



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

The  Lines
Between



Food Insecurity and Learning Loss Pilot Evaluation Report

Conducted for:



Contact: lorraine@thelinesbetween.co.uk

©The Lines Between 2020

1. Introduction	3
2. Tackling food insecurity	7
3. Impact on young people and their families	12
4. Learning loss and engaging with education	20
5. Project design and a youth work approach	25
6. Final thoughts	36
Appendix 1: Case Studies	39

1. Introduction

1.1. YouthLink Scotland were funded by the Scottish Government to coordinate and support a pilot programme, focused on addressing food insecurity and learning loss in the school holidays. It took place during summer 2020, targeted at young people (S1-S6) identified by trusted professionals as being at risk of food insecurity or learning loss.

1.2. Six Regional Improvement Collaborative local authority areas¹ participated in the pilot programme. Each developed its own delivery model, aiming to support 20 young people. The innovative programme offered partnership opportunities for schools, and youth workers from community learning and development (CLD) teams and third sector organisations, to:

- **Identify and engage young people who would benefit most, including those newly vulnerable due to COVID-19.**
- **Plan an approach to delivery that adheres to Scottish Government public health restrictions and protection measures.**
- **Deliver a dignified approach to food insecurity.**
- **Embed measures to tackle food insecurity within informal learning.**
- **Deliver learning opportunities tailored to the needs of the cohort, including preparing for transition and reducing learning loss.**
- **Take a holistic approach to supporting families affected by food insecurity; where possible and appropriate, engaging the whole family.**

1.3. The Lines Between, an Edinburgh based social research agency, was commissioned to evaluate the pilot. This report sets out our findings, with evidence drawn from:

- **Interviews with 32 young people and 29 stakeholders (13 youth workers, 11 parents and 5 teachers) across the six areas.**
- **Self-evaluation forms completed by 105 young people across the six pilot projects.**
- **Referral and monitoring data provided by each project.**



¹ Moray, Dundee, Falkirk, Scottish Borders, East Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire

Young people who took part in the pilot

1.4. The six pilot projects worked with 152 young people in the summer of 2020; exceeding the original target of supporting 20 in each area or 120 in total. Overall a gender balance was evident; 51% of participants were female and 49% were male.

1.5. Projects successfully engaged young people in the core target age groups (S1-S6), with 129 in this age group; most (86 out of 152) were 12-14 years old². Wider work with families provided opportunities for siblings to get involved; as a result, 5 children under the age of 10 took part.

Scottish context for food insecurity and learning loss

1.6. Three quarters of the young people who took part in the pilot live in areas of poverty with 50% in SIMD 1, the most deprived data zones in Scotland and 27% in SIMD 2. Research by the Scottish Government provides some context about food insecurity and learning.

1.7. Food insecurity: The Scottish Health Survey³ (2018/2019) suggests that 70% of children in the most deprived areas in Scotland typically have less than five portions of fruit and vegetables a day and 14% have none. Some of the young people who participated in the programme lived in single parent households. In that year, the latest for which figures are available, nearly one in three single parents reported that they had been worried they would run out of food in the previous 12 months and 12% of all single parents said they had run out of food due to a lack of money or other resources.

1.8. Learning loss: Data on attendance at schools demonstrates differences in attendance rates, linked to deprivation⁴. Pupils in the most deprived areas had lower attendance rates than those living in the least deprived areas – across all sectors pupils living in the 20% most deprived areas had an attendance rate of 90.4% compared to 95.3% for those in the 20% least deprived areas.

1.9. The next page provides a summary of the locations and models in each pilot project.



² Age data was not available for 9 participants

³ More information available in the latest Health Survey (published on the 29th of September 2020) <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-health-survey-2019-volume-1-main-report/>

⁴ More information can be found in the latest School education statistics <https://www.gov.scot/collections/school-education-statistics/#schoolleaverinitialdestinationsandattainment>

Overview of provision

Moray: The Moray Council project was co-delivered by CLD youth workers and youth workers from The Loft, a third sector partner. Families received a weekly challenge box, with activities and resources. Young people met outdoors two afternoons per week, for sessions to prepare for the transition back to school and address learning loss with activities in the community garden and the beach. (1)

Scottish Borders: Scottish Borders Council worked in partnership with TD1 Youth Hub. The programme was delivered primarily online, with STEM sessions, baking, photography and self-care. Young people and their family received a food parcel each week, with themed meals recipes. All young people had the chance to start a Youth Achievement Award or Dynamic Youth Award. (2)

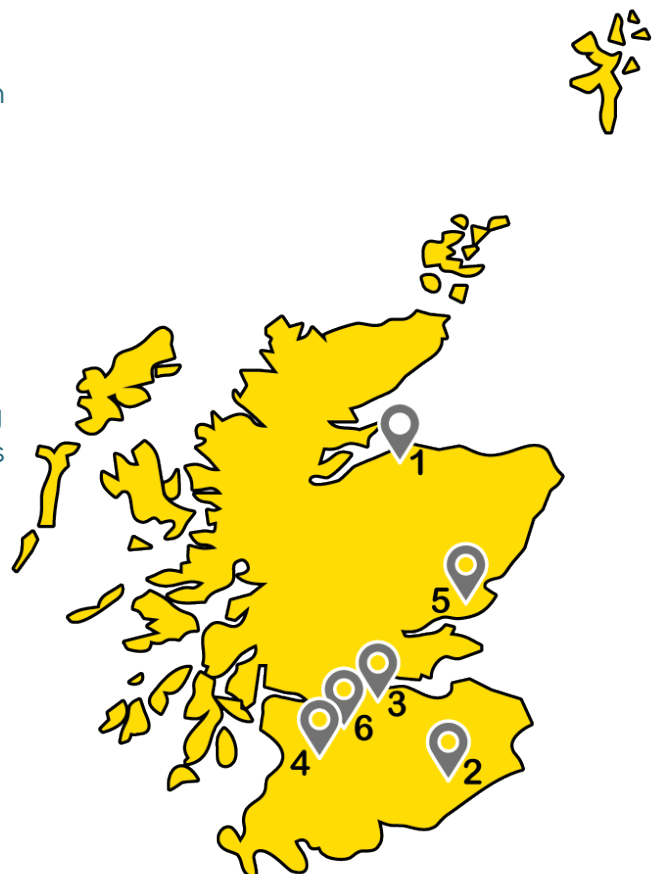
Falkirk: Falkirk Council's Summer Takeaway project used a family model of delivery. Participants received ingredients and resources each week with challenges on science, cooking and health and wellbeing. Youth workers also provided online and telephone support. (3)

East Ayrshire: East Ayrshire Council worked in partnership with Yipworld to deliver the Summer Stuff programme. Young people had lunch at Yipworld's centre and learned how to prepare food to take home to eat with their family. Online tutorials supported extra cooking at home, with food parcels provided for families to buy ingredients. (4)

Dundee City: Dundee City Council's CLD workers delivered a face to face programme, in a community garden, where young people took part in engagement and learning activities centred around health and wellbeing. The food sessions focused on choice, learning and new experiences with sessions on cooking skills, nutrition and food safety.

Young people received basic equipment and ingredients to make healthy meals to share with their family. (5)

South Lanarkshire: South Lanarkshire Council delivered a varied programme of activities including horticulture, fitness and wellbeing, cooking and issue-based work such as health issues in the community. Young people received a weekly delivery of food and activities, supported by online resources, phone support from school based Pathfinder support workers and digital groupwork sessions. (6)



Programme impacts:

1.10. The data below presents an overview of impact, based on self-evaluation forms completed by 105 young people who took part in pilot projects this summer. A range of positive impacts are evident; young people felt the project had contributed to learning, relationships, confidence, engagement with school, skills and eating.



Try new things

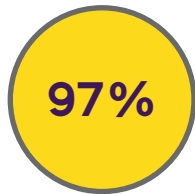


Get on better with the people I live with



How to cook different foods or meals

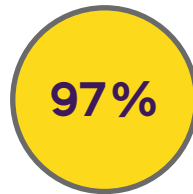
I really enjoyed doing stuff with my family and having fun with them



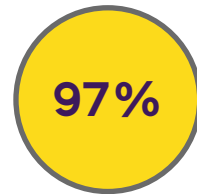
Do something I am proud of



Be caring, helpful and respectful of other people

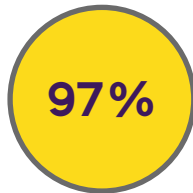


Have fun over the holidays

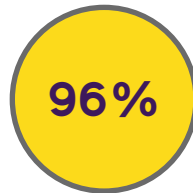


Have fun at home with the people I live with

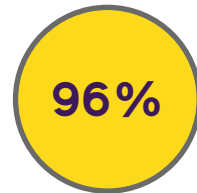
I learned how cheap things can make good food



I learned how to cook safely



I learned about food and healthy eating



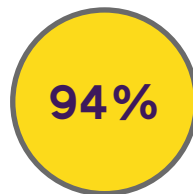
I learned how to work with others



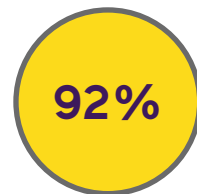
Be more confident



Help me and my family eat healthier food and meals



To make and fix things



Have a better, more positive, view of myself



I learned how to ask for help



Helped me to learn about science and nature



Look forward to going to school after the holidays

I enjoyed finding out about different things to cook

2. Tackling food insecurity

2.1. This chapter covers the complex nature and causes of food insecurity, its impacts and the stigma surrounding food and poverty in Scotland. Case Study 1, which captures experiences at the pilot project in Dundee Community Garden, provides more insight into the themes described in this chapter.

A complex issue

2.2. Food insecurity ranges from worrying about running out of food, to actually running out of food and experiencing hunger due to lack of money or other resources.

2.3. Two thirds of the young people who took part in the pilot were referred based on concern by a trusted professional that they were experiencing or at risk of food insecurity. Analysis of data about referrals to the pilot revealed the challenging circumstances faced by young people who took part in the programme and the success of projects in engaging the young people this initiative aimed to reach:

- **The largest proportion (36%) were referred on the basis of being in receipt of free school meals. Within this group many (24 out of 54) were highlighted as in receipt of free school meals and coming from a large household; small numbers were described as in receipt of free school meals and supported by a youth group/foodbank (6) or with poor school attendance (5).**
- **One third (32%) were assessed as being at risk of food insecurity or learning loss based on a youth worker's or family support worker's knowledge of the young person's home situation.**

Examples include an awareness of a parent's alcohol or drug use, a chaotic home life or the young person having caring responsibilities.

- **Just over a quarter (27%) were referred by schools, on the basis of poor attendance (22%) or a request (5%) by a pupil support worker.**
- **One young person's parent asked for them to be included.**

2.4. For some of the young people who took part in the pilot food insecurity is directly linked to poverty. One youth worker described shock at the level of deprivation he witnessed:

I know it's an area of deprivation and stuff, but the likes of some of the kids coming in, their trousers are holed, their shoes are holed and stuff like that. That has been quite unexpected.

Youth Worker, East Ayrshire

2.5. While most of the young people who took part in the pilot live in areas of multiple deprivation, the issue is not contained to these communities. More widely, food insecurity can affect any household in working poverty if wages do not cover basic costs or provide a sufficient buffer for financial shocks. Some of the families who participated in the pilot had found themselves in need of support with food for the first time, because of the financial impact of COVID-19.

Although a lot of my families were on benefits, it was also the ones that I felt that were struggling a bit, but never really struggled before. These are the ones I was finding that don't really come forward too much, because they've never needed to, and they don't know how to. So there's a lot of families that I think go under the radar.

Family Support Worker, Falkirk

2.6. Our evaluation found that factors such as education, experience, confidence and family circumstances contribute to food insecurity and other issues with food. For example, low levels of literacy and numeracy affected the extent to which families can budget, plan meals and follow recipes. Some young carers lacked cooking skills, because they had limited opportunities to learn from others in their household, and families with chaotic lives or unpredictable working patterns struggled to plan meals, relying instead on fast, costly food. These barriers can make it difficult for individuals and families to break cycles of food insecurity.

2.7. Geography adds a layer of complexity to the issue. Households in rural areas face higher costs and fewer choices due to the limited provision of supermarkets and infrequent, costly public transport options. This was a particularly acute issue in Moray, the most rural of the six pilot areas.

It's about how they get it [food], it's about transport, it's about availability, it's about cost. Particularly in Speyside. We have the biggest geographic area in Scotland and you have families who live in extremely rural areas that have no access to the main supermarket. They've only got access to a small shop, that makes the cost much more expensive and means that if they want to shop at a supermarket they need transport. The additional challenges in a rural area are just massive.

Youth Worker, Moray

The lived experience of food insecurity and other food issues affecting young people

2.8. Some of the young people who took part in the pilot exhibited or described the hunger they or other people in their households were experiencing. For example, a youth worker in East Ayrshire had to provide food at the start of a session 'because the kids widnae sit still, they kept moving around because they were that hungry.'

2.9. Young people talked more discreetly about their experiences of food insecurity with youth workers they formed trusted relationships with. They felt able to talk about difficult aspects of their homelife, including not having access to basic foodstuffs such as toast for breakfast or a snack for breaktime.

2.10. Some of the young people who took part in the pilot lacked basic but important food handling skills. Youth workers described issues that emerged as they worked with young people; not knowing how to use a potato peeler, or even how to use a knife and fork.

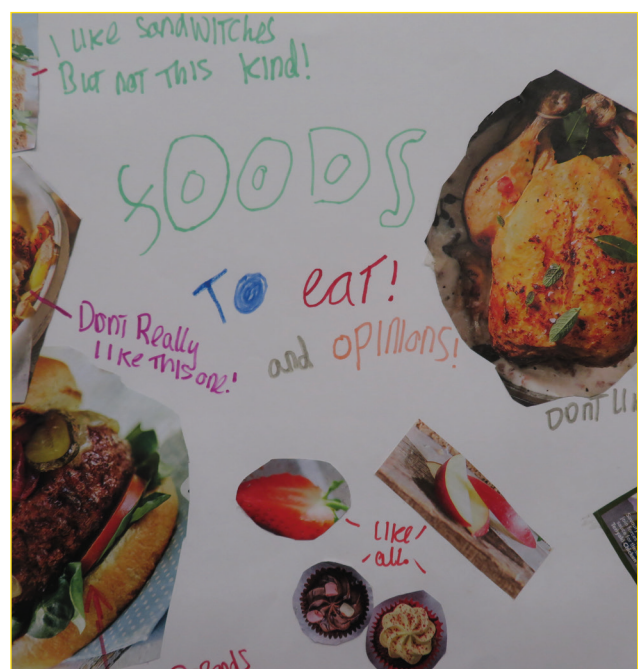
2.11. Young people also lacked confidence and familiarity with social experiences linked to food. An experienced youth worker described her surprise that this was the first time some of the young people in her group had ever tried a Chinese takeaway. Other young people had never been to a hotel restaurant for food before and the youth worker explained how delighted they were to get to do this with their friends for the first time.

Stigma

2.12. Breakfast clubs and food banks are important services in the pilot communities. However, stakeholders described insufficient capacity to meet demand and explained that the stigma of food insecurity prevents families and young people from asking for help through fear that they will be judged, labelled or be contacted by social services.

We took each group out for a high tea at the hotel... I was so chuffed to see them, especially the girls because you've got these four girls that really come from a poverty background and are struggling... when we got to the hotel they were just delighted. I think overall it was just a great experience for them because they'd never been in a hotel for their supper.

Youth Worker, Moray



There's a lot of young people and families that are very proud and will not actually open up and share that they've got difficulties. There's a lot of affluent areas in Galashiels, but there's a lot of deprived areas. My worry is that some young people are overlooked, and we wouldn't necessarily know that there was actually any kind of issues with regards to food in the local community.

Teacher, Scottish Borders

2.13. Hidden demand for support with food makes it difficult to quantify the extent of the issue and subtle approaches are needed to support families with food insecurity. In chapter 5 we explain how the pilot projects were designed to address food insecurity in a dignified way. Referral partners understood this and were sensitive in how they approached families, using their knowledge and experience to judge how best to describe the projects to them.

2.14. The backdrop of the pandemic also helped to mitigate the stigma of participating in the projects. Lockdown measures meant that across Scotland many families found it difficult to access food, and there was less of a taboo around receiving help.

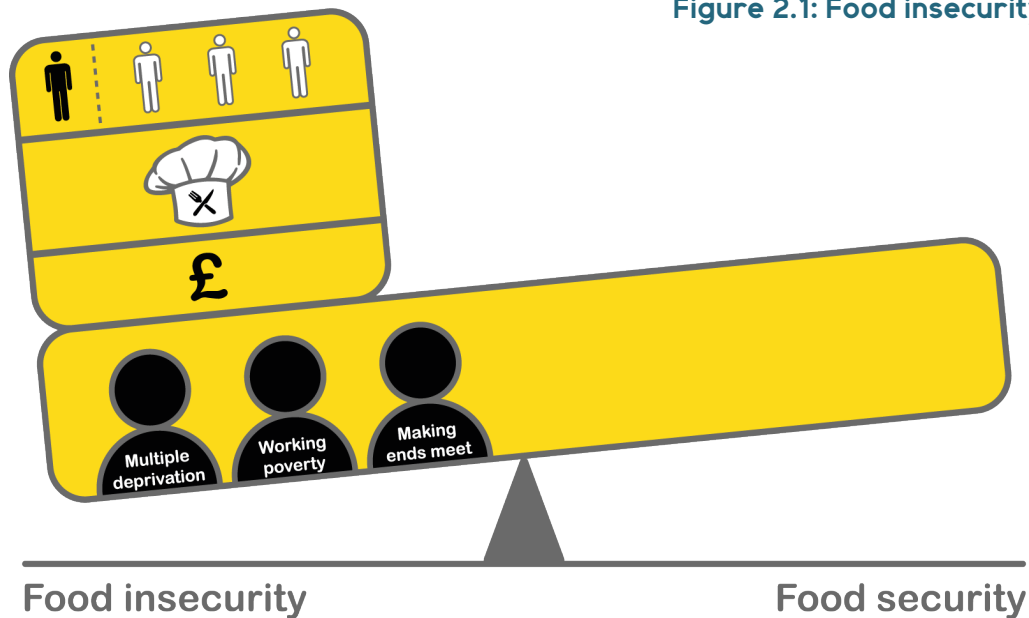
With shielding, and the delivery of food parcels for shielding, I think that was reducing the stigma of people asking for help, because people were seeing food parcels being delivered in the community.

Youth Worker, Scottish Borders

2.15. Further, with young people confined to their homes and unable to go to school or see their friends, opportunities to take part in organised activities appealed as a way to alleviate boredom and, for some, to diffuse mounting tensions within the household. This context coupled with referral partners' sensitive approach meant that the stigma was less of a barrier to participation than it might otherwise have been.

2.16. **Figure 2.1** below illustrates the factors of food insecurity (financial, food skills and experiences gap and social stigma) affecting families who participated in the pilot. Those in the middle of the scale are currently making ends meet but are precariously close to tipping into food insecurity.

Figure 2.1: Food insecurity factors.



The parents have been super appreciative of the bags that were given for their food and stuff. Like nobody's just taking the food and kind of shoving it in a cupboard, because we mention to the kids about making it and stuff, they're quite excited to go home and make it with their mums or dads or whoever looks after them.

Youth Worker, East Ayrshire

Valued support

2.17. The welcome response to food parcels from families who took part in the pilot indicates the need for initiatives to tackle food insecurity. In conversations, stakeholders alluded to the important role of food banks and breakfast clubs within the projects' wider communities, but also the stigma and shame around these food resources.

2.18. Parents and young people described their delight with the quality and volume of ingredients they received and mentioned using them straight away. Many young people were also excited to receive their deliveries. Packages with treats, such as vouchers to buy food to host a cinema night, were identified as young people's favourites and indicate that this was not a typical occurrence for them.

3. Impact on young people and their families

3.1. This chapter identifies impacts of the work delivered by pilot projects. We have used the programme outcomes framework to structure this chapter, highlighting any wider unanticipated results. Intended project outcomes were as follows:

- **Improving learning and skills around food, cooking and healthy eating.**
- **Developing confidence.**
- **Enhancing group participation skills.**
- **Strengthening relationships.**
- **Broadening perspectives.**

3.2. Confidence was a strong theme, and has a bearing on many outcomes. We focus on confidence as an outcome in itself and describe its significance in relation to other outcomes, where relevant. Case Study 2, which captures experiences at the pilot project in East Ayrshire, provides more insight into the themes described in this chapter.

Food related learning and skills

3.3. Developing learning around food and cooking was a core element in the programme and our evaluation identified that this was achieved in each of the six pilot projects.

3.4. Sustained participation helped to generate a significant increase in food related knowledge and skills among the participants. Most commonly this concerned basic cooking skills and knowledge. Some young people mentioned that they had never cooked before and learned how to use basic equipment for the first time, while others explained how the project helped them to build on their existing knowledge.

I know more about using a slow cooker now because that isn't something I have done before... They're really easy as well, really good for families.

Young Person, Dundee

Figure 3.1 sets out the skills and knowledge young people told us they had learned.



Figure 3.1: Examples of food knowledge and skills learned by young people

At the start it was simple stuff, well it's simple to us, using a knife and fork and eating at the table. You can see as the weeks have gone on, they're much better at using their knife and fork and cutting up their food. You can definitely see a progression.

Youth Worker, East Ayrshire

3.5. The skills focus of each project varied from area to area. For example, in Dundee, the team purposely simplified the recipes over the project period, making them less skills orientated (such as using pre-chopped vegetables) to underline how easy home-cooking can be and maximise the likelihood of young people continuing to cook themselves.

3.6. Knowledge of healthy eating also increased, but to a lesser extent than the new cooking skills many young people developed. Such is the extent of food insecurity in some of the communities that the priority was ensuring access to food, rather than focusing on healthy eating. One young person and two parents we spoke to would have preferred healthier recipes, however the less healthy recipes were also generally described by young people as the most fun and enjoyable.

3.7. An important change in attitudes about the cost of home-cooking was identified. Budgeting exercises helped several young people to appreciate how cost effective it can be to make a nutritious meal compared with a takeaway.

3.8. Most significantly, our evaluation identified an appetite for continued use of the skills and knowledge learned through the project.

We've learned a bit about budgeting and stuff like that, how to make healthy food without like spending loads and loads of money, having quite a sensible budget to do it and not wasting any of the food, making sure we've got the right amounts and that.

Young Person, Dundee

3.9. Some young people have cooked the recipes again and found the confidence and creativity to adapt them as required.

She took a lot onboard and it got her up and running. So by now she can go and do some things herself after this, she's doing it on her own...

Parent, South Lanarkshire

She loved the cooking, absolutely loved all the cooking, and has made several of the dishes after, even now. She made them for family and friends, she's altered the recipes. She has an auntie who's gluten free, and one of the things was cheesecake, and she then asked how she could make it for her auntie.

Parent, South Lanarkshire

3.10. The kitchen equipment provided to families was well received, particularly the slow cooker. Several young people and parents have continued to use it since. For some families it has had a profound effect to the extent that one of the youth workers in Dundee explained it as 'life-changing' for one of the single parents in her group.

3.11. Some participants mentioned that the ingredients and recipes were not always to their taste but generally this did not deter them from participating.

Self-Confidence

3.12. Many strands were evident when we explored young people's confidence. Some became confident in trying new foods introduced through cooking activities.

Although meals were not always to the young people's tastes, they were generally willing to at least sample it. This was a big achievement for some, including participants for whom new experiences can be especially daunting, such as those with autism.

I think it was good that I got to make something new, I got to try out new things...

Young Person, South Lanarkshire

3.13. The youth workers we spoke to linked this new confidence to the fact that the young people had invested their own time in making the meals and therefore felt a sense of ownership over the results.

3.14. Empowerment and ownership are fundamental to the youth work approach and our evaluation identified several other examples of empowerment contributing to a growth in confidence and self-belief. Feeling a sense of pride in their achievements and receiving praise from family members was a big part of the confidence boost young people experienced. It also developed parents' confidence in their children's ability. Knowing they could cook safely meant they would permit them to do more in the future.

3.15. One parent explained how much her daughter enjoyed activities that gave her freedom to apply her creativity and organisational skills, such as preparing a picnic and cinema night for the family. Her daughter ended up stretching the task because she enjoyed it so much leading to a significant increase in her confidence and self-belief.

3.16. Experiences with the online activities highlighted some particular challenges young people have with confidence in digital participation. Initially many were reluctant to share photos of their meals or to talk about their progress via online communication platforms. Several youth workers were surprised by this, given how comfortable young people are perceived to be with social media. Some young people mentioned feeling anxious about being seen online by others or were worried their meals might not be as good as their peers'. Youth workers reported an increase in uploads of meal photographs as the young people became more confident in their abilities and comfortable with the people in their group.

I think more the young people didn't want to compete openly on what they'd cooked... but as the weeks progressed, that changed, and people would just upload things, just put it straight into the chat. Because I think there was a feeling of, we're all in this together, and we're actually doing really well, and my pizza looks just as good as his pizza.

Youth Worker, Falkirk

I struggle to get out of the house anyway so it's something that my mum enjoys me getting out of the house and doing. Half the time I'm scared to leave the house, like I just struggle... It's good that I've actually managed to get out of the house and get to see my friends

Young Person, Dundee

Group participation

3.17. Group participation featured in every project, though it was most prominent in the locations where face-to-face activities were possible. Excursions in Moray and Falkirk were a source of much fun and excitement and the favourite part of the project for several young people. Again, the lockdown context may have contributed since this was the first opportunity many had to go out with friends for a while. In Moray the group trips were directly linked to food and emphasised the social value of eating. As mentioned previously, a trip to a local hotel for high tea was particularly successful.

3.18. The projects in East Ayrshire and Dundee had access to a community venue and so were able to deliver much of their activity in-person. For one participant, this was a big factor in helping them to overcome their anxiety about leaving the house.

3.19. Initial low levels of confidence in group participation were evident among young people in all pilot locations, particularly if they were new to the group. In most cases, confidence grew over time, particularly for in-person activities, but this was also evident in the online engagement. We highlight the example of one teenager with Asperger's who struggles to socialise with his peers in the school environment. His youth worker explained that he has been much more comfortable using an iPad and that this has led to a noticeable increase in his ability to hold conversations and maintain eye contact. This was described as 'massive progress' in the teenager's life.

3.20. For a small number of young people, engaging with the group via phone or video was a source of continued anxiety and not all were able to move beyond this during the project period.

Relationships

3.21. Involvement in the projects had a particularly positive effect on family relationships. Our evaluation demonstrates how projects successfully involved parents, carers and sometimes other family members in activities. Cooking together created 'quality time' which, for many, would not have happened otherwise. The extent of the positive impact on family relationships was unanticipated and highly valued by youth workers.

3.22. One young person told us getting to spend time with his mum was the 'best thing' about the activities. For some households cooking together had a healing effect and diffused tensions between family members. We also identified examples of cooking helping to relieve day-to-day frustrations between siblings such as for the family overleaf.

Yeah, it helps a lot because it's helped me build my confidence as well, because I don't like – for example I'm not, I have anxiety, so I don't like talking to new people sometimes. So it's actually helping me that I'm talking to you right now.

Young Person, South Lanarkshire

3.23. In other instances it had a more profound impact, helping to mend strained relationships. One parent in South Lanarkshire said she and her daughter were regularly 'at logger-heads' with each other before the project started. This family had an especially difficult time during the lockdown period and while not all of the activities ran smoothly they found that by the end their relationship had improved dramatically. The parent believed that the project had played a significant role in this.

3.24. Relationship benefits encompassed extended family too. Our evaluation highlights how effective food is as a topic for conversation and an activity to be shared with the wider family. In South Lanarkshire the project encouraged one teenager who had experienced considerable upheaval in her family life to bake with her aunties for the first time.

Well it's made a big difference in here, because trying to get the boys all to kinna do something together... it just doesn't happen very often. So the fact that they were kinna working together and enjoying the activities, they've quite enjoyed that. It's been nice to see them working together, instead of arguing and fighting amongst each other and being stuck to their computers all the time.

Parent, Falkirk

3.25. Another point to note is the impact on relationships with youth workers. Some young people took part in youth work activities for the first time and there is evidence of an appetite for continued engagement (see chapter 5 for more details).

3.26. Connections were also reinforced or established between youth workers and families. Some youth workers reflected on the increase in their contact with parents and carers as a result of the home-based element to the activities.

Strengthening relationships has been an important outcome of the project for youth workers and is something they wish to cultivate in the future.

3.27. By encouraging families to sit down together and eat, the pilot projects also unlocked the social value of food. This was a significant change for some households and there was a sense among youth workers that it could have a lasting positive effect.

Broadening perspectives

3.28. We identified multiple layers to the way projects have broadened perspectives. At one level it opened up the world of youth work to some young people who had never participated before. It also led to a shift in how some view themselves and their abilities. The pride and self-belief the activities have instilled have been significant. This has led some young people to develop a greater sense of independence as evident in the enthusiasm expressed for doing more cooking in the future.

3.29. There is also evidence of a change in perspectives towards money which goes beyond the anticipated learning outcomes. One youth worker observed that the young people in her group started to take pride in how cheaply they could make meals. This contrasted with their typical attitudes which was that spending a lot of money was something 'to show off about'. For her this change in mind set was a 'big turning factor' for these young people.

Every one of them, because we'd asked them to do the meal together, at least two or three of the nights out of the week they all sat down and had their meal. That was the one thing that kept coming back from the family was they all sat down and ate their tea. Most of them wolfed it and they were right back upstairs again, but almost all of them at least tried it. So hopefully that's something that carried on after that.

Youth Worker, Dundee

3.30. Other profound wider effects are also evident. For some young people the projects have led them re-evaluate what they want out of their life and who they want to spend time with. Several mentioned a change in attitude towards school and in their educational ambitions; this is covered more in chapter 4.

3.31. Another example is the dramatic shift one youth worker observed in a teenager who struggled in school and would often find himself in trouble.

The youth worker was unsure how he would react to the activities but was delighted by how well he got on with the other participants and the effort he put in. She observed how proud he was to be taking his meals home as if he was seeing himself as 'the man of the family'.

3.32. Linking with the theme of relationships, another young person told us how taking part in the project had made her want to reconnect with her father who lives in another country and meet with his side of the family for the first time.

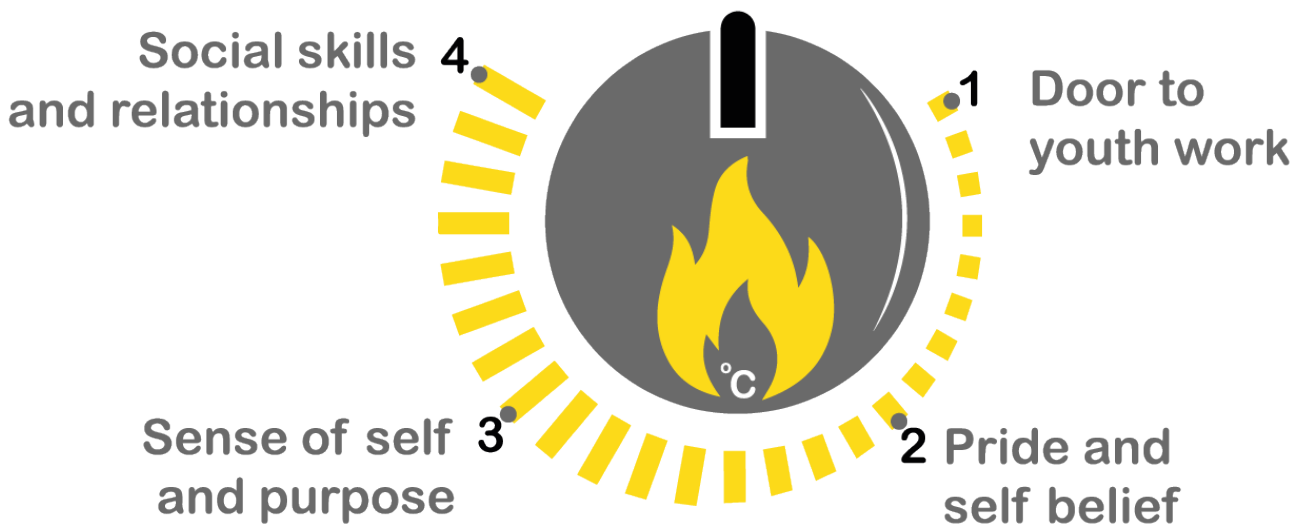
It's actually hard to believe, but my dad lives in England, so somehow all of this has brought me and my dad closer as well, we talk a lot now. Because it put my confidence up, now I'm speaking to people that I never thought that I would. It's bringing me closer to my family now, so it's actually helped me a lot more than everyone thought it would.

Young Person, South Lanarkshire

3.33. Perspectives have broadened in a number of ways as a result of the pilot projects.

Figure 3.2 summarises the range in intensity of these wider impacts. Our evaluation attests to the significance of these impacts on the lives of the young people and their families and indicates that over time the ripple effects could be even more profound.

Figure 3.2: Wider impacts for young people



4. Learning loss and engaging with education

4.1. Breaks from school are known to result in a loss of engagement, academic skills and knowledge, particularly amongst young people in areas of multiple deprivation, who may have limited access to informal learning opportunities out of school. Food insecurity also hampers young people's ability to engage with education in a number of ways.

4.2. The programme aimed to address learning loss and improve participants' educational prospects. This chapter summarises how the projects supported young people with transitions back to school; attendance; engagement with education; and the value of accreditation. Case Study 3, which captures experiences at the pilot project in South Lanarkshire, provides more insight into the themes described in this chapter.

Easing the transition

4.3. At the time of our evaluation pupils had only recently returned to school and were adjusting to the new COVID-19 safety measures. Lockdown followed by summer holidays caused pupils to be out of school for approximately six months. With such a long time away and facing a very different learning environment, returning to school was especially daunting for pupils this year.

4.4. Youth workers were particularly concerned about those transitioning from primary to secondary school. Involvement in the food pilots meant that some of the younger young people started or built relationships with pupil support workers which helped them to feel more comfortable in their new school. The contact that the projects maintained between young people and youth workers also helped to ease the transition amongst some of the young people teachers were most worried about.

4.5. A guidance teacher in Moray spoke of her amazement that one teenage girl came back to school, attributing this to the food insecurity project:

She's been very unsettled, you know, she's needed a lot of help. She's needed a lot of support and had a lot of adaptations to her school day. But I always say to staff, actually it's a miracle she's back, because she didn't engage with anything during lockdown at all apart from the project. That's the one thing that she engaged with. I didn't think we'd have her back in school.

Teacher, Moray

4.6. The support which another young person accessed as a result of the relationship she established with one particular youth worker through the project helped enormously with her return to school.

It's reinforced her relationship that she has with the staff, and I would say that's a huge one for us. I think the activities that were done are a massive benefit, but I think that relationship and just keeping that contact going was absolutely huge. I think she knew she had somebody who was there for her all the way through, and she knew that person would be there for her when she went back to school. I think that was huge for her.

Parent, South Lanarkshire

4.7. The daily structure which the pilot projects provided also helped significantly during a time when most 'normal' routines had been lost.

Improved attendance

4.8. Poor attendance at school was an ongoing issue for several of the young people who took part in the projects; Just over a quarter (27%) were referred by schools, on the basis of poor attendance (22%) or a request (5%) by a pupil support worker.

4.9. Youth workers and teachers were concerned that the disruption over the spring and summer would make this worse. However, this has generally not been the case. Stakeholders noted that the attendance of some of the pupils they were most worried about had significantly surpassed their aspirations. Their involvement in the pilot projects were cited as a key factor.

Engagement with education

4.10. Our evaluation indicates that the projects may also lead to an improvement in educational engagement and set young people on positive pathways. Involvement in the projects has led some young people to re-consider their subject choices and become more ambitious about what they can achieve.

4.11. One teenage girl in Falkirk is now studying home economics because of the interest the project ignited in this as a future career option. Similarly, a youth worker helped a young person from his group to change his timetable to include Higher RE. The relationships formed through the projects were critical enablers in both examples.

4.12. A school environment does not suit the learning needs and preferences of all pupils. This was the case for several of the project participants. Pilot projects were able to remove learning barriers by employing less formal, alternative engagement methods. This included a relaxed, nuanced approach to delivery tailored to the specific needs of each young person, the use of digital technology and working in small groups.

4.13. Creating different outputs that did not focus on reading and writing also helped young people who struggle with literacy and numeracy; for example, making and assembling meals – or taking photos of dishes they had prepared rather than writing about them.

4.14. One young man from South Lanarkshire had very poor attendance and attainment. His project youth worker explained how he 'came on leaps and bounds' over the course of the sessions. Working in smaller groups and using online platforms to communicate helped him to feel more confident and able to participate, leading to sustained engagement throughout the project.

4.15. For David⁵, the project's practical focus suited his learning style and enabled him to participate in a way he was unable to at school. Project workers are now exploring how approaches like this might supplement classroom learning for him, longer term.

David in particular, he really struggles with writing. He doesn't like to admit that, and he doesn't like anyone to know that he's struggling. So that wasn't really an issue in the project because they allowed the young people to take photos of things, like take photos of the steps that they were doing. So there wasn't really a pressure to write things down.

Teacher, Scottish Borders

I think the good thing is we've got engagement, I think the worry was having that time out away from school, with young people not necessarily returning, particularly with attendance being a strong issue within that locality, especially in that postcode area, attendance is fairly poor on the whole. But attendance has been very good from the young people that have been involved in the programme.

Teacher, Scottish Borders

4.16. Improvements in engagement with education are also evident in the few instances where the project itself failed to sustain participation. For some young people having access to a support network through the projects has enabled them to take positive steps forward with their education, such as two young men in the Scottish Borders who have now enrolled in college and are embracing online learning.

⁵ Pseudonyms have been used to protect anonymity

4.17. A common theme in our findings for educational engagement is empowerment. The pilot projects helped to instill a sense of self belief and control over learning that has fundamentally improved the educational prospects for some young people at the greatest risk of disengaging entirely. Long term impacts on educational attainment are not possible to establish at this stage; however, the initial indicators are strong.

Value of accreditation

4.18. Accreditation of learning was expected or achieved for just over two fifths (42%) of the young people who took part in the programme. Where it featured this was either in the form of a Dynamic Youth Award or a High Five Award.

4.19. The challenging lockdown circumstances meant that it was not feasible to build certification into all projects. For example, in Dundee the project worked with a different group of young people each week and felt accreditation was not possible in this timeframe.

4.20. The youth workers we spoke to were clear about the benefits of accreditation and the importance of building it in to activities with young people where possible. It is a way to instill a sense of pride and achievement where this may be absent in school; improving confidence and self-worth and encouraging young people to view themselves positively and consider learning pathways when they might otherwise have struggled or disengaged. Accreditation is part of wider aspirations to broaden personal and educational horizons through youth work.

Summary

4.1. **Figure 3.3** summarises the learning impact of the pilot projects in the form building blocks.

The four base blocks are the immediate learning outcomes of the project. These are:

- **Enhanced support network.**
- **More stable routine.**
- **Receptiveness to alternative learning modes.**
- **Certification.**

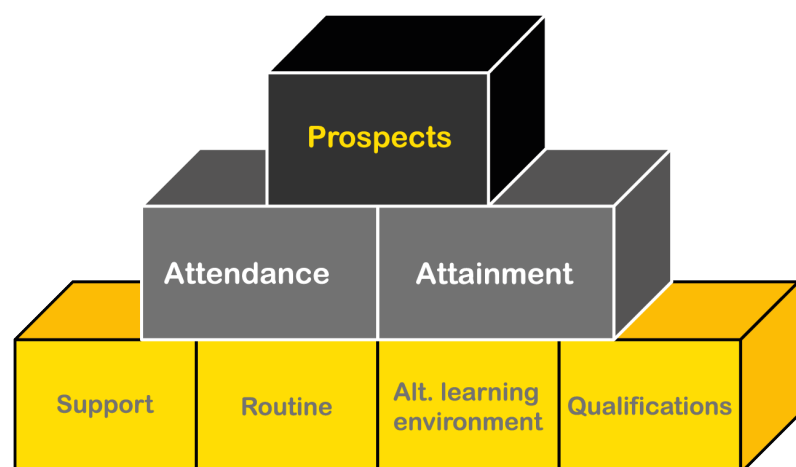


Figure 3.3: Learning impacts for young people

This provides a foundation for improving attendance and attainment over the medium term. In the long term this has potential to significantly strengthen participants' wider educational prospects, including young people most at risk of disengaging completely.

The fact that they've got a qualification already to me is a building block, you know, there's a sense of pride that they've had from that, hopefully because we make a big deal of it, both in school and out in the community. They'll get their certificate, we'll present them in an assembly normally, we'll make a fuss about it to make sure it is recognised as a major achievement for them, and something to build upon.

Teacher, Keith, Moray



5. Project design and a youth work approach

5.1. This chapter considers the design features and delivery approaches that made the projects effective. Informed by the views of participants and stakeholders, we also suggest developments for consideration should the programme be rolled out in the future. Each of the case studies in Appendix 1 provide more insight into the themes covered in this chapter.

We listen to young people, we're not telling them what to do. It's giving them that opportunity to take part and have a voice. And they're much more at ease with it because they feel like they can come forward and actually be themselves. A lot of young people feel that in school, they're told to do this, told to do that, and youth work doesn't work like that.

Youth Worker, Moray

Youth work approach

5.2. A youth work approach to delivery was fundamental to the projects' design. Our evaluation highlights this was critical for the programme's overall success. Aspects of the youth work approach common across the six projects were as follows:

Figure 4: Features of the youth work approach

- Each was designed to address core strands of food insecurity and learning loss through providing fun and engaging experiences that young people wanted to participate in.
- It was delivered by professionals whose manner and behaviour distinguishes them from other service providers. This creates a trusting non-judgemental relationship and equal power dynamic – a relationship of reciprocity not authority.
- Activities are based on what young people say they want to do and what they want to achieve. They take place out of school hours and participation is entirely voluntary.
- Based on a principle of empowerment not charity – as one youth worker put it 'a helping hand, not a hand-out'.

I don't want social work in my life. I've raised six kids and I've never needed them, and I don't want them now... So that helps, that's a great help that it's just somebody that's experienced life but isn't there to judge you.

Parent, South Lanarkshire

5.3. For one teacher the relationships formed through the youth work approach was more important than any other aspect of the design.

5.4. The trusting relationships formed through the youth work approach were the key to unlocking wider benefits for participants as discussed in chapters 3 and 4, particularly for those who are the most in need and/or least likely to seek support themselves.

Flexible and reactive

5.5. A youth work approach is responsive to young peoples' personalities and circumstances. This is evident in the way each pilot project was delivered. Project plans were made but they would bend and flex as required. For example, staff in Dundee decided to reduce the focus on healthy eating because minimising the barrier to cooking emerged as the greater need of the young people involved.

Age appropriateness

5.6. We found little to suggest that the projects were devised with specific age groups in mind beyond the goal of working with young people between the target ages of S1-S6.

Youth workers were mindful of the need to appeal to a range of ages when they were planning activities. As it transpired many of the young people's younger siblings also ended up joining in with activities at home. This indicates the inherent value of a flexible youth work approach.

Forget the programme, the biggest key part here was the relationship that TD1 have got with families in the community... They have got a phenomenal relationship, they're really well-known, they go over and above for young people. So there was trust there from the parents from the beginning. TD1 had full buy-in and the support, whether that be food, whether that be the activity packs, whether it be online sessions, there was trust there, and that was key.

Teacher, Scottish Borders

5.7. That said, one young person felt that a juggling activity she participated in was too young for her, a point which her father also agreed with; some options tailored to age may have been useful. Overall projects' achievements in reaching targets and sustaining engagement with young people throughout delivery points to the success of the approaches for young people across the target age groups.

Designed and delivered with dignity

5.8. As mentioned in chapter 2, the stigma attached to food insecurity means that subtle approaches are needed to tackle the issue. Although food parcels were a central feature in each of the pilot locations, a conscious decision was made not to frame the programme as a food provision service. The projects were packaged as a series of fun and creative learning activities themed around food. Ingredients and cooking equipment were the tools that enabled participation; the means rather than the end. Each project was designed to address food insecurity needs in a dignified way, without dwelling on the issue itself.

5.9. This sensitivity is evident in the way the youth workers and referral partners approached the families that were identified as potential participants. They used their knowledge and experience to judge how best to present the project. They would often purposely avoid mentioning the food parcels, and instead focus on other aspects of the projects that they felt the families and young people would respond positively to.

The importance of fun

5.10. Fun was an inherent feature of delivery by youth workers and it proved to be important for securing and sustaining participation. Participants' feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with most citing how much fun they had above everything else.

Excursions and group activities were a key to this, as were the food parcels. Youth workers explained the parcels sparked a sense of intrigue and anticipation amongst young people each week.

5.11. Participation was entirely voluntary. Enjoyment is therefore also evidenced by the sustained level of engagement achieved, including among young people known for poor attendance at school.

Because we're quite a seasoned guidance team, you don't always say you're a food activity project, because that might not go down very well.

Teacher, Scottish Borders

I think for us it was never really about identifying that you might be struggling with food. It's probably been more about engagement and the learning opportunity of cooking.

Youth Worker, South Lanarkshire

Participation and engagement

5.12. The table below compares engagement across the projects; every area exceeded the target of supporting 20 young people; in every area the majority of young people attended all or most sessions they were offered.

	Total YP	Engagement levels
Dundee	28	The majority of YP (24 out of 28) attended 'all' (16) or 'most' (8) of the project sessions they were offered, with 6 young people attending extra sessions; for example, in a volunteering capacity, or to continue to use the garden.
East Ayrshire	26	The majority of YP (25 out of 26) attended 'all' (3) or 'most' (22) sessions.
Falkirk	23	The majority of YP (18 out of 23) attended 'all' (13) or 'most' (5) sessions.
Moray	26	Almost all YP (24 out of 26) attended 'all' (20) or 'most' (4) of the project sessions.
Scottish Borders	21	Two thirds (14 out of 21) attended 'all' (11) or most (3) project sessions.
South Lanarkshire	29	The majority of YP (22 out of 29) attended 'all' (10) or 'most' (12) project sessions.

COVID-19 context

5.13. While the youth work approach was undoubtedly key to the appeal of the projects, it is likely that the backdrop of COVID-19 also contributed. Several young people and parents mentioned that they were drawn to the projects because they offered a welcome distraction from the boredom or tensions caused by lockdown.

5.14. Each project also sustained high levels of participation throughout, including from young people youth workers felt would be unlikely to participate at all. Together this feedback suggests that the lockdown circumstances likely enhanced the appeal of the programme for some.

5.15. Had the young people not been participating in the projects, they told us they would likely have been on their phones, playing computer games or doing nothing. However, our perception is for that for many this would have been the case regardless of lockdown, indicating that activities delivered by the projects would still be appealing if delivered at a different time outwith lockdown



Partnerships

5.16. The significance of the youth work approach for the success of the pilot projects should not detract from the contribution of other partners. Partners were key referral agents and, in many projects, the involvement of support workers and teachers was essential for identifying participants in most need of support and for creating the initial contact.

5.17. Partner involvement was also a factor in increasing educational engagement once back at school. As mentioned in chapter 4, the projects helped to establish relationships between some young people transitioning to secondary school and pupil support workers there. The evaluation also identified the development of multi-agency ways of working by different partners, for example youth workers communicating with teachers in order to adjust pupils' timetables once back at school.

5.18. Collaboration meant that project partners gained a more holistic insight into the lives of the young people and the families they support which was helpful for their own roles. Working alongside other professionals also offered CPD benefits and positive learning experiences for professionals involved.

A multi-agency approach was definitely key, it meant that no young people were missed out.

Teacher, Scottish Borders

Local authority or third sector lead?

5.19. The lead delivery partners in three of the six pilot projects were third sector youth work organisations; the rest were delivered by local authority youth work teams. Third sector organisations assumed this role in Moray, East Ayrshire and the Scottish Borders due to the strength of their existing relationships with the target young people. In line with our point above, our evaluation highlights the importance of tailoring the delivery mechanics by area rather than employing a 'one size fits all' approach.

5.20. This does however raise the issue of funding. In Keith, most staff at the youth work charity were furloughed when the project was being delivered. The project's success was therefore dependent on the one paid staff member who remained and volunteer support. This underlines how precarious youth work provision in the third sector can be and the need to ensure adequate resources to enable effective delivery and maximise the impact for participants.

Other effective design features

5.21. Other design aspects which emerged as key to the success of the projects are as follows.

Equipment and resources	<p>Providing equipment for families to continue to apply their new cooking knowledge and skills was an effective feature of the design as demonstrated by the numerous examples of continued use of the equipment by parents and young people. Some projects also provided young people with other resources such as a school bag, water bottle, games and stationery as part of the food related activities but specifically to help ease the transition back to school. Thoughtful, strategic approaches to project design such as this were key for its overall effectiveness.</p>
Localised place-based approach	<p>The local approach to delivery emerged as another success factor. Involvement of partners with an understanding of the target participants and experience in engaging them meant that the right people were targeted and suitable, sensitive approaches were employed. Where activities took place out of the home, the use of familiar community facilities helped to avoid another potential barrier to participation which could have been created with a more centralised approach.</p>
Funding	<p>The scale of funding for the pilot projects was substantial compared with typical youth work projects. This meant that youth workers could provide a high volume and quality of provisions within the food parcels and was part of the reason why there was such excitement about the deliveries and an appetite to continue to participate.</p>

Lockdown: challenges, opportunities and legacy

5.22. Lockdown created considerable delivery challenges. Youth workers had to change their plans at short notice and operate within substantial constraints. Our evaluation identified creativity, quick thinking and commitment to adapt projects without diminishing their effectiveness. For example, it took time and ingenuity to source ingredients and equipment, but delivery staff achieved this. Families were happy with what they received; many said it significantly exceeded their expectations.

5.23. The circumstances also meant that delivering group activities was especially difficult. In Dundee, the format was adjusted to enable small groups of young people to engage in-person at the local community garden whilst in Moray and Falkirk excursions were included.

5.24. Digital delivery was embraced across the pilot locations to enable a group work if activities took place in the home. It is not possible to comment on whether remote or in-person delivery was more effective in this instance because everybody was reacting to the unusual and uncharted circumstances. Decisions were typically based on feasibility rather than preference. Thinking ahead to the potential future delivery of the programme, in-person delivery remained a preference. However, the benefits of other approaches demonstrated by the respective projects meant that many could see the value of a blended approach.

5.25. Digital engagement methods had mixed success. A lack of knowledge and or confidence using online communication platforms were two barriers to participation. However as previously mentioned, the use of digital removed sizeable engagement barriers for some who find difficult to communicate in-person or who struggle with writing. This was a real breakthrough for some young people and has provided a platform which youth workers will continue to build on.

5.26. There were a number of other positive and unexpected effects of lockdown. As previously mentioned, using online communication platforms removed engagement barriers for some young people who find it more difficult to communicate in person. While digital approaches did not suit all participants and will not replace the face-to-face group approach advocated by youth workers, it has provided an effective platform for engagement which youth workers are keen to incorporate moving forward.

5.27. Typically, youth work activities are delivered at a local community venue with limited parental involvement. Lockdown circumstances meant that many activities had to be re-planned so they could take place in the home and opportunities to involve the family emerged. While youth workers hoped that their projects would encourage family participation, they were delighted by how well this worked. Encouragingly, many new contacts wished to continue to engage with youth workers after the projects ended.

5.28. Not only did cooking involve other members of the household including parents and siblings, but it also became a way for youth workers to connect with the wider family.

As youth workers you don't usually get that interaction with families because usually young people would turn up at your youth centre and then they disappear, they engage and go entirely and we wouldn't get that engagement with a parent or carer unless it was the odd occasion a parent or carer would turn up to pick a young person up. So it's been really, really nice and I think it's opened the eyes up of some parents to what is a youth worker, what is it that they do? So it has been beneficial.

Youth Worker, South Lanarkshire

5.29. This unexpected opportunity for engagement with families has had a significant legacy for youth work practice as follows:

- **Better communication and more trust and between youth workers and parents/ guardians.**
- **Greater appreciation of family circumstances improves youth workers' understanding and ability to connect with young people.**
- **Created relationships with new young people who youth workers will now continue to engage.**

5.30. In some instances, the unplanned elements of the project have already yielded a profound impact on participants. For example, David, who was mentioned in chapter 4, struggled at school. The relationship youth workers established with David's mother was a big factor in her allowing him to attend the group activities in the Dundee.

For him in particular I'm hoping that that's him set up with a link with the CLD Youth Team and hopefully they'll just – I don't know, they just take him under their wing and they're dead nurturing. They find something that they like to do, and they just go with it.

Pupil Support Worker, Dundee

The beauty of this was it was in the home, so the power had to be handed to the family. And then permission was given from the family. So it was much more of a collaborative thing between our service and the families than a normal event might be, where they feel as if they're an invitee and they're participating. They were actually running the show, you know. So it was really an empowerment tool to be able to do it in the home.

Youth Worker, Falkirk

5.31. Opportunities for digital engagement also helped to address David's confidence issues in groups. Together this ensured a positive experience and youth workers are now liaising with David's teachers about the possibility of changing his school timetable to include youth work activities.

Future developments

5.32. The table below summarises a range of developments to consider if the programme were to be delivered again and rolled out more widely.

Theme	Feedback	Suggestion
Target Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A particular need for support around food was identified for care leavers and new parents. A small number of the older young people felt that some of the activities (such as juggling) were too young for them; conversely, some of the older young people took up opportunities for further involvement in the programme, through volunteering. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider tailoring future projects to specific age groups.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Given the extent of food insecurity there was a desire to include more families, including those who are 'under the radar' and unknown to support services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Widen project remit.
Activity Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The context of the pandemic meant that some of the activity preparation was fluid but with more certainty and less restrictions, things could have been easier for youth workers and additional benefits for young people, such as accreditation, could have been possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work time saving measures such as online shopping into project design. Incorporate accreditation within all projects.

Theme	Feedback	Suggestion
Activity Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some partners felt that the projects could have benefitted from a more collegiate approach to design at an early stage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involve key partners at the earliest possible stage.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people did not like some recipes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involve young people in the selection of recipes.
Activity Type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value of home-based, digital and group activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include a blend of models.
Digital Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anxiety for some surrounding sharing photographs and participating in video calls. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build in more training and confidence building measures.
Recipes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some felt that the ingredients were too sugary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater focus on healthy eating where appropriate.
Involving Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Success of the home-based approach led to the suggestion that more parent involvement outwith the home could be possible. This would help strengthen social food-based outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include cooking events in youth clubs or in school that are delivered by young people for parents.
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated budget enabled high quality provisions and helped to garner continued participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure project is appropriately resourced and that costs fully reflect partner needs.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff resource was an issue in third sector provision due to furlough. 	

6. Final thoughts

It was one of the nicest pieces of work that I've done in a long time.

Youth Worker, Falkirk

6.1 This innovative pilot has generated evidence about the important role of youth work in a partnership approach to tackle food insecurity. Across the different models of food-related activity, we identified consistent positive messages about impact, engagement and effectiveness.

6.2 Staff involved in this programme were able to support young people and their families with sensitive, dignified approaches that lead to sustained levels of engagement.

6.3 The programme was successfully delivered in an extremely challenging context; and the provision of food and activities was particularly valuable in the period of sustained time away from school during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

6.4 New, creative models of digital delivery, socially distanced outdoor sessions and blended approaches were developed during the pilot. Positive data on impact shows the wide range of ways that participants benefited.

6.5 Trusted professionals' insights into young people's home circumstances was a crucial factor in targeting and identifying those who could benefit from support in relation to food insecurity or learning loss.

6.6 A complex array of food related issues emerged during delivery; in addition to experiencing hunger or anxiety about food, some young people lacked very basic skills with food preparation, planning and handling.

6.7 The pilot demonstrates youth work's contribution to preventing learning loss by maintaining young people's skills, motivation and engagement with education in holiday periods. The approach is an effective model for delivering opportunities for young people to gain accreditation, develop confidence, engage with new experiences and build relationships with positive role models in their communities.

6.8 Unanticipated benefits also emerged, such as opportunities to engage with wider family members including siblings and parents and the role of food as an activity to bring families together. This meant the programme achieved a greater reach than anticipated and exceeded the target number of participants with many of those who took part reporting improved relationships at home.

6.9 Important learning about the unique position of youth work in the community has emerged – CLD and youth work partners did not face the barriers to engagement with families that some education and social work partners encounter; because their role is different. Through contact about food and activities, they were able to identify and address hidden needs and make new connections with families who are struggling.

Key features of approaches to food insecurity and learning loss in young people

Our evaluation underlines the effectiveness of a youth work approach to tackling food insecurity and learning loss among young people and their families. The diagram and points below summarise the key aspects of this approach that were central to the success of the summer food programme and which could influence future strategies for addressing these issues.

Figure 6.1: Key features of the pilot's approach.



Key features of approaches to food insecurity and learning loss in young people

Youth work approach

Three of the six tiles in the above diagram are hallmarks of the youth work approach to working with young people. This includes:

- Purposely designing activities to be **fun, engaging and responsive to participants'** interests; having fun is essential for drawing and maintain interest.
- Creating a **sense of agency and control** by giving participants a say in what they are doing; delivering sessions outside of the school setting and school hours; and making attendance voluntary.
- Fostering a relationship of reciprocity not authority. By offering support on young people's terms, in a friendly, non-judgemental way **equal power dynamic** is formed which makes young people feel at ease and willing to participate.

The youth work approach is effective because it encompasses each of the above. Together these strands create a sense of **empowerment** amongst young people which is vital for sustaining participation and encouraging long-term engagement and change.

Partners

The involvement of partners helps to identify and involve the young people most in need and ensure projects are effectively designed to meet their needs. This lays the groundwork for a successful project but also creates a lasting legacy by encouraging joined-up approaches to working and enhancing the support network available to young people. The diagram illustrates how partner support for youth workers is key to overall success.

Flexible Design

Project design should avoid a 'one-size fits all' approach and reflect the circumstances and existing relationships within the community. This will determine the best mix of delivery partners, who would be the most effective lead (i.e. third sector or local authority) and who plays a supporting role.

COVID-19 has also demonstrated how external factors can significantly change project parameters, highlighting the need for delivery partners who have the skills, experience and resource to be flexible and accommodate change.

A whole family approach

Food insecurity is a family and community issue. Including families in a project is an effective way to maximise reach and impact. A family approach can create the shared knowledge, skills and positive experiences required to bring about a lasting change. Initially this affects the household but has potential to cause a ripple effect taking in the wider family and neighbours.

As well as improving family dynamics, a whole family approach helps to strengthen the support network for young people. Youth workers are able to build better, stronger and trusted relationships with families, giving them a better understanding of the family's circumstances and the support they need.

Ongoing support

Factoring ongoing support needs in project design ensures project benefits are sustained and built on further over time. Our evaluation demonstrates potential for this project to lead to profound positive change in the long-term. Joined up working and resources to support next steps is key for unlocking this potential.

Appendix 1: Case Studies

The seeds of change: A summer of growth in Dundee's Community Garden

Dundee City Council's CLD workers delivered a face to face programme in a community garden, where young people took part in engagement and learning activities centred around health and wellbeing. The food sessions focused on choice, learning and new experiences with sessions on cooking skills, nutrition and kitchen safety. Families also received basic equipment, recipes and ingredients to make meals to share at home.

- **28 young people took part in the project.**
- **All were referred to the project by youth workers as young people known to be a risk of food insecurity or learning loss in the holiday period.**
- **The majority (24 out of 28) attended 'all' (10) or 'most' (8) of the sessions they were offered, with six young people attending extra sessions; for example in a volunteering capacity, or to continue to use the garden.**

Staff and young people described their time at the project and its impact.

A sensitive, dignified approach to delivery:

'I think obviously the rise in food bank referrals was through the roof and stuff like that, so I think this wasn't seen as... Like food banks sometimes people can attach shame or embarrassment, just things like that, and I think for this it was totally different, because the family is still getting fed, but they don't see it as a handout, because it's more like a project they're getting involved in, they're putting their time in.' (Referral partner)

The value of a youth work approach

'Within a school, they know they've been selected as a vulnerable group... there's always a level of stigma. Whereas... as soon as I get them out into the garden into the community centre, and we're just there, and a group of people playing pool, then we'll make some food and we'll sit down and eat it and things. When you're out in the wild or in the community setting, you're just a community group. Yeah, anywhere else the dynamic is totally different.' (Youth worker)

'In feedback their headmistress and the head of one of the primary schools, she said that's all she's heard since that group had went back was how much fun they'd had and that they want to come back.' (Youth worker)

'Of course, we started off with the council resource of healthy eating, but actually quite quickly I decided if we're going to just provide a meal, we'll do it no judgement and stuff, "What will you eat, will your family try this?"... We would say you could add the veg or not if you're not going to eat it.' (Youth worker)

'The cooking was an aspect, but it was more the eating. As it went on, we tightened it up more to make it as easy as possible. I don't need to teach you to dice an onion. If you're a 10-year-old, I can buy a packet of sliced onion, and you put it all together in the morning, as long as you're sitting down at teatime and you're all eating.' (Youth worker)

'We hadn't gone under a guise, we just said we're youth work and you'll get your dinner. Buying in the lunches was also a big thing, because I thought that would be the easiest - "What do you want for your dinner?" But loads of them had [asked], "What do you get from a baker?" You would give them a menu and they would be there for an hour just saying, "I've never been asked, what do I want? I've got a choice of two things on a school dinner and that's what I choose because I get them for free".' (Youth worker)

'Some of them would look at the ingredients and say, "I'm not going to eat that." But every single one ended up cooking and trying it. At least there was two or three occasions where they took stuff home and then the next day I'd say, "How did that go?" They said, "None of us liked it, but I took it to next door," or, "I took it to my granny." I'd say, "That's absolutely fair enough".' (Youth worker)

'Everybody said, even the kids that we only knew for that week, they said that if we were doing anything like this again, they'd certainly be up for it.' (Referral partner)

The lived experience of food insecurity

'Without this some young people might not get fed, or their parents might not always be around to feed them.' (Young person)

'It felt... a warm feeling inside.' (Young person, on being able to make dinner for their family because of their involvement in the project).

'My family has ate some of it, and they've enjoyed it but the things my family didn't eat I brought it to the family down the street cause they struggle. So I brought the food we didn't eat along to them so it didn't go to waste, and they really enjoyed it.' (Young person)

'Having the food for groups coming in, it can help them because they might not have anything to eat that day. So it's giving them, even if it isn't something hot, it's giving them some good food for the day. It does bring people in because it's just kind of human nature, if [there's] food you want to go there.' (Young person)

'I'd been working in the school hubs since lockdown started, so I got to know quite a lot of kids from the hub, and I just felt they needed opportunity to get out of the hub. Because they had been eating like sandwiches for all that time, no hot meals.' (Referral partner)

'Some families might not have the money to make a fresh meal every day that's healthy.' (Young person)

'Actually this family turned up at the end of it and they were given the ingredients, and then two or three days in they were saying, "Are we still getting food?" One of the mums was saying, "Oh my car packed up at the start of the week, I can't believe it, this is excellent, we've had our teas all week".' (Youth worker).

A world of difference: East Ayrshire Council and Yipworld

East Ayrshire Council planned and delivered a project in partnership with community-based youth work organisation Yipworld. A mixed age group of young people who Yipworld had supported during lockdown were identified as those who would benefit most during school holidays. They included young people requiring transition support to move into S1.

The 5-day-a-week Summer Stuff programme was delivered in Yipworld's centre and incorporated practical and physical activities. Young people prepared food on-site and took this home to eat with their family, while recipe ideas and ingredient packs encouraged cooking to carry on at home.

Staff, young people and a parent described some of the project's activities and the impact on them and their families.

- **26 young people took part in the project.**
- **All were referred to the project by youth workers as young people known to be a risk of food insecurity or learning loss in the holiday period.**
- **The majority (25 out of 26) of young people attended 'all' (3) or 'most' (22) of the sessions offered.**

Choice and enjoying a fresh healthy diet

'After we identified the children, [Youth Worker] phoned the parents and said, 'Look this is what we're doing, are you interested?' They were so keen, I think it was, 'Oh my God here's something for the kids to do,' even if it was for only one morning or whatever... they had a bit of focus on their week and a bit of routine, and they had to get up early to be here for 10 o'clock... because normally they're lying about, and they'll be in their pyjamas or whatever.' (Youth Worker)

'So that was the whole idea... we have been giving the families ideas for recipes and things like that, ingredients to make, like today it's lasagne, and some garlic bread, salad as well. It's fresh produce that they've been getting, you know, to take away with them. And actually some of them have been making it and taking photos on their phones, so it is working.' (Youth Worker)

'Yeah, they normally give us like food bags to make food at home [mentions the tomato and potato stew] it's just really good and it's fun to make, me and my mum's made it three times.' (Young person)

'Yes, we got recipes and things sent home, we also got wee bags and that as well, so we could make spaghetti bolognese or like a chicken dinner or something. So we used to sit and prep the dinner, which was great.' (Parent)

'I helped mum make the casserole the first time I got it.' (Young person)

'My eldest son, he would be in charge of doing the bigger tasks obviously, and the girls would be in charge of prepping and putting into the pots and that or measuring things. So they were in charge of doing stuff like that and showing and things... We made everything that came home... it absolutely benefitted the whole family.' (Parent)

Opportunities to contribute, develop skills and increase confidence

'So we were telling them how much money it cost [for certain meals] and stuff like that and we gave them all the prices and they had to work it out themselves. But that was a major shock to them how cheap it was.' (Youth Worker)

'We've got two boys that come in and they take pictures of the stuff they've made at home and bring it back and they're quite proud showing us the stuff they've made.' (Youth Worker)

'If it's new young people, they're quite timid to get involved. But then as the weeks go on, you can see they're getting more involved, they're getting a wee bit more confident.' (Youth Worker)

'I would say definitely their confidence is a big one, but when you're talking about skills for life and with the cooking, you can see that starting to progress as well. It's simple stuff, well it's simple to us, but using a fork and knife and eating at a table. But you can see as the weeks have gone on, they're much better at using their knife and fork and cutting up their food.' (Youth Worker)

'It's actually shocked me how well it's gone – how much of a difference you can actually see, the likes of their cooking. It gives them confidence not just in the cooking, but they're determined to go back home and try and make it themselves and show us. Aye it's been different, but it's definitely been worthwhile.' (Youth Worker)

Learning about food, cooking and healthy diets

'So what we wanted to do was say, 'Look you don't need to spend a lot of money on a meal for a family really you don't, it is about adding vegetables. If the kids don't like vegetables it's about grating the carrots through the mince, they don't know.' (Youth Worker)

'Some of the things I had maybe [made] before aye, there was a few things, is it stroganoff or something? I was trying to figure out how to make that, but it was a new recipe and I was like, 'I've never made this before.' But it wasnae hard, and it wasnae difficult, but it was a challenge if you know what I mean?' (Parent)

'Recently we did a hidden sugar and hidden fat game, and it was surprising how much fat and sugar were in some meals.' (Young person)

'Some of the things cost like only like 50p or 75p.' (Young person)

Homework: The South Lanarkshire approach

The South Lanarkshire pilot project was delivered by the Youth Family Team who form part of the region's multi-agency Pathfinder partnership. Activities were delivered remotely, taking place in the home. Young people received a weekly delivery of food and activities supported by online resources, phone support from your workers and digital group sessions. A varied programme was delivered including cooking, horticulture and fitness as well as issue-based work such as community health. The aim was to provide opportunities to build relationships and develop resilience, alongside activities to address learning loss during the summer holidays.

- **29 young people participated in the project (10 males, 19 females).**
- **Participants were 12-16 years old, most were aged 12-13 years (19 of the 29).**
- **They were referred to the project by children's services, schools and local authority family support teams on the basis that they were identified as young people on the edges of care and low school attenders.**
- **The majority of YP (22 out of 29) attended 'all' (10) or 'most' (12) project sessions.**

Youth workers, young people and their families shared their experiences of the project.

Family fun during a difficult time

'As a family we really enjoyed it, we found it brought us together to do a lot of things as a group. You know, even things like [my son] would set the table while [my daughter] was plating up the curry and stuff like that so as a group.' (Parent)

'Because we haven't really spent much time together through lockdown and stuff, it gave us something to do together.' (Parent)

'... I like the cheesecake one, I made that gluten free one for my auntie because she's gluten free.' (Young person)

'The growing, she liked doing that as well, and fed that into the family. Her grandad's got an allotment so she was, "Can you put this in your greenhouse for me?" So it did involve not just the family in the house, but other family members and we would take them and say, "Oh look what Rachel's made us for dinner," and then she would get a phone call from them. Again that passed time for us, filling time during the lockdown was huge.' (Parent)

Improved family relationships

'Yeah and I enjoyed spending the time with my mum and cooking with her and that, so it kind of got me and her a bit closer, so I really liked it.' (Young person)

'I don't usually get help in the kitchen, so it's really good for me to get a lot of help in the kitchen.' (Parent)

'We thought that was something that our older daughter could maybe take a bit of a lead on. Because I think during lockdown their relationship [with siblings] took a bit of a hit as well, you know... She does have a lot of control issues, and we kind of felt that this was her own thing... that she could be actually able to take a lead on and involve her little brother if she felt like it, or us as a family and a team approach.' (Parent)

Youth work with the wider family

'I think the benefit for us is we managed to maintain and even establish at some points the relationships with the family and not just the young person... We were chatting to the parents, we were seeing the family home, so we got that whole holistic view.' (Youth worker)

'I think keeping in touch with [a named youth worker] particularly, who is a huge, huge support for our daughter, and for us as a family I have to say.' (Parent)

'I really can't rate the staff highly enough. Their input, even if there was an issue during the week, you just had to lift the phone or a question about it or anything at all, they were always there. It certainly got us through summer, because we were having a really, really tough time. I think without that things would have been way, way tougher. So it definitely, definitely got us through a lot.' (Parent)

Averting learning loss and changing mindsets towards learning

*'Having [named youth worker] as our contact was really huge for *Rachel. It didn't have to be school talk, it could have been anything, but just having that actual person and not having that complete break over the summer from everything. That was a really, really huge thing for us...'* (Parent)

*'That was probably the best part of it, because when I was at my wits' end, [named youth worker] was either at the end of the phone... or he was delivering the stuff there. I think he's going to continue that with *Claire in school.'* (Parent)

'It's helping me out because I know that I have to do something within these certain weeks on certain days, so it's helped me out a lot and it's getting me back in schedule for school.' (Young person)

'Because he was doing it himself on his own initiative, it was a lot easier for him. If we had to put him in a class, he would have struggled with that... It was good to see how he managed to engage, but I think that was the positive of it, because it was virtual and it's just mum and dad at home, then it's not like a teacher or anything trying to pressure him and stuff'. (Youth worker referring to a teenager who struggles in school)



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

The Lines Between



YouthLink Scotland, Rosebery House, 9 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh EH12 5EZ

T: 0131 313 2488 E: info@youthlinkscotland.org W: www.youthlinkscotland.org

YouthLink Scotland is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in Scotland No: 16457. Charity Ref: SC003923