



# Healthy Start and Covid-19 interventions

## Belfast Food Network: Interim report, Nov 2020

### Healthy Start and Covid-19 interventions

To help increase awareness of the Healthy Start scheme amongst those in need we planned to develop a training scheme across South Belfast, consisting of Healthy Start advocates from community groups who can help raise awareness of the scheme through their work and with their audiences.

In early 2020 we hosted meetings with several key community organisations and public health officials in South Belfast. Many of whom were not previously aware of the scheme. However, the project has come to a halt due to new covid-19 restrictions and social distancing limiting face-to-face meetings.

This setback is especially unfortunate as, simultaneously, food poverty has skyrocketed in Belfast and food banks have struggled to meet increased demand. We have been able to progress a number of other projects though, including awarding 27 micro grants to greengrocers, fisheries, box schemes and community growing initiatives enabling them to adapt to Covid-19 by buying new stock, websites, equipment, delivery costs and wages.

We also moved our Nourish programme online, creating a series to promote the use of fresh, local and seasonal produce in simple home recipes, to help increase food knowledge and skills.

### Challenges and learning

The pandemic has highlighted how vulnerable we are to external shocks and created an opportunity to address systemic issues more effectively. It has also highlighted the need to collaborate to ensure we are working together to support and reach those in need.

### Next steps

We hope to be able to continue the Healthy Start training sessions again in the future when restrictions allow. In the meantime, we will work with Food NI to extend the number of local businesses accepting the vouchers and encourage clear advertisement of the offer. We plan to deliver webinars with smaller independent grocers, develop a resource pack for business owners and meet with larger supermarkets in the City. We are also becoming the NI Sustainable Food Places partner in 2021 which will help our food poverty work reach a wider audience and have a greater impact.

This activity was assisted by financial support and other advice from Food Power.  
[www.foodpower.org.uk](http://www.foodpower.org.uk)



**“ Babies are so hungry they stuff toast in their nappies in hospital**

**Belfast doctor**

### Outcomes

- Hosted 5 meetings with a range of allies to help increase awareness of the Healthy Start Scheme
- Refocused our planned work to support local businesses increase uptake and advertising of the Healthy Start scheme.

