding, enjoyable, most valuable, great, amazing, satisfying, boosting confidence, becoming more confident, feeling part of a 'family', a strong team -- all evoking positive emotions and often describing their engagement as having brought out potential in them which they didn't realize earlier. All those interviewed hold the Operations Manager in high regards for her 'natural inclination' towards creating a friendly and welcoming environment, her problem-solving approach and her pragmatism in dealing with issues and concerns and for making use of available opportunities for the wellbeing of staff and volunteers.

The increased confidence and skills acquired by volunteers and staff from the strong relationships that they have established has led to immediate benefits for the project as volunteers have become more adept at running the operations and taking prompt action to address problems on their own initiative. This has positively influenced the members' experience of shopping at CSS. As described earlier (section 3.18) respondents reported a high level of satisfaction with the feeling of connection with the volunteers and staff.

3.44 Summary of key findings

From members survey

- 51% felt worthwhile to be involved with CSS, 46% felt happier
- 36% felt a positive impact on level of anxiety
- 24% felt that CSS had influenced their satisfaction with life
- 62% felt better physically.
- 67% felt better mentally
- 62% felt 'more connected with people'
- 38.9% made new friends
- 73% felt 'part of a community'.
- 59% felt 'more confident'
- 66% felt 'more in control of life'
- 41% felt 'somewhat connected' to other members
- 31% felt 'very connected' to other members

3.4 Outcome 4: Regeneration of community asset

The regeneration of FCC as a community asset for the local community is a key objective of the project. In addition to the collaboration with Coventry City Council on food-related projects described earlier (see section 3.19) other key developments are reviewed below.

3.41 Community Gardening

It started with a self-organised small group of people (around 8-10) from community groups, [ReCC](#) and [CARAG](#), and a few members from CSS getting together to do community gardening in the small patch of growing space at the back of the car parking lot. This led to involvement of other organisations keen to support community gardening. For example, a local social enterprise, [Team Springboard](#) built the raised beds for growing vegetables, planted medicinal herbs and other plants and contributed to designing and development of the growing area.



By the end of the growing season in August-September, the community garden had produced assorted vegetables like tomatoes, cabbage, onions, kale, squash, and beans, amongst others. The harvest was used by the gardening group for making meals which they shared; and some of the produce were given to the members of CSS as 'extra vegetables' for free or in the Recipe Bags.

The community garden had become a space for connecting over growing and sharing of food during that summer. The group brought their children over for outdoor activities and held events like story-telling sessions, which during the lockdown had especially become meaningful. The members even produced videos of their experiences to share with other 'food hubs' as a source of inspiration for others to take up community gardening.

When gardening stopped because of restrictions, a few joined CSS as volunteers and registered as members. One of them described the positive impact of community gardening on her in terms of alleviating social isolation and improving her sense of wellbeing, while also providing the opportunity to learn new skills, and inspiring her to start gardening in her backyard.

... it really helped me because I don't like sitting down doing nothing. And I was so stressed and so depressed because of the lockdown. Dealing with a child as a lone mother had become stressful. So, the fact that we had that opportunity to even go to that garden, I go with her.. It was a relief. It was a relief for us. And it has helped me... my stress level really went down... It was good. [Member-volunteer, Nov 2020 interview]

Amongst the respondents in the members' survey, only one had joined the community gardening activity, however, 50% had stated interest in joining community gardening in the future.

3.42 Bare Necessities project

[Bare Necessities](#) was originally a three-month COVID-19 project between Feeding Coventry and Coventry Foodbank during the first national lockdown, which has continued since then. It is essentially a non-food essentials redistribution initiative. It includes items in three 'core' categories, sold in pre-packaged packs -- a toiletries/personal hygiene pack (containing items such as shampoo, conditioner, body wash, soap, and deodorant), a household pack (includes washing up liquid, washing powder, fabric conditioner, and antibacterial spray), and a baby pack (includes baby lotion, baby wash, nappy sacks, nappies). These packs are available as an add-on for those members interested to buy them.



The monthly data on cash sales, as shown below (Figure 18) indicate a good uptake by the members of CSS.



Among the respondents, eight (18%) reported having ‘bought it always’ and for others it was ‘infrequent’. The most cited reasons for purchasing the packs were: ‘low price’, followed by ‘they use toiletries regularly’ and then ‘convenience’. For the 43% (19 out of 44) who did not buy these packs, the most cited reasons were ‘not needed/required’, followed by ‘lack of money’, and that they ‘buy from another place’. Four of the members were not aware of this initiative.

It is revealing that one of the reasons for not purchasing these packs was also given as ‘nothing wrong, but just interested in the food’. It would be interesting to explore further the intersections of food with non-food support within the CFH project.

3.43 GrowBaby project

[Growbaby](#) is a project led by a church group, [Coventry Vineyard](#). It involves the recycling of clothes, toys and equipment of good quality to help families in need with young children. Between September and December, it had started operating from the Sports Hall in FCC every Friday when the CSS was open. Members of CSS (and other people from the community) could collect items free or donate items there. At the time of writing, the project has been suspended because of the third national lockdown.

3.44 Community cultural events

During a period when most cultural events and celebrations had been cancelled because of pandemic-related social restrictions, FCC hosted a few socially distanced cultural events/activities for the benefit of its members and the local community when opportunities came up. This was supported by detailed risk assessment and putting in place measures to make the building COVID-secure.

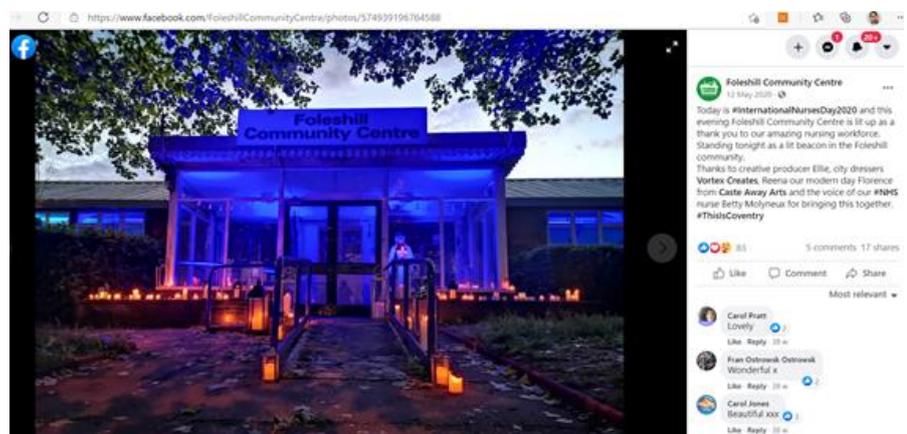
Foleshill Screenings was a collaborative project between the University of Warwick's Department of Film and Television, Coventry University's Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, the Media Archive for Central England, and FCC, funded as part of Warwick/Coventry City of Culture Open Call funding. The one-day programme in October 2020 included the screening of archival clips on the local history of Coventry in the Main Hall at FCC. It received positive feedback from the 20 attendees, which included members and volunteers from FCC as well as people from the local community. Two respondents of the members' survey reported having attended this event.

CSS celebrated a **Christmas Hampers event** in the week before they closed for Christmas for their members and volunteers. This received enthusiastic support from local community groups/organisations, like [Tales from Coventry Tables](#). At this event, cake (baked by one of the volunteers), hot chocolate, and apple juice, were offered to CSS members who came to collect their hampers. Members who could not be physically present had the hampers delivered to their homes. As described by staff,

So, we got all the fruit and veggies donated. We contacted like Tesco and Asda and got hot chocolate and sausages and bacon and stuffing and butter; and the cafe suppliers, our normal regular suppliers 'Feed the hungry' provided cheese and butter and orange juice. So, we got lots of donations, but we also got the members to contribute because that would help them learn budgeting as well. And it was amazing... actually we ended up pretty much breaking even, so the project didn't cost us anything. [Staff, Jan 2021 interview]

FCC had a festive atmosphere on the actual day when the members came to collect the hampers. The event has received very positive feedback from the volunteers and members, also validated in the conversations held by a member of the research team present on the day.

Another event celebrated at FCC was the **International Nurses Day 2020** in May in collaboration with Coventry City of Culture 2021 team to celebrate a spirit of hope, care and concern, which



received positive feedback from the local community as noted in Facebook exchanges.

The project plan envisioned the revitalisation of FCC as a cultural space for fostering community engagement and community cohesion and these cultural events that FCC has celebrated or organised point to progress in that direction.

3.45 Community-led group activities/programmes

The project plan includes the commercial letting of space in FCC for community-run programmes and activities for generating income while supporting the development of new skills and knowledge, health and well-being for the benefit of their members and the wider community. This has not happened to the extent planned, invariably affected because of the restrictions and regulations of COVID-19.

However, FCC has managed to let space for a few community-run activities and programmes. This includes for example educational programmes (like tuition groups, ESOL classes) and martial arts classes by local community organisations. One of the volunteers ran Pilates sessions for some time.

Although severely limited under the current circumstances, the events, activities and programmes held so far, and the interest shown by community groups to use the rooms in FCC show the potential for developing such avenues for community engagement and community cohesion, and for training and reskilling.



Supported by local partnerships, links and connections established with community groups and organisations across the city, including the local Council, as described in this section, FCC is making progress as a vital community space.

3.46 Summary of key findings

- Community gardening
- Increased number of community partners
- Increased links with council-led projects
- Increased number of community-led activities/programmes
- Increased letting of space for community-led activities/programmes

4. Challenges

In the overall context of mounting an effective response to COVID-19 lockdowns, social distancing regulations and restrictions, continuing to run operations has not been without challenges. The processes and practices have had to adapt/modify under changing circumstances and new learnings to meet the increased demand for food provision. Given the impact of the extenuating circumstances, the project has primarily been limited to providing low-cost food to its members. The main challenge going forward will be to go beyond food support to actively supporting members cope with hardship and disadvantage and enabling them to make the transition out of the crises that they find themselves in, which is central to the CFH model.

Our interim analysis brings to the fore the key challenges in areas as described below.

4.1 Membership and support services

At the launch of CSS in March 2020, the plan was to cater initially for 250 members. By the end of December 2020, the project had around 300 'active' members with an average of 135 members turning up per week. There is a consensus among staff and volunteers that membership numbers should be capped, such that they can continue to deliver a food offer of sufficient quantity and quality which current CSS members have become accustomed to. A further increase in members would increase the challenges to meet food demands. In addition, staff and volunteers realise the need to limit membership numbers at a level that would allow the provision of sufficient quality wraparound support that members need in keeping with the project's aim to support members' transition out of the crisis that they have found themselves in. Finding the right balance between expanding the project's reach and sufficient engagement is a key challenge.

To cite one example, current membership includes a sizable number of non-English speaking members, especially from the Romanian community in Foleshill. Although there is a concerted effort on the part of the project staff and volunteers to engage with these members (by using Google Translate, occasionally with the help of Romanian translators, and in specific situations with the help of coordinators of the [Roma Project Coventry](#)), existing **language barriers** are significant. These barriers will remain an obstacle to move beyond the sole provision of food. Further, transcending language (and cultural) barriers will be key to social inclusion of diverse communities that especially characterise Foleshill.

4.2 Food-related

While there is good progress on tapping into food surplus in sufficient quantity and of a good quality (in nutritional content), food procurement has not been without challenges. Without

the massive donations of food and without the large grants funding used to purchase the basic staples, the food surplus received from FareShare would not meet the entire demand.

... we do like FareShare. Obviously, we don't know what we're going to get. And so we have to tailor everything to that... [Member-Volunteer, Nov 2020 interview]

The FareShare orders are very good, and we are pleased... we're really happy with what we get from FareShare. But it definitely isn't enough, we have to source fruit and vegetables from the local supplier. We have to source tins from the supermarket really. We have to top up the dairy products each week like cheese and eggs from a local supplier. We have to spend quite a bit of money every week. And luckily, we've got quite a few grants in which ... that's been really helpful.

[Staff, Nov 2020 interview]

In addition to the procurement of sufficient food at a low-cost from diverse sources, providing a nutritionally balanced offer across different food categories each week is no less a challenge. This is made all the more difficult because of the unpredictability and unreliability of food stock from week to week, and which does not always include food that meets specific dietary needs, like vegan, gluten-free, or sugar-free, and specific to cultural preferences.

... a very concrete example is halal chicken, halal meat. We don't get it from FareShare. We used to get it from one meat supplier that we had, but we had to buy it. And then they stopped supplying it. It was from the cafe supplier, which is one of our main suppliers for eggs and fresh products. And they stopped sourcing halal chicken, so we didn't have it for a long time.

[Staff, Jan 2021 interview]

As described earlier (section 3.15) although the feedback from respondents about the food has been overwhelmingly positive, few respondents were unhappy with the food being close to its best before date or use by date. In their interactions with members, the staff and volunteers had encountered this dissatisfaction on a few occasions. They described two reasons behind this -- either the members were not aware of the short-dated nature of 'food surplus' in general (despite being informed about it in the T&Cs at the time of registration) or because they did not have freezers at home.

... I think most people do just freeze and we put freezing instructions on anything that we pack ourselves that was split up, and then obviously, there are freezer instructions on pre-packaged items. If I was getting one of the bags of shopping, I'd automatically like freeze most of the stuff that is close to its use by date. And saying that, it would be absolutely fine and it's not a problem. But if you've got members that haven't got freezers, then I can see that would be more of an issue for them. [Staff, Nov 2020 interview]

The above quote points to the importance of suitable freezing and cooking facilities at homes as complementary to food provision that can affect food resilience.

Although there is a concerted effort by CSS to strike a good balance between variety, quality, and quantity of food offering, the logistics of sourcing and collection from numerous 'unpredictable' sources, has been a key challenge, one which is met by relying on a substantial number of volunteer hours and intensive coordination by staff. The fact that CSS never ran out of food nor had a shortage of volunteers during the entire period speaks volumes about the project team's management and people skills, but it masks the extra workload for a core group that the project relied on.

4.3 Data management

With all efforts focused on keeping the CSS open and running while adapting operations in tandem with changing government guidance and restrictions for health and safety of staff, members and volunteers, the plans by the staff to systematically collect and organise data in relation to use of the social supermarket by the members had experienced noticeable delays. Staff reported the difficulties in prioritising data collection and organisation when coping with the logistics and demands of running the daily operations, which in itself had become an intensive process during the lockdowns. At the time of the launch in March, new members were requested to fill in a fairly detailed application form. However, in order to reduce burden on staff capacity and minimise burden on potential members, those joining in subsequent months during the pandemic were only asked for the basic information (such as name, address, family size, dietary requirements, and contact details) required to coordinate the food supply and provision. The process of collecting and recording comprehensive information resumed in October, which explains the sparse and incomplete data for the earlier months.

Particularly since November, staff have been systematically reviewing earlier data and organising the database on membership.

... So, there's been some problems with... some issues with recording the attendance. It has been quite hard to manage. So many people coming along, and, you know, trying to get the correct spelling of their name and then mark who's attended and when they've attended. I'm not saying we haven't done it, but there's definitely some improvements that need to be done on the attendance data. I feel like that's the one area that's left at the moment that really does need my effort to make sure that's as accurate it can be. Yeah, I don't feel happy with the attendance data that we've recorded to date. So, we have spent quite a bit of time recently going back through the last six weeks of data, to make sure that it's accurate and matches the membership numbers and the names and actually balances back the numbers of the people that have attended ... and balances back to the number of bags that we know we've sold.

[Staff, Nov 2020 interview]

As a very practical step whose implementation had been delayed, CSS started issuing membership cards to the members in November. These bear the member's name, photo,

their membership number and expiration date. The issue of membership cards was expected to streamline the process of recording data on the use of the CSS by its members, and the volunteers have confirmed this.

Maintaining an accurate database is also critical for the purposes of submitting grant applications for raising funds for CSS, as pointed out by one of the Trustees of Feeding Coventry⁶. Many important steps towards ensuring this have been taken towards the end of last year.

4.4 Coordination with other food hubs in the city

As described earlier (section 3.19), in the last year a number of ‘food hubs’ have emerged in Coventry. They have formed an alliance whose aim is to ensure a fairer citywide distribution of food resources and an even access to food across the various food hubs. CSS has joined this alliance, and has benefited from grants funding received, for example DEFRA funding in July for provision of food during the first lockdown.

Each food hub in the alliance cater as a priority to residents in their vicinity (within a specific geographical area, based on postcode). They all generally follow what is locally referred to as the ‘Henley Green’ model (i.e. their members are offered a food basket for £4 containing food items from a standardized list to choose from which is worth £20). However, there are variations between them, for example, in food offering (in terms of quantity and quality) based on their respective food procurement, including local donations. They all do not operate in the same way. According to staff and volunteers at CSS, people have turned up at CSS wanting to be members of CSS for their ‘better’ offering even if they were not locally resident, and they had to redirect them, which has caused disappointment and disagreements on many occasions. The extent to which there should be coordination among all the food hubs is an emerging question while perceived differences in services across the city might become a challenge.

This also points to a bigger issue of CSS (and other food hubs) role vis-à-vis a citywide strategy for food insecurity, one that is tied to a more long-term food strategy with key priorities of building sustainable, equitable, and resilient food systems.

4.5 Financial Sustainability

The self-sustaining social enterprise model for the project includes income generation from membership fees, the Community Café and from the commercial letting of additional spaces in the building. The breakout of the pandemic and its impacts since March 2020 has however

⁶ Personal communication, Jan 2021.

affected the project schedule in a major way by slowing down the progress made in establishing two key components: the café and the letting of space. The latter has been at best sporadic and limited. At the time of writing, the planning for the development of the Community Café space is under way.

On the operational side, the main expenditures relate to staffing costs, utilities, and food. Considering food costs, as described earlier (section 3.13), although the income generated from membership fees has covered the cost of food procured from FareShare, the total burden of food costs have been absorbed by numerous grants and COVID-19 funding, local and national, available for community food organisations. It is estimated that there is a shortfall of about £5-6 for every food bag that a member gets from the CSS.⁷ In the likelihood that grants funding is not easily secured/forthcoming and COVID-19 funding for community organisations is no longer available or restricted in the coming months, food provision will be undermined. Managing a tight budget for meeting the operational costs will be a key challenge to the sustainability of the project and its future outcomes.

4.6 Project management and governance

Over the last ten months (March-December), continuing the project delivery during the pandemic has required an exceptionally high level of activity that needed to be coordinated and mobilised through timely, quick and nonetheless rigorous responses. This has put unusual pressure on the capacity of the project team, project management and the Trustee board as Feeding Coventry refocused to respond to the pandemic. For example, operations shifted from an onsite pantry-style shopping model to a dual model of onsite collection and delivery. Opening times for CSS quickly moved from 2 days per week to 3, then 4 and the Operations staff who had been employed on a part-time basis were made full time. As described earlier, operations stretched over additional projects in response to the changing situation brought on by the pandemic (such as the emergency food hub). In terms of governance, the rapid expansion of the project has also meant that Feeding Coventry and the Board of Trustees have had to be responsive to developments and this has presented a challenge to the project management approach. As described by the Project Manager⁸,

Whereas initially the outcomes and remit of the project were clear, Foleshill Community Centre and the Social Supermarket have been the site of food delivery initiatives that fall outside of the original scope of the Lottery funded project. Whilst the delivery of food bank, school holiday meal provision and shielding packages have provided a much-needed community response, they placed an unexpected additional workload on staff and volunteers and the board as they respond to the citywide initiatives including the need to meet the challenge of a citywide approach to food purchase and distribution. The board has had little time to consider the

⁷ Personal communication with a Trustee of Feeding Coventry.

⁸ Personal communication

strategic development of the organisation, and change control processes are limited to the regular board meetings which have been often operational in content rather than strategic by necessity.

Steps have been taken to widen the knowledge and skills base of staff and volunteers so that for most positions (e.g., shift leads) several people have gained knowledge and experience to fill these particular roles. Nevertheless, under the unusual pressures that the project team has been working under, and the rapid expansion of the service, the management of risks from key staff stepping away and/or volunteers dropping out potentially poses a key operational challenge to the viability of the project in the coming months.

5. Final Reflections

We asked the members an open-ended question on sharing with us anything that they would like to about CSS/FCC that the survey had not addressed, and the responses from 10 respondents (not in any order of priority) were as follows (Box 5).

- nice way to help people
- more fresh veg
- Thank you for your help
- no, not at this time
- volunteers very friendly & welcoming
- involving local children would be beneficial; have 2 children who'd love to participate
- improve quantity of food supply as it was in the beginning
- brilliant to have such lovely support in the community
- address to be corrected on CSS records
- brilliant, wouldn't change a thing; feel happy when I'm there; staff very polite and make you feel wanted

Box 5

In addition to feedback on food, the social aspect comes out quite clearly. In this sample of surveys, the members who participated have a particular profile. The median annual household income is under £10,000, mainly middle-aged, of white British ethnicity, and unemployed, looking for work. They are in rented housing from Housing Associations. It is difficult to ascertain accurately how this profile relates to the entire membership because of limited/incomplete data. Nonetheless, the key findings from the evaluation exercise

undertaken in this study capture the experiences of members who are 'active' and what we describe as a 'core' group of volunteers, member-volunteers, and staff.

5.1 Beyond food: social connections

In contrast to food banks that have been associated with stigma and shame, social supermarkets like CSS are a step-up in that they provide those vulnerable to food insecurity access to food in a dignified way and a degree of choice over food in a retail-like environment. Furthermore, it is also about supporting health and wellbeing, and building social connections. As one of the staff elaborated, in response to the CSS allowing members to come inside the building to do their shopping after the first lockdown was lifted,

I think people who are the members, especially now that they're able to come into the social supermarket, you can see that they enjoy that experience a lot more than when they were having a prepacked bag given to them. It's really, I think, it's much more dignified than the foodbank offering for sure. [Staff, Nov 2020 interview]

For some members, there might still be some hesitation and embarrassment.

I think it is just that they feel they have to use a service they haven't had to do that before. But ... my feeling is that sort of after that first one or two visits, people don't feel so bad because they can see here that there's a wide variety of members that have come in and we just treat everybody as equals to ourselves... nobody feels like they're being judged or looked down on in any way at all. [Staff, Nov 2020 interview]

Although, the Community Café and the Community Hub are not yet set up, and the project has been restricted to food provision, and community gardening, it would appear to have created a 'social' environment where relationships are nurtured.

When our members come in, we have a chat and a joke or people can offload if they've been having a difficult time, whereas I think when people are using the foodbank, possibly, they don't get that kind of opportunity. So, there is a social side here, because, you get to chat with us. I say, that's my favourite part. But I think there should be a much bigger social aspect, which at the moment is impossible, because of COVID. [Staff, Nov 2020 interview]

Clearly, the project has demonstrated an indomitable community spirit and an **ethic of 'care'**, providing an invaluable safety net for the increasing numbers of people living in or at risk of food poverty. The extent to which community initiatives like this project can absorb the economic fall-out from the pandemic, with an increasing number of 'working poor' subject to insecure employment, insufficient incomes, and inadequate welfare support, amidst increased costs of living, is however a debatable issue.

5.2 Co-construction with stakeholders

'Co-construction with stakeholders' is an important aspect of the project as envisaged at the time of conception of the project with a two-fold aim: to eventually enable community 'ownership' over the project; and secondly to inform local and national policy reform which address key drivers of food insecurity. This essentially requires creating opportunities for members/users to engage with the project and to have a strong, collective voice.

5.2.1 Engagement between staff and volunteers

In describing their experience of engaging with the staff, all volunteers described their experience in words such as 'fantastic', 'feeling valued'

Another thing fantastic there is that Operations Manager is so open to suggestions. She really welcomes anybody making suggestions about any processes that they feel will work better. So, that's been really nice to sort of feel valued. [Staff, Nov 2020 interview]

... I must admit there is a lot of trust amongst us. I can't speak highly enough of her (Operations Manager). She makes it obvious that she trusts us. And you can always feel that you can trust Operations Manager to listen to you, if you know, and she just picks up on things as well anyway. But she's very approachable, very, very approachable... [Staff, Nov 2020 interview]

The volunteers appreciate the '**co-learning**' that is taking place between them and staff in response to arising problem as described in the following quotes.

... it wasn't surprising that it was a little bit crazy outside at one point. Yeah ... the brilliant thing is that Operations Manager just reacts very quickly to situations... Such that we won't have that (problem) again. She asks, have you got any suggestions? What should we do? And everybody gives their ideas. And, then the next week, it's much better... [Staff, Nov 2020 interview]

... Operations Manager is very open for implementing anything that any of us volunteers think might make the job go better, or, we'll try it, because there's not many things that have failed really, but she's definitely supportive, and you know she will always chat about things and we have laughs along the way as well. So she's really supportive and she is ... very, very professional at what she does and in supporting her staff ... [Member-volunteer, Nov 2020]

Over the months, the project has put in place key **operational processes**. These include a volunteer handbook and guidelines on building management processes, food stocking and delivery, food hygiene, safeguarding, 'whistleblowing', and customer complaints. In October, the CSS achieved a 5-Star ('very good') Food Hygiene rating from Coventry City Council. This rating indicates the highest standards achieved in three elements. These include: Hygienic food handling (including preparation, cooling and storage); Cleanliness and condition of

facilities and building (including having appropriate layout, ventilation, hand washing facilities and pest control); and Management of food safety (i.e., checks in place to ensure that food sold is safe to eat and evidence that staff know about food safety). The Operations Manager along with staff and a volunteer who had received formal training on Food Hygiene, and a volunteer with prior experience in the area, had trained other volunteers (informally) on this aspect. A clear example of co-construction, which points to a 'review and reflection' approach used by the staff and volunteers.

5.22 Engagement of members

At the end of the project, the aim is that the members would take ownership of FCC and the CSS. We asked in our members' survey if they were aware of the social supermarket's structure (i.e., type of organisation) and how it is governed. More than half (19 out of responses) were not aware and 12% (4 out of 33) responded that they had no interest in the matter. Among the 36 respondents who were aware of the structure and organisation, 28% (10 out of 36) expressed an interest to get involved and to participate in some of the strategic decisions of the social supermarket (e.g., type of food to be sold, the opening times, and the support services to be provided). 31% (11 out of 36) were not interested, and 39% (14 out of 36) had not thought about it.

A significant development in 'co-construction' with members can also be seen in relation to members engaging in project delivery as volunteers (described earlier, see section 3.22). It has already helped with making the provision of services better.

*... this is a really positive change. Because first, it means that members have a bit more **power or influence over the project**. And they are involved. And we can get their feedback as well. And this has been a really positive change on the quality of our offer. So, for example, on chicken handling, we had some feedback from members that came here to volunteer saying that on a couple of times some meat that they received were either not well, like frozen, or not so fresh, and that we have to be a bit more cautious. And it's true that usually these feedbacks, maybe because of the nature of our project, we don't receive it from members, maybe because members at the moment still see our offer as being like because we are charity, and not to criticize... afraid that if they are like negative or give us some negative feedback, we won't like... I don't know why until now, whenever we were asking for feedback, everyone was saying, Oh, yeah, it's really good. You're doing a great job. No, nothing needs to be changed. But with members coming to volunteer with us, they were a bit more keen to give us some feedback about what we are offering. And it allowed us to improve the services that we have.*

[Staff, Jan 2021 interview]

As of December 2020, there were at least 10 active members who occasionally volunteer, and another 5-10 on a regular basis. It will be useful to capture the extent and nature of their engagement and the outcomes for the final evaluation.

5.23 Engagement with stakeholders

The Operations Manager has regular engagement with the Project Manager and the Board of Trustees, reporting on the operational status of the project. This has ensured a regular process of identifying and solving issues and responding to a quick-changing situation. In describing interaction with the Trustees,

... from where we've come to where we are now has been a massive leap. And it can only get better really, because the vision is great... the Trustees are really proactive about things with Operations Manager. [Member-volunteer, Nov 2020 interview]

In order to redesign the space in the FCC to set up the Community Café, the management has embarked on a consultation process among staff, volunteers, and member-volunteers to take their experiences and expectations into account.

It has engaged with the local council on various projects (as briefly outlined in section 3.19). This has widened the nature, scope and reach of the project, making FCC a community base for extending support. The project team participate in the regular meetings organised by **Support for Foleshill** group. This group, which is an initiative led by Coventry City Council, includes individuals, community groups, and organisations across different sectors who support each other for the benefit of the Foleshill community. This has enabled the project to link up with local groups. For example, with [Foleshill Creates](#), which brings people in the community together through art and creativity. The group has created festive art for the FCC, and members have benefited from the online art activities conducted by the group during the pandemic period. Another example is the link established with [Foleshill Library](#), which has donated books to FCC, and they are in discussion to run sessions for members and their children.

By engaging with [Coventry Food Network](#) which has evolved out of Feeding Coventry and which is a partnership of statutory, voluntary and private organisations, the project is benefitting from making new connections and partnerships with local community groups/organisations.

The project has actively engaged with **Family Hub at Foleshill**, which works with children, young people and families who are in need of help and support. Family Hub has supported them on many of the projects. As described by the Operations Manager,

We work really closely with them ...when we had the cycling project, you know, we worked with them on it. They took the bookings and provided volunteers. And when we did the summer holiday program, they provided volunteers and supported that work as well. And, they've also

had volunteers here... so they'll talk to the members and take referrals to the Family Hub.
[Staff, Jan 2021 interview]

The project's engagement with stakeholders has invariably deepened over the period and shows a gradually growing embedment in the local community.

5.3 Overcoming setbacks

In addition to coping with the direct fall-out from the pandemic, over the last 9 months, CSS encountered other setbacks in the form of two [break-ins](#) and the theft of its van used for deliveries. In the break-ins, the raiders took food parcels intended for the 'emergency food hub' and other supplies.

These events and the resulting publicity brought forth a tremendous outpouring of support from the wider public almost instantly. Massive donations of food and other help poured in from community partners, local businesses, local councillors, private individuals, which enabled the project to continue with its operations with minimal disruptions.

This demonstrates not only the resilience of the community spirit and a recognition of the invaluable work done by the project, but also the project's success in building a strong support base through the relationships and connections it has established within a short time.

6. Summary and recommendations

6.1 Summary Table

In the following five Tables, we present a summary of our key findings related to a) the progress made in putting processes and activities in place, b) the outcomes and c) challenges and areas for improvement.

Food Resilience		
Outputs	Outcomes for Members	Areas for improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to affordable food (300 active members as of Dec 2020) • Food procurement from FareShare, local food suppliers, donations, direct purchases • Engagement with local food projects & other 'food hubs' in Coventry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced shopping bills on food • Without food from CSS, many would have turned to foodbanks • Reduced worry about food • Increased consumption of fresh fruit & vegetables • Increased consumption of different types of food • Increased confidence in cooking new dishes • Increased engagement with local food projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement of enough food across essential food groups at low cost • Food options for diet-specific & culture-specific needs • Connections with producers of locally grown produce • Connections with local food business groups • Data on reduced visits to food banks • Data on changes in understanding of nutritional and dietary choices in everyday food consumption
Source: CFH project records + Research Interviews	Source: Member survey	

Table 5.1: [Summary of Section 3.1](#)

Training and Reskilling		
Outputs	Outcomes for staff and volunteers	Areas for improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employment created (staff) • Apprentice • Staff training • Volunteers on-the-job training • Members becoming volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved knowledge & skills of staff & volunteers (formal training) • Improved knowledge & skills of volunteers (informal on-the-job training) • Increased knowledge & skills of members engaged in project delivery as volunteer (informal training) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of members' needs • Structured programmes/activities for members
Source: CFH project records, Research Interviews	Source: Research Interviews	

Table 5.2: [Summary of Section 3.2](#)

Health and Wellbeing		
Outputs	Outcomes for staff, volunteers and members	Areas for improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a community space for staff, volunteers & members • Access to advice and information (informal) for members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased physical wellbeing • Increased mental wellbeing • Increased social connections • Increased confidence & self-esteem • Increased control over life • Increased level of wellbeing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of members' needs • Structured programmes/activities for members
Source: CFH project records	Source: Member survey, Interviews with staff & volunteers	

Table 5.3: [Summary of Section 3.3](#)

Regeneration of Community Centre		
Outputs	Outcomes for FCC	Areas for improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start of community food growing • Hosting a number of community-led projects • Letting of space for community-led programmes/activities • Hosting of cultural activities/events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased engagement with local community partners (e.g. educational programs, martial arts) • Increased collaboration with council-led food projects • Increased links with other food hubs in city • Increased engagement by community with FCC (cultural events) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement with diversity in community • Coordination with other food hubs • Engagement with city wide food strategy • Database management
Source: Interviews with staff volunteers, project coordinators of other projects, community partners	Source: Interviews with staff volunteers, project coordinators of other projects, community partners	

Table 5.4: [Summary of Section 3.4](#)

Co-construction with stakeholders		
Outputs	Outcomes for members, staff and volunteers	Areas for improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engagement with Board of Trustees • Engagement with local Council • Engagement with local food networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few members have influence in project delivery • Co-learning between staff and volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation & engagement of members • Diversity among staff & volunteers to reflect community diversity
Source: Interviews with staff & volunteers	Source: Interviews with staff & volunteers	

Table 5.5: [Summary of Section 5.2](#)

6.2 Recommendations

In the interviews that we held in Nov 2020, we posed an envisioning question to our interviewees on their vision for FCC – to imagine what they would like to see happening or changing over the next few years and what they would like themselves and the members to see, feel, or experience when they come into the FCC. Some of the answers are given below:

I think, obviously, having an eat in or a cafe area would be so beneficial for customers that probably don't want to go home straight away or need just to sit down and, you know, just so they can meet people [Member-Volunteer]

... especially once the cafe is open, I think that will make a big difference for the members because I think it will be somewhere where they are not just going to get food but where they can actually relax and have a chat here and socialize. And I think from talking to members, they clearly really enjoy engaging in conversation, the majority. I think that will be something that they'll really enjoy being able to sort of come and have a hot drink or cold drink and a chat really, between themselves and with volunteers. That's something that I think at the moment is missing, but I think it would be there if it wasn't for COVID. [Staff]

... support services... because if they've got underlying issues like, you know, debt, or, you know, if they've got drink related or whatever their issues or problems are, then they've got someone that can actually be able to support them, and send them to the right place to get help to be able to move forward with their life... [Member-Volunteer]

I think, obviously, the building will be completely transformed, as it is quite an old building. So, you know, something really nice ... a nice reception cafe area and the supermarket very nice as well. [Member-Volunteer]

... we should be able to refer to other services. But that's one thing that at the moment, we haven't had training for that to know what other services are available and exactly where we can direct people. [Staff]

As seen in the quotes above, key elements expected of the project from members, volunteers and staff in the immediate future include the setting up the Community Café and the provision of wraparound support services for members.

We consider it important that the project builds on what it has achieved so far. The main recommendations that emerged from this interim evaluation are in four areas.

1. More diversified, local food procurement for food resilience

The members surveyed unequivocally expressed their satisfaction with the food that they can access from CSS, but the findings also indicate challenges in securing a stable supply of a good range of food, which meet nutrition needs in vulnerable communities without aggravating existing health inequalities. Dependence on food donations and/or food surplus is inherently unreliable for food provision on a longer-term basis. Therefore, it would be beneficial, and we strongly encourage, exploring alternative approaches focusing on a more diversified and stable local food supply. We would recommend a targeted piece of work on local food businesses engagement, which capitalises on local peoples' investment in giving within their local area. This would build on the success of fruitful relationships that have been established. Other options include working across/with other community organisations and groups to create a 'food supply network', connecting with local producers, processors, distributors, and bulk purchasing to reduce costs; connecting with community growing sites and community growing networks to get more locally grown surplus produce. These would be worthwhile areas of exploration and allocation of resources, as they will add to local economy resilience and create possibilities for supporting healthy and sustainable diets.

2. Develop wraparound support services for members

There is a recognition amongst the staff and volunteers that the CSS offers a temporary solution to addressing food insecurity, and providing members with wraparound and holistic support is critical. This is all the more relevant in the coming months when the economic impact of the pandemic will add to existing vulnerabilities and disadvantage among the communities. We strongly recommend putting in place a mechanism to understand what the members need support with, provide them access to a range of support in ways that they are comfortable with, and thus enable members to address longer-term challenges. At the time of writing this report, the management and staff have already started on carrying out a 'support pilot' exercise to understand the needs of members. We consider this an important step in this direction. It is also important to build on the success of supporting members to

develop areas of interest, self-confidence and skills through volunteer opportunities within the centre and the wider community. This 'Journey of Change' should inform future planning for highest impact in supporting people out of crisis and into connections and mutual support networks.

3. Increase community outreach and engagement

This recommendation has two elements. First, specific engagement with the multiple ethnic groups in the community to encourage involvement of community members currently under-represented in the pool of volunteers and in the composition of staff. Reaching out relies on a longer time and additional capacity for the building of relationships and trust and to gain strong local insights. This would take care of the language barriers currently faced when engaging with non-English speaking members. Second, to build and expand relationships and connections with local community organisations and groups, including those involving local youth. This would enable local community needs to be embedded in the project's planning and development process and FCC to become a 'community hub' for training and skills in line with strategies to tackle poverty, food insecurity and social exclusion.

4. Longer term funding and income generation

Initiating and running a social supermarket at the current scale of operation in a building that required extensive renovation has been a mammoth and costly project. Total food costs have been absorbed by substantial funds raised from grant funding and donations, but these are one-off in nature. Longer term funding would certainly benefit in terms of reducing uncertainties over meeting the operational costs and capital costs in the current uncertain climate. This is required until operations become financially self-sustaining. It is important that the project continues to be supported in applying for grants. Small grants applications have been successful over the period but large infrastructural grants require a specialist skill set and are time consuming in their development. As COVID-19 restrictions are loosened, appropriate use of the rooms in the building for generating income (such as from the commercial letting of rooms for community-run programmes and events), and a business plan for the kitchen and Café needs to be considered to create a revenue stream, adequately supported with additional staff, training and development time.

5. Align project management and governance

In the light of the ongoing loss being accrued in the operational budget, we support the recommendation from the Project Manager that the development of the project includes a period of 'containment' whereby change controls and governance are clarified and consolidated. This would require paying attention to aligning project management and governance to strategic priorities for achieving the project outcomes, and coordination

between the key stakeholders to support project delivery. For example, an organisation wide annual project plan should be developed to include income generation targets alongside key risks and deadlines, such as the completion of Lottery funding, completion of project management support and the need for additional staffing in the Community Café. We would recommend consideration be given to ensuring key staff retention including the provision of appropriate HR support or supervision, benefits, and training to the staff, to manage risks of potential disruption from sickness or absence, and to succession planning. A targeted piece of work on ensuring systematic data capture, organisation, and management (e.g. members' use of CSS, pattern of food use, food sourcing) is recommended for effective internal monitoring and tracking of project performance.

7. Conclusion

The outbreak of COVID-19 and the imposition of the first national lockdown barely ten days after the launch of Coventry Social Supermarket placed the project squarely on the frontline of an unanticipated crisis of unimaginable consequences touching every aspect of life, the repercussions of which are continuing to unfold.

Coventry Social Supermarket (CSS) has continued to keep its doors open. It has adapted in response to demands placed on it while effectively complying with COVID-19 regulations and restrictions. The staff and volunteers even managed to put together a seasonally festive program for their members just before closing for Christmas as a hopeful end to a difficult year.

Members and volunteers alike have described CSS as a 'lifeline' during the pandemic, more so considering that many other local community organisations and groups felt forced to shut their doors. Interviews and the members' survey have revealed a feeling of immense gratitude, whether it was for meeting food needs, reducing anxiety over food, acquiring new skills and self-confidence, reducing social isolation, or developing social connections. At this interim stage of evaluation when the Community Food Hub (CFH) is partly operational, it is difficult to say whether the project in Foleshill has reduced the need for members to turn to emergency food provision, which is a key indicator of its impact. Nonetheless, there is an indication that people using foodbanks may have turned to using CSS. There is good progress towards achieving the expected outcomes, mainly in the key area of food resilience. The progress in the other two key outcome areas – training and reskilling, and health and well-being – in the more structured or formal aspect of developing wraparound services for members has been impeded by the pandemic.

Despite the unprecedented challenges imposed by the pandemic, planning has already started to develop the Community Café, and the Community Hub. Important relationships

have been built with organizations for implementing the support services, for renting FCC spaces, and with community partners who will support setting up of the Café.

Another key outcome of the CFH project has been to revitalise FCC that had been long-neglected into a community-base for many local food projects, for cultural events, and community-run activities and programmes. This is built on new connections and collaborations with local community partners, including the local council.

We have identified key challenges in the areas of membership and support services; local food procurement; data management; coordination with other food projects; financial sustainability; project management and governance, which need attention as we move out of the 'emergency-mode' to longer-term project goals. We have made recommendations to help address the future development of the project.

The interim findings of our evaluation support studies from across the UK revealing the critical role that community organisations on the frontline have played in supporting people during COVID-19, especially those most vulnerable. The project is a testimony to the spirit of community resilience and the possibilities of creating spaces of hope for communities facing the brunt of inequalities and disadvantage.

For the final evaluation, which we will undertake at the end of the second year, we will continue our observations and follow up with the participants of this evaluation exercise to assess the longer-term changes in their experiences. We will include more participants (members, volunteers, and local community partners) in our sample with the aim of understanding and assessing the outcomes from the project at the end of a two-year period. We will also deliver a short video made of video-clips that we have recorded of the experiences of members, volunteers and staff at various stages of the project and the transformation of Foleshill Community Centre into a vibrant community space.

Appendices

1. Evaluation Matrix

Saxena, L.P. (2019) Evaluation Matrix for Coventry Citizens Supermarket

This Evaluation Matrix was an output of the Evaluation Working Group, established by Feeding Britain, comprising of academics/researchers and practitioners from across the Feeding Britain pilots, to monitor and evaluate progress across a range of Feeding Britain activities, and to develop simple guidance and tools to allow local projects to evaluate effectively].

Outcome [1]

People who have experienced hardship crisis are better able to improve their circumstances

Outcome [2]

People who are at high risk of experiencing hardship crisis are better able to plan for the future

Outcome [3]

Organisations are better able to support people to effectively tackle hardship through sharing learning and evidence

Outcome [4]

Those experiencing/who are at high risk of experiencing, hardship crisis, have a stronger, more collective, voice, to better shape a response to their issues

[5] Project is running successfully

Matrix with the above outcomes [1] to [5] for Community Food Hub Pilots as identified by Feeding Britain along with specific outcomes for Coventry Citizens Supermarket arrived at in discussion at local pilot level are presented in Table below.



PROJECT COMPONENT -1

Citizens Supermarket

- sale of mainly food (some non-food consumables) at deeply discounted prices (and some free) with wraparound support services
- choice & dignity through shopping experience

EXPECTED OUTCOMES	OUTPUT INDICATORS (process)		OUTCOME INDICATORS (impact)	METHODS
[1] [2] Food resilience Health & Well-being (physical, mental, social)	No. of members - gender - age-group - post-code Frequency of use by members Membership renewals/non-renewals Total food sold/redistributed -type by category [chilled, ambient, frozen] -by product type [fresh produce, meat, fish, poultry, dairy, bakery, drinks, canned products, snacks, prepared meals, other] Total non-food items sold/redistributed -type by category	Data collection form (monthly basis) [5]	Improved access to affordable quality food for vulnerable groups Increased consumption of healthier food/fruit & vegetables Increased buying/cooking of different types of food Change in weekly shopping bill on food Increased engagement with food industry including local food producers, suppliers and retailers Fostering a market for locally grown produce & local food producers	Baseline data required from which change can be assessed -questionnaires at the time of membership -questionnaires at the time of membership renewal/every 6 months -monthly data collection forms from month 1 of operation Focus group of members at the end of 6 months, repeated over time Interviews

PROJECT COMPONENT -2

Community Café

- Shared eating space (hot meals prepared onsite at deeply discounted prices)
- Community bakery
- Cooking workshops/demos
- School holiday hunger programmes
- Space for social interaction

EXPECTED OUTCOMES	OUTPUT INDICATORS (process)		OUTCOME INDICATORS (impact)	METHODS
<p>[1] [2]</p> <p>Food resilience</p> <p>Health & Well-being (physical, mental, social)</p>	<p>No. of users on daily basis</p> <p>- members of Centre</p> <p>- non-members (from community)</p> <p>[gender, age-group, post-code]</p> <p>Frequency of use by members/users</p> <p>Total food used in Café</p> <p>No. of meals served</p>	<p>Data collection form (monthly basis)</p> <p>[5]</p>	<p>Improved access to affordable meals</p> <p>Increased consumption of healthier food/fruit & vegetables</p> <p>Reduced social isolation</p> <p>Increased level of well-being (physical, mental, social)</p> <p>Increased numbers of people who feel confident in their food literacy/cooking skills</p> <p>Increased understanding of nutritional and dietary choices in everyday food consumption</p>	<p>Focus group of users</p> <p>Self-reports from users</p>

PROJECT COMPONENT -3

<p>Community Hub</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Space for provision of wraparound support such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -job skills training -debt and benefits advice -health & wellbeing services 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Space for hire by local community groups for social activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -music, arts, sports Community food growing 		
EXPECTED OUTCOMES	OUTPUT INDICATORS (process)		OUTCOME INDICATORS (impact)	METHODS
<p>[1] [2] [3]</p> <p>Training & Reskilling</p> <p>Health & Well-being (physical, mental, social)</p> <p>Community engagement/ Cohesion</p> <p>Community food growing</p>	<p>No. of programs/sessions run/hosted by community partners</p> <p>No. of members supported on the different programmes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender - Age-group - Post-code - Members/non-members <p>Frequency of use by members</p> <p>No. of growers</p> <p>Type of food grown & uses</p>	<p>Data collection form (monthly basis)</p> <p>[5]</p>	<p>Increased access to advice and information</p> <p>Increased skills of users</p> <p>increased ability to plan for future</p> <p>Improved levels of self-esteem & confidence of users</p> <p>Increased feeling of being in control of their own lives</p> <p>Reduced number of visits to emergency food provision</p> <p>Increased level of physical activity</p> <p>Increased participation in group/social activities</p> <p>Increased participation by wider local community between different groups</p>	<p>Focus group of users</p> <p>Self-reports from users</p> <p>Self-completed exit questionnaires</p>

<p>No. of community partners</p> <p>No. of wider community engagement events hosted/participated in</p> <p>No. of links to local council-led projects: Family hub, school holiday hunger, school breakfast clubs, etc. - No. of beneficiaries</p>	<p>Increased collaboration with local council to meet needs</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p>OUTCOME [4]</p> <p>Co-construction with stakeholders</p> <p>Community 'ownership' over project</p>	<p>No. and type of activities for members/users/stakeholders</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to give feedback on project (what works, what doesn't) - to engage with improving project delivery (type of food, identifying activities/skills training etc.) <p>No. of community open days/other events</p> <p>No. of attendees to the events</p>	<p>Feedback box Focus groups Questionnaires Citizens Juries Citizens forum</p>
<p>Create opportunities for members/users to have a strong, collective voice, to better shape responses to their issues/engage with local and national policy makers</p> <p>Inform local and national policy reform through identifying key drivers of food poverty</p>	<p>No. and type of opportunities for members/users to voice their issues</p>	

2. Members Survey

The survey questions designed the by evaluation team included questions on six sections:

SECTION 1: Member of Coventry Social Supermarket

SECTION 2: Your food shopping

SECTION 3: Your food at home

SECTION 4: Your health & wellbeing

SECTION 5: Other involvement at Foleshill Community Centre

SECTION 6: About you

INTERIM EVALUATION (period March-December 2020)

Data collection

Total surveys distributed	87
Total surveys returned	44
- Romanian	7
Consent for follow-ups for final evaluation	26
- Romanian	5

3. Interviews Schedule for Volunteers

Semi-structured

1. How did you hear about Coventry Social Supermarket (CSS)?
2. How long have you been volunteering?
3. Reasons/motivations for volunteering
4. Nature of involvement/engagement? How often? How has it changed over the period?
Why?
5. How would you describe your overall experience?
6. How has volunteering helped you? How
7. Vision for FCC over the next few years
8. How do you feel about the management? Their level of support? How do you provide your feedback? Do you feel 'listened to'?
9. What isn't working with the volunteering as it is structured? What can be changed/improved?
10. Reasons why you think there is a need for social supermarket?
11. What in your understanding are the main reasons for food poverty?
12. How would you like to see food poverty addressed?

References

Feeding Britain_Citizens Supermarkets

<https://feedingbritain.org/what-we-do/flagship-projects/citizens-supermarkets/>

Feeding Britain_Briefing on Community Food Hubs Pilots

Feeding Coventry_Briefings on Foleshill

Foleshill Community Centre - Frequently Asked Questions. Available at <https://www.coventry.gov.uk/downloads/file/26322/foleshill-community-centre-frequently-asked-questions> (Accessed 31 Jan 2021)

Saxena, L. P. (2019). Evaluation Matrix for Community Food Hub, Foleshill, Coventry (Prepared for Feeding Britain).

Saxena, L.P. and Tornaghi, C. (2018) [Social-Supermarkets-and-Austerity-Retail-in-Britain](#)

Websites

<https://www.facebook.com/FoleshillCommunityCentre/>