

Food and health – A community approach

Evaluation of an all-island Community Food Initiative 2013-15

safefood funded a three year programme of ten Community Food Initiatives (CFIs) across the island of Ireland to promote healthy and safe food in low-income areas using a community development approach. It targeted families with children and the programme was managed by **Healthy Food for All**.

Why?

Republic of Ireland

11%

of households experienced food poverty in 2015

Northern Ireland

17%

of the population was living in food poverty in 2016

Low-income households

Constraints: Economic, Skills, Access

Eat less well than higher-income households

Higher level of diet-related disease



How?



10

projects funded on the island of Ireland

3

years funding provided by **safefood**

Local, accessible, support

Community Food Initiatives (CFIs) address food poverty at a local level.

CFIs focused on low-income families with children.

CFIs became part of a coordinated programme of support, networking and training.

Findings

29,369
participants

58%

of participants took part in the most popular activities of healthy eating and gardening

60%

of participants were female



Through CFIs the issue of food and health became more central within the communities.

Participants reported making healthier food choices after the CFI Programme.

Considerable support and guidance was provided to the CFIs, including 50 site visits, 8 training and networking events and email/phone support.

The programme was an important and valid part of tackling food poverty locally.

Sustainability beyond the agreed funding term was a challenge for the CFIs.

Aim

An evaluation was carried out to determine if the programme achieved its objectives, which were:

- Fund ten community-based food projects
- Provide technical support, collective training and facilitate networking
- Encourage projects to consider long-term sustainability from the start
- Promote shared learning amongst CFIs
- Identify policy and best practice lessons and increase awareness of these among stakeholders on the island of Ireland.

Methods






Three different sources of data were:

CFI's
Qualitative and quantitative data on activities, reach, successes, challenges and learnings collected in quarterly and annual questionnaires, face-to-face interviews with staff and participants took place in each CFI in years one and three.
Healthy Food for All Development worker
Five face-to-face interviews took place with a Development worker to collect data on promotion activities, technical support, training and networking.
Stakeholders
An online questionnaire was circulated to the all-island Food Poverty Network members (Response n=6/15). One-on-one phone interviews took place with senior health and community managers (Response n=3/15).

Findings

- Eight of the ten CFIs reported that the funding process was easier or equal to other funding processes.
- 29,369 people (60% female) participated in a range of activities.
- 82 was the average number of people per CFI who took part in regular activities in year three.
- Activities mainly focused on healthy eating or gardening and most were one-off events.
- CFI staff reported positive changes in participants' eating habits.
- CFI staff reported healthy food became more central to their work.
- The Development worker delivered 50 site visits, eight network and training events, ongoing email and phone support - this coordination input was viewed very positively by CFIs.
- CFIs had 'mixed feelings' about the long-term sustainability of their projects with funding being the most reported challenge.
- Best practice lessons were identified in relation to recruiting families, sustainability and local engagement.
- Stakeholders reported a clear benefit from the CFI programme in increasing awareness about food poverty, addressing local needs, increasing nutrition and food knowledge and social/community cohesion.
- The programme has potential to influence policy and needs to be further promoted with policy makers.

Table 1. Engagement with activities over the three year period

Activity	Total number of participants	% of total activities
 Healthy eating	9,381	32
 Gardening/ Growing	7,735	26
 Cooking skills	4,940	17
 Planning/ Budgeting	1,218	4
 Other	6,195	21

Conclusion

The programme achieved its objectives.

- The projects had a broad reach within their communities using both one-off events and regular activities and benefited from the programme approach.
- Sustainability of projects beyond the lifetime of the programme was a challenge for projects. Influencing government policy is a longer term goal for the Programme.
- This approach to tackling food poverty should be supported in the future, integrated more into existing structures and promoted among policy makers and a broader range of stakeholders.

Find out more

For more information and to download the full evaluation report visit www.safefood.eu/cfi

