



Supporting children to eat well 365 days/ year in Cutteslowe, Oxford.

Oxfordshire Food Poverty Alliance, final report, May 2021

Children eating well 365 days/ year

Our original aims of addressing holiday hunger in Cutteslowe, an island of deprivation amidst an otherwise affluent area, were challenged as COVID hit: holiday activities ground to a halt and the community centre shut. However, with some amazing community volunteers our ambition to support children to eat well year-round continued. Through partnerships with our Fareshare provider SOFEA, all 56 FSM families from the local primary school received weekly top up fruit and veg parcels. A new community larder set-up and is now providing vital food access to 105 families. Oxford Mutual Aid have also been providing 80 prepared meals/ week stepping up with an additional 200/ week through school holidays. In January 50 families participated in a 6-week cook-a-long “Play:Full” programme – receiving weekly recipe and activity bags and enjoyed trying new tastes and developing new skills.

Our research into lived experiences of people experiencing food insecurity helped to inform food poverty training sessions that we delivered to 121 volunteers and frontline workers from 55 organisations. Our Community Food Networks, meeting monthly during the pandemic, have enabled the larder and community leaders in Cutteslowe to connect with other services across Oxfordshire and share ideas, best practice, challenges and resources.

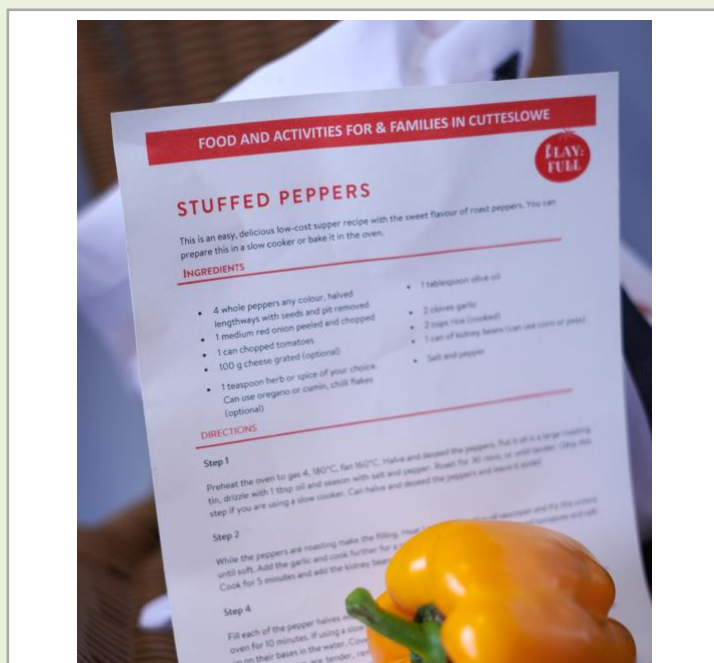
A Poem:

A community that convenes around and about great food and great intentions:

Testing out our food inventions...

Preparing food for hungry kids that they grow strong and true and have life chances they can embrace without fear, without shame or loss and hungry stomachs”

(anonymous, participant at a community food café, Oxford)



This activity was assisted by financial support and other advice from Food Power.
www.foodpower.org.uk



Our challenges and learning

Working in partnership – playing to partners strengths - keeping the big picture in mind and not sweating the small stuff has helped us to be flexible in our plans and ensure that, as far as possible, all children and families in need are supported.

Listening to the voices of those experiencing food insecurity, through our research, has enabled us to focus on the importance of dignity in food access. We have incorporated these messages in our food poverty training for volunteers and frontline professionals and in our food insecurity toolkit. Listening to these voices informed how we pitched our Play:Full activity programme. Focusing the programme on providing fun family activities during lockdown rather than ‘telling’ people how to cook and eat, removed stigma and promoted dignity- the enjoyment of healthy food, learning new skills and sharing of positive food experiences then just happened along the way!

Quote from participants in the Play:Full recipe bag course

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“ I always look forward to receiving the bags as it provided me and my kids an activity to do together” ,
“It’s a great initiative. It relieves stress to cook with kids and eat together”

“it’s the first time I ever tried lentils and used coriander leaves in my cooking and I absolutely loved it”

Our next steps

Cotteslowe has emerged from the pandemic with a vibrant sense of community centred around healthy, affordable food. This has spilled into an emergent growing project launched by community members – Edible Cotteslowe, with an ambition to get the community engaged in growing in the park, planters and disused spaces. We aim for this to become a focal point to bolster the sense of community ownership and resilience as we emerge from the pandemic. As the Community Centre re-opens we also aim for more Play:Full activities - in person so that children and families can share healthy food alongside enrichment activities and the joy of being together.

Our key achievements and impact

- > 100 food insecure families experiencing food insecurity can access healthy affordable food via the Cotteslowe Community Larder
- 50 families, including 80 children engaged in 6 weeks of fun cooking activities, built their cooking confidence, learnt new knowledge and skills
- Interviews with people with lived experience of food insecurity informed our food poverty training delivered to 121 frontline workers and volunteers
- Community Food Networks provided peer support to Cotteslowe community leaders including, knowledge and resource sharing

Outcomes

- Cotteslowe has a more robust infrastructure to support those experiencing food insecurity through the larder and other initiatives.
- The infrastructure is scaffolded by a stronger sense of community, supporting each other to access food and eat well.