



**FULL REPORT**

# MY FOOD COMMUNITY

FULL EVALUATION REPORT ON THE FIRST DELIVERY OF A COMMUNITY FOOD LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

DECEMBER 2022

Amy Beardmore, Mat Jones, Sarah Hills, and Sanda Ismail

## Authors

Amy Beardmore, Senior Lecturer in Public Health<sup>1</sup>

Mat Jones, Professor of Public Health and Community Development<sup>1</sup>

Sarah Hills, Senior Lecturer in Sustainability<sup>2</sup>

Sanda Ismail, Senior Lecturer in Public Health<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Centre for Public Health and Wellbeing, UWE Bristol

<sup>2</sup> Department of Geography and Environmental Management

## Contacts

UWE Mat Jones: [matthew.jones@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:matthew.jones@uwe.ac.uk)

Food for Life Get Togethers, Dale Cranshaw: [dcranshaw@soilassociation.org](mailto:dcranshaw@soilassociation.org)

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## Report citation

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*“This action project undoubtedly helped kick start our food partnership to focus, understand, and share the benefits of the pantry model with our community groups in Bury. Promoting this model has now been built into both our food strategy, but also recently in our anti poverty strategy”*

*“I was able to put into action the skills that I had developed during the year of attending the My Food Programme sessions and activities. I was particularly pleased that I had developed much better leadership skills and so was able to run events and get involved at a more strategic level. The events were great fun and really engaging and the roles I now have such as being a board member for Food Cardiff and moving a motion on Support for Community Food Service providers at a political conference.”*

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Cover photo: Larne community fridge and garden. Credit: Bill Guiller



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## Executive Summary

### My Food Community: an overview

In the context of the current cost of living crisis, many activists are working within their communities to promote access to affordable, healthy, and sustainable food. Yet there are very few opportunities share experiences, ideas and resources between such community food champions, and to develop the skills needed to create change.

The Soil Association's My Food Community is a community leadership programme intended to create 'a network for good food champions to learn, connect and take action'. My Food Community forms part of Food for Life Get Togethers, a UK-wide National Lottery funded initiative designed to make the 'good food the easy choice for everyone'

Since its launch in September 2021, My Food Community (MFC) has recruited and trained members of the public with a shared interest in food to become food champions, whilst also giving them the opportunity to put their newly developed skills into practice by implementing a food-based project in their local area.

MFC is delivered through a range of self-guided learning materials, online training sessions and regular virtual peer meetups. This was supported by Koreo, a leadership coaching specialist. In the second phase of the programme, participants apply for a £1000 grant to develop a small-scale community food project of their own inspiration.

### Evaluation of the programme delivery

This evaluation, led by UWE, reports on the first pilot of MFC that took place between September 2021 and November 2022. The evaluation was designed to be formative and iterative, developing alongside the programme itself. Data used in the evaluation consisted of a combination of desk-based research, observations at group sessions, analysis of feedback, participant and stakeholder interviews and surveys.

Central to the MFC design was an ethos of 'test and learn', making the programme flexible and agile, allowing it to evolve and adapt according to feedback during delivery. This iterative design was intended to help the team refine the programme in year one, with a view to rolling it out to a second cohort in year two.

Whilst the programme was advertised through social media, the staff team drew upon existing Soil Association networks to target their recruitment efforts towards a diverse range of potential participants from different settings across the UK.

The profiles of 39 participants show all participants were active across a wide range of community food projects prior to applying to the programme, with the majority involved in community events and workshops, activities associated with reducing food insecurity or growing produce.

Of the 39 profiles submitted, 13 participants described themselves as being passionate about connecting communities and bringing people together through food, whilst reducing food waste, sharing food, food education and gardening or growing were all of equal importance.

At the point of joining the programme, the area that they looked forward to most was the opportunity to share ideas and learn from others.

Of the 39 who registered with the programme, participants joined an average number of nine sessions. Engagement was mainly online, with 17 MFC members taking the opportunity to attend a keynote face-to-face meeting towards the end of the first part of the programme.

Overall attendance across both compulsory and non-compulsory sessions fluctuated over time, with the highest attendances recorded at the initial induction session and the first learning and inspiration workshop (28 and 23 participants respectively). However, a core group appear to have remained engaged after these early sessions, with average attendance at the learning and inspiration workshops totalling 13 participants. The leadership masterclasses attracted 12 attendees on average, as did the roundtable discussion sessions, representing 30% of the total cohort.

Of the 39 participants, 33 progressed to successfully apply for a £1000 small project grant.

### Learning from delivering the programme

Participant reflections at the end of the programme fell into seven themes set out below.

- 1. Confidence and kudos.** The programme gave participants the confidence to speak to others about food, express themselves more clearly and “walk the talk” around the food agenda. It was felt that the programme had given participants kudos or gravitas when speaking to others. An identity as part of a national programme was seen as a positive element of the programme.
- 2. Expanding and creating networks.** Participants value having a supportive network of like-minded people and have enjoyed learning from the experiences of others. Almost all participants reported that they had found new contacts from within the programme, and some had begun to expand their wider networks and spheres of influence too.
- 3. Accessible and interesting course content.** Many participants appreciated the content and length of the sessions. The ability to engage flexibly was important given that most had other ongoing commitments. The theoretical, task-driven content allowed the sessions to be targeted and having access to a Koreo coach was considered a premium aspect of the programme.
- 4. Shifting ideas about leadership.** Participant’s attitudes to leadership were clearly changing as the programme progressed. Some expressly stated that they had changed their views on what constitutes leadership, whilst others talked of becoming more confident and better able to take the initiative within communities (although they tended not to use leadership terminology).
- 5. Clarifying the course content and structure.** The programme would benefit from a clearer structure and sense of direction from the outset. Participants wanted details in advance to help them plan their time more effectively and to know what to expect. Expectations of participants could also be clearer as some believed that they needed to have well-formed ideas or far-reaching community projects, which was not the case.
- 6. Streamlining content.** Course content sometimes felt overwhelming to participants, and it was difficult for some to fit the sessions in alongside their other commitments. Some also found it hard to keep a reflective diary but felt that they were doing this through other means such as note taking.

- 7. Empowering and including participants.** More could be done to ensure equal participation in sessions – whilst some have more to say than others, it should not be assumed that those not speaking do not have anything to say. This may require some creative thinking around alternative ways to participate. Additionally, it should not be assumed that participants will naturally connect and get on, so more could be done to promote inclusivity.

### Longer term impacts of the programme for participants

- At six months after completion of the course, twenty-two participants in MFC responded to a survey on the impacts of the programme.
- Respondents were asked to report on what well with their Community Action Projects. Leading themes included: ‘fostering inter-ethnic/ cultural working relationships’, ‘greater community engagement’, ‘innovation, building new relationships and collaborate working’, and ‘personal development’.
- MFC members also reported encountering various hurdles in their Community Action Projects. These were around time commitment, cost-of-living crises, manpower, funding and difficulties in engaging others.
- A majority (73%, n= 16) ‘strongly agreed’ that their Community Action Projects helped them to apply their learning from MFC and only a few ‘neither agreed nor disagreed’ to this (9%, n= 2).
- Respondents found specific sessions of the MFC programme useful in their role as a Food Champions. These were the ‘Learning and Inspiration Sessions’ (n= 14); ‘Round Table Discussions’ (n= 10); ‘Connect and Share Sessions’ (n=12); ‘Coaching’ (n= 7) and 1-2-1 with other participants and team members (n= 10).
- Over 85% of respondents reported to have made several connections after taking part in the MFC programme in terms of sharing ideas, contacts, resources or working together on activities with others involved in food issues. These connections ranged from ‘more than 20’ (n= 8) to ‘6 to 10’ (n= 2) or ‘10-15’ (n=2) connections.
- As a result of taking part in MFC, respondents reported improved competencies in their community work for the following areas<sup>1</sup>:
  - advocacy for healthy and sustainable food-related issues (82%, n= 18)
  - initiating healthy and sustainable food activities (73%, n= 16)
  - helping other people take action on healthy and sustainable food-related issues (73%, n= 16)
  - creating big ideas around healthy and sustainable food-related issues (64%, n= 14)
  - raising awareness around healthy and sustainable food-related issues (64%, n= 14)
  - helping others identify opportunities for healthy and sustainable food activities (55%, n= 12)
  - inspiring others to contribute to healthy and sustainable food-related issues (55%, n= 12)
  - actively connecting with others outside their local community in food activities (55%, n= 12)
- After taking part in MFC, most respondents (68%, n= 15) ‘definitely’ regarded themselves as a community leader in food activities. This was positive change in self rating compared to start of the programme.

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<sup>1</sup> Assessed in terms of a 5 star rating

- After taking part in MFC, 46% (n= 10) perceived their skills creating change in food system to be 'extremely strong' in this area. No participants gave themselves this rating for the start of the programme
- After taking part in MFC, 27% (n= 6) felt that their confidence in community leadership around food systems was 'extremely high'. Prior to MFC, no respondent had rated their confidence as 'extremely high' in this domain.
- After taking part in MFC, respondents felt that their knowledge in understanding of food citizenship had increased. Prior to MFC, no respondent felt that their knowledge on this subject was 'extremely strong', 41% (n= 9) felt that they had 'extremely strong' knowledge of the subject after taking part in MFC.
- Various factors helped participants achieve the goals of their groups. Those rated 'extremely important' included more grant funding (68%, n= 15); more national networking opportunities with like-minded groups (36%, n= 8); more local networking opportunities with like-minded groups (55%, n= 12); more training and information resources on community food topics (27%, n= 6); more mentoring and peer support opportunities (23%, n= 5); better access to local facilities (64%, n= 14); better access to volunteer support (50%, n= 11) and more help to campaign on community food issues (46%, n= 10).



## 1. Introduction

We live in a time of great uncertainty and insecurity with regards to food. Climate change, the cost-of-living crisis, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Covid 19 pandemic have all contributed to soaring food prices, shortages, and fluctuations in supply. The impact on individuals and their families is significant, with figures showing that food insecurity levels have increased by 60% since the first six months of the pandemic.<sup>2</sup> As a result there are now over 2,000 food banks in the United Kingdom,<sup>3</sup> with the number of people using them set to increase further still over the coming months as more and more people find themselves having to make very difficult choices, such as whether to buy food or heat their homes.<sup>4</sup>

Far from being an issue for the minority, more and more people are finding themselves in a position of increasing uncertainty about what they can afford, and how and when they can feed themselves and their families. These issues are contributing to an ever-increasing awareness of food and food insecurity in the UK and the impact it has on people's lives, particularly for those on low incomes. Many charities have warned of potentially catastrophic consequences for families if the government does not act soon<sup>4</sup> and as such there have been calls for the government to put food insecurity at the heart of their 'levelling up' agenda.<sup>5</sup>

However, whilst much needs to be done to address these issues on a national level, there are ways in which these challenges are being tackled in a positive way from within local communities. There exists a growing movement of people who are passionate about food and who are seeking ways to not only address food insecurity through community initiatives and local food activism, but to simply share their love of good food with others. These initiatives often focus on issues of sustainability, the reduction of food waste and ways to maximise opportunities to share resources, giving them a long-term focus whereby communities can begin to support themselves, come together and take joy in the processes involved in growing, cooking and eating good, local food.

Although it is difficult to think of food and food systems in the current climate without considering the backdrop of crises outlined above, there is much more to food systems than simply responding to emergency demand. Food activists often work at a local level and within their own communities to share skills and resources with others, empowering and enabling local people to make good food choices. This also means being aware of people's cultural needs around food, as well as enabling them to make decisions that are appropriate to their diet and that maintain human dignity.

### 1.1 Food for Life and Food for Life Get Togethers

The Food for Life programme – led by the Soil Association – aims to transform the entire culture around food, thus 'making good food the easy choice for everyone'.<sup>6</sup> The programme encompasses multiple approaches that include building knowledge and skills through food education;

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<sup>2</sup> Food Foundation (2022) <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-insecurity-tracking>

<sup>3</sup> Tyler, G. (2020) House of Commons Library, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/what-do-the-latest-food-bank-statistics-tell-us/>

<sup>4</sup> Goodwin, S., 2022. Food aid charities fear the worst as the cost of living crisis takes hold. *BMJ*, 376.

<sup>5</sup> Food Foundation (2022) <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/press-release/new-data-shows-food-insecurity-major-challenge-levelling-agenda>

<sup>6</sup> Food for Life (2022) <https://www.foodforlife.org.uk/>

championing the importance of well-sourced ingredients; making healthy and sustainable meals the norm; and reconnecting people with where their food comes from.<sup>6</sup>

Food for Life Get Togethers (FFLGT) is a specific element of the wider Food for Life programme which brings together a range of people around the topic of food, regardless of their age, heritage or background.<sup>7</sup> As part of the programme members of the public are invited to sign up to the FFLGT website where they can be supported to create their own community get togethers, such as community growing, cooking and sharing activities. FFLGT also gives people the opportunity to become part of a digital community as well as a physical one, whereby like-minded people across the UK can share recipes, growing tips and other food-based knowledge.<sup>7</sup>

UWE Bristol is leading on the academic evaluation of the FFLGT programme over a four-year period. Now in its third year, the evaluation's focus is on the specific aspects of the programme that include, alongside My Food Community, the role of FFLGT's small grants in community capacity building and good food agendas, and the role of FFLGT's networking building activities.

## 1.2 My Food Community

One focus of the FFLGT programme over the past year has been My Food Community (MFC), an initiative which aims to create 'a network for good food champions to learn, connect and take action'.<sup>8</sup> Since its launch in September 2021, MFC has recruited and trained members of the public with a shared interest in food to become food champions, whilst also giving them the opportunity to put their newly developed skills into practice by implementing a food-based project in their local area.

MFC is delivered through a range of self-guided learning materials, online training sessions and regular virtual peer meetups, the aims of which are threefold: to support learning and personal development, thus empowering participants to become community leaders; to establish a network of people who are united by their passion and interest for good food; and to take community action on food that's good for climate, nature and health.<sup>8</sup>

Central to the MFC design is an ethos of 'test and learn', making the programme flexible and agile, allowing it to evolve and adapt according to participant feedback as they progress. As such, the programme team built in several points for programme review, in which participants were able to provide formative feedback to the strategic team. This enabled the team to be responsive to the needs of the current cohort, whilst also using the learning to design a more streamlined version for the second cohort who will begin in late 2022.

This report builds on the findings from phase one and the interim report by including data from various additional sources, case studies and interviews collected during and after the completion of the second phase of the programme. It concludes with reflections on the lessons learned during version one of MFC, and what constitutes best practice in this area.

## 2. The evaluation

The evaluation of MFC is led by a team of researchers at UWE Bristol and is just one element of the in the wider Food for Life Get Togethers (FFLGT) evaluation. The focus of this particular workstream is FFLGT's work on developing local good food community leaders. Community leadership initiatives

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<sup>7</sup> Food for Life (2022) <https://www.foodforlife.org.uk/get-togethers>

<sup>8</sup> My Food Community Information and Guidance, 2021

such as MFC have the prospect of learning from local innovations and scaling up change at local and national levels. The main aim of the evaluation of this workstream is to assess the processes and impacts of MFC, with particular reference to themes of leadership models and project implementation.

## 2.1 Aims of the evaluation

The overarching intended outcomes of the FFLGT programme for Years 3 and 4 are that:

1. Knowledge and understanding related to equality, diversity and inclusion in social food activities is developed and shared widely
2. Good Food Champions influence and inform changes in policies, practice or behaviour in their communities, settings or projects, that contribute to regeneration
3. People of different ages or backgrounds have stronger connections with each other through food
4. Get Togethers organisers are more connected with each other
5. People across the UK have more knowledge, skills, networks and resources to run and sustain social food activities<sup>9</sup>

Whilst the evaluation is heavily aligned to all of these outcomes, the evaluation team's focus is on points 1, 2 and 4.

With these outcomes in mind, the evaluation and programme teams have agreed two primary aims for the evaluation of the MFC project:

- To explore approaches to and attitudes towards leadership within food-based community capacity building projects
- To explore the processes involved in establishing a successful programme for developing community leaders and increasing engagement in local good food priorities.

## 2.2 Research questions

Although these aims focus primarily on concepts of leadership and processes of programme implementation, it is recognised that there are wider aspects of MFC which will impact on these aims. For example, the programme also incorporates themes of self-reflection, community participation and development, developing and widening local good food networks and identifying local priorities.

The evaluation and programme leadership teams therefore agreed on the following research questions:

1. *What are the main factors that have enabled participants of the My Food Community programme to engage with communities and wider stakeholders?*
2. *To what extent does broadening spheres of influence and leadership through the My Food Community improve engagement in local good food priorities?*
3. *To what extent does the My Food Community initiative provide a model for building community capacity on local 'good food' priorities?*
4. *How have planned reviews by FFLGT staff on the programme design supported the delivery of My Food Community?*

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<sup>9</sup> UWE Methods for Yr3 Research

## 2.3 Outputs and intended audience

The evaluation is intended for use internally within the Soil Association as a guide to enhancing practice when implementing future, similar initiatives. It is also likely to be of interest to potential commissioners and future stakeholders, as well as to those interested in participating in subsequent iterations of the programme. In addition, the evaluation can be used to produce resources designed for an external audience that will showcase some of the successes and meaningful outputs from MFC.

## 2.4 Evaluation methodology

The evaluation of MFC has evolved and adapted alongside the programme itself, and as such has been designed to be both iterative and formative. Beginning in October 2021, the UWE evaluation team worked closely with those involved in the design, implementation and delivery of the programme, as well as with those participating in the initiative. In these early conversations the aims of the programme were established, although it was made clear that the ‘test and learn’ approach meant that there were still some unknown elements to the programme. As such, the evaluation team designed an evaluation that could follow the journey of both the programme and its participants to create a convincing exploratory case study.

Due to the timing of the evaluation team’s involvement in the project and the lack of baseline measurements, it was not deemed possible to collect any meaningful quantitative data from participants during version one. The focus therefore is on the participants journey through the programme and is therefore predominantly qualitative in nature. However, there is a clear need to develop quantitative data collection methods for future cohorts.

Data used in the evaluation consisted of a combination of desk-based research, observations at group sessions, and analysis of feedback and participant and stakeholder interviews (as detailed in Table 1). A small amount of quantitative engagement data was also made available to the evaluation team.

**TABLE 1 – FIELDWORK**

Date	Description
Ongoing	Desk based review of available information and resources
Dec 2021	Initial interviews with the programme team x 3
Jan 2022	Observation of reflect and review event with participants and analysis of feedback
Feb 2022	Interviews with participants x 6
May 2022	Observation of share event
May 2022	Interviews with programme team x 5
May 2022	Observation of reflect and review event with participants and analysis of feedback
Jul 2022	Follow up interviews with participants x 2
Jul 2022	Attendance at internal review meeting with programme leads/strategic team
Aug 2022	Output design meeting
Sep 2022	First stage evaluation report
Oct 2022	Collection and inclusion of follow-up data on participant projects
Nov 2022	Final report on the evaluation of MFC v1
Mar 2023	Academic paper

Ethical approval for this research was obtained through the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol), Health and Applied Sciences Research Ethics Committee, Reference HAS.20.11.034.

### 3. Findings

Implementation of the MFC programme consisted of three key areas in version one: 1) planning, design and implementation, prior to the start of the programme; 2) phase one of implementation: training, workshops and ‘connect and share’ sessions; and 3) phase two of implementation: project implementation. In this section we bring together the findings for each of these phases.

#### 3.1 Planning, design, and implementation

##### 3.1.1 Purpose and programme design

The purpose of version one of MFC was to pilot the design and implementation of a good food programme aimed at helping individuals develop community leadership skills, whilst also establishing a network of local good food champions. The programme was also designed to support one of the wider strategic outcomes of the Social Association, namely to encourage people to become active food citizens who are engaged in issues associated with healthy and sustainable food systems, focusing on creating initiatives and implementing system change within and beyond their own communities.<sup>10</sup>

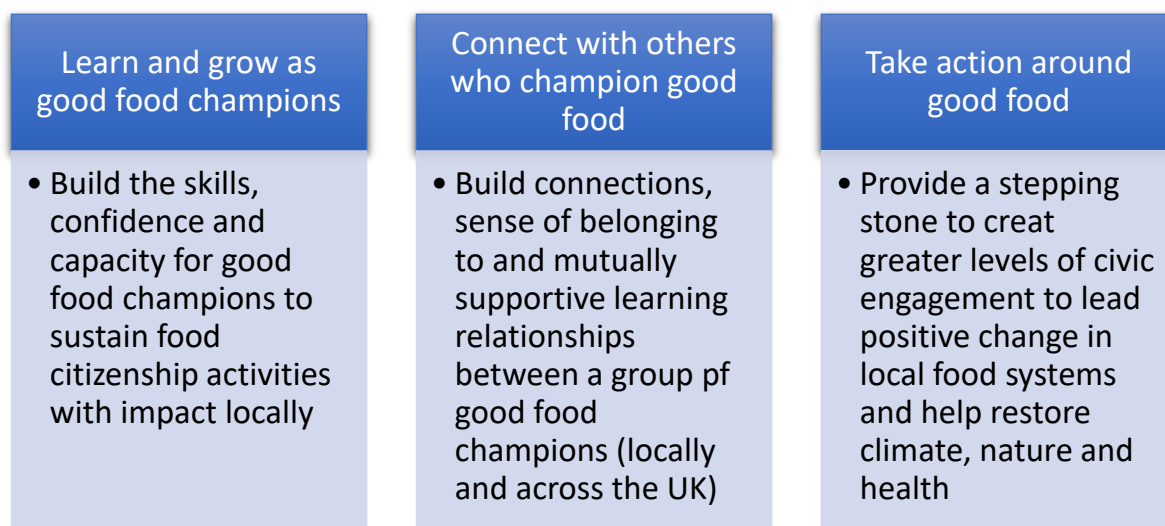


FIGURE 1 – AIMS OF MFC

The FFLGT service design and impact teams designed the programme using a theory of change model (see Appendix) that would test assumptions and enable the team to respond in real time to any challenges encountered along the way. This iterative design was intended to help the team refine the programme in year one, with a view to rolling it out to a second cohort in year two.<sup>10</sup>

Opportunities for participants to feed back their experiences to the strategic team were integral to the design of the programme, with ‘key reflection points’ gathered at the end of each activity session and more thorough feedback taken at regular reflect and share meetings. Alongside opportunities to collect qualitative feedback, the initial planning documents state an intention to gather data on the engagement of participants, as well as some baseline information about their

<sup>10</sup> MFC Learning, Evaluation and Impact Plan, August 2021



current understanding of leadership skills, their reflective skills, and the extent of any of their existing networks.<sup>10</sup>

For participants, the MFC programme was designed to incorporate two distinct phases, consisting of a series of workshops, training and 'connect and share' sessions which were designed to lay the groundwork for becoming a local good food champion. The timetable and content of these sessions can be seen in the Appendix and is also summarised in Table 2. The second phase of the programme allowed participants to put these new skills into practice through the development of their own projects within their local communities. To facilitate this, they were each given a grant of £1,000 to spend on their community food initiatives.

### 3.1.2 Recruitment

An information and guidance document was created for the programme during the planning phase, which clearly set out the aims and objectives of MFC. This document also served to introduce the project, to define the participants that the programme was looking to recruit and to provide guidance as to what taking part would involve.<sup>11</sup>

As phase one of the programme was effectively a pilot, some of the recruitment was quite targeted and predominantly aimed at those who were already part of the existing Soil Association networks. At the time of recruitment, a number of regional network managers were still in post and these individuals were able to reach out to their members, explain the programme and invite people to join. In addition to this targeted approach a wider call was placed in the Soil Association newsletter and through their national partner organisations.<sup>12</sup>

Through this approach the strategic team were also able to ensure that they were not overwhelmed by application in version one, and the targeted recruitment of promising candidates also allowed the team to use the test and learn approach with a cohort that would perhaps be more open to an evolving and iterative programme design.

Figure 2 shows the areas of the UK that the first cohort were recruited from, demonstrating that participants were recruited to the programme from different regions across the country. Some of these participants appear to be focused within particular areas of those regions, perhaps where there was already some established Soil Association activity.

### 3.1.3 Participant profiles

The following information regarding cohort one was gathered by the strategic team at the start of the programme. It includes information on group demographics, as well as their previous experience and links into other Food for Life Get Togethers activities.

Figures are based on the 48 people who originally joined the programme (some of these later dropped out or did not always engage with the content).

#### **Who are the MFC programme participants?**

- 43% of applicants had heard about MFC from the FFLGT team, and 23% from Eden Project Communities
- Personal characteristics
  - 79% were between 30 and 59 years old. Under 30s made up the smallest category

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<sup>11</sup> My Food Community – Information and Guidance

<sup>12</sup> Interview with a member of the strategic team, July 2022

- 89% White
- 73% were educated to university level (25% undergraduate, 48% postgraduate) and 15% to secondary school (6%) or sixth form college (8%) level
- 92% were female and 8% male
- 48% were based in the 30% most deprived areas of UK
- Almost half of the cohort were based in England (44%, n=21), with 27% (13) from Wales, 15% (7) from Northern Ireland and 15% (7) from Scotland.
- Most of the cohort were part of Neighbourhood Community Groups (44%) or Third Sector Organisations (33%). Other organisations included care settings, local authorities and a farm.
- 35% had previously been involved in Food for Life Get Togethers, for example through taking part in key events or receiving small grants (9 former grant holders in cohort). Three of the successful applicants were FFLGT 'Experts by Experience'.<sup>13</sup>

This data shows that – in this initial cohort at least – a large proportion of applicants were white (although the percentage is very similar to the national population of 87%), female and educated to degree or postgraduate level. Interestingly, however, there was good representation from across some of the most deprived areas of the UK. The demographics and diversity of the cohort is discussed further later in the report.

### **This is me profiles**

When joining the programme participants were asked to complete a 'This is Me' profile, which detailed projects that they had previously been involved in, the areas they were particularly passionate about and what they were most looking forward to about the programme. 39 responses were received and analysed, grouped into themes and are summarised in Figures 4, 5 and 6.

These graphs show that all participants were active across a wide range of community food projects prior to applying to the programme, with the majority involved in community events and workshops, activities associated with reducing food insecurity or growing produce.

Of the 39 profiles submitted, 13 participants described themselves as being passionate about connecting communities and bringing people together through food, whilst reducing food waste, sharing food, food education and gardening or growing were all of equal importance.

As participants joined the project, the thing that they looked forward to most was the opportunity to share ideas and learn from others. Being



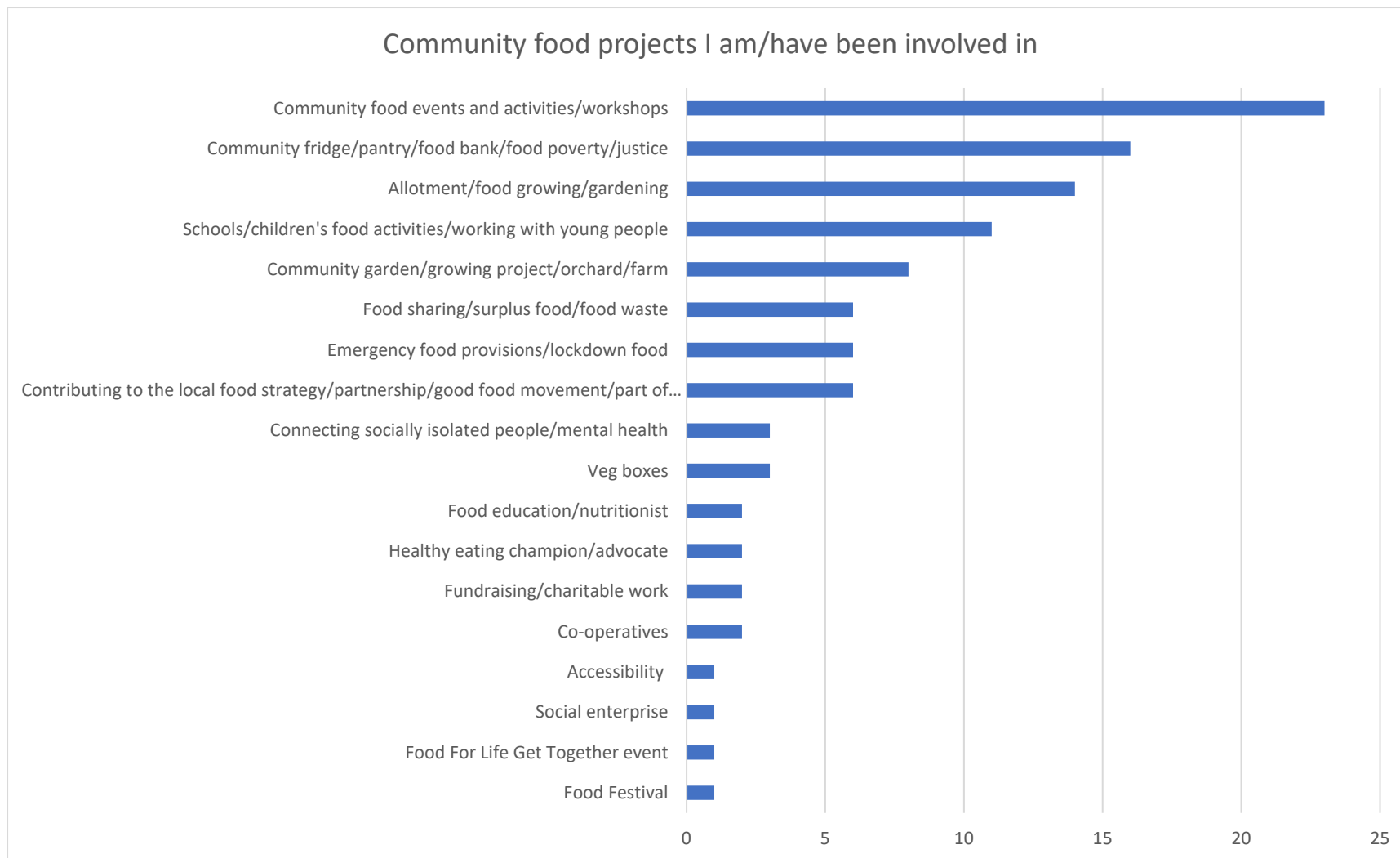
**FIGURE 2 – HELPING TO WATER THE GARDEN IN LARNE**

<sup>13</sup> Intro to the MFC cohort

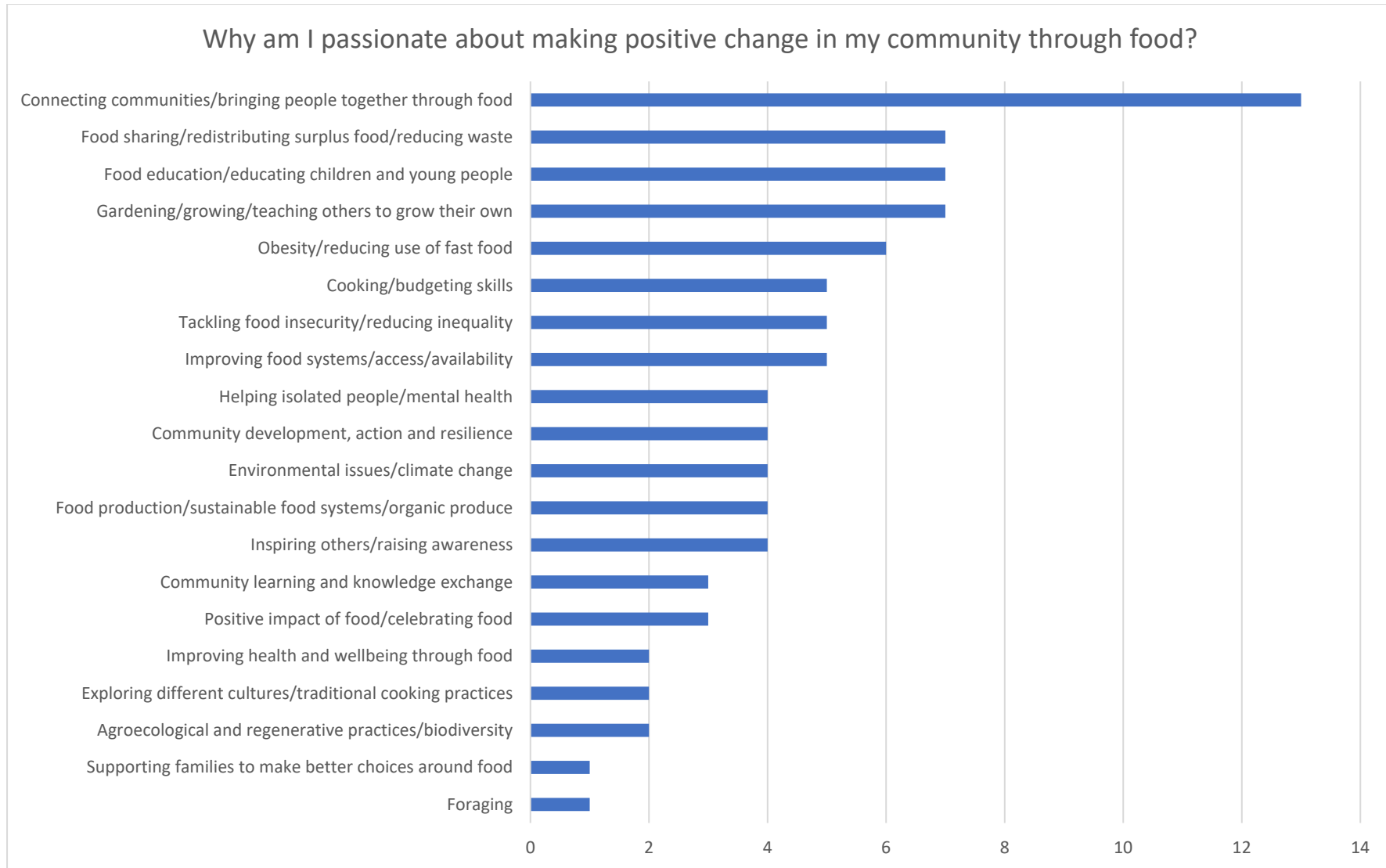
part of a wider network where they could meet and share ideas with like-minded people was also seen as important.



FIGURE 3 – MAP OF MFC PARTICIPANTS

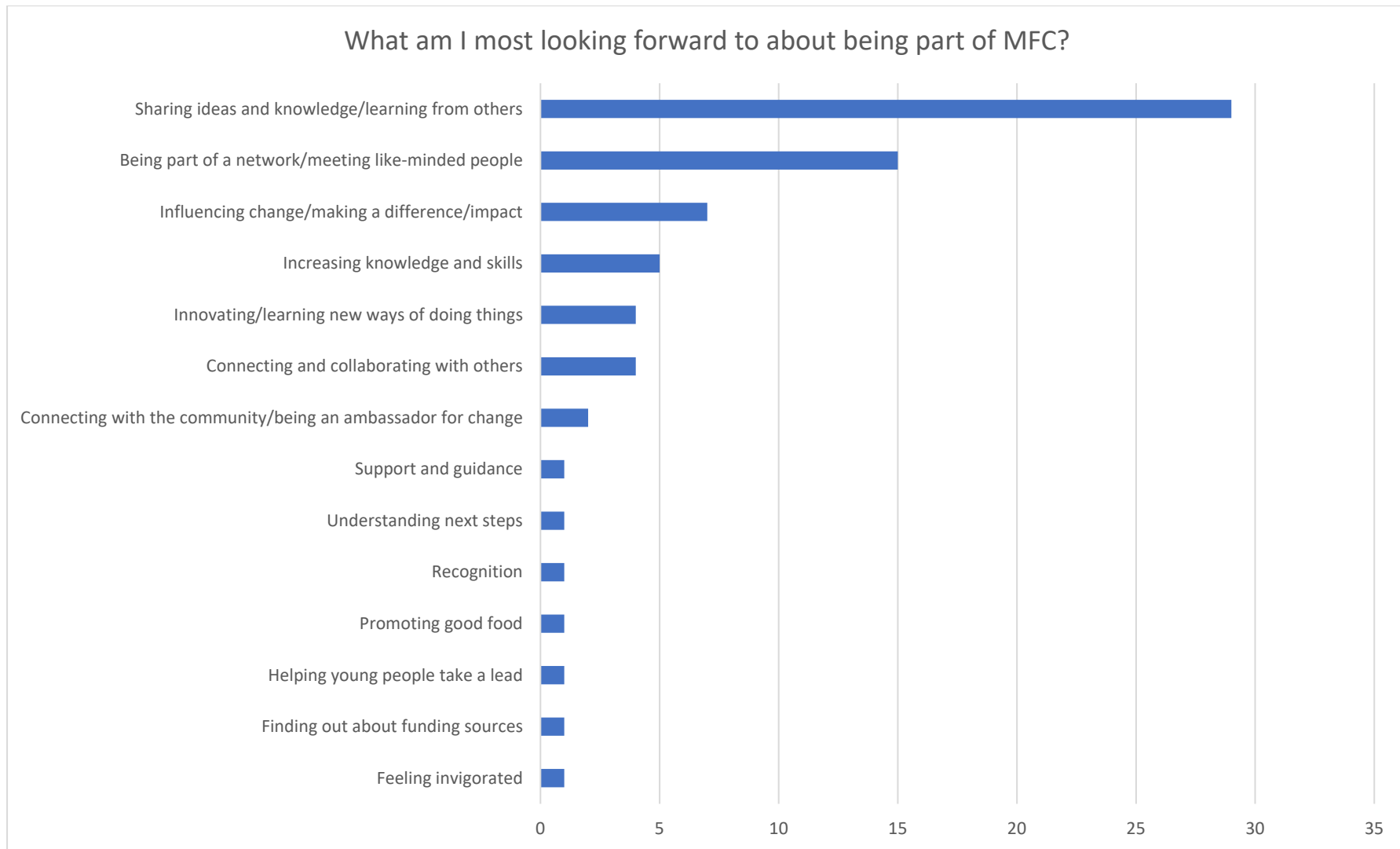


**FIGURE 4 – COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECTS MFC PARTICIPANTS WERE PREVIOUSLY INVOLVED IN**



**FIGURE 5 – WHY ARE MFC PARTICIPANTS PASSIONATE ABOUT MAKING POSITIVE CHANGES THROUGH FOOD?**





**FIGURE 6 – WHAT ARE MFC PARTICIPANTS MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO ABOUT THE PROGRAMME?**

### 3.1.4 Phase one timeline

A programme of structured activities took place between 21<sup>st</sup> September 2021 and 16<sup>th</sup> December 2021, and a summary of the timetable can be found in Table 2 below (see Appendix for detailed activities). Sessions highlighted in grey were non-compulsory extension sessions in addition to the core activities. Participants were offered a choice of at least two different dates and times for each activity (core and non-compulsory) to encourage them to attend at a time that suited them.

**TABLE 2 – PROGRAMME TIMETABLE**

Week	Activity
1	Induction/connect and share space
2	Induction
3	Learning and inspiration workshop
4	Roundtable discussion
5	Leadership and development masterclass (Koreo)
6	Connect and share space
7	Learning and inspiration workshop
	Roundtable discussion
	Diversity and inclusion
8	Learning and inspiration workshop
9	Leadership and development masterclass (Koreo)
10	Connect and share space
11	Learning and inspiration workshop
12	Roundtable discussion
13	Connect and share space
	Learning and inspiration workshop

### 3.1.5 Engagement and attendance

Participant attendance and engagement in the programme based on data collected by the Soil Association has been reported elsewhere<sup>14, 15</sup>, but for the purposes of the evaluation some of the headline data is reproduced in this section with additional comment where appropriate.

#### Overall engagement

- 41 members started the programme in September 2021; of these 39 were still registered on completion
- Participants joined an average number of nine sessions
- Total grant money awarded to participants was £33,000 (£1000 to 33 participants)
- 17 MFC members attended the face-to-face meeting in March 2022

<sup>14</sup> MFCV1 endpoint review – survey and engagement data

<sup>15</sup> A year in review – Food for Life Get Togethers

**TABLE 3 – SESSIONS ATTENDED**

<b>% of cohort</b>	<b>Number of sessions attended</b>
Bottom 25%	0-4.75
Middle 50%	4.75-13
Top 25%	13-20

It is unclear from this data the extent to which the 39 participants who remained in the programme at the end of the cycle were still engaged in specific MFC activities. It is clear however that the top 25% of participants were the most engaged and active.

Overall attendance across both compulsory and non-compulsory sessions fluctuated over time, with the highest attendances recorded at the initial induction session and the first learning and inspiration workshop (28 and 23 participants respectively). However, a core group appear to have remained engaged after these early sessions, with average attendance at the learning and inspiration workshops totalling 13 participants. The leadership masterclasses attracted 12 attendees on average, as did the roundtable discussion sessions, representing 30% of the total cohort.<sup>14</sup>

## 3.2 Findings from the end of phase one

### 3.2.1 Participant reflections at the end of phase one

Information gathered at both the reflect and review sessions and through participant interviews revealed some very positive feedback from participants at the mid-point of the programme. For many, the programme had given them a confidence that they did not feel they had previously, and some noted that being part of a national initiative had given them validation in developing their projects and in speaking about their work to others. This confidence came from multiple sources, including the training they had received, the one-to-one coaching sessions, talking to their peers and being part of an official programme being run by a well-recognised organisation.

*“I'm more confident now with what I'm doing, even though I'm a bit nervous about it. I'm quite happy to talk to people about all this food related stuff that I might not have done before.”*

#### **Confidence and kudos**

The programme has given participants the confidence to speak to others about food, express themselves more clearly and “walk the talk” around the food agenda. It was felt that the programme had given participants some kudos or gravitas when speaking to others and having an identity as part of a national programme was seen as a positive element of the programme.

Those interviewed also described themselves as being ‘delighted to be chosen’ and that it was ‘amazing to be part of this little community of people’. Participants really valued the networks that they had started to create, both within the MFC programme and in their local community and they often reported forming good bonds with other MFC members. This went beyond making social connections and many cited incidents where they had been able to learn from their peers, with two participants meeting others outside of the regular scheduled sessions. One participant recalled an

occasion when they had wanted to produce a community cookbook so had asked members of the Facebook group for help, and another MFC member responded to share their own ideas and experiences.

In terms of course delivery, many were positive about the fact that the programme had taken place online as this had given them more options regarding how and when they could engage. Many participants had additional commitments, so having flexibility about when and how they engage was seen as being very valuable. One participant reflected that they liked the structure of the course and the fact that the sessions were two hours long.

#### **Expanding and creating networks**

Participants value having a supportive network of like-minded people and have enjoyed learning from the experiences of others. Almost all participants reported that they had found new contacts from within the programme, and some had begun to expand their wider networks too.

Participants valued the course content, and one specifically mentioned the sessions on food justice and ethics as being particularly informative. They also liked that the course was task-driven and broken down into theoretical concepts. Participants appreciated the coaching element of the programme which allowed them to have one-to-one sessions with a Koreo coach – one participant in particular referred to this as a ‘premium’ element of the programme.

*“They've had sessions that have just really activated my interest and given me more strength to keep addressing issues on a strategic level, as well as working out how I'm going to do this on the ground.”*

The fact that the programme was not only free but that it also offered participants the opportunity to apply for the £1,000 grant funding was seen as a very positive element of the programme. At the mid-way point all participants were looking forward to seeing what the next phase of the programme would bring for them and their projects.

#### **Accessible and interesting course content**

Many participants appreciated the content and length of the sessions and felt that the ability to engage flexibly was very important given that most had other ongoing commitments. The theoretical, task-driven content allowed the sessions to be targeted and having access to a Koreo coach was considered a ‘premium’ aspect of the programme. One participant also noted that they were attracted to the programme because it was free and there was no upfront investment required.

Although many participants were not sure what to expect when starting with MFC, one noted that they had been hoping to develop their networks and gain leadership skills so that they could take their ideas forward within the local community. Interestingly, another participant stated that the programme had given them a new perspective on what leadership is, stating that it had opened their eyes to the fact that leadership isn't necessarily something that needed to be studied or learnt.

*“...You automatically think that you've got to be qualified in some way or you've got to go to college for three years, or university, or whatever it may be in order to have that specific qualification to say you are what you are. But what I've learnt through being with My Food Community is that actually isn't the case. That's just the capitalism perspective [...] on things, where really the real learning comes from lived and real-life experiences.”*

#### **Shifting ideas about leadership**

Participant's attitudes to leadership were clearly changing as the programme progressed. Some expressly stated that they had changed their views on what constitutes leadership, whilst others talked of becoming more confident and better able to take the initiative within their communities (although they tended not to use leadership terminology to express this). This theme is closely related to the earlier theme of confidence and kudos as people become more confident within their local communities.

#### **3.2.2 How did participants feel the programme could be improved for future cohorts?**

Participants appeared acutely aware that this was a 'test and learn' project from the start, but at times the uncertainty or vagueness associated with this meant that they were unsure of the direction the programme was taking, particularly at the beginning. For some this was disconcerting and at times they felt the programme lacked organisation and structure as a result. However, it appears that some people got more used to this uncertainty as time went on and became more comfortable with – and excited by – seeing where the programme might take them.

Interestingly, one participant noted that if the programme were to have a clearer structure then it might appeal to employers who could send their employees on the programme as part of a training package. Related to this were comments made by some participants about how future iterations would benefit from providing participants with key dates, templates and deadlines in advance. Not having these meant that for some – particularly those who were also working – it was difficult to plan ahead and organise their time effectively.

#### **Clarifying the course content and structure**

The programme would benefit from a clearer structure and sense of direction from the outset. Participants wanted to be given key dates and deadlines and templates in advance to help them plan their time more effectively and to know what to expect in future sessions. Expectations of participants could also be clearer as some believed that they needed to have fully formed ideas at the beginning, or that they needed to be thinking about implementing big, far-reaching community projects, which was not the case.

There was an overwhelming number of sessions to engage in for some. For those who are solely volunteers this was easier to fit in, but for others who were working part or full time there were difficulties involved in this. One participant worked full time and was having to treat it as part of their job which – whilst relevant to their paid role – had not officially been approved by their line



manager. The same participant also noted that they might have been put off participating in the programme if they had known how many sessions there would be at the start. They also had concerns that it would not be possible for many people working full time to complete the course, particularly if they could not justify it as part of their role.

#### Streamlining content

Course content sometimes felt overwhelming to participants, and it was difficult for some to fit the sessions in alongside their other commitments. Some also found it hard to keep a reflective diary but felt that they were doing this through other means such as note taking.

Lastly, some thought that more could be done to help participants feel empowered to participate during the online sessions as it was felt that some people dominated the conversations more than others. This is a common problem and is especially challenging in online interactions. Additionally, there was sometimes an assumption that participants would naturally connect with one another, but it was felt that more could be done to facilitate this through the mentoring element of the programme.

*“When you get like a group of different people together. Some people are much more comfortable talking than others. You have to plan for it and you have to [think] okay, what are we going to do so that everyone can participate?”*

#### Empowering and including participants

More could be done to ensure equal participation in sessions – whilst some have more to say than others, it shouldn't be assumed that those not speaking don't have anything to say. This may require some creative thinking around alternative ways to participate. Additionally, it should not be assumed that participants will naturally connect and get on, so more could be done to promote inclusivity.

### 3.2.3 Reflections of the strategic team at the end of phase one

Interviews were also conducted with members of the strategic staff team and with those responsible for delivering the course content. This section briefly summarises some of the key reflections on how the project has gone so far, and how the learning might be used to inform version two.

#### 3.2.3.1 The test and learn and co-design model

The strategic team were aware that there was some vagueness around the project at the beginning, although this was thought to have been felt more keenly by participants than the strategic team who were familiar with the logic model and theory of change. One interviewee recognised the model as incorporating aspects of a co-design methodology but believed that elements of it had felt more akin to rolling out a strategy at times. This participant urged caution as the programme progressed to version two as it was felt that there was still much more to learn and that the programme should continue to be iterative in nature.

Although there were occasional uncertainties, those delivering the project were open with participants about the nature of the programme and its design principles from the outset. This openness allowed a level of mutual trust to develop between participants and the delivery team,

which in turn ensured participants remained committed to the programme. Establishing this level of trust and commitment was seen as a core strength of MFC, in that participants remained engaged and invested throughout.

### *3.2.3.2 Recruitment and cohort diversity*

There was an awareness amongst the strategic team that the current cohort was not very diverse, although this was not unexpected given that recruitment had been quite targeted for version one. The strategic team agreed that the language used in the recruitment process was a key part of this, and this was closely related to conversations regarding the use of leadership terminology more generally (see below).

For one interviewee the key to recruiting a diverse cohort was to address any potential barriers that might exist for potential participants, which may be related to issues associated with the flexibility of the programme (for example ensuring that individuals working shifts or those who are single parents are able to fit the programme around their existing commitments). It was also suggested that more diverse communities could be reached through the networks of existing members, either directly or indirectly.

### *3.2.3.3 Technology platforms to support the programme*

It was recognised that improvements were required in terms of the technology used and how participants engaged with it. A new platform was in the process of being piloted with the current cohort with a view to being implemented for version two of the programme, and this was proving to be much more user-friendly. It was also hoped that the new platform would encourage participants to communicate more effectively outside of the programme, as this was something that had not been as easy to do in version one.

### *3.2.3.4 Qualitative versus quantitative evaluation measures*

Two participants noted that qualitative measures were currently the only possible way of evaluating the first version of the programme. This was partly because no baseline measures were taken at the start for later comparison, but it was also acknowledged that much of the programme is about personal experience and development which would be very challenging – if not impossible – to quantify. That is not to say that quantitative measures could not be taken into account for version two, but it was noted that this would require thinking about ahead of time to ensure that the right data was collected at the right time.

### *3.2.3.5 Leadership terminology*

This was perhaps the subject that came up the most during the interviews with members of the strategic team and is clearly a significant consideration going forward. It was felt that getting the terminology right was important throughout the lifespan of the project, and that this began with using the right phrasing in any recruitment materials. Using leadership terminology, it was felt, could alienate some people particularly if they were prone to self-screening. There is clearly a need to explore this further with participants to understand how they see themselves in this space and if becoming a 'leader' as such is what they want from the programme (as opposed to a food champion, community activist and so on).

### *3.2.3.6 Programme outcomes*

There was an awareness that participants had started to build effective networks, and this was evidenced through multiple examples. However, some interviewees noted that it was less evident whether the programme had effectively created community leaders. Again, this was associated with terminology and whether participants would identify themselves as having leadership qualities, but

it was also noted that this was a time-consuming endeavour that was not likely to be evident until the end of the programme or even beyond. However, one participant questioned whether the programme should exist to simply turn people into leaders or if it was more complex and nuanced than that – again, this was something to be considered in future iterations.

### 3.2.4 Reflections of the learning and development partner, Koreo

Learning and development consultancy Koreo were responsible for delivering the leadership sessions during phase one of MFC, and also offered members the opportunity to have two coaching calls, one at the start of the programme and another towards the end of phase two. The sessions were designed to complement the MFC programme's aims and objectives and to help individuals understand the concept of leadership using self-reflection techniques.

A member of the consultancy spoke to the evaluation team about these sessions, reflecting on the content and how it was received by participants. The sessions covered a broad range of topics, including styles and models of leadership, as well as leadership roles.

One of the biggest challenges with cohorts working in a community space was reported to be convincing them that they could be leaders, and that in most cases they already were. This was largely due to a lack of understanding around the skills involved, and with the terminology that is traditionally often associated with being a leader:

*“When you break down the skills, people realise they have been doing it the whole time; it is the word itself that has a certain connotation...part of our goal is to say you might struggle with that term, but by the end we want you to realise that you have all the skills.”*

However, perhaps the biggest challenge for Koreo in working with community leaders, is the element of self-reflection required. This is something that people working in this space are often uncomfortable with according to the trainer we spoke to, because it requires taking time out from helping or thinking about the needs of others:

*“In community projects that self-reflection element is quite hard because they are so used to thinking about other people and about their communities... people see it as a privilege but actually it's really important.”*

Overall Koreo felt that – in terms of their involvement at least – version one of MFC had landed well with participants, but that the strategic team would now need to focus on what the priority outcome should be for the next cohort. A clearer purpose here, it was felt, might help the team focus on what the overall goal of the programme should be. For example, should participants be expected to produce a tangible outcome, or is success simply defined by having participated in the overall experience of MFC?

Lastly, there was some discussion regarding how changes in attitudes and perceptions of leadership might be 'measured', if at all. Like others who were asked this question, the interviewee from Koreo felt that this was mostly an issue of personal development, and therefore largely subjective and difficult to quantify:

*“A lot of it is quite experiential and individual. You could do an assessment at the beginning and at the end, but if it is a self-assessment, it doesn’t really mean anything because of the subjectivity of it. I find the qualitative stuff, there’s a lot more power in that. But maybe its more about the ability of people to do... it’s what can you do now that you perhaps didn’t think you could before? Or what do you feel you have access to, or confidence to do, or whatever, however that’s framed. It’s still not a number but its something more concrete.”*

It was estimated that around 80% of the original participants took up the offer of the early coaching call. Fewer had requested a second coaching call, and at the time of interview these calls were yet to take place. However, it was likely that these discussions would focus on how participants relate to ideas of leadership at the end of the programme and their thoughts on next steps.

Koreo hope to embed the two coaching calls into the second version of the programme, possibly introducing a third call at the halfway point.

### 3.3 Findings from the end of phase two

#### 3.3.1 Reflections from the strategic team

This section summarises the feelings of the strategic team at the end of phase two of the programme, drawing on interview data with a member of the strategic team<sup>16</sup> and observation notes from the endpoint review<sup>17</sup>.

When asked whether the aims of the programme had been achieved, the member of the strategic team was confident that this was broadly the case, although felt that it was perhaps quite nuanced in places. It was felt that some aspects of the programme could be improved for future cohorts to create greater depth and more tangible outcomes for participants.

*“I feel like there were layers we didn't have time to delve into with our participants that may have been able to provide us with a stronger sense of those outcomes being delivered. But maybe that’s really harsh. I mean, it's a pilot, it's the first time we've delivered it. And those who've probably engaged the most probably did get that deeper outcome.”*

##### 3.3.1.1 Learning outcomes and reflection

An important element of the programme was asking participants to keep a reflective journal. The strategic team felt that this might have been more effectively achieved through asking participants to create a workbook rather than by asking them generic questions. This will be addressed in version two where participants will be asked to reflect back specifically on the learning outcomes from each session rather than as part of an evaluation survey. This will help the participants and the strategic team track how those learning outcomes are being applied. In version one it was hard to track a path directly from the learning in each session to meaningful outcomes for individual projects, so it is hoped this will become clearer in version two. Participants in version two will also be asked to share

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with member of the strategic team, July 2022

<sup>17</sup> MFC notes from internal endpoint review

their reflections in a slightly more structured way, which will be particularly beneficial given the planned increase in numbers for that cohort.

Grants were named 'Community Action Grants' in version one, but this will be changed to 'Leadership Action Grants' for version two, which will hopefully encourage participants to demonstrate how they have applied their leadership skills to their projects. The team would like to start seeing how participants are applying their learning and if they are starting to ask the right questions – for example, if have they been able to use a specific skill or technique in a meeting.

### *3.3.1.2 Participant engagement*

Rather than having individual coaching calls in version two, there are plans to change to an action learning set format, whilst still using the same methodology associated with coaching. These will come after a leadership session and will encourage participants to see how they will apply some of the learning within their own projects.

The strategic team recognised that some participants had been less engaged than others and made various attempts to reach out to those concerned via email and through one-to-one contact. Many of these individuals had struggled with the technology used in the original iteration of the programme, but the team hope that the move to the Circle platform will mitigate some of these issues in version two. Circle is an interactive online platform that will also allow sessions to be uploaded and viewed again by those who were unable to connect previously.

Anecdotal feedback given to the strategic team regarding lack of engagement was that the programme was appropriate for their needs, but that other commitments meant that they did not have enough time to engage fully in live or interactive content. Version two of the programme therefore aims to build in more flexibility around engagement. Some members benefited from one-to-one contact from the team in order to support and reassure, although it was noted that being able to engage these participants effectively required adequate resources to do so, and that this work could be very time consuming.

However, it was noted that in terms of the pilot of the programme all forms of engagement were valuable, and all feedback had been beneficial in that it had helped the strategic team shape version two.

The team plan to produce guidance for version two that states an expected minimum level of engagement of 80% from participants taking part in the programme. This will not necessarily mean attending all live sessions and includes watching recorded content and other forms of interaction.

*“One of our design principles was ‘you're all on your own journey’. And I think those design principles, because we laid them out right at the beginning, built a level of trust between the cohort. It didn't matter if you were a commissioner or someone wanting to set up a community fridge, you all had something you wanted to change about the local food system, and that was the defining USP of the group.”*

### *3.3.1.3 Diversity of the cohort*

Although the cohort itself wasn't particularly diverse, the design ethos of the programme concentrated on participants considering who else in the community might benefit from a programme like MFC. For example, one participant worked closely with Syrian and Polish



communities in mid Wales and felt these populations would benefit from being part of the programme, so one of the aims of version one was to use the initial cohort as facilitators who could engage the wider community in work around food.

In addition, the Soil Association has recently appointed to an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion role and this person has supported recruitment for version two. Efforts to further diversify through the second cohort were showing signs of promise at the time of writing, with a much more equal gender balance in applications to the programme.

#### *3.3.1.4 Leadership skills*

As previous findings have suggested, the strategic team were aware that rather than becoming leaders per se, participants were beginning to recognise different styles and techniques of leading. No participants had expressly stated that they had become leaders as a result of their participation in the programme, but instead were exhibiting signs of improved confidence and the adoption of different leadership styles.

*“We didn’t set out to say, ‘right, we are creating leaders’ – what we wanted them to do was recognise the qualities of food leadership. And I feel like we’ve got that because they are recognising that.”*

The programme is more closely aligned to a personal development programme as it moves towards its second version. This raised the perennial issue of how best to gauge changes in leadership skills through quantitative measures, and the strategic team were keen to see some development here for version two. Although still somewhat subjective, it was suggested that this could be gathered through baseline and follow up reflections on individual leadership skills. This would require finding the right terminology and asking participants where they might fit on a scale of leadership.

*“Everyone’s leadership style was different, but we gave them legitimacy to have their own leadership style around food. I felt that was one of our strong points.”*

#### *3.3.1.5 Barriers to participation*

The time commitment involved in MFC was noted as being a barrier to some participants in version one, and in response to this the length of the programme has been adapted from 9 months to 6 months for version two. The team also recognise that the online sessions were tiring for people and have factored in more face-to-face interaction for the second cohort.

#### *3.3.1.6 Alumni of the MFC programme*

The strategic team acknowledged that at the start of the programme little consideration had been given to an exit strategy for those completing the programme. Many participants of version one had expressed an interest in knowing what will come at the end of the programme and how they might stay involved. Through this enthusiasm to continue being part of the programme, the strategic team have worked with some of the original participants to support them in becoming mentors to future cohorts. As a result, version two has been designed to incorporate opportunities for these participants to support the new cohort, but these individuals have also begun to talk about their work across other networks. One member has spoken at the Sheffield Poverty Network and others have used their skills to apply for the Sustainable Food Places Bronze Award scheme.

Alumni of the course are therefore continuing to make an impact with their work even after the programme has finished by supporting new MFC participants or by reaching out through wider

networks to share their skills and experiences with others. This has been a very welcome outcome of the programme that had not necessarily been anticipated by the team at the start of version one.

#### *3.3.1.7 Internal processes*

During end of programme discussions, the team reflected on what had gone well internally in terms of delivery of MFC. It was broadly acknowledged that the team now had a valid model for the delivery of pilot programmes as a result of MFC, and that the mechanisms for gathering feedback on what does and doesn't work had been particularly effective. There was also recognition that some caution needed to be exercised when logging the learning throughout the programme, particularly in terms of the amount of information generated and the resourcing within the team to act on any changes that needed to be implemented. As a result of a lack of resourcing and the amount of feedback gathered at particular points in the programme, it was felt that some of this information did not necessarily always translate into real change.

As the team were about to embark on version two of the programme, they noted various points of development to consider:

1. Remaining flexible would be key to another successful programme.
2. Making it clear to participants how the taught sessions link to their wider personal development and to their work in becoming a good food champion is crucial.
3. Leadership technology should be introduced gradually.
4. Collecting baseline data on confidence and their connections to other networks would be beneficial.
5. Making time within the course for participants to focus on their own health and wellbeing, particularly within the context of the current cost of living crisis would be important going forward.
6. Learning logs are useful for programme development, but the team must ensure that these are carried through into tangible actions, and that this work is not too burdensome on particular members of staff.

### *3.3.2 Case study one – Barbara Rhodes and the Community Green Group*

#### *Project overview*

The idea for this project developed from a small Community Green Group which Barbara has been a member of since before the inception of MFC. This group of local community members has been successful in placing edible plants and vegetables within the local community using resources such as planters repurposed from the council and have also been responsible for generally improving the look of the local area. Through their local connections the group were asked to take over the renovation of the garden in the local primary school and Barbara took the lead on this piece of work, making it an obvious choice for the focus of her MFC project.

The school garden had fallen into a state of disrepair and become very overgrown with weeds in recent years. As a result of Barbara's involvement in MFC and her developing leadership and networking skills, many of the beds within the school have now been rebuilt or new planters established, and a weekly gardening club is now held with the children of the school. The children have planted tomatoes, potatoes and herbs and are now growing pumpkins for Halloween in some of the large beds that surround the school.

Barbara's work with the school is ongoing and she now uses the redeveloped space as an educational tool to teach children about planting and growing. She has also recently introduced tasting sessions and some of the children have been brave enough to try eating various herbs and

vegetables. Her work also extends into grounds maintenance, and she regularly attends in school holidays and on weekends to water the plants and plans to plant hedging to make the playground less exposed.

*“I am pleased to report that it is going extremely well. I’ve only been working with the early years children, but if I walk into the playground, I get mobbed – it’s like being a rock star. And they love it! We’ve grown all sorts of things.”*



**FIGURE 7 – CLEARING THE RAISED BEDS**

#### *Developing leadership and networking skills*

Barbara was interviewed twice for the evaluation, and in early discussions spoke of feeling overwhelmed by the task ahead. Speaking to the research team for a second time in July 2022, this feeling of trepidation had dissipated considerably, and she reported that the project was going from strength to strength. The grant money awarded to her as part of the programme has been spent at the school on various materials and supplies, as well as on some fruit trees to be planted in the community and some wildflower seeds for the children at the school to take home and sow. But it is not just the grant money that has assisted her work; through a connection she made during her time on the programme she was made aware of the fact that there was some funding available through the Woodland Trust to pay for the hedging, and she was able to successfully apply to that fund. This has allowed her to make a big impact in the local community.



*“In a sense I’ve always done community things [...] whereas this one is far more visible. And it impacts the tiny children, right up to the retired people.”*



**FIGURE 8 – INSTALLING THE COMMUNITY CONTAINERS**

In addition to the connections made through the MFC network, Barbara has also been able to use her leadership skills and growing influence to engage the wider community in her work. This has led to three new members joining the gardening group, interest from the local ward councillors, as well as admiration and recognition from local people. Using the principles of Incredible Edible, she is keen to share more produce with the community, but the current challenge lies in people understanding that they are allowed to take some of what is available for their own use – she hopes that installing some signs will assist with this. She is also using her persuasion skills with the council and Network Rail to encourage them to let some local areas grow wild rather than cutting them back.

Despite some reticence in recognising herself as a leader within this area, Barbara acknowledges that she has previously been a leader in other areas of her life and has held leadership roles before.

However, she feels quite strongly that without her involvement in MFC this project would not have happened and that the programme has given her the confidence to ask for things within the community:

*“It’s hard to say, but I guess I must have developed leadership skills, because I can say to the group ‘I need someone to come and help me water the school garden on Saturday or Sunday morning’, and they’ll turn up at 8 o’clock on a Sunday morning. I think that must mean something!”*

Barbara equates her leadership skills with her ability to influence, and she tends to talk about the concept of leadership within those terms. She sees her strengths being in facilitation and organising others, and believes that it helps to be seen as someone who appears to have an idea of what might be possible within the community:

*“If I don’t know, I know somebody who will.”*

This is also closely linked to her knowledge, connections, local network and the confidence that MFC has given her:

*“For example, this week I was on a farm, and there is a wildflower meadow on that farm, and I knew it was full of yellow rattle, and we wanted some yellow rattle seeds so I’ve used my network to go and get some... There is so much you can bring in by simply being brave enough to ask.”*

Barbara continues to grow her network and is preparing to start marketing the Community Green Group to engage more local residents, holding regular meetings – either weekly or bi-weekly – in the future. She has big plans and wants the group to be sustainable long term, so therefore sees great value in engaging local people of all ages in the project. She has also begun to see evidence of the wider impact of her work, and reports that there has been a significant decrease in littering since the group has been active and that there is a growing sense of pride in the area from local people. The local school – which had previously been in special measures – has also since seen an upturn in student admissions, and Barbara notes this as further evidence of the wider impact of her work.

Barbara plans to stay involved with MFC as a mentor for the next cohort.

### 3.3.3 Case study two – Lynsey Poole and Larne community fridge and garden

#### *Project overview*

The primary aim of this project was originally to establish a community fridge, although this has grown and now incorporates a community garden (this was originally a dementia garden for older people but was underused during the pandemic and therefore repurposed). Money has been spent on creating a seed library and producing seed packs. A garden has also been created as part of the project which includes a terrace, raised beds and a ‘chatty bench’. The garden also contains pollinators, lettuce, fruit trees, peas, beans, broccoli, and potatoes. The space is often used by those who are home-schooled and their families but also by those with issues around food security. Many of these people are concerned about taking from the garden and not giving back, but some have managed to grow their own seedlings which they have donated back to the garden.

#### *The impact of My Food Community*

Being part of MFC inspired Lynsey to develop an edible garden alongside the community fridge, and this is now producing fruit and vegetables which have been paid for through the £1,000 grant. She has also established a seed library, which she explains has been a force for good as it has brought different members of the community together:

*“It’s become very circular... we have the seeds in the seed library and we also have some free compost now that people can take which was provided by the council, and we also have pot recycling with one of our local garden centres...so people are taking those and filling them, taking the seeds from the seed library and they are able to grow their own items and give me their extra seedlings back for people to take, and they are able to donate food surplus that they have grown from their own gardens into the community fridge. And it’s just such a joy! I couldn’t wish for this project to be any better.”*



**FIGURE 9 – THE COMMUNITY FRIDGE**



**FIGURE 10 – LARNE COMMUNITY GARDEN**

The community garden continues to grow and is thriving – alongside the beans and peas there are now fruit trees, blackberries, raspberries, salad and herbs. The garden brings joy to many local people, but there is also an educational aspect to it which provides added value.

The community fridge pre-existed Lynsey's participation in MFC, but she recognises that it wouldn't have developed into what it is now without the support of the programme and the skills she has gained as a result of taking part. Many of the ideas she has had to develop the project have been inspired by the experiences of others on the programme or by what she learned during phase one.

Like others on the programme, the grant money came as a happy surprise, and Lynsey spent this money on the seed library in collaboration with a local community shed project that supports local people with additional needs. She also used the money to invest in fruit trees, salads, vegetables,

compost, pollinating plants, and generally getting the garden ready to grow produce. The garden is very sensory, having been originally intended for those with dementia, and Lynsey's work in renovating the space has meant that the dementia group are now able to use the garden for those purposes once again. There is also a local family who home school their children who regularly use the space for educational purposes.

Lynsey continues to develop the project further using the remainder of the money and there are plans to develop a herbal tea bar by growing chamomile and peppermint so that local people are able to help themselves to leaves and take them home to make tea. She then plans to use the last of the money to hold a foraging workshop that demonstrates how to use the garden.

*"I have not had any negative feedback whatsoever. It is just a delight – whenever I am there, which is most days, there are just so many comments – people will come and say 'you've done a great thing, you've done a great job'. We have other volunteers as well, other gardeners, and just the comments are absolutely fantastic."*

The project continues to inspire local people to get involved, including those who have previously been isolated, as well as older people from a local residential care home and local allotment holders. Lynsey describes the project as being very inclusive, and its impact is far-reaching within the local community, and it has become the focal point for many local groups.



*“I think that being part of MFC gave me a lot more confidence, and I was also able to listen to other people who had been there, done that. So, to have that information beforehand is very important because sometimes networking can be very difficult and it’s just bringing people along with you. I feel that MFC and especially the other participants involved are fantastic, and their knowledge has been incredible, along with the team.”*

In terms of leadership, Lynsey would not have called herself a leader at the start of the programme, but that has changed, and she would now describe herself in those terms. She has gained a lot of skills in this area and as a result has been asked to speak at events, which is something she would never have considered doing prior to joining the programme. Like others, Lynsey heavily equates leadership with confidence and has learned to channel her passion for food into her leadership skills.

Lynsey has enjoyed hearing the ideas of others and has been inspired to ‘think outside the box’ when it comes to food – for example, learning from another MFC member that when food banks give out tins, no one asks if they have a tin opener. She now tries to do the same by passing on her skills and knowledge to others, and particular passions of hers are inclusivity, building confidence and emphasising that you don’t need to know everything, but it is important to try – ‘every day is a learning day’, she says.



**FIGURE 11 – LYNSEY WORKING ON THE COMMUNITY GARDEN**

## 4. Other projects led by My Food Community participants

Each participant was given the opportunity to apply for a £1,000 grant to fund their project, and case study examples of the projects undertaken by participants are outlined in this section of the report.

### 4.1 Cooking in schools

This project brings families together within the school environment to share cultures and traditions around food. The school in question is multicultural and the most recent sessions took place over the Easter holidays in the school dining room. Families were given recipes to cook and were then invited to collect the ingredients they needed from the ‘marketplace’ in the hall. Each family was able to take the food home with them at the end of the session.

This project provides learning opportunities for the children who are participating in weighing items, reading recipes and preparing nutritious food, whilst parents can demonstrate and share their skills and knowledge of food. Many parents found themselves able to talk to their children for the first time about their experiences of cooking with their own parents who in many cases were no longer living or were living in different countries.



**FIGURE 12 – COOKING IN SCHOOLS PROJECT**

#### 4.2 Recipe book and community events

This project is currently working on multiple activities that include creating a recipe book based on recipes emailed in by residents. The project lead has been in touch with a publisher who works with disadvantaged communities, and they are exploring ways of developing the idea further. It is hoped that this might also be expanded into a food memories project.

Other activities include working with residents who do not have much space for growing to create planters for balconies, an element of the project which has attracted additional funding from the town council. Cookery sessions are also being held with the aim of demonstrating practical skills – the next scheduled session will show families how to take a whole chicken, portion it out and use the remainder to make stock. The families will then be given a box to take home so that they can replicate and practice recipes at home. The project also incorporates events such as a teddy bear's jubilee picnic and a forest school.

#### 4.3 Multicultural cooking sessions

These sessions are about to begin and will be held in the local church where there are cooking facilities. Prior to this the project has been planting fruit and rhubarb in the church grounds and recently held a plant sale. There are plenty of local people who are keen to volunteer for the cooking

sessions and these will be delivered free of charge to attendees, with the grant being used to hire the venue and pay for ingredients. The project will begin with Chilean cooking, and they are hoping to showcase some diverse cooking from places such as Syria and Greece through these classes. It is also intended that those demonstrating will also talk a little about their culture during these sessions, and the project lead is also hoping to get younger people of different ethnic backgrounds involved in the project.

#### 4.4 Food Festival

This project used a combination of online and in person events to deliver a range of activities based around food. These included seed swaps, foraging walks, a garden tour, online webinar and school microgreen growing workshops. This was funded with the grant and with some underspend from the local health board. People participating in the festival were also asked to make a pledge to good food, which was an effective way of getting the public involved.

Over 200 people participated in the festival and there were nine activities in total. The festival was a great success, and the project lead is hoping to replicate it in the future.

#### 4.5 From food banks to food pantries

This project is being led by a participant who is currently working within public health and therefore has existing relationships with a range of partners across the local food system. There were 18 food banks within the local borough but only one or two food pantries at the start of the project. The funding awarded was used to work with a local woman who had experience in this area. Food pantries offer a lot more choice and dignity than the food bank model. Visitors to the pantry pay £2.50 and can take away £20 worth of food which they can choose themselves (unlike in the food bank model where food is chosen for those attending).

The project has also conducted some peer mentoring and is looking to capture some case studies of those who have made the transition from food bank to food pantry. A toolkit will also be created along with some training in how to do this. It is also hoped that a film can be produced demonstrating the benefits of pantries over food banks.

#### 4.6 Growing project

This project currently has a polytunnel and large greenhouse in which they grow salad and offer open sessions to local residents twice a week. However, they have recently expanded beyond this and have created a seating area and some raised beds. The volunteers are excited about growing vegetables and there are currently hundreds of tomato plants, celery, fruit bushes and strawberries growing onsite. Volunteers are encouraged to follow their interests and grow vegetables of their choosing.

Some sharing events are being organised as part of the project and there are currently 18 adults and 60 children interested in attending. The project lead has purchased magnifying glasses, seeds and cress that can be grown in biodegradable espresso cups instead of in eggs for use at these events. The intention is that attendees will also use the produce to cook and eat, and everyone will be able to take home a plant at the end of the session. The project is also planning to hold a big lunch on the Bank Holiday Friday of the Jubilee weekend.

## 5. Findings from the follow-up survey

### 5.1 Introduction

This section reports on a survey a follow up evaluation survey of the processes and impacts of the first run of My Food Community. An online survey was designed in Qualtrics and emailed out to members who had engaged with My Food Community programme.

Twenty-seven (24) MFC members responded to the survey. Out of these responses, there was one duplicate and one other response which had a lot of missing data and these were deleted from the dataset before analysis. Hence, the total sample analysed was 22.

### 5.2 Demographic characteristics of survey participants

Figures 1-3 illustrate the demographic characteristics of respondents by sex, age, ethnicity and nation location. Almost all respondents (91%, n= 22) were female and from white background (95%, n= 21). The modal age group was 30-39 years old (n= 7) and 10 of the respondents were located in England.

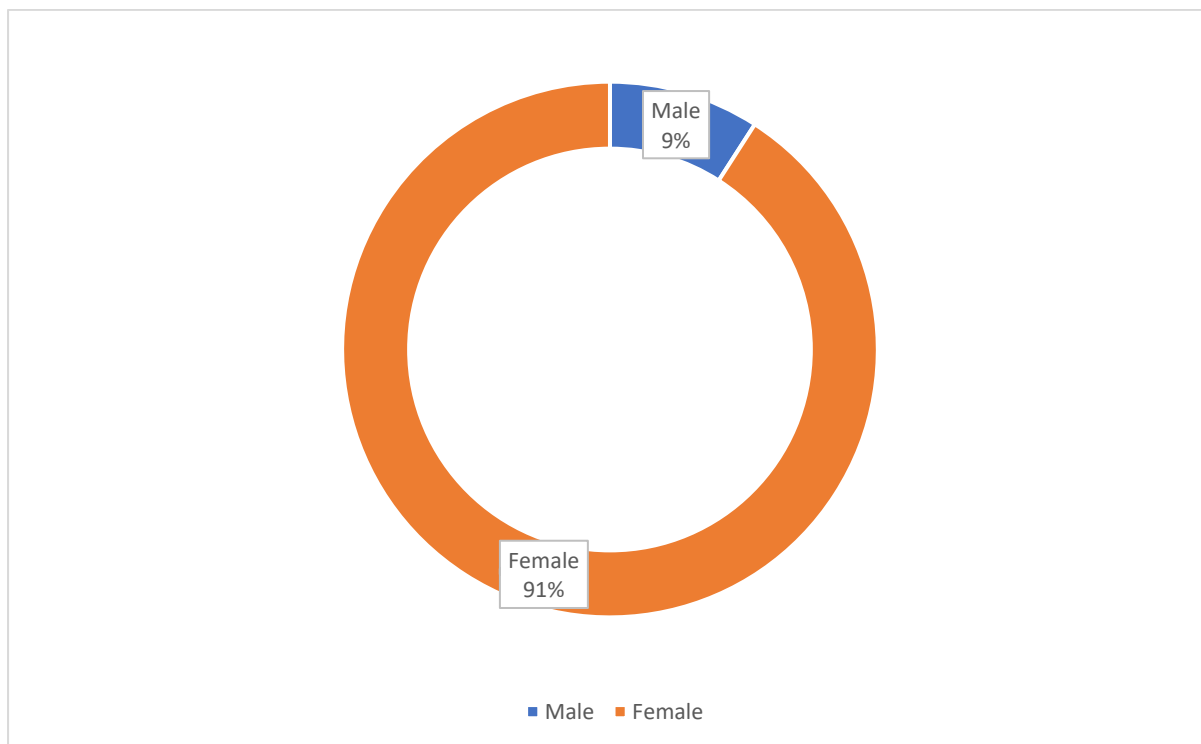
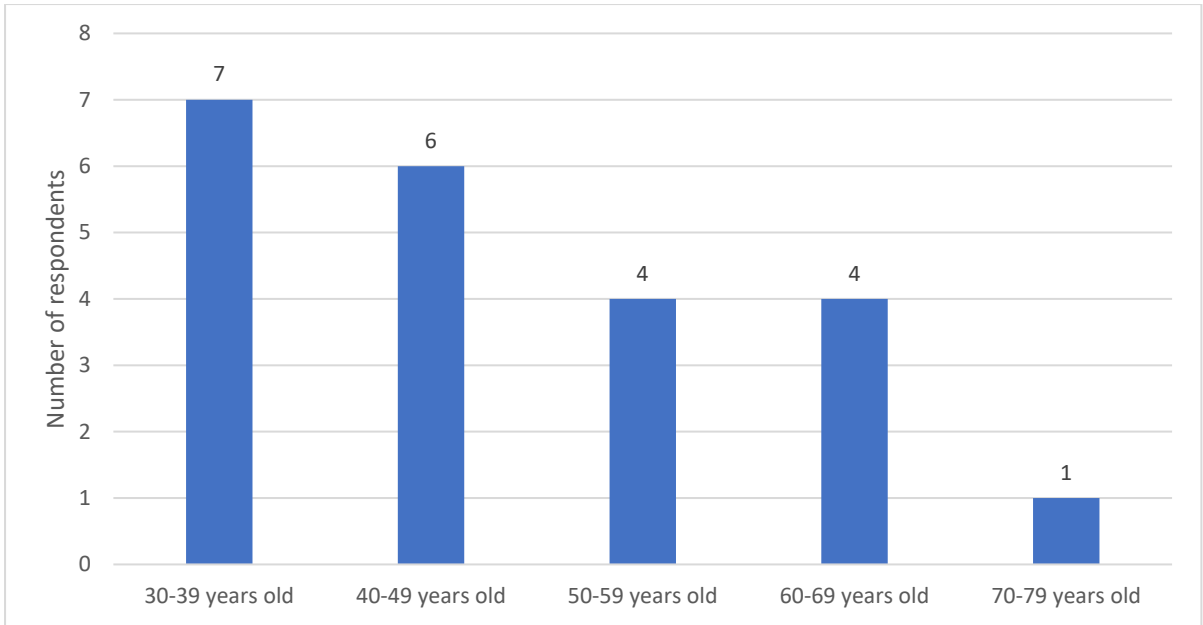
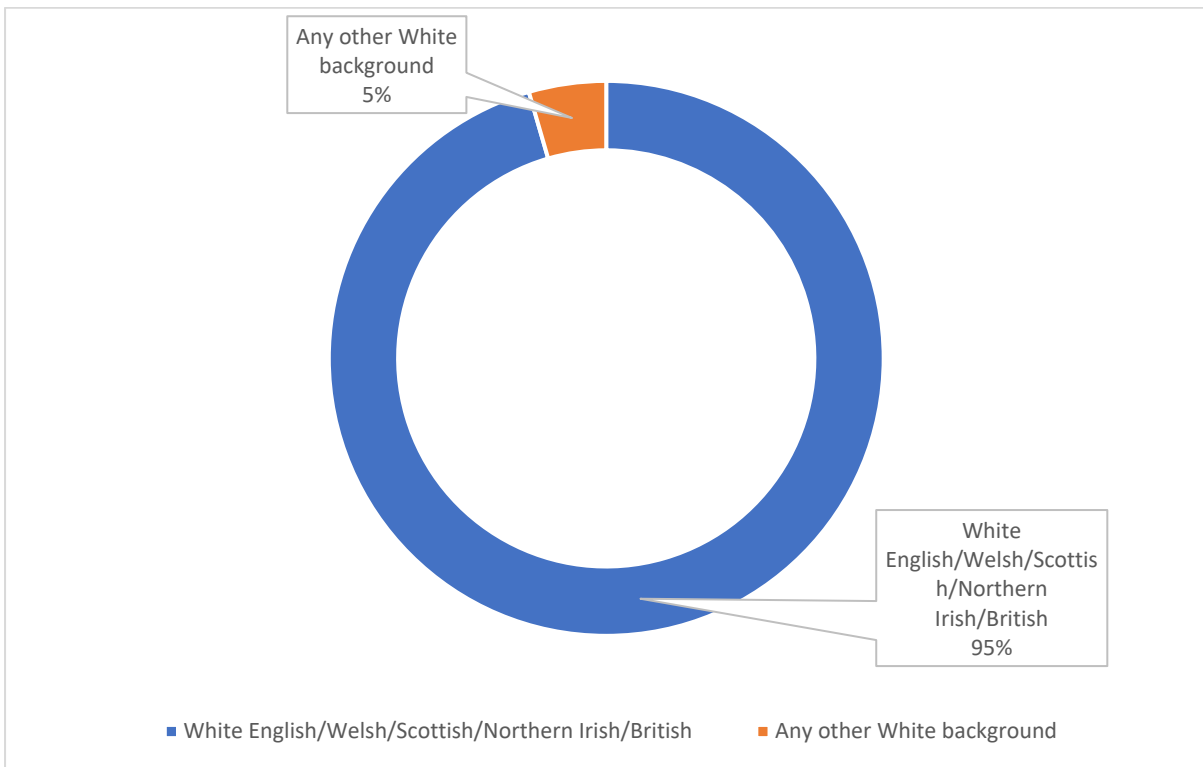


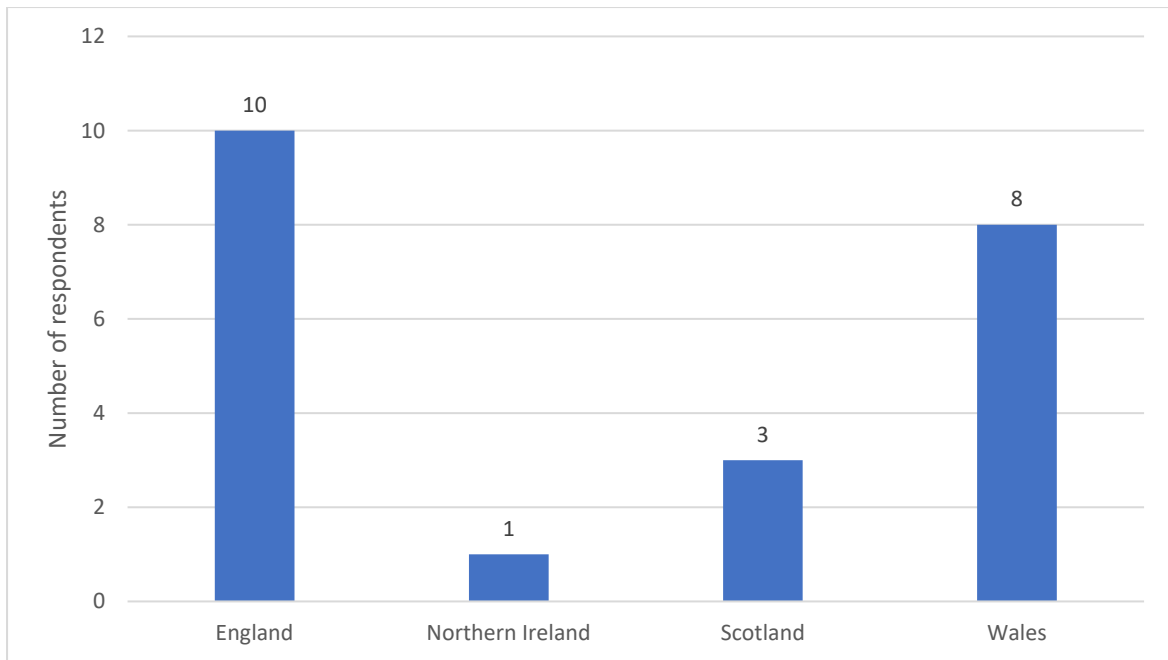
Figure 3: Sex of respondents



**Figure 4: Age bracket of respondents**



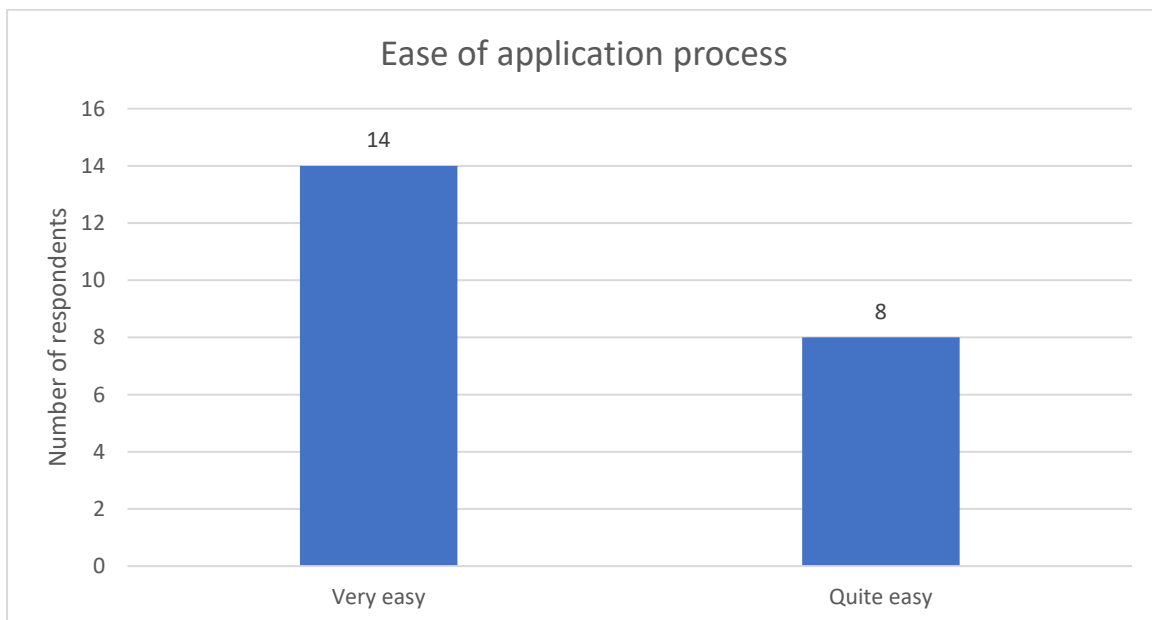
**Figure 5: Ethnicity of respondents**



**Figure 6: National location of respondents and their groups**

### 5.3 Ease of initial application process

Respondents were asked how easy the initial application process for the community action project was. Fourteen respondents (64%) found the process to be very easy whereas the rest (36%, n= 8) found it to be quite easy (Figure 5).



**Figure 7: Responses indication of how easy the initial application process for the Community Action Project**



## 5.4 Success of community action project

Respondents were asked to describe what went on successfully with their Community Action Projects. These responses have been organised into the following themes:

### **Theme 1: All aspects of the project**

Some respondents explained that all aspects of their project were successful.

*“All aspects of growing food, sharing information and sharing produce with our groups and the wider community.”*

*“Pretty much everything! The funding paid for us to run events making apple juice with local children. The children really enjoyed it, we were able to use up apples that couldn't be donated to local food sharing groups because of cosmetic blemishes and we were able to buy juicing equipment that will last for years.”*

### **Theme 2: Fostering inter-ethnic/ cultural working relationships**

What went successfully for some respondents was the greater diversity in working with people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

*“Getting groups of people from different ethnic backgrounds and cultures has worked very well and some great relationships have been made between people.”*

*“Also, managing to get people from multicultural backgrounds to deliver the cooking sessions on a voluntary basis was a really positive experience, there is a willingness to share culture and experience. We celebrated October with a Harvest Supper where participants, volunteer cooks and others in the community came together to share dishes they had cooked, it was a fantastic event with one of our green mentors having a fungi display and talking to the community about the specimens, a Polish lady brought jars and bottles of her home made preserves, fermented foods and cordials for people to try. Just a great event attended by around 50 people and hopefully this will lead on to starting a Supper Club.”*

### **Theme 3: Greater engagement**

For other respondents, they observed wider engagement of participants in their activities.

*“Building & engagement with the disadvantage areas and provided more access and knowledge to accommodate more people in taking part in our action project.”*

*“- it was great to allow people to do more of what they love in the garden, growing seedlings and sharing food and time together”.*

*“The community engagement was brilliant and the participants of the sessions thoroughly enjoyed.”*

*“We had a good number of interested people turned up. Had tattie harves, yoga, bug hunt and plant swap for our audience.”*

*“As a project we have been working with older people for over ten years but always in a food growing setting. Changing this approach to get older people involved from Carers groups, sheltered housing, care support groups, etc meant that instead of getting people active they would just come down and sit in the community garden or wander about the allotments and wildlife garden and then hopefully take part in the arts and crafts sessions that we ran whilst enjoying a hot meal, snack and tea/coffee. People that were less active did not then feel obligated to do volunteering.”*

#### **Theme 4: Innovation and refurbishing**

One of the success stories recorded by respondents about the community action projects was that they were able to create something new or reinvigorate an existing activity which led to greater participation and impact.

*“Having support including financial and mentoring to create a community-based food project.”*

*“My community project is ongoing and going well. 30 metres of edible hedging is in. Lots of different veg and herbs were grown in 2022, including pumpkins which were decorated and made into soup for Halloween. We had masses of tomatoes and herbs.... An additional raised bed is planned for community access.”*

*“Our young people engaged in a therapeutic herb garden and plan to grow their own veg in 2023. They have begun the planting process.”*

*“Seeing the money go straight into bringing the garden to life. And seeing the site become more usable and engaging.”*

*“The project overall has been a huge success! With the funding we were able to create an IncrEDIBLE Community Garden full of pollinating plants, vibrant and sweet smelling scented flowers alongside carrots, beetroot, herbs, salad vegetables, fruit trees including apple, plum, pear, cherry and blackberry in the garden. This brought more people with an interest in outdoors, growing good food together and an increased connectedness alongside our successful pre-launched Community Fridge Project. We also were able to purchase a seed library which has been a massive success. People of all ages and gardening abilities have enjoyed collecting seeds, growing flowers and produce together which has been in turn donated back to the garden as seedlings to share to the community or indeed as an end product, for example, beetroot or courgette that has been donated back into the community fridge. This has created a circular movement! The life cycle of food and has provided great education for all. With the final piece of funding we were able to create Larne's first ever Community Orchard. 8 trees of varying heritage varieties have been planted in an accessible space provided by the council which has never been used as anything particularly before. This will not only benefit our community fridge and growing project in the IncrEDIBLE community garden, but provides an additional way to educate the community, increase connectedness, togetherness and collaboration and host a variety of learning and education workshops also! Thank you, so much!”*

*“As a result of the funding we were able to give these families the resources – kitchen equipment, ingredients, recipe cards, cookery workshop – to be able to replicate the recipes at home.”*

## **Theme 5: Building new relationships and collaborate working**

Establishing new connections and working collaboratively with other stakeholders was perceived as a success of some the community actions projects.

*“I built relationships with new organisations that I had previously failed to do so. We worked collaboratively to produce a piece of work that we set out to achieve.”*

*“This action project undoubtedly helped kick start our food partnership to focus, understand, and share the benefits of the pantry model with our community groups in Bury. Promoting this model has now been built into both our food strategy, but also recently in our anti poverty strategy. At the start of this year there were only a couple of pantries, now there are seven. Via making the film pantries have been please to both connect and to learn from each other.”*

*“The collaborating with others and getting ideas and enthusiasm from others to run events”*

*“The engagement from organisations was great and there were some strong connections made.”*

*“The project was so popular that the town council match funded, which enabled us to also supply slow cookers to each household and to create a recipe book which is currently being printed. The recipes included are designed to use food waste, promote home grown produce, and low energy recipes. The biggest success was that the chef who helped run the face to face session loved the idea so much that he has now set up a permanent programme to support families called Cooking Pops. He runs weekly cooking sessions and set up a kitchen items borrowing scheme where people can borrow kitchen items to try at home and if they like them and use them often they get to keep them, if not they can return them.”*

*“We have plans for some collaborative work with pupils, culminating in a harvest festival in September /October 2023 to celebrate what we have grown.”*

*“We are still in the throes of setting it up. We have formed a working group with the council, that is a success in its self but at the same time it means that progress is limited to their pace and stipulations with can be frustrating. Our community is very supportive and eagerly awaiting progress.”*

## **Theme 6: Maximising impact**

For some, the community action projects maximised impacts.

*“I was able to match the funding with some additional funding through the health board, and therefore maximise the impact. The money was offered through a 'small grants' model, which allowed me to engage with lots of community groups/businesses and shared the role of delivery amongst a good network of people.”*

*“It was very volunteer led in my organisation, it was great to feel that I could have confidence that an idea however small was having a big impact.”*

### **Theme 7: Personal development**

One MFC member recorded an implementation of leadership skills in community activities developed through the MFC programme as a success story.

*"I was able to put into action the skills that I had developed during the year of attending the My Food Programme sessions and activities. I was particularly pleased that I had developed much better leadership skills and so was able to run events and get involved at a more strategic level. The events were great fun and really engaging and the roles I now have such as being a board member for Food Cardiff and moving a motion on Support for Community Food Service providers at a political conference."*

### **Theme 8: No successes yet**

For one respondent, they were still yet to identify any successes of their community action projects.

*"Unfortunately, I have not been able to complete the project as initially laid out in my application. Therefore at this stage there are no positive outcomes to report."*

## **5.6 Challenges with Community Action project**

In terms challenges that respondents faced with the community action projects, these were around time commitment, cost-of-living crises, manpower, funding and difficulties in engaging others.

### **Theme 1: Time commitment**

Time constraints was one of the difficulties several respondents mentioned as a challenge in their community action projects. These time constraints were sometimes around time for other partners to commit to the project.

*"I had very positive responses when I initially discussed the project with a local GP group, and a local farmer, who were both keen to be involved. However on follow up I was unable to get commitment from the GP group to move forward with the project. I believe there may have been some staff changes, so the lady I initially spoke to has moved roles and this made it challenging to pursue."*

*"Adapting the initial ideas was challenging so that it could work around volunteers, and participants timescales."*

At other times, time needed to complete various tasks associated with the project was also mentioned as hurdle.

*"Time is always the biggest challenge. The background work to this project to research content/build our info page and make our film has run through the year, however our action project will officially be launched with our wider partners in December."*

*"The time commitments were more than anticipated and the training also came at a time of instability for me so I was unable to fully commit to the training as much as I was planning. However, I appreciate the support offered to me by the team and hope that the resources will still be available to access beyond this phase."*

*"On one occasion an event was planned with very short notice putting pressure on us to get apples in time but it all worked out."*

*“The time and technology- I found it a bit overwhelming at times.”*

*“Booking time in the hall at school during the holidays.”*

## **Theme 2: Cost-of-living crisis**

A couple of respondents mentioned the high cost of living as a challenge to their community action projects.

*“The main challenge is the cost of living crisis. Our projected costs have tripled in 9 months.”*

*“My plans for my project were interrupted by a period of ill health so I moved events from summer to autumn, but this worked out ok. I had no idea that the Cost of Living Crisis was going to hit my community in the meantime.”*

## **Theme 3: People power**

Having the people available to facilitate the community food activities at times posed a challenge for respondents in their community action projects.

*“At times, the challenge was getting enough people to do the work. I have worked with early years only, and would have liked to extend to older children. A TA 'helpfully' dug up all the potato crop before it was ready. Someone sat on the tomato plants. Hose pipe ban over the summer.”*

*“Enlisting volunteers at first although now I have an established list of people who love to help with this sort of project (mainly retired) so this element is no longer a challenge.”*

The challenge with personnel was not only about the right number of people but also about the adequate knowledge and skills-set of these personnel.

*“Getting start with the project was a challenge. Limited knowledge of gardening.”*

*“We'd hoped that the recipe book would be compiled by recipes given to us by local residents, but after the face to face cookery session it became clear that most families didn't even have recipe ideas to offer. They tend to stick with pre-made, 'throw in the oven' foods. So seeking the right level of recipes to include in the recipe book has caused a delay in getting the book to print.”*

At times, project activities were adversely impacted due to ill health of staff. This was caused by the pandemic

*“On one of the sessions, I caught Covid for the first time after buying all the ingredients so that session had to be postponed”*

*“With Covid 19 still in circulation it was sometimes challenging to recruit new volunteers with [many] people still wary to mix with others.”*

## **Theme 4: Funding**

One responded reported funding as a challenge for their community action project.

*“Generating funding to [support] more events at a reasonable and affordable cost in a time of economic inflation.”*

## Theme 5: Difficulties in engaging others

Trying to manage participants from different backgrounds and cultures was seen as a challenge by some of the respondents.

*“Having groups from different cultures and religions has been quite challenging and language barriers. Google translate and interpreters were useful in managing this, but food is universal, and we were able to come this. Scottish weather also created some issues for outdoor work.”*

*“I had two great meals and plant sharing sessions with 2 different groups that i have worked wit, but i had an idea of getting them to work together for an event which didn't gain much enthusiasm – I guess I was pushing this rather than allowing the groups to see what they wanted to do, the two separate meals and plant sharings were really great in different ways in the end.”*

*“Trying to hold online activities as part of the festival – it was difficult to get any engagement.”*

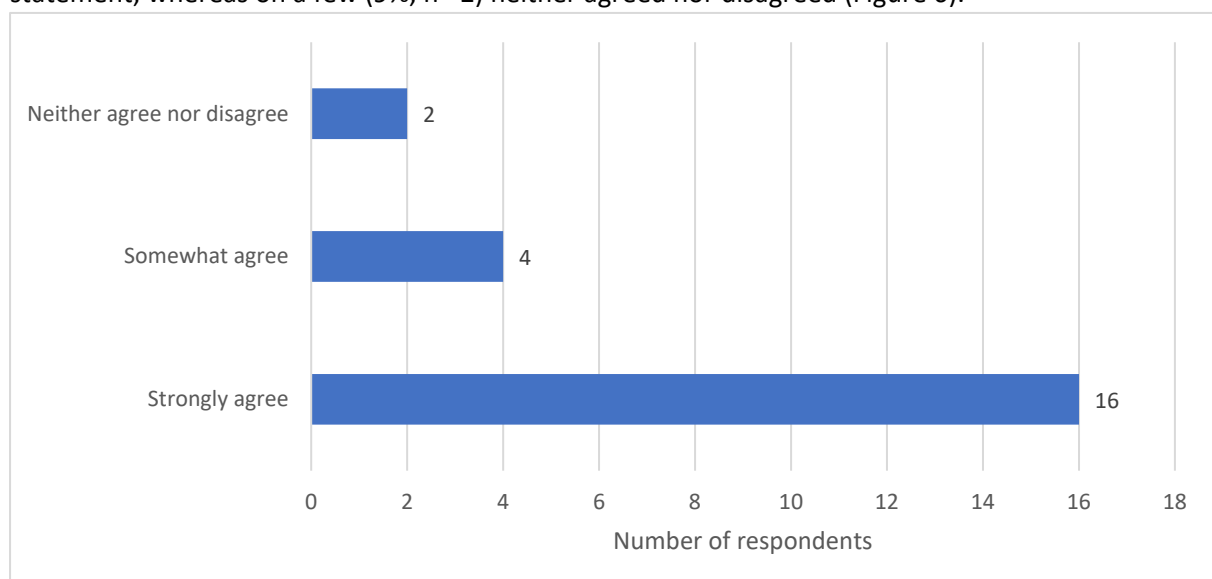
*“Working with children who might have additional support needs was challenging and difficult environment. I've yet to make in roads with the schools that I had hoped for.”*

## Theme 6: No challenges

Honestly, we have had a hugely positive response all round. The projects have been highly publicised and award winning (the community garden gained Runner Up in the Community Gardening competitions and I won Volunteer of the year for the projects). It has been positive, happy, and wonderful.

### 5.7 Applying learning from the Community Action Projects

We asked survey respondents to rank the extent to which they agreed to the statement: “Did your Community Action Project help you apply your learning from the MFC programme?”. This could be learning about any aspect of the programme. Majority (73%, n= 16) strongly agreed to this statement; whereas on a few (9%, n= 2) neither agreed nor disagreed (Figure 6).

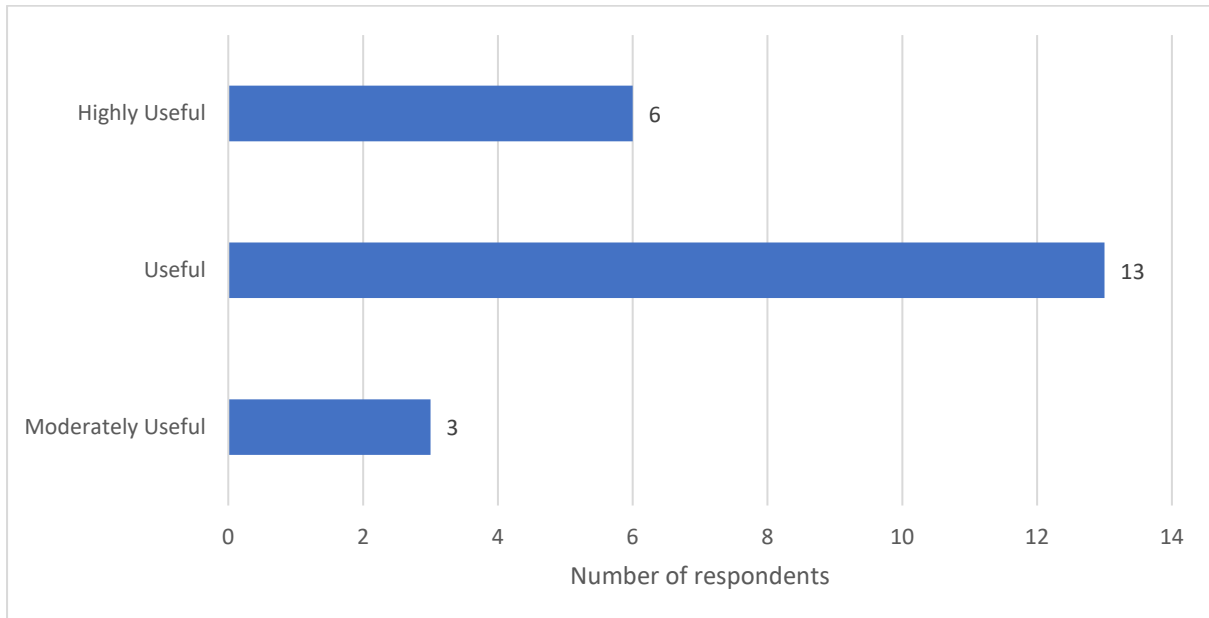


**Figure 8: Level of agreement on how the Community Action Project help respondents in applying their learning from the MFC programme**

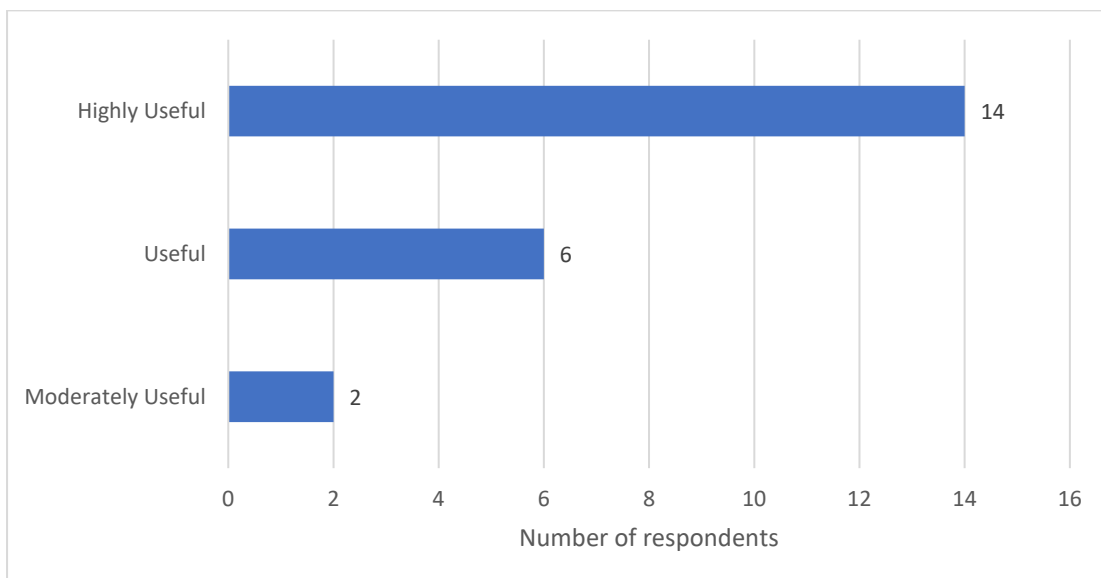


### 5.8 Usefulness of aspects of the MFC programme.

We wanted to hear from respondents about how useful they found various aspects of MFC in their role as a Food Champion (Figures 7-13). The aspects that most respondents found highly useful were the Learning and Inspiration Sessions (n= 14); Round Table Discussions (n= 10); Connect and Share Sessions (n=12); Coaching (n= 7)<sup>18</sup> and 1-2-1 with other participants and team members (n= 10).

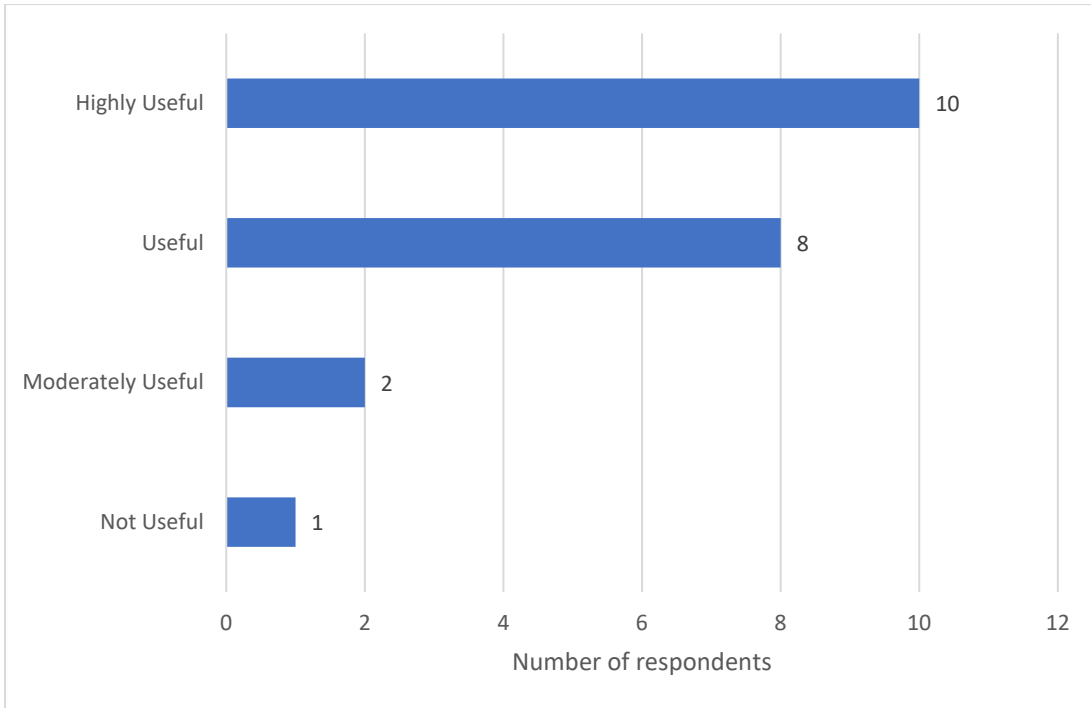


**Figure 9: Usefulness of Leadership Master Classes (n= 22)**

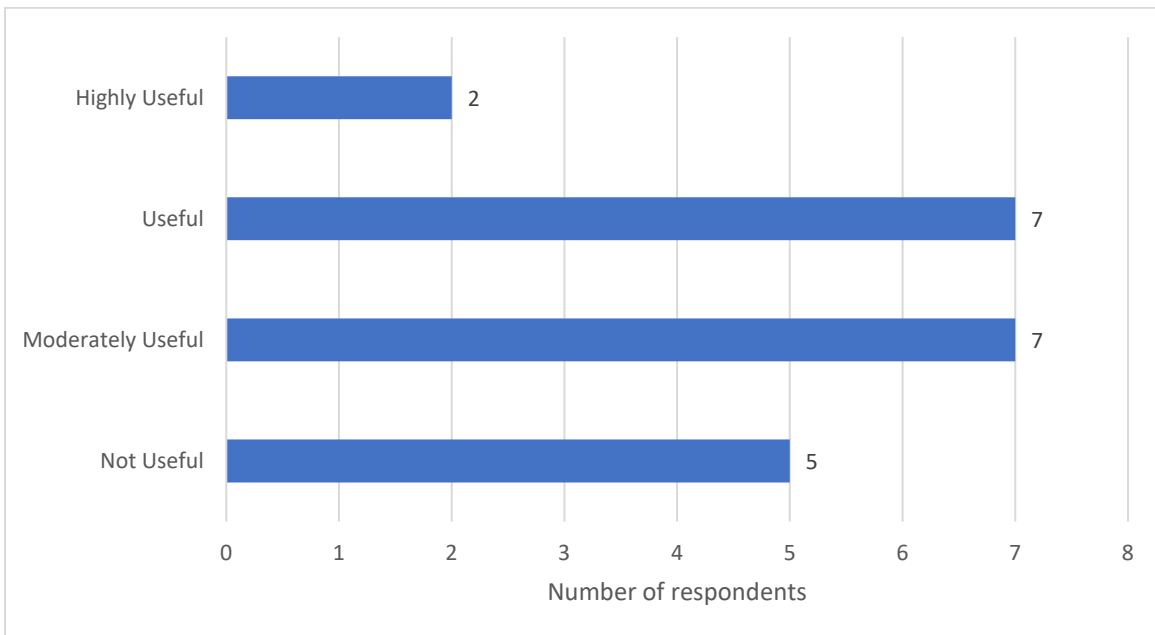


**Figure 10: Usefulness of Learning and Inspiration Sessions**

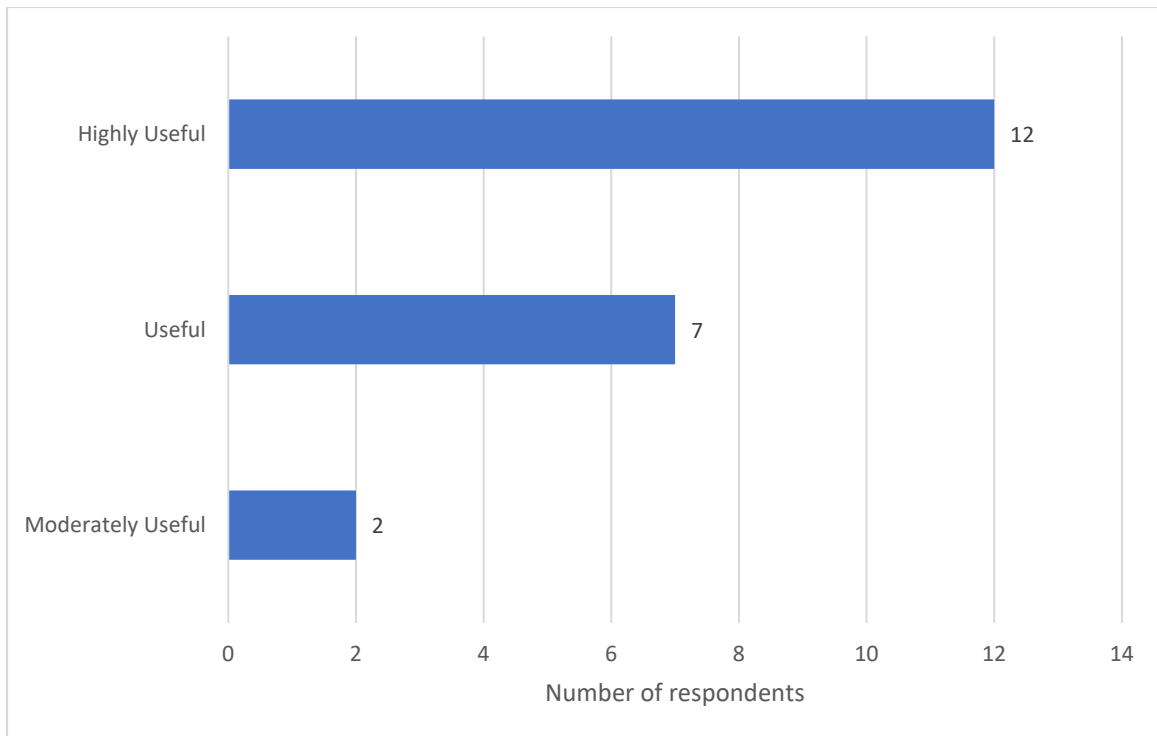
<sup>18</sup> 7 respondents also found this to be useful



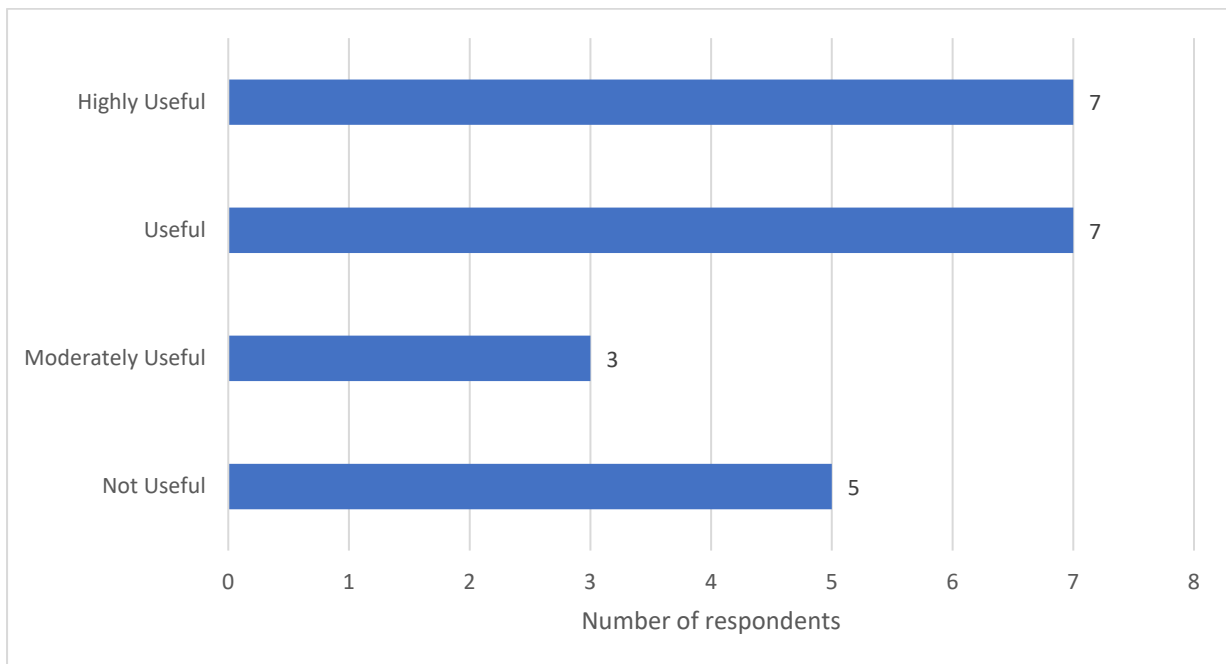
**Figure 11: Usefulness of Round Table Discussions (n= 21)**



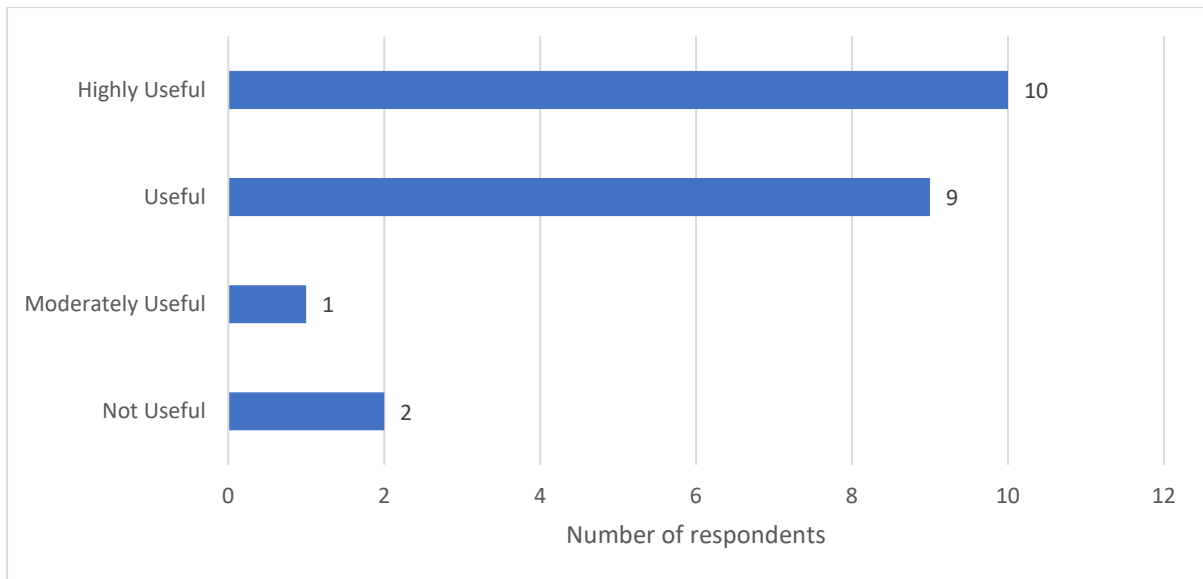
**Figure 12: Usefulness of Reflective Practice Handbook**



**Figure 13: Usefulness of Connect and Share Session**



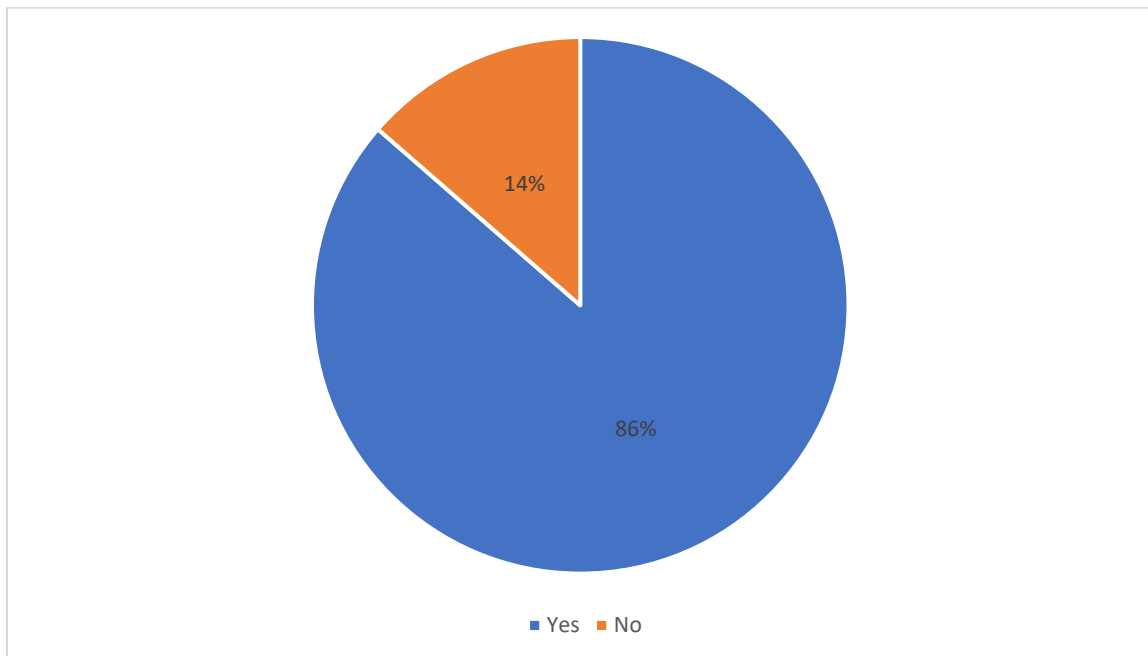
**Figure 14: Usefulness of Coaching (n= 22)**



**Figure 15: Usefulness of 1-2-1 with other participants and team members**

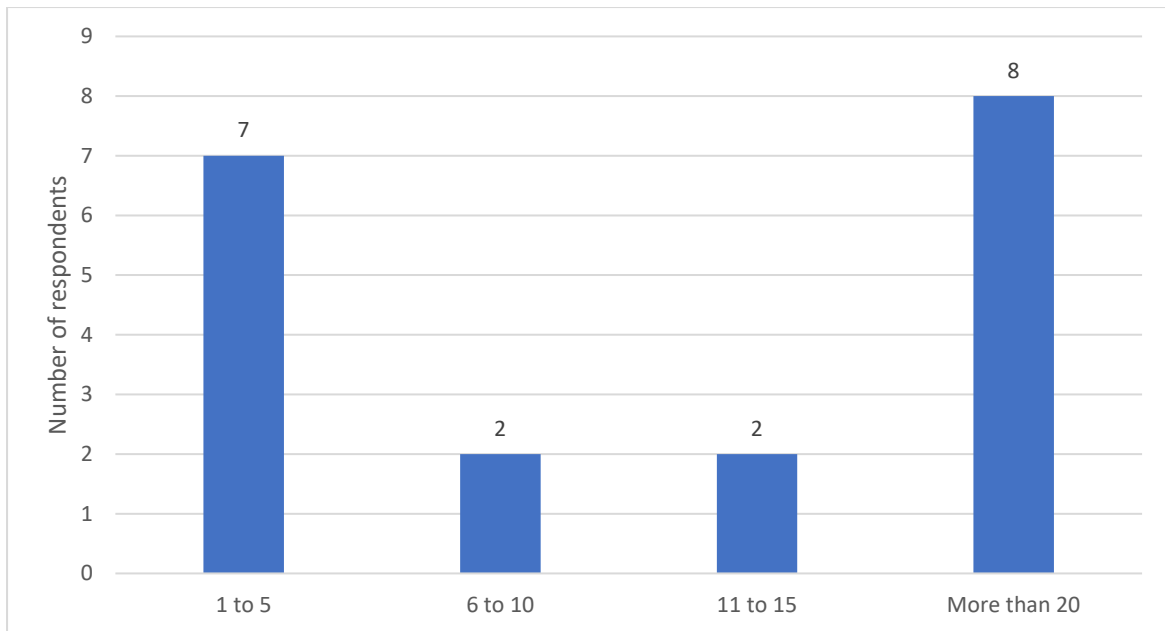
### 5.10 Making connections after the MFC programme

When it came to the number of connections that respondents made after participating in MFC, 86% (n= 19) confirmed that they made connections such as sharing ideas, contacts, resources or working together on activities with other involved in food issues (Figure 14).



**Figure 16: Proportion of respondents who made connections after the MFC**

In terms of the number of connections that were made, the modal number of connections was 'more than 20' (n= 8), followed by '1 to 5' (n= 7), '6 to 10' (n= 2) and '10–15' (n=2) (Figure 15).

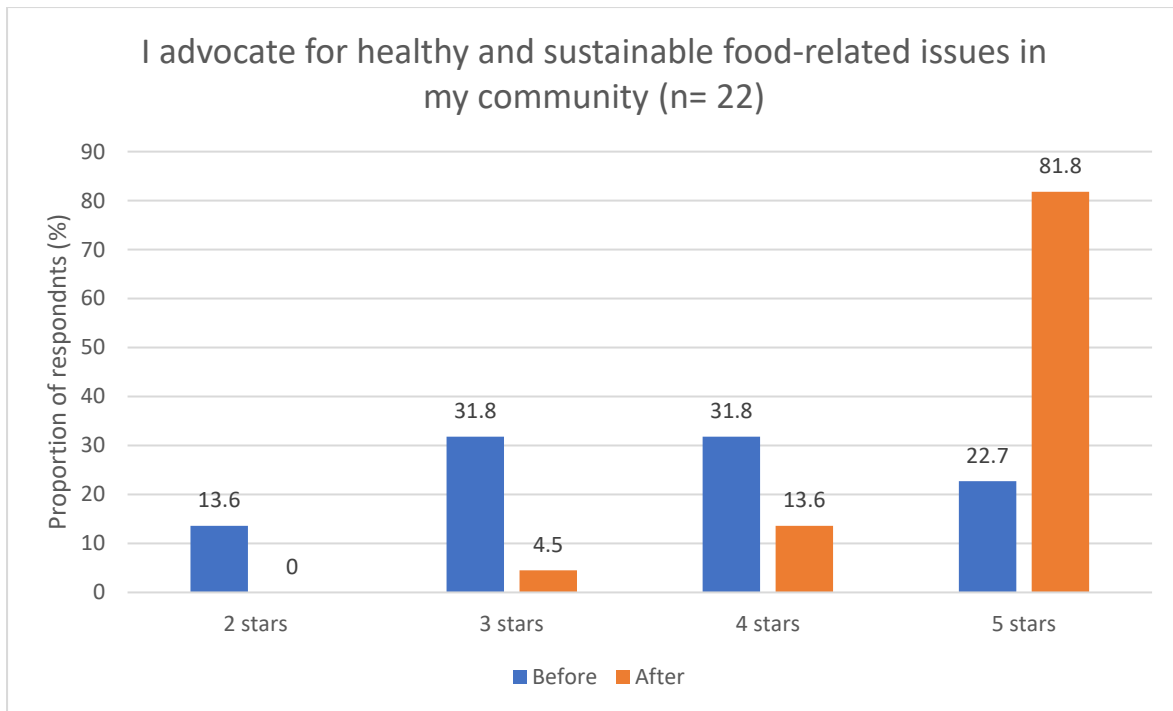


**Figure 17: Number of connections made after taking part in MFC**

### 5.11 Respondent ratings before and after taking part in MFC

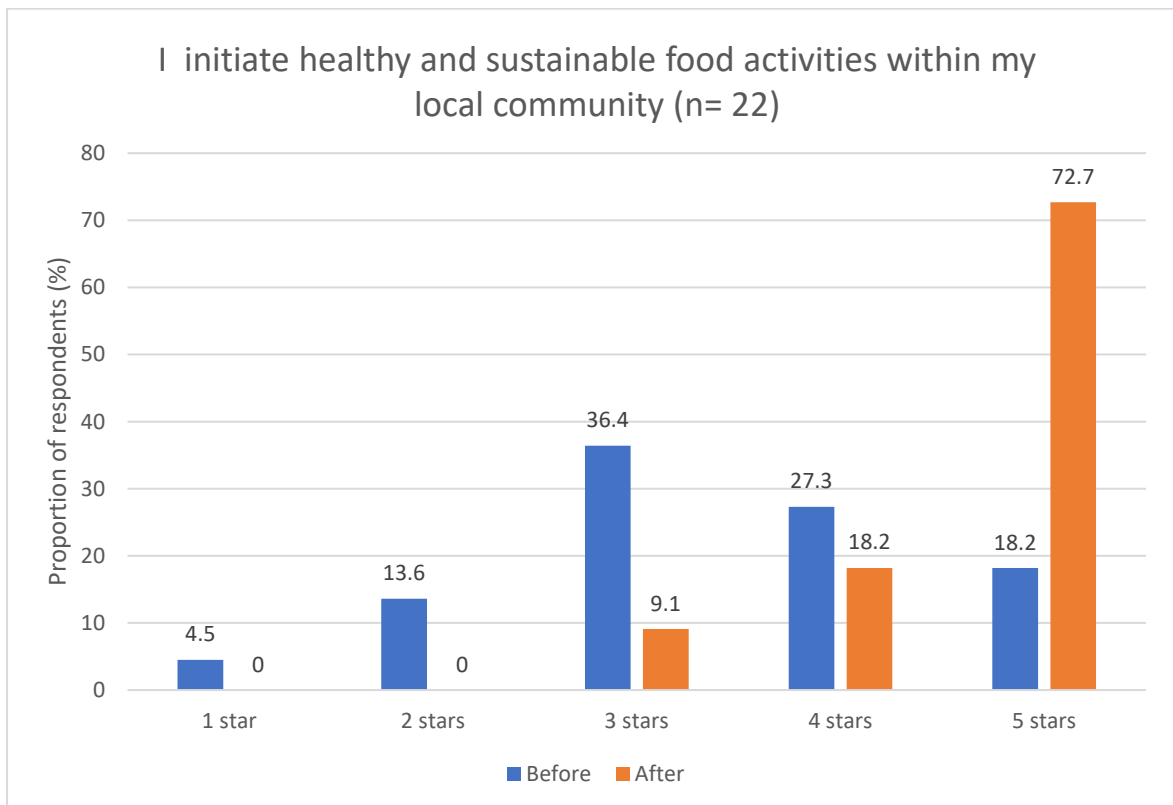
We asked respondents to rate their skills and competencies in various aspects of community food activities before and after taking part in MFC. A rating of 1 star indicated the lowest level of competence and 5 stars represented the highest level of competence.

Most participants (32%, n= 7) rated their competency in advocating for healthy and sustainable food-related issues in their community as 3 and 4 stars before MFC. However, most rated their competency in this area as 5 stars after MFC (82%, n= 18) (Figure 16).



**Figure 18: Respondent ratings before and after taking part in MFC: I advocate for healthy and sustainable food-related issues in my community**

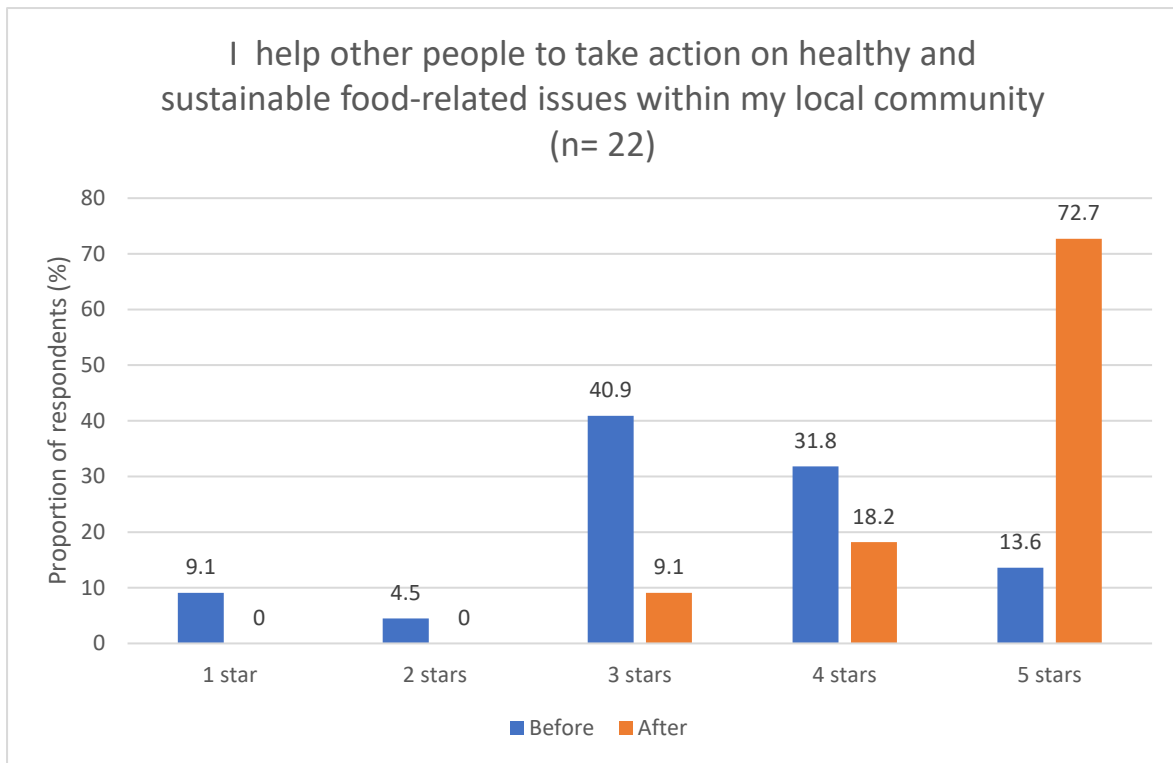
Majority of the respondents (36%, n= 8) rated their ability to initiate healthy and sustainable food activities within their local community as 3 stars before MFC, whereas most (73%, n= 16) rated their ability in this aspect as 5 stars after MFC (Figure 17).



**Figure 19: Respondent ratings before and after taking part in MFC: I initiate healthy and sustainable food activities within my local community.**

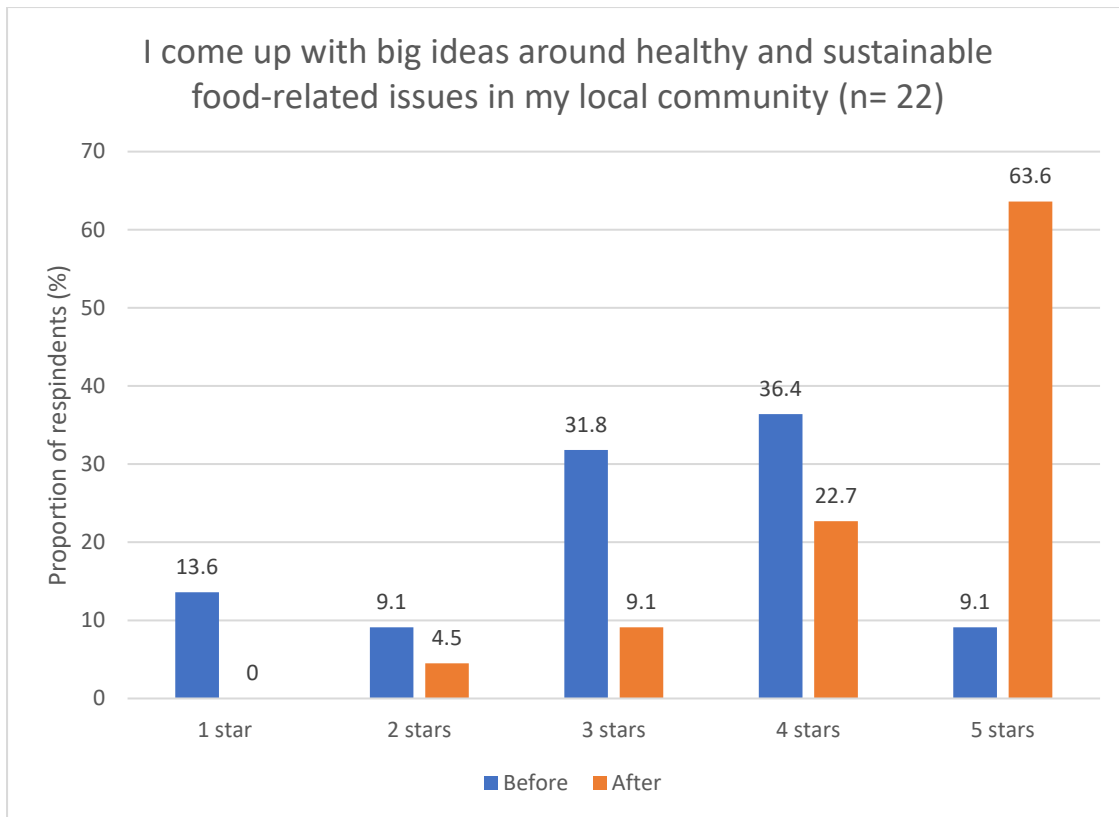


While most respondents (73%, n= 16) rated themselves as 5 stars in helping other people to take action on healthy and sustainable food-related issues within their local community after taking part in MFC, the majority (41%, n= 9) had rated themselves as 3 stars against this competency prior to taking part in MFC (Figure 18).



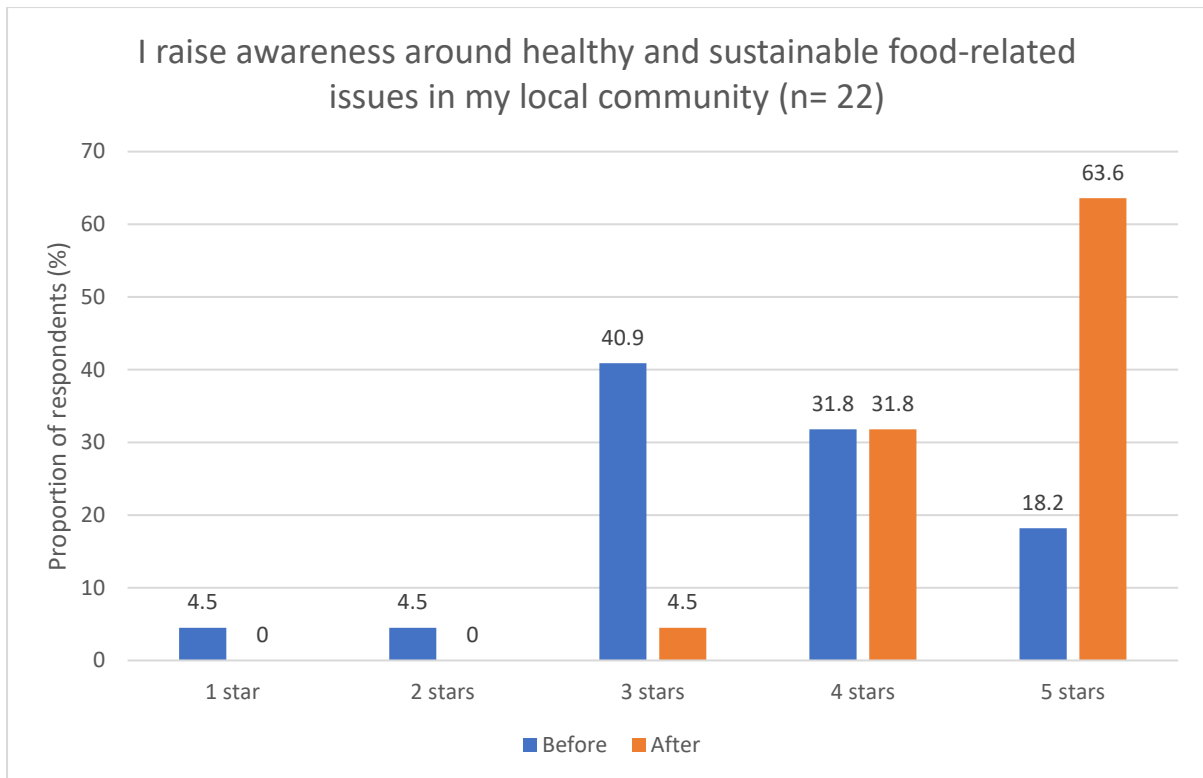
**Figure 20: Respondent ratings before and after taking part in MFC: I help other people to take action on healthy and sustainable food-related issues within my local community**

Four star was the modal rating of respondents (36%, n= 8) in their ability to come up with big ideas around healthy and sustainable food-related issues in my local community prior to taking part in MFC. However, the modal rating went up to 5 stars after participants has engaged in MFC (64%, n= 14) (Figure 19).



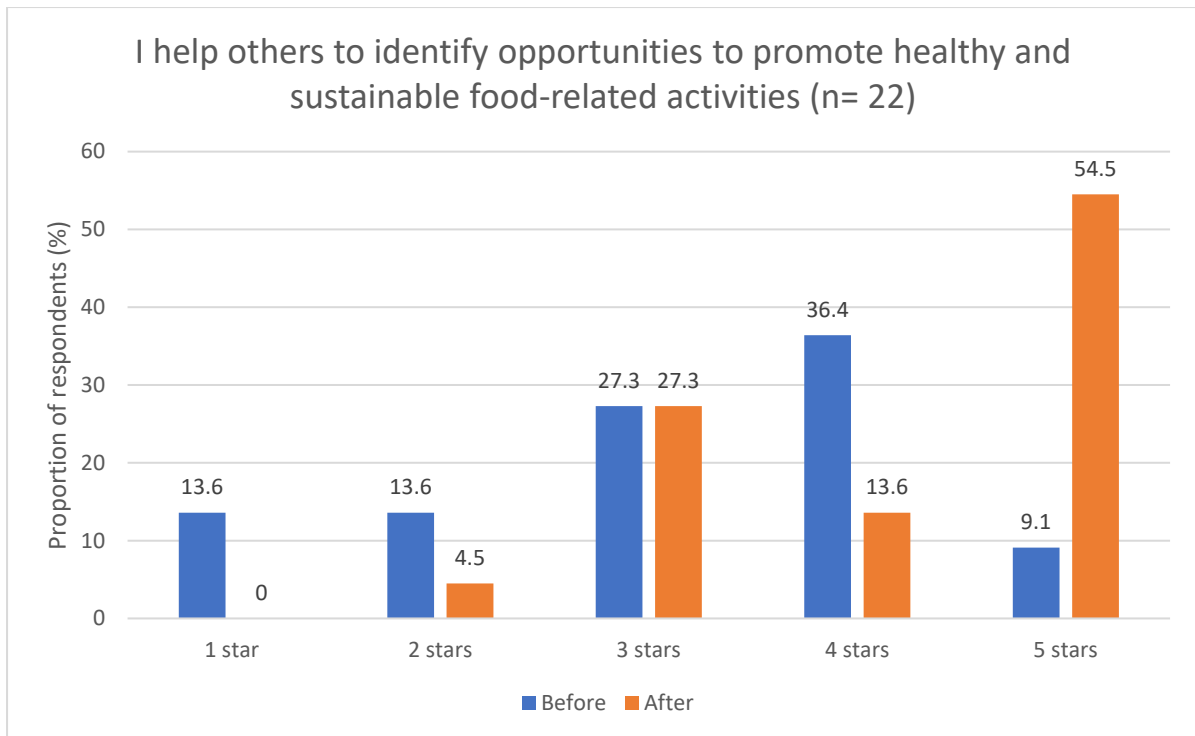
**Figure 21: Respondent ratings before and after taking part in MFC: I come up with big ideas around healthy and sustainable food-related issues in my local community**

In terms of respondents' ability to raise awareness around healthy and sustainable food-related issues in their local community, most of them (41%, n= 9) rated their ability in this area as 3 stars before taking part in MFC. Sixty-four percent (n= 14) rated themselves as 5 stars in this competency after taking part in MFC (Figure 20).



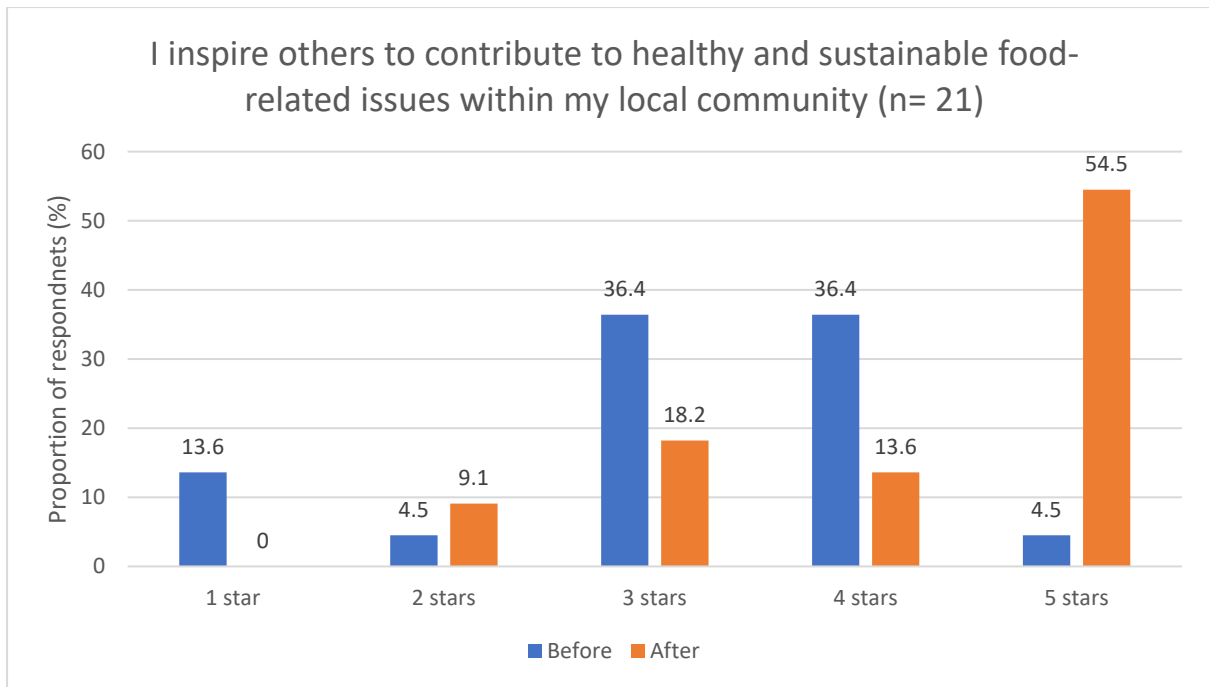
**Figure 22: Respondent ratings before and after taking part in MFC: I raise awareness around healthy and sustainable food-related issues in my local community**

The modal rating for helping others to identify opportunities to promote healthy and sustainable food-related activities prior to respondents' participating in MFC was 3 stars (27%, n= 6). After taking part in MFC, this modal rating went up to 5 stars (55%, n= 12) (Figure 21).



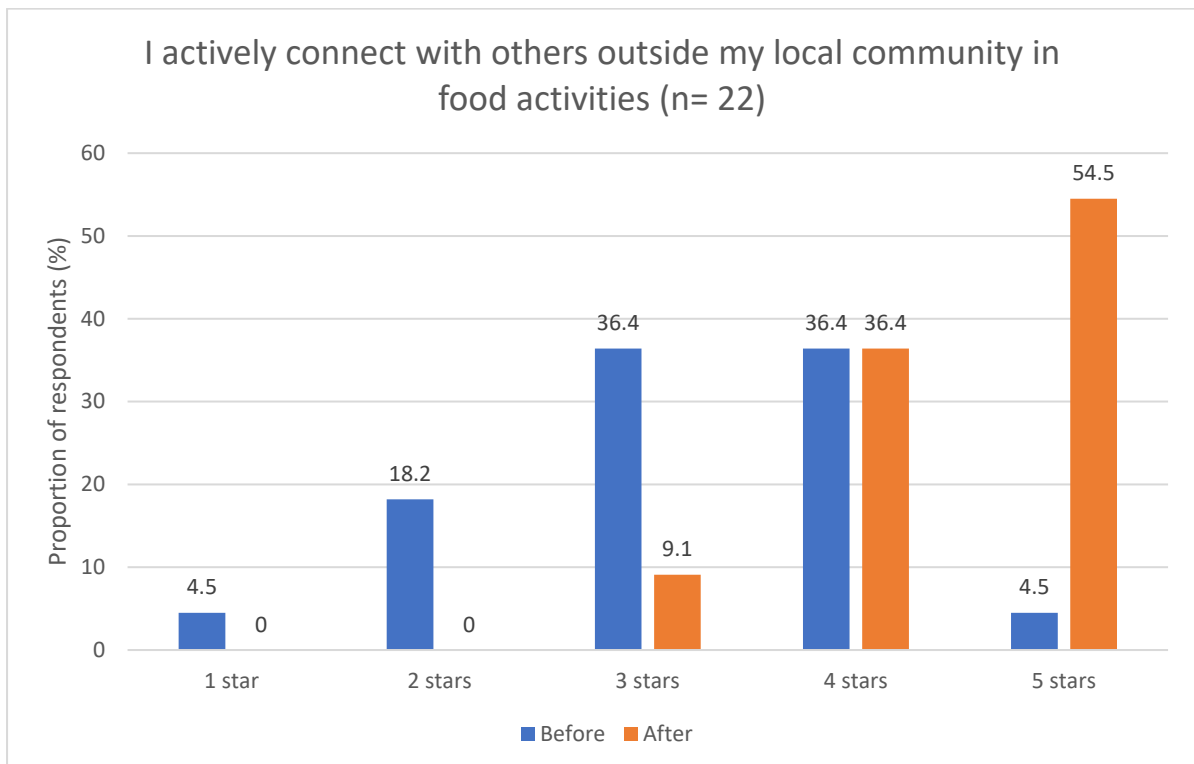
**Figure 23: Respondent ratings before and after taking part in MFC: I help others to identify opportunities to promote healthy and sustainable food-related activities (n= 22)**

Most respondents (36%, n= 8) rated their ability to inspire others to contribute to healthy and sustainable food-related issues within their local community as 3 or 4 stars prior to engaging with MFC. However, after engaging in MFC, majority of the respondents (55%, n= 12) rated their skill in this aspect as 5 stars (Figure 22).



**Figure 24: Respondent ratings before and after taking part in MFC: I inspire others to contribute to healthy and sustainable food-related issues within my local community**

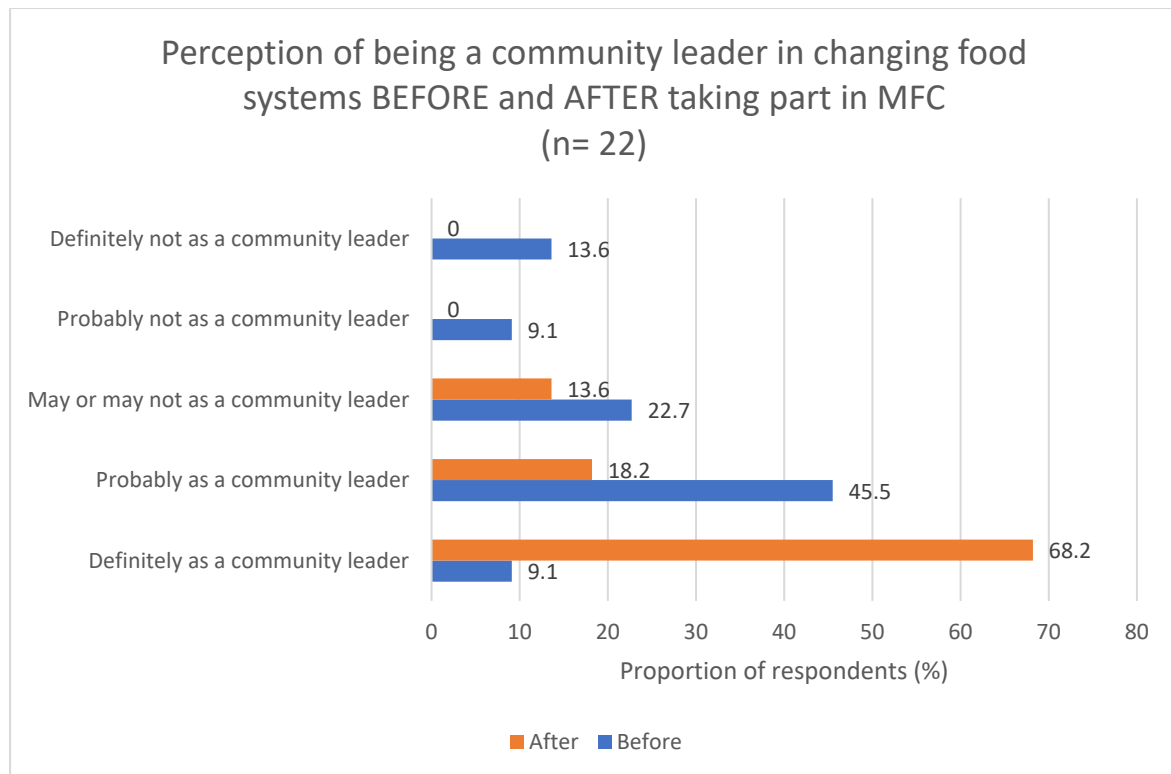
The modal rating of MFC members for being able to actively connect with others outside their local community in food activities before engaging in the programme was 3 or 4 stars (36%, n= 8). After taking part in MFC, this modal rating went up to 5 stars (55%, n= 12) (Figure 23).



**Figure 25: Respondent ratings before and after taking part in MFC: I actively connect with others outside my local community in food activities**

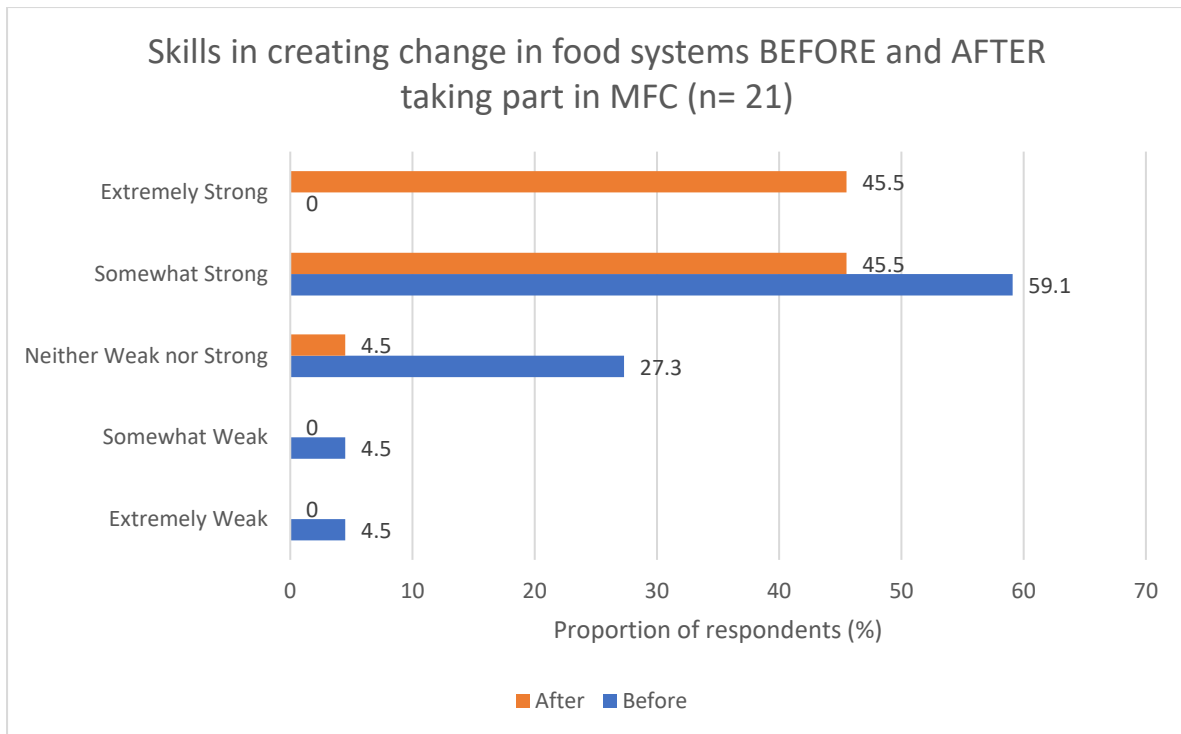
### 5.12 Leadership skills before and after MFC

While majority of respondents probably saw themselves as a community leader in food activities before taking part in the MFC (46%, n= 10), most respondents (68%, n= 15) definitely regarded themselves as a community leader in food activities after taking part in MFC (Figure 24).



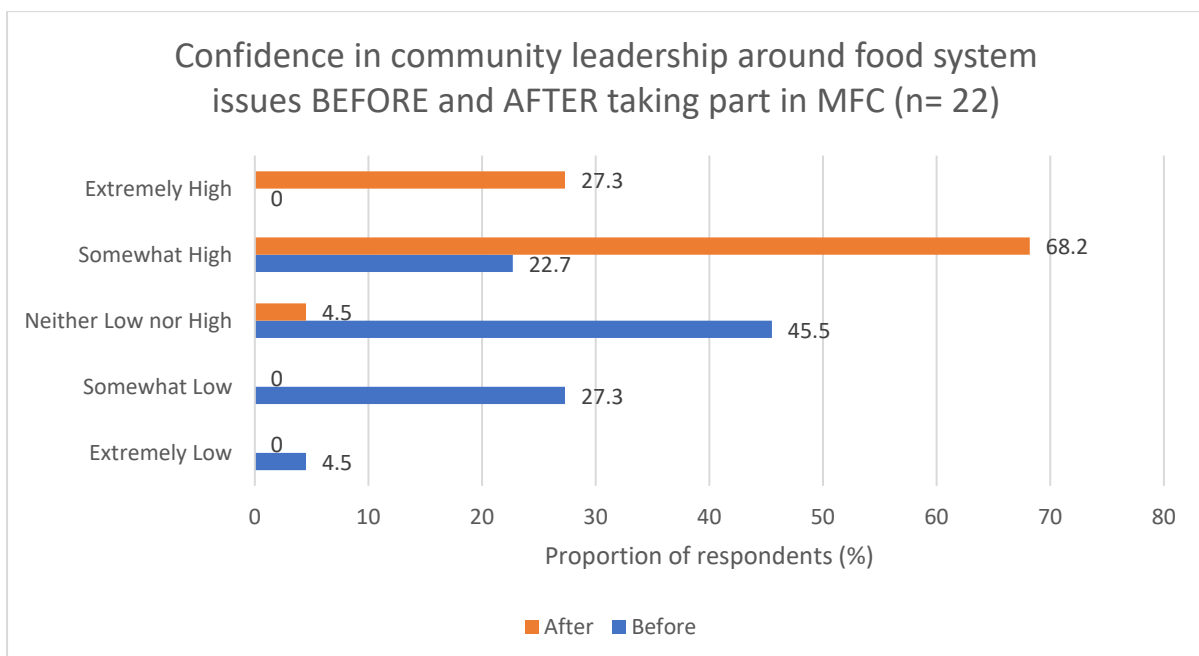
**Figure 26: Perception of being a community leader in changing food systems BEFORE and AFTER taking part in MFC**

We asked respondents about the strength of their skills in creating change in food systems before and after taking part in MFC. None of the respondents felt their skills in this area was extremely strong before taking part in MFC. However, after taking part in MFC, 46% (n= 10) perceived their skills to be extremely strong in this area (Figure 25).



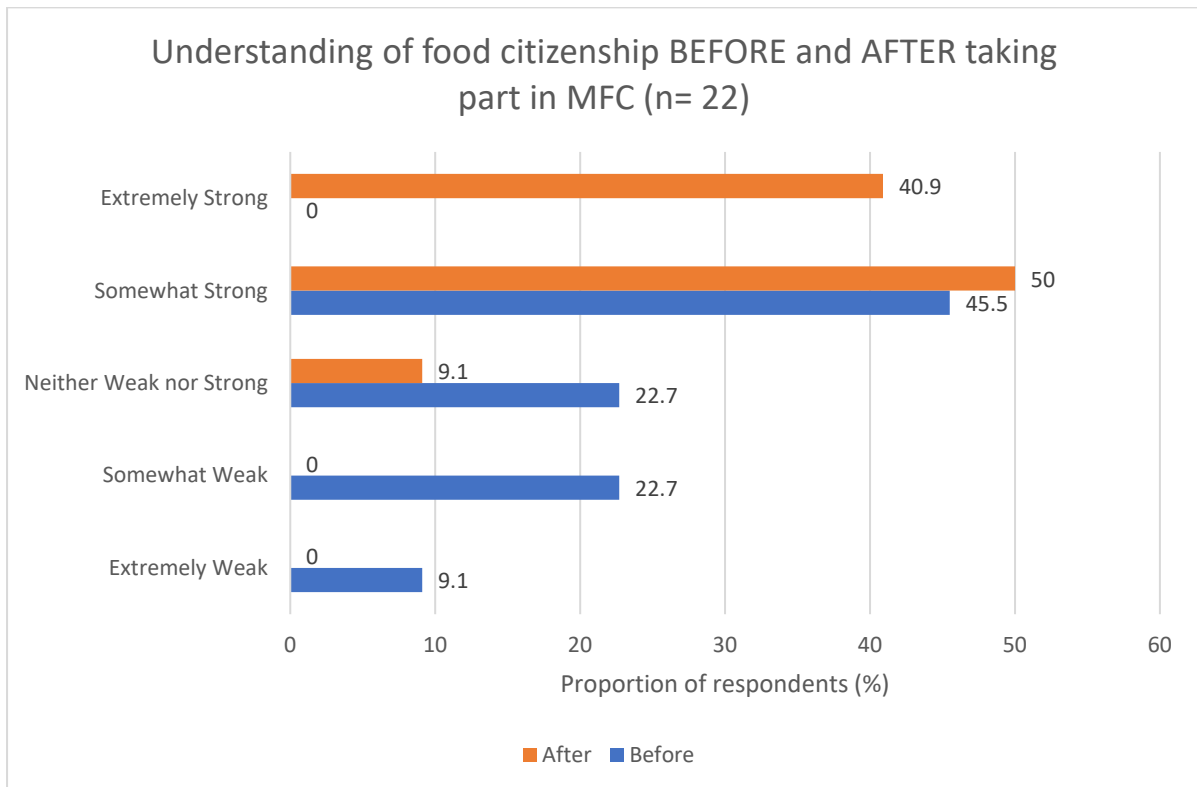
**Figure 27: Skills in creating change in food systems BEFORE and AFTER taking part in MFC**

In terms of how confident respondents felt in community leadership around food systems, none of the respondents felt that their confidence was high before taking part in MFC. However, after taking part in MFC, 27% (n= 6) felt that their confidence was extremely high in this aspect (Figure 26).



**Figure 28: Confidence in community leadership around food system issues BEFORE and AFTER taking part in MFC**

Whereas no respondent felt that their understanding of food citizenship was extremely strong prior to taking part in MFC, 41% (n= 9) felt that they had extremely strong knowledge of food citizenship after taking part in MFC (Figure 27).

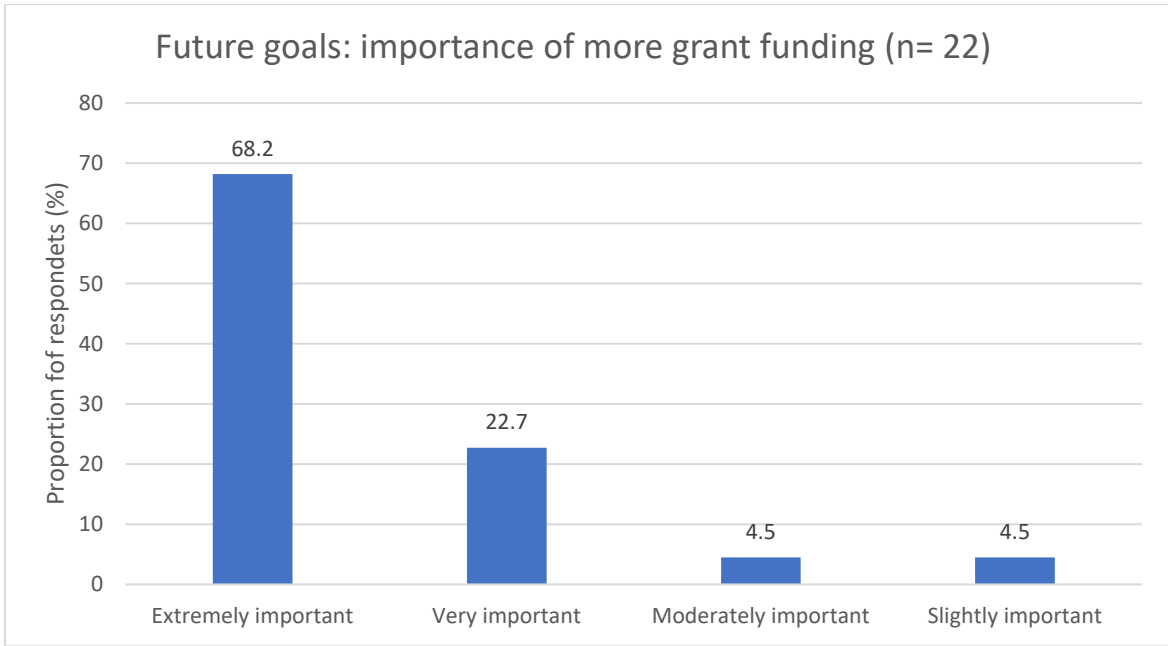


**Figure 29: Understanding of food citizenship BEFORE and AFTER taking part in MFC**

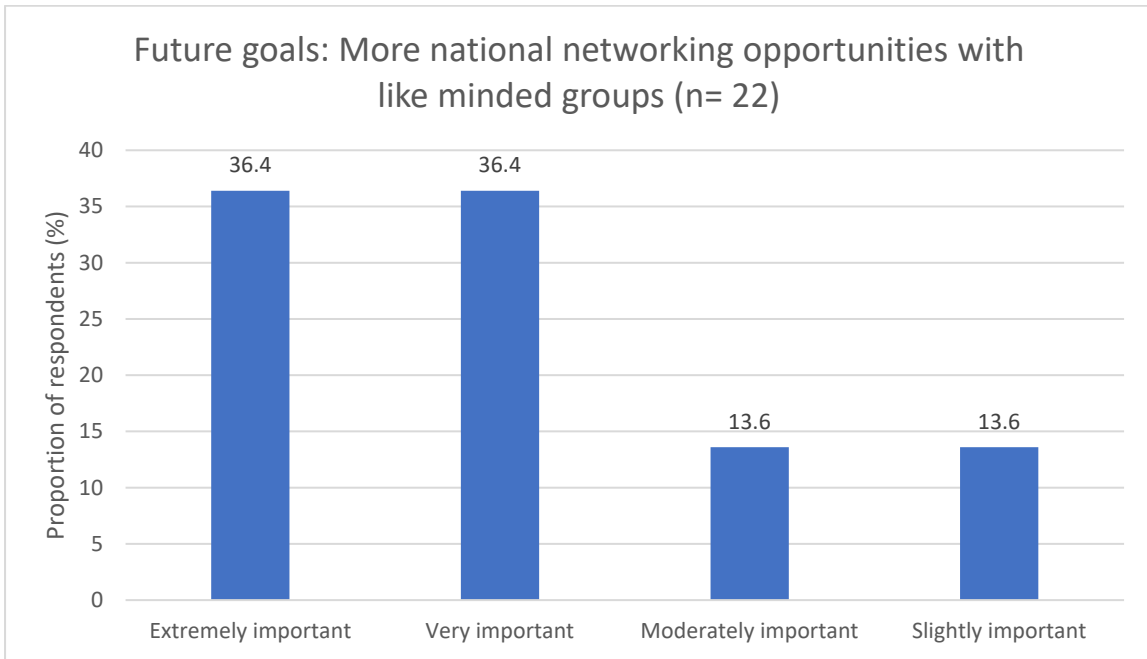
### 5.13 Important factors in achieving the goals of MFC members

Survey participants indicated the importance of various factors in helping them achieve the goals of their groups (Figures 28-35). The proportion of respondents who indicated the various factors as extremely important in helping them achieve their goals were importance of more grant funding (68%, n= 15); more national networking opportunities with like minded groups (36%, n= 8); more local networking opportunities with like minded groups (55%, n= 12); more training and information resources on community food topics (27%, n= 6); more mentoring and peer support opportunities (23%, n= 5); better access to local facilities (64%, n= 14); better access to volunteer support (50%, n= 11) and more help to campaign on community food issues (46%, n= 10).

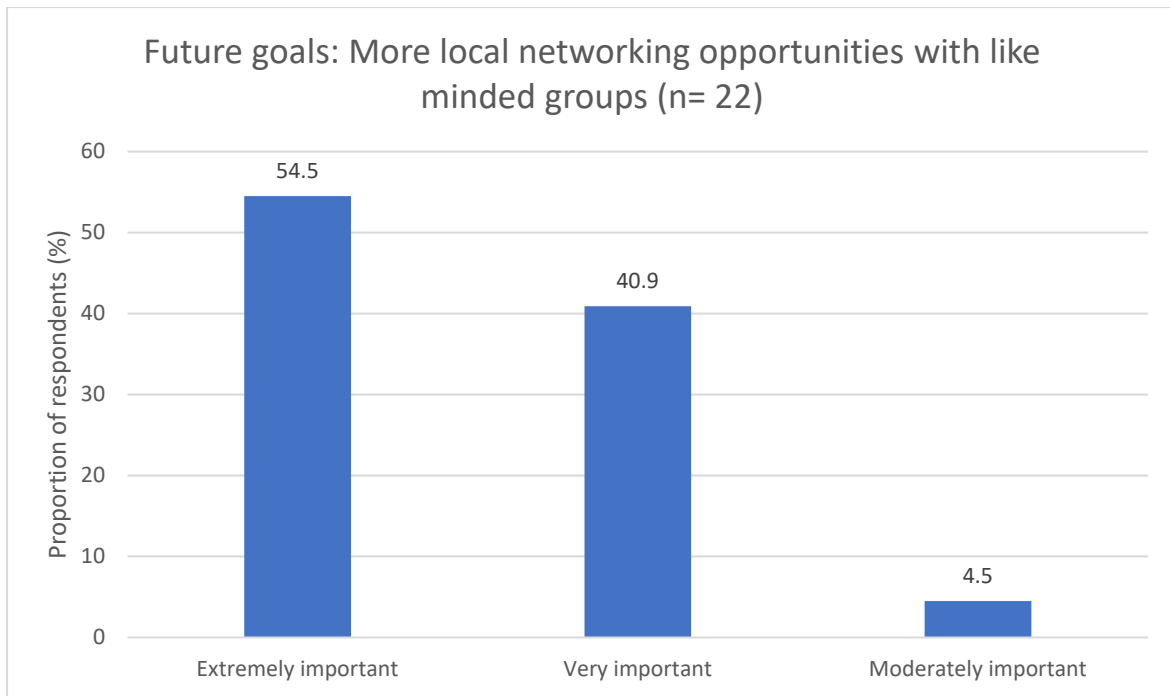




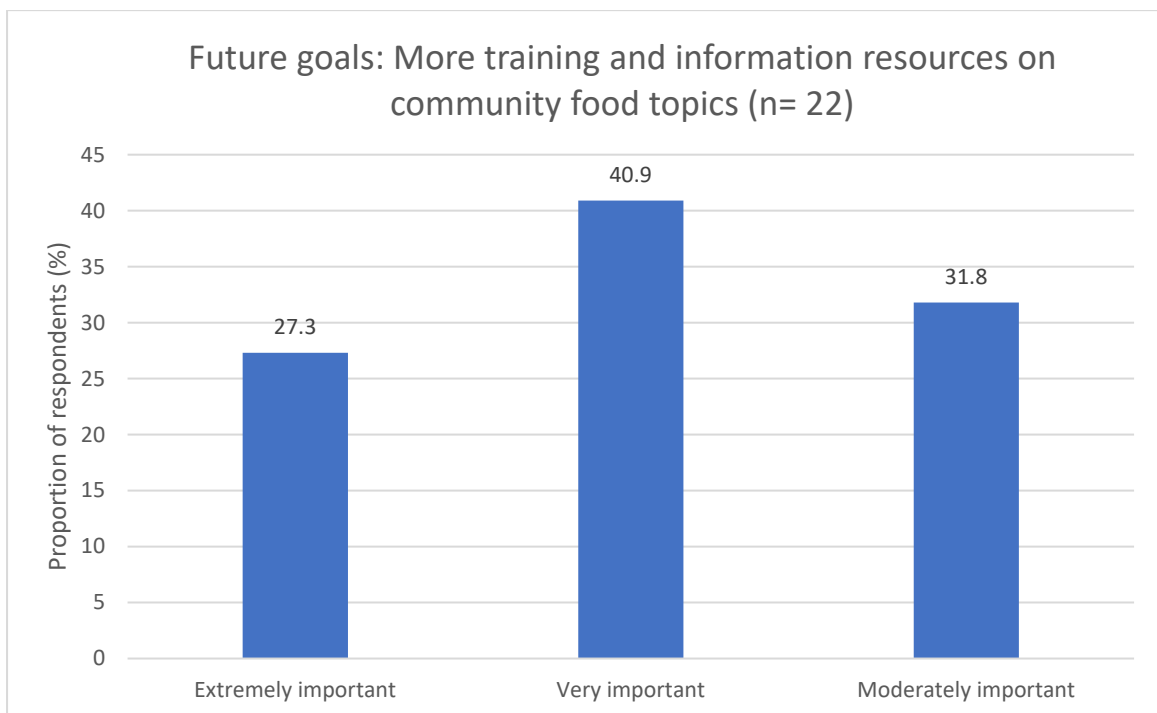
**Figure 30: How respondents felt about the importance of more grant funding in achieving their goals**



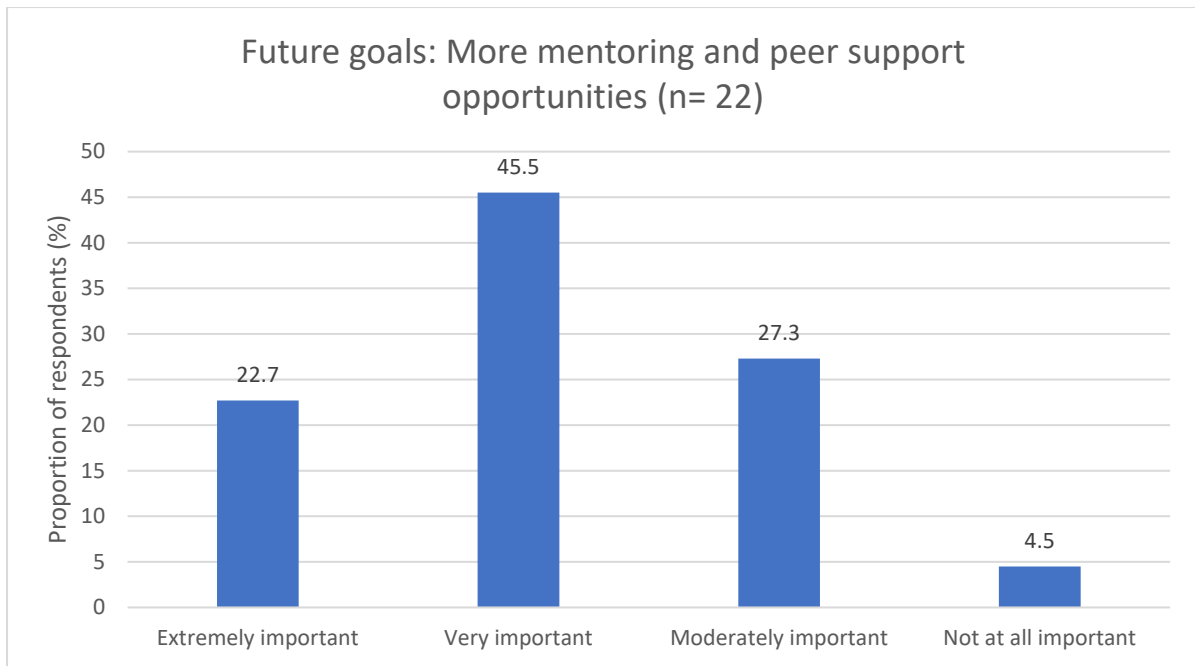
**Figure 31: How respondents felt about the importance of national networking opportunities with like minded groups in achieving their goals**



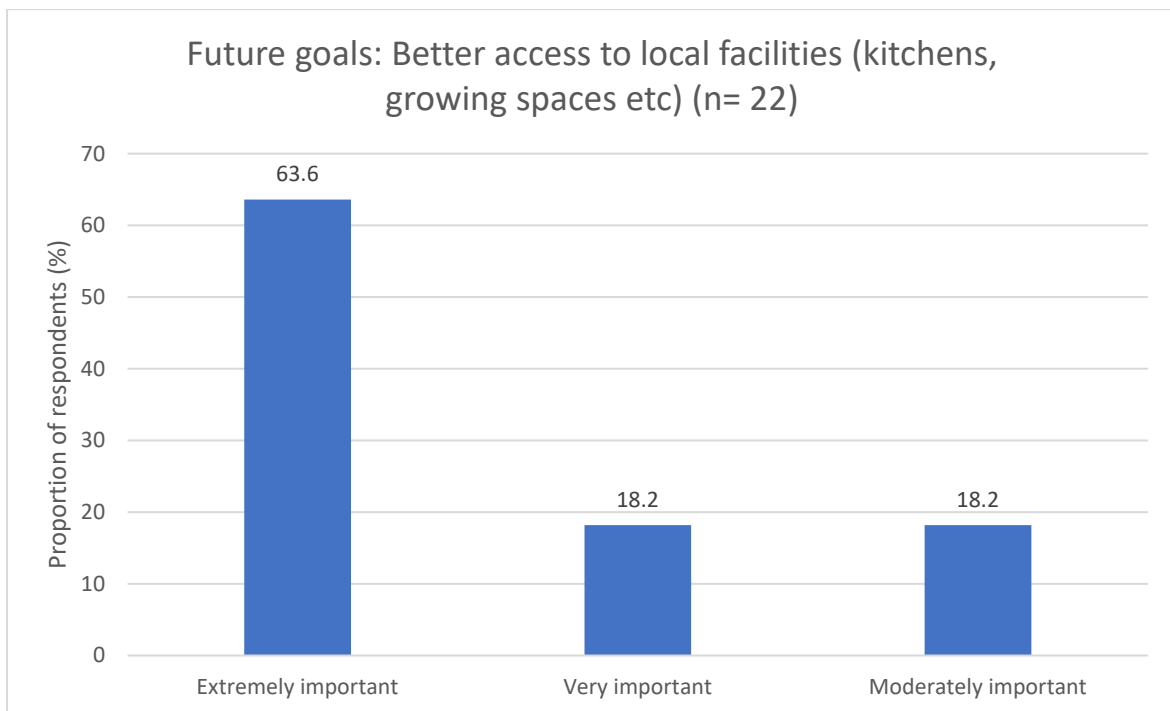
**Figure 32: How respondents felt about the importance of local networking opportunities in achieving their goals**



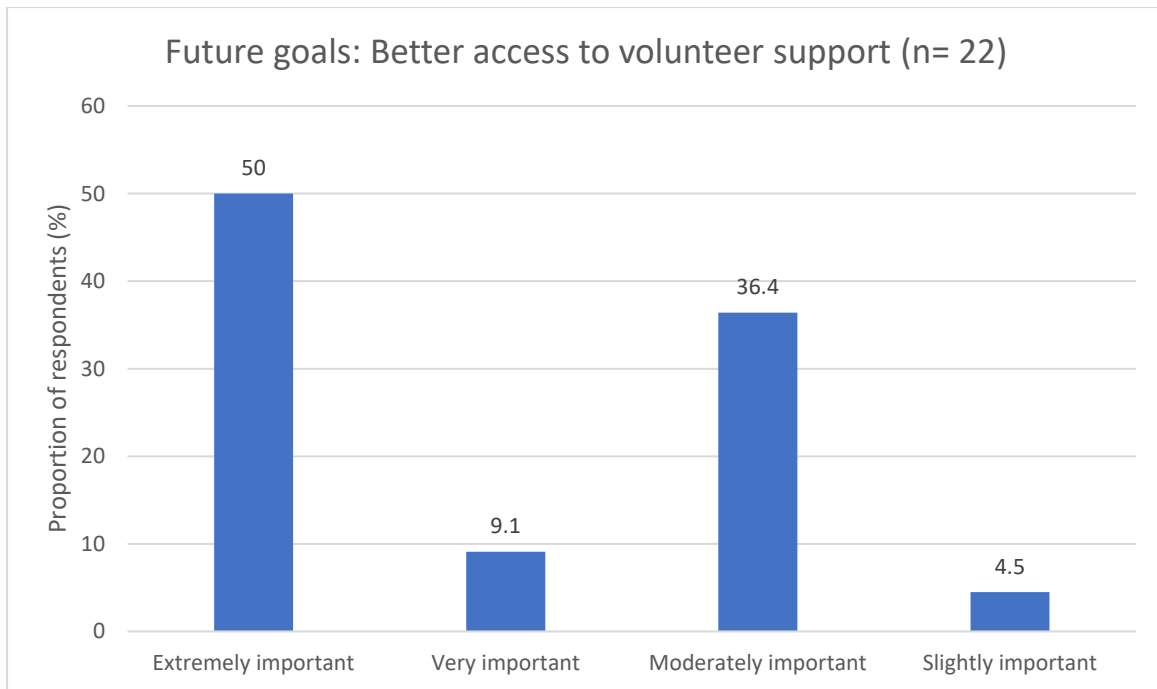
**Figure 33: How respondents felt about the importance of more training resources on community food topics in achieving their goals**



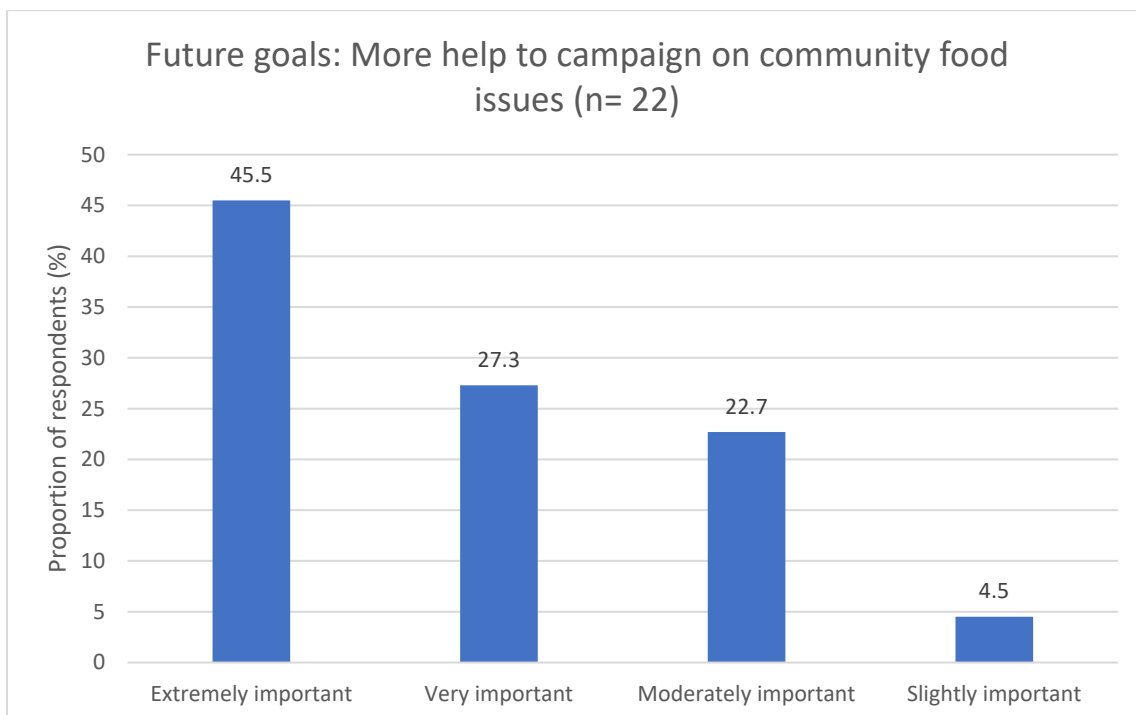
**Figure 34: How respondents felt about the importance of more mentoring and peer support in achieving their goals**



**Figure 35: How respondents felt about the importance of better access to local facilities in achieving their goals**



**Figure 36: How respondents felt about the importance of better access to volunteer support in achieving their goals**



**Figure 37: How respondents felt about the importance of better access to volunteer support in achieving their goals**

Other important factors that respondents indicated to support them in achieving their goals are:

help to keep up to date with food legislation/rules

Help w/dealing with the Council Environmental Health Dept when it comes to food prep. I would like to expand our project to making sauerkraut and other fermented veg products to give away. However the only local business that makes these foods relocated their kitchen to an adjacent Council district because Swansea Council Environmental Health were so uncooperative.

I would like to see a reassessment of food hygiene laws, they are strangling small scale food initiatives and forcing us to revert to pre packed goods.

local collaborative working

Marketing/publicity locally.

support around academic training and careers in food systems/ public health work

#### 5.14 Preferred financial scale of grants

Given the importance of grant funding for many groups, survey respondents were asked to select what size of grant opportunity was most relevant to the current needs of their group. Most respondents went for the option of £500-£5k (41%, n= 9).

**Table 2. Grant opportunities – priorities for respondents**

Grant size option	Frequency	Percent
£100-£500 (Minimal admin. Many opportunities)	2	9.1
£500-£5k	9	40.9
£5k-£20k	7	31.8
£20k-£100k	5	22.7
£100k-£500k (Complex admin. Few opportunities)	2	9.1

#### 5.15 “My Personal Journey as a participant in MFC”

As an overall reflection, survey respondents were asked you give their reflections on their experience of My Food Community as a personal journey. Given the very personal nature of the responses we are reporting them in full.

*“Being a participant of MFC has opened up a lot of new opportunities for us as a project. It has allowed us to connect with so many new groups and individuals and share our food growing skills, whilst learning new skills and information ourselves. MFC has helped us treble our food production and we know teach people to cook healthy meals as well as producing food.”*

*“Having recently been diagnosed with high cholesterol and a heart condition through medication that I have been taking and in working with local people who suffer from ill health, poor diets and unhealthy lifestyles as a project we want to change the attitudes that local people and especially young people have to eating. Our project is in a great position to help with some of these issues.”*

*“I am a bit surprised about how much impact the leadership skills aspects of the MFC participation has affected me. I have loads more experience, better networks and more respect now so I can be an active leader at many levels including Welsh politics. I am really hoping that I can contribute to Cardiff's campaign to get a gold award for our capital city in the Sustainable Food Places award scheme.”*

*“I am more confident showing young people how to create healthy meals. Organizing wellbeing lunches has been successful and not something I had tried before.”*

*“I am much more confident and equipped with a wealth of knowledge to take forward.”*

*“I am now much more aware of the complexities of the food chain and how much we are hostages of the food industry and government policy. I naively thought that the population just needed to understand how to shop and eat well now I realise that we all need to understand how powerful mega corporations are in influencing government policy and that is quite frightening. We need to change everything from town planning (ie ensuring that every community has walking distance access to fresh local produce) packaging policies which mean people must buy more than they need, force more restrictions and better information on UPF products etc. Restrict the influence on policy makers of mega corporations and supermarkets. We need to change our value system of putting profit before health. Ultimately it would result in more productivity and less costs to the NHS.”*

*“I cannot thank My Foot Community enough for the opportunity to be part of this important pilot scheme and funding for the Community Action Project to create a positive change within my community surrounding good food. Being involved allowed me to connect with other like-minded individuals, learn a lot, think outside the box and things I would not have considered before. I believe it allowed me to be more inclusive, more understanding and to reach out and make sure all individuals in the community are able to take part. I am not fearful or nervous now in answering questions, making new connections or putting an idea out there and making it happen. Thank you.”*

*“I have become a lot more aware of how much more focused other community food action groups are towards providing food to those without, and how to ensure that a project is inclusive. Which sometimes when focusing more on the sustainability side of outcomes this can be lost. This has helped broaden my understanding of good project delivery in a more holistic way. Seeing other groups delivery and structures has given me a lot more confidence in my own and areas in which I can improve. There is so much capacity within the group to connect and share, however I find it difficult to follow up on these when time to deliver my own project is a priority and challenging. This is much easier I find in focused meet up groups with dedicated time rather than online connections which I struggle with. This is something I could have made more use of and hope to going forward with the circle, and fb groups.”*

*“I have done food events and activities before taking part in MFC but was often put off by the rules around food safety. Also, my own anxiety around food and eating in front of people put me off wanting to front/organise a food project. Since MFC I have organised or been involved in 5 other food projects, including toddler cookery, slow cooker demonstrations, setting up Cooking Pops, allotment growing sessions, and Soup Saturday at the allotment. I'm excited to see what else we can do in the community.”*

*“I think, advocate and consult more with my community about the meaning of food for different people, e.g. the cultural importance, the fact that sometimes actual food in bellies is more important for some families than the quality of food, people's access to good food etc. I've been learning more recently regarding not only the differences between supermarket foods and organic/home grown but also the differences in nutrient density depending on how/where grown. MFC has certainly added more valuable knowledge to what I already knew.”*

*“I was already deeply involved in local food systems work as coordinator of a local food partnership, so there were aspects that I already felt somewhat experienced in. However, I was not very confident and the programme helped me to overcome this, it definitely helped me feel more secure in my knowledge and enhanced my understanding in many areas. I found the connections and social aspect of the programme probably the most valuable, listening to and learning from others experience, both in roles similar to mine and across the different sectors and roles people had – the mix was really interesting. The support from the team was fantastic and I have been recommending it to others.”*

*“It was great to be exposed to so many different aspects of food and the challenges there are for so many people in so many different ways I feel I knew my postage stamp area very well but my eyes were opened to so many other things – challenges and resolutions and ideas around food that has informed me a lot. I made friends and it was really important after the isolation of lockdown. Also my step daughter had a terminal cancer diagnosis 2 years ago so for me it was really useful to have a welcoming and supportive work setting to do things in but was also friendly and open this helped me get more focused on my work life and how it was going to continue after the shock of this diagnosis – at first I felt like quitting work but now my work is very supportive of our family all enjoying life to its full.”*

*“It was really exciting to be offered funding to come up with a creative project to support community-based engagement around sustainable food. We held a series of seasonal and nourishing cookery workshops on pulses and the benefits of incorporating pulses into a diet and using more plant-based proteins. It was good to feel part of a national network and it makes me value the opportunities to connect with other organisations around the UK as well as in my local community. I feel that having funding available to support people step up to becoming food leaders in their local community through supporting events and learning opportunities could play a really important role in strengthening local food communities. The training was also really helpful in terms of building upon my skills and meeting others and learning from others. However as stated I couldn't engage with it as much as I anticipated due to personal circumstances.”*

*“It was really helpful to see how others are connecting to their communities and found inspirational ideas I could use in mine.”*

*“Just really understanding the whole food community ethos and how everything can and should link together, from growing, cooking and consuming.”*

*“Looking back over my life, I have always taken leading roles, such as president of the students union in college, leading a breastfeeding support group as a young mum. Parish Counsellor in my village etc. As a retired person with a lifelong interest in food & farming, MFC offered me an opportunity to build on this knowledge and become more influential in my community. It gave me the confidence to do this, and take the lead for my community project, which I am pleased to say is now ongoing.”*

*“MFC was a brilliant journey. Not so long ago I completed an MSc and the sessions provided were comparable to tutorials and topics covered were a good refresher of my previous learning. My current role in the community can be quite an isolated position so the MFC environment provided a brilliant space to share ideas, talk about food systems and gain inspiration from others. I had realised that I had reverted to quite traditional ways of thinking in my role and participating in MFC reminded me that I could be a disrupt and I could divert from the status quo. For example, I hadn't been brave enough to introduce any futuring/horizon scanning into my work but have since felt comfortable exploring these ideas with community stakeholders. I have felt more confident and able to identify that I am an expert in my community on food systems. I can use my voice to support others and see the change that's needed to build community food resilience.”*

*“Outlook before MFC was inwardly looking at opportunities within school and improvements to pupils' health, knowledge and understanding and their future prospects. During and since MFC, I have the confidence to look further afield to how family health and prospects are affected about the food system. My project was aimed at family learning and the passing down of skills, knowledge and recipes through intergenerational collaborative working. I am now involved in creating a toolkit for primary schools called 'Beyond the School Gates' specifically looking at community involvement in the food system. I am also involved in the creation of a community gardening project which was (and still is!) outside my comfort zone but I have learnt that knowledge can be learnt and other people can help so projects don't need to be perfect from the beginning but can evolve during the journey.!*

*“Taking part in MFC came at a great time for me personally coinciding with the launching our Bury Food Partnership. MFC really helped to focus on key topics and to frame conversations with different partners. I also found it useful to connect with other food leads to appreciate we are all facing/experiencing similar challenges. Much of the system change work I do is ongoing and it can feel at times overwhelming, models shared via MFC helped me to reflect and to stay optimistic eg the ripple effect, one tiny change can transform and lead to change.”*

*“Taking personal ownership that what we do does have a positive impact to help influence social change within our community.”*

*“The leadership and inspiration sessions really resonated with me and I have felt more confident to pursue the version of leadership that works for me. I appreciated being able to connect with people from other projects, and learn from new perspectives. This has informed how I work with people in my own community who might have similar roles to some of the MFC participants.”*



*“Unfortunately, I felt like only properly participated in the first half of the sessions because a new job in 2022 interfered with me attending live online activities. But I found I really grew from listening to what other people were doing and have found continued engagement via the Facebook page very helpful. MFC widened my perspective by showing me that I was part of a whole network of people working on similar issues. This is really morale boosting and helps build resilience because working on your own project can get lonely.”*

## 6. Strengths and lessons learned

To summarise the strengths of the programme and the lessons learned during version one of MFC, it is beneficial to revisit the research questions on which this evaluation was based. These were:

1. *What are the main factors that have enabled participants of the My Food Community programme to engage with communities and wider stakeholders?*
2. *To what extent does broadening spheres of influence and leadership through the My Food Community improve engagement in local good food priorities?*
3. *To what extent does the My Food Community initiative provide a model for building community capacity on local ‘good food’ priorities?*
4. *How have planned reviews by FFLGT staff on the programme design supported the delivery of My Food Community?*

Much of the learning from the evaluation covers multiple themes and, in many cases, responds to more than one of these questions. For this reason, the findings are summarised and discussed in this section under two subheadings: 1) strengths of version one of the programme and 2) lessons learned.

### 6.1 Strengths of version one of the programme

- Participants reported a significant increase in confidence as a result of taking part in MFC. This was influenced by multiple factors, including the kudos of being part of an official programme, a realisation that they already possessed leadership skills, and the support of other members of the cohort.
- Participants were able to create valuable networks amongst their peers on the programme, but also within their own communities – again, this was closely associated with the confidence the course had given them.
- Whilst it was difficult to please everyone with the timing of delivery of the course content, this was mitigated as far as possible through the provision of duplicate sessions and multiple ways to engage.
- The fact that the programme was free to participants was part of its initial appeal for many applicants.
- The opportunity to apply for a grant of £1,000 was a very welcome surprise to participants, and this money appears to have been put to good use across 33 of the projects.
- The programme has been successful in helping individuals recognise their existing leadership skills, as well as helping them develop new perspectives and approaches to leadership. Many participants were already leaders within their communities, and MFC has successfully helped them to recognise this. The follow up survey showed that participants felt that they had improved their leadership competencies across a set of different measures.

- The iterative, flexible and responsive nature of the programme meant that the strategic team were able to respond quickly to elements that needed refining or adapting.
- Initial barriers to participation associated with the technology used to engage participants were addressed through the introduction of a new interactive platform. This was then tested by individuals from version one, and now represents a significant improvement for version two's cohort.
- Individuals have expanded their networks as a result of participating in the programme, both through the MFC cohort and within their wider communities. Participants reported now having skills in facilitation, negotiation, conflict management and persuasion. In many cases they were also now well known within their communities and had gained recognition of their abilities and support from local residents and local organisations.
- Many participants had begun to make an impact beyond their communities and were being asked to share their knowledge and experience with organisations and at regional and national events.

## 6.2 Lessons learned from version one of the programme

- The test and learn nature of version one was in many ways beneficial to the strategic team and the associated ambiguity at the start of the programme was broadly well accepted by participants. However, as the programme moves into its second and third iterations with much larger, externally recruited participants, it will be important to have a clear direction from the outset.
- Whilst the participants clearly saw multiple valuable benefits in participating in the programme, tangible outcomes (particularly those that could be directly traced to the course content) were less obvious. This in itself is not problematic, but the strategic team will now need to decide what a 'good' outcome looks like for programme participants – be it a tangible output or outcome, or simply having successfully completed and engaged with the programme.
- Related to the previous point, decisions also need to be made about how success is measured. The progress of participants in version one focused largely on their journey through the programme, a method which was deemed to be important and appropriate by the strategic team as many participants had very different and personal experiences of the programme. However, there are ways that changes in attitudes to leadership and self-perception of skills and abilities might be measured using baseline and follow up questionnaires, and these will need to be pursued in future versions.
- Clearer course content – including deadlines and timetables – would be very beneficial, not only to participants in managing their time, but also to potential employers who might be considering sending staff on the programme. Likewise, the volume of course content needs to be carefully managed in future iterations so that participants are able to fulfil other commitments alongside MFC.
- Some sessions were dominated by certain members of the group, and more could be done in future to ensure that all participants feel empowered to share their thoughts in an inclusive environment.
- Improving the diversity of the cohort will enhance the experience of all involved on the programme and will facilitate an inclusive atmosphere. Equally, more could be done to trace the impact of group member's influence on their wider communities, particularly those who are marginalised or minoritised.

- The strategic team will need to think about how they manage the gathering of feedback in future cohorts, as there was a danger of over-evaluating the cohort at times. Likewise, if feedback is gathered from participants and not acted on then they may become disenfranchised or lose faith in the feedback mechanisms, so changes need to be acted on accordingly and in a timely way.
- Resources within the team need to also be carefully considered, and in particular the capacity of some members of staff who are tasked with managing the cohort, collecting and processing feedback, and implementing any necessary changes.

## 7. Conclusion

The iterative nature of the MFC programme has allowed it to be flexible and responsive to the needs of participants, and this is reflected in the findings presented in this report. Whilst the first version of the programme has been broadly very successful, the lessons learned from this process provided a valuable opportunity to further refine MFC for future cohorts. This should mean that participants are able to gain all the benefits of participation whilst also maintaining their existing commitments, and that they are able to achieve meaningful outcomes as a result of taking part in the programme.

As a result of participating in version one, participants have been able to widen their personal networks through MFC and beyond, whilst an increased confidence has allowed them to negotiate, influence and persuade others within their local communities. They have been able to create projects that further the local good food agenda in regions across the UK, from cooking projects in schools to community gardens and fridges. Taking part in MFC has therefore allowed them to create significant impact at a local level, and for some participants it has given them a platform to inform others through wider, regional networks and organisations.

The strategic team have an opportunity to reflect on the desired outcomes for MFC, what they may look like and how they might be measured (if at all). Decisions will also need to be made about how reach and impact can be assessed, and whether more can be done to include marginalised and minoritised communities in the programme.

Finally, although valuable, regular feedback processes and close attention to the needs of participants must be effectively and delicately managed so as not to over-burden key members of the team and to manage the expectations of participants.

## Appendix 1 – My Food Community – Timetable (Sep-Dec 2021)

Each core session will run twice to ensure as many people as possible can attend. You can choose to join whichever suits you best. There will also be multiple times available to join the optional spaces.

These dates and time are provisional at this stage. We'll contact you ahead of each session with exact details and will try to give as much warning as possible if dates and times change. All the sessions will be held on Zoom.

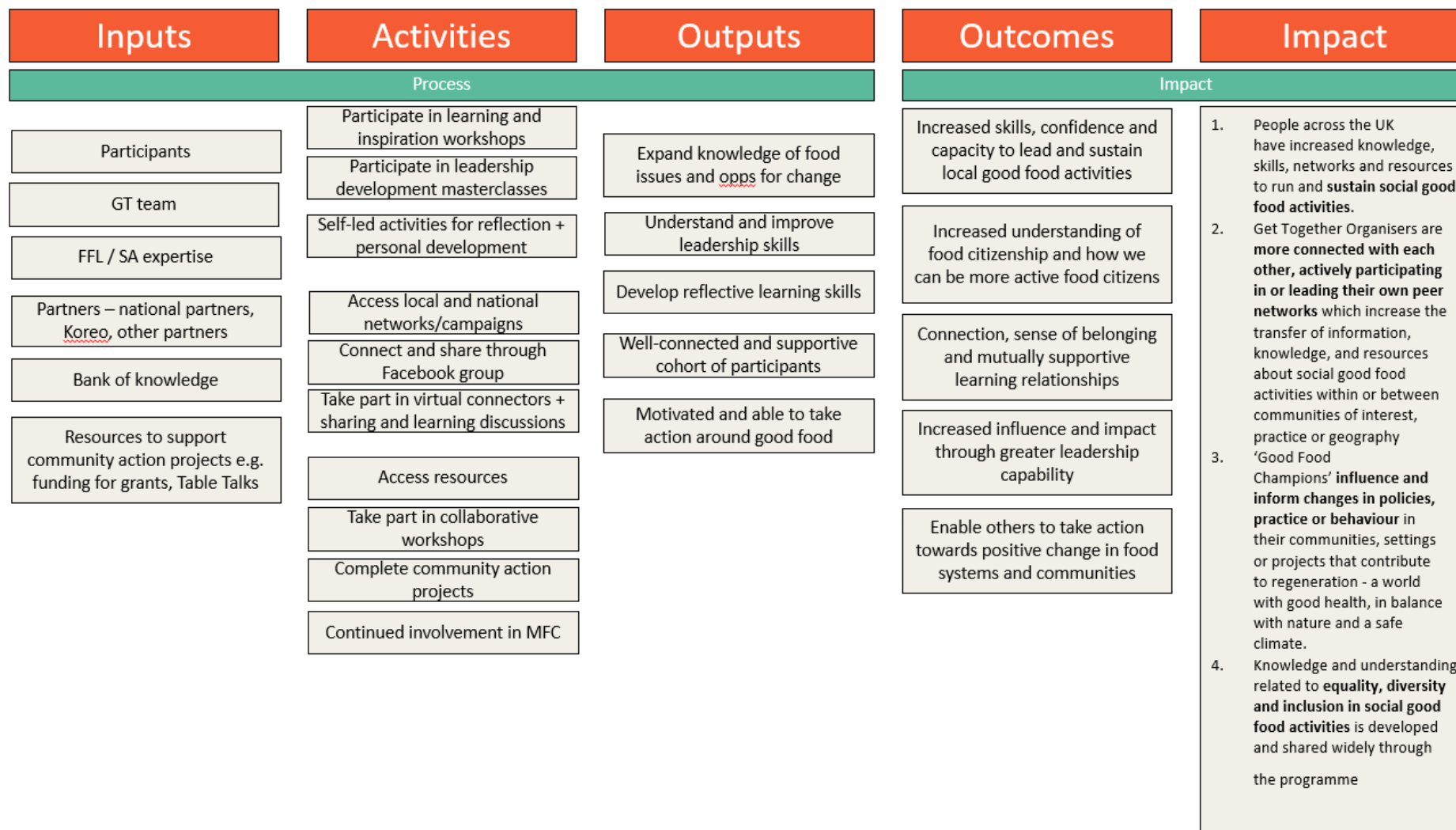
Key	
<b>Core sessions</b>	Learning & Inspiration sessions Leadership development masterclasses
<b>Extension sessions</b>	Roundtable discussions Connect and share spaces

Week	Date	Time	Session	Type of session
1	21/09/2021	16.00– 17.00	Small group connect and share session	Induction/Connect and share space
	22/09/2021	12.00– 13.00		
	22/09/2021	17.00– 18.00		
	23/09/2021	11.00– 12.00		
	23/09/2021	14.00– 15.00		
	24/09/2021	13.00– 14.00		
2	29/09/2021	10.00– 12.00	Welcome session	Induction
	30/09/2021	14.00– 16.00		
3	06/10/2021	10.00– 12.00	What is Good Food?	Learning and inspiration workshop

	07/10/2021	14.00– 16.00		
4	13/10/2021	10.00– 12.00	Roundtable discussion – Access to good food is a right not a privilege	Roundtable discussion
	14/10/2021	14.00– 16.00		
5	20/10/2021	10.00– 12.30	Leadership models, roles & styles	Leadership development masterclass
	21/10/2021	14.00– 16.30		
6	18/10/2021		Connect and share space	Connect and share space
	25/10/2021			
7	Week commencing 01/11/2021	TBC	Food Sense Wales/Nutrition Skills for Life (Wales only)	Learning and inspiration workshop
	03/11/2021	10.00– 12.00	Roundtable discussion – supporting diversity and inclusion	Roundtable discussion
	04/11/2021	14.00– 16.00		
8	10/11/2021	10.00– 12.00	Tackling the climate and nature emergency through sustainable food and an end to food waste	Learning and inspiration workshop
	11/11/2021	14.00– 16.00		
9	17/11/2021	10.00– 12.30	Group Dynamics	Leadership development masterclass
	18/11/2021	14.00– 16.30		
10	23/11/2021	16:00– 17:00	Nation/region specific connect and share	Connect and share space

	25/11/2021	12:30– 13:30		
11	01/12/2021	10.00– 12.00	Creating a shared vision for the future & identifying spaces for future collaboration	Learning and inspiration workshop
	02/12/2021	14.00– 16.00		
12	08/12/2021	10.00– 12.00	Roundtable discussion – Human Centred Design	Roundtable discussion
	09/12/2021	14.00– 16.00		
13	14/12/2021	16:00– 17:00	Connect and share space	Connect and share space
	16/12/2021	12:30– 13:30		
	15/12/2021	10.00– 12.00	Building community awareness, active food citizenship and a local good food movement	Learning and inspiration workshop
	16/12/2021	14.00– 16.00		

## Appendix Two – Theory of Change





## Authors

Sarah Hills, *Senior Lecturer in Sustainability*<sup>2</sup>

Sanda Ismail, *Senior Lecturer in Public Health*<sup>1</sup>

Mat Jones, *Professor of Public Health and  
Community Development*<sup>1</sup>

Amy Beardmore, *Senior Lecturer in Public  
Health*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Public Health and Wellbeing, UWE Bristol

<sup>2</sup> Department of Geography and Environmental  
Management

## Contacts

UWE Mat Jones: [matthew.jones@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:matthew.jones@uwe.ac.uk)

Food for Life Get Togethers:

Dale Cranshaw, Head of Programme  
[dcranshaw@soilassociation.org](mailto:dcranshaw@soilassociation.org)

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**Front cover:**  
**Larne community fridge and garden**  
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