



NOURISHING NORFOLK NETWORK

Evaluation by the University of East Anglia

Dr Sarah Hanson
Mrs Anna Sweeting
Dr Nikki Garner
Dr Adam Wagner
Mr Charles Handy

July 2025



Foreword

The Nourishing Norfolk programme evolved from a pilot activity in Thetford in 2020. As the leading grant maker of community activity in Norfolk, the Community Foundation has a unique view of emerging community challenges, identified through the applications we receive for grants. During Covid we had seen a growing demand from community charities to pivot their offer and provide food in addition to their usual support offer. It was clear that until households could afford to eat, they were not able to tackle issues that led them to or kept them in poverty. Our aspiration with the programme has always been to understand what levers need to be in place to help individuals and communities to thrive.

From the beginning our community conversations informed us of the difference the programme was making and that it went way beyond the provision of affordable food. There have been countless individual stories of how people have found this offer transformational in building confidence, stability and creating social networks to grow skills and connections. Many have commented on how maintaining individual dignity and building on local community assets is integral to the success the programme has achieved.

We want to understand the depth and breadth of this offer to local communities and the financial value to a wider system, in the hope that we can work in broad partnerships to ensure the continuation and evolution of this programme. We remain mindful that our communities are in the driving seat and our role is to help to break down barriers, facilitate support and help to enable the creation of the future they want to see.

Claire Mackintosh MBE
Chief Executive Officer
Norfolk Community Foundation

Acknowledgements

On behalf of my colleagues, Anna Sweeting, Nikki Garner, Adam Wagner and Charlie Handy we would like to offer the following thanks.

To Norfolk Community Foundation for commissioning the work with the support of The National Lottery. Also, our gratitude to the many stakeholders, hub leaders, shoppers who use the hubs and our lived experience group for giving their time so generously. We could not have done this without you.

It is a piece of research that has given in-depth insights into how to effectively respond to community needs and develop and roll out a community intervention on their terms. It also demonstrates the very real impact the Nourishing Norfolk network of social supermarkets has on the lives of the people of Norfolk and their communities.

Dr Sarah Hanson
Associate Professor in Community Health
University of East Anglia



Table of Contents

1. Introduction	6
1.1 What is the context in which Nourishing Norfolk was set up?	6
1.2 Who are Norfolk Community Foundation?	7
1.3 What is the Nourishing Norfolk Network and how does the model work?	7
1.4 Are all the food hubs the same?	9
1.5 How did the research team evaluate the model used for Nourishing Norfolk Network?	11
1.6 Data collection	11
1.7 Shopper advisory group	12
2. What did the evaluation demonstrate in terms of a delivery model?	13
2.1 Support people to move at a pace that suits them to the next point	13
2.2 Communities serve themselves, creating pride of place, connectivity and reduced isolation	18
2.3 Food hubs are a good place to introduce wider health support and have potential in the prevention space	22
2.4 Platform for individual growth	24
2.5 Safe place for disability or difference	27
2.6 A model that can respond to a crisis	28
2.7 Reduces a sense of financial pressure	29
2.8 Basic food needs are met with dignity	32
2.9 Healthier diets, increased vegetable and fruit intake and growing foods	34
3. What needed to be in place to make Nourishing Norfolk happen?	37
3.1 Offering affordable food, a core range and reliable supply	37
3.2 The community is empowered, maintains control and sets direction	40
3.3 A person-centred approach	41
3.4 Funded and secure	43
3.5 Volunteer workforce	44
4. Who benefits from Nourishing Norfolk?	47
5. What role did Norfolk Community Foundation play to enable and evolve this model?	51
5.1 Pace and agility	51

5.2 Asset Based Community Development	52
5.3 Convening, mobilising action and leadership	55
5.4 Innovation.....	58
6. What is the wider learning for Norfolk Community Foundation?	59

1.Introduction

1.1 What is the context in which Nourishing Norfolk was set up?

Food insecurity (also sometimes called food poverty, and more latterly, food and nutrition insecurity (Simelane & Worth, 2020)) is when a family or individual struggles to have enough to eat. In high income countries (such as the UK), one definition is, “the uncertainty and insufficiency of food availability and access that are limited by resource constraints, and the worry or anxiety and hunger that may result from it” (Loopstra et al., 2019).

The Food insecurity tracker (The Food Foundation, 2024) (an online survey of 6,177 adults in the United Kingdom conducted in June - July 2024 YouGov Plc) demonstrates particular populations who are food insecure. For example, whilst 7.2 million adults (13.6% of households) experienced food insecurity in June 2024 and 2.5 million adults (4.8% of households) reported not eating for a whole day because they could not afford or get access to food, 41.9% of households in receipt of Universal Credit reported experiencing food insecurity and households with a mental health condition and single adult households with children were more than twice as likely to be food insecure than those without any such condition.

In the UK, the recommended healthy, balanced diet is represented in the Eatwell Guide (Buttriss, 2016) which visually represents the amounts and composition of each of the five main food groups (fruits and vegetables, dairy and alternatives, protein foods, starchy carbohydrates and oil and spreads) and discretionary foods in order to meet the UK macro- and micro-nutrient recommendations in a sustainable way. The most recent data from the Food Foundation’s Broken plate report (The Food Foundation, 2025) starkly shows that the price of healthier foods continues to increase (at twice the rate in the past two years) and are more than twice as expensive per calorie than less healthy foods. As well as increasing in price, healthier foods are less available. On average, children consume less than half the recommended amount of fruit and veg but twice the recommended amount of sugar. The UK Food strategy will be developed in 2025 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/leading-food-experts-join-government-food-strategy-to-restore-pride-in-british-food>) with one of its aims: to provide more easily accessible and affordable healthy food to tackle diet-related ill health; helping to give children the best start in life and help adults live longer healthier lives.

Social supermarkets have emerged recently in the UK as an alternative and more progressive solution to emergency supplies in food banks. They aim to provide a more sustainable long-term solution by offering affordable nutritious food. Primarily they sell ‘food surplus’ that is not sellable in mainstream supermarkets (mislabelled, damaged, near sell by dates etc), prices are heavily discounted, often symbolic, and target consumers such as those on low-incomes (Saxena & Tornaghi, 2018). The organisation of these varies, for example some run on a membership basis with different levels of support and where there is space, some also offer community spaces, cafes and advice hubs. It is suggested that they represent a welcome shift from the food bank model by offering more choice, are potentially less stigmatising, and may contribute towards healthy nutritional

intakes (Mulrooney et al., 2023). Importantly the social supermarkets model does away with pre-conceived ideas of food support recipients as passive citizens and is more mindful of the agency of members. They can also be operated side by side with food bank provision (Ranta, 2024). A recent international review which piloted new social supermarkets in a partnership between academics, a social enterprise and two government agencies developed a rubric to define the service elements of a social supermarket (Pettman et al., 2023): Food and grocery provision (including dignified provision and nutritious food); Organisational model (including partnerships, sustainability and workforce capacity); Target groups (who accesses?) and Pathways out of food insecurity and social services (including social connection, access to support, opportunities for learning and skills and reconnection with food).

There are no national data on the nature and extent of social supermarkets, and to date they have not been extensively researched in the UK. There are 396 Affordable Food Clubs, many of which are social supermarkets, in the Feeding Britain network (<https://feedingbritain.org/>) providing vital support in communities across the UK.

1.2 Who are Norfolk Community Foundation?

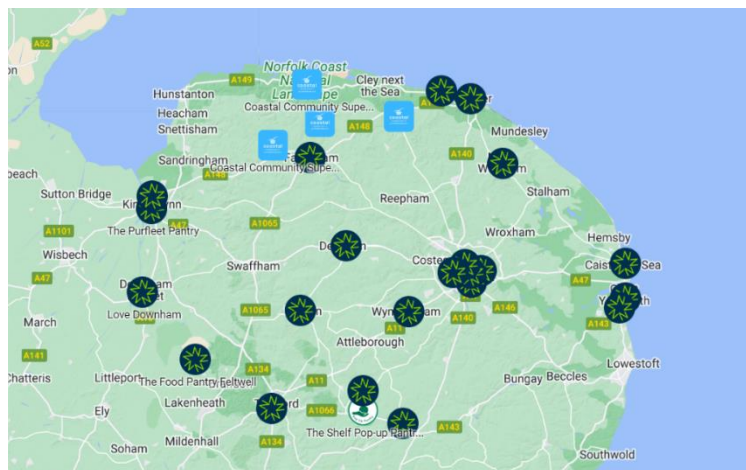
Norfolk Community Foundation (NCF) describes themselves as an, “independent local charity helping ordinary people do extraordinary things that make our local communities thrive, and improve the lives of people who live there. We provide local funding and support that ensures that small local charities and voluntary groups can continue and grow, providing essential care, support and opportunity for the most vulnerable in our communities. All funds raised are invested in Norfolk to make a real difference to local lives. Led by our local knowledge and insight, we direct support to where it is most needed.” (Norfolk Community Foundation website - [About | Norfolk Community Foundation](#)). Since 2005, when The Foundation was set up, NCF has invested £50 million in Norfolk communities through awarding over 17,000 grants to more than 3,000 local organisations.

1.3 What is the Nourishing Norfolk Network and how does the model work?

NCF sought to work with grassroot organisations to investigate food insecurity at the local level and design community asset-based approaches to respond to specific community needs and available resources (Norfolk Community Foundation, 2023).

Starting with a pilot social supermarket in Thetford, The Burrell Shop, was launched using a social supermarket model provided by Feeding Britain. This was seen as successful and led to NCF developing their own concept of what a social supermarket could look like in Norfolk. They created the idea of a ‘food hub’: a place where people could access affordable food and support to help escape food insecurity in the future. Working with Norfolk County Council’s Office of Data and Analytics (NODA), NCF identified 10 locations where food support would have the biggest impact. From this, NCF began to build the UK’s first centralised affordable food hub network.

Established in 2022, the Nourishing Norfolk Network, led by NCF, has been working with local partners to develop food hubs across Norfolk's most deprived neighbourhoods. The network aims to provide affordable groceries to thousands of people in Norfolk, whether they are in a densely populated city or a sparsely populated rural village. It now includes 26 food hubs, each operated by different charities and organisations with unique characteristics responding to the needs of their local communities.



NCF provided initial seed funding for each hub to cover a staff member for two years and to cover infrastructure costs (venue space, shelves) and initial food supplies. The Network team includes a Coordinator, Food Strategy Development Manager and a Warehouse Supervisor as well as accessing the wider NCF team (such as finance, administration and 'giving' team). The network is overseen by the Chief Executive, Claire Mackintosh MBE and by the NCF Board of Trustees.

Beyond providing initial funding, the network delivers a range of support and activities for the food hubs. These include:

- **Wider funding** - the Network directed a range of centrally secured funding to the hubs including Household Support Fund and Volunteer support funds. Most recently, nine of the food hubs have received funding for growing projects. In their wider activities as VCSE groups, the food hub organisations can also access other NCF grant funding.
- **Warehouse and logistics** - following hub feedback that sourcing regular, high quality food at affordable prices was becoming increasingly difficult, the Foundation established a Nourishing Norfolk warehouse. Starting first in a pilot warehouse space on the Norfolk Showground provided by the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association, NCF developed the offer of centralised ambient food provision. Then as a result of a partnership with a local firm, Norse Group, Nourishing Norfolk were able to find a space and support with logistics to operate the warehouse making Nourishing Norfolk the only affordable network in the UK with its own supply and distribution model (Norfolk Community Foundation, 2023).
- **Skills support and pro bono professional services** - NCF offer a range of skill sets within the foundation and also foster access to pro bono support from professionals including legal, financial or fundraising expertise.
- **Opportunities to share learning, expertise and excess food supplies** - this includes monthly meetings either online or in person, a Whatsapp group for food hub staff and a recent online portal of resources

- A voice for the food hubs to raise awareness and future investment - this has included at a national [e.g. Nourishing Norfolk were featured on BBC Radio 4 Food Programme with cook and TV host Delia Smith (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001wxpl>) and local level (e.g. at The Royal Norfolk Show, a large county agricultural show with approximately 80,000 attendees in 2024 and 2025. Photographs below.)]



Photo credit: EDP James Weeds



By November 2024, the 26 food hubs in place across Norfolk enabled **35,445 people** to access affordable food with **13,852 households** across Norfolk signed up to their local hub. As part of these households, this included **12,782 children** aged 0-17 years. On average, people saved **52% off the average basket of food**.

1.4 Are all the food hubs the same?

While the individual food hubs in the Nourishing Norfolk network share the common goal of providing affordable food, each food hub is unique in how they were set-up to achieve this. Each was established within their specific communities, responding to the local needs

and assets available.

Some are part of existing community centres run by an overarching charitable trust, such as The Burrell Shop (Charles Burrell Centre), Shrublands Food Club (Shrublands Centre) and Phoenix Larder (Phoenix Centre). Others were set up as an additional offering as part



of a wider charity, faith based organisation or school provider, for example Sally's Store and Sheringham food club (Salvation Army), Love Downham (Swan Youth Project), Food Cabin (Wellspring Family Centre Church), Holt Food Club (operated by Coastal Community Supermarket, hosted by Independence Matters, support for adults with learning disabilities) and Earlham Community Shop (Earlham Early Years Nursery). Other food hubs were started by individuals who recognised and responded to their local community need, such as The Pantry in Kenninghall and Caister Community Larder. Each provides a unique offer that meets the needs of the community, from market town, to coastal town to rural village. For example in rural communities mobile supermarkets operate as 'pop ups' in small village halls in approximately six to eight villages.

Opening times vary greatly, ranging from 2 to 40 hours per week, and operational models differ. For example, Soul Foundation Social Supermarket does not price individual food products, but instead asks shoppers to pay £4 on a bag basis and puts limitations on certain items such as cleaning products. Whereas many of the shops, such as The Feed Social Supermarket, use a points based system (e.g. 10 points equates to £1) and these are then converted to a value at the till.



The hubs also vary as to whether they are open to all within the community, or to a set number of people specifically experiencing poverty or hardship for a finite period. For example, Magdalen Street Pantry, run by St Giles Trust, is targeted in their approach and supports about 60 members at any time during which the members receive a weekly shop (for £3.50) and personal face to face support to help address underlying issues contributing to poverty. With the aim of promoting independence, members are encouraged to move on after the six-month intensive support programme. This differs to the Food Cabin in Dereham, who actively advertise that all are welcome and shoppers can come as many times as they need.

Hubs all seek to provide 'wrap around support' in some form, ranging from an informal conversation over a cup of tea with a volunteer or fellow shoppers, or inviting wider services such as Citizens Advice Bureau, Reed Wellbeing Health Checks, Age UK Norwich or Norfolk Community Law Service to provide advice and support sessions.

Some have also been able to offer dentist appointments or health checks, alongside school uniform or cooking classes. There is much evidence of innovative practice, such as the Purfleet Pantry which has secured an allotment with a large shed and polytunnels. Through this it is hoping to support 30 families via a local school partnership to support STEM learning (Science, Technology, English and Maths), cookery projects as well as supplying fresh produce into the hub.

“The food hubs come at it from their own perspectives and they have their own kind of organisational aims beyond the obvious food side. Some will have a bit more of a skills and employment vibe about them just because that's how they've pushed themselves and others will focus more on well-being or young people. You know, they all vary.” (NCF staff involved in very early stages of set-up)

1.5 How did the research team evaluate the model used for Nourishing Norfolk Network?

In 2024, a team of researchers, led by Dr Sarah Hanson and Mrs Anna Sweeting from the University of East Anglia were commissioned to evaluate the Nourishing Norfolk Network. The mixed methods evaluation aimed to identify: Firstly, the difference that the programme has made to people and communities in Norfolk. Secondly, the opportunities that exist to further develop the programme to meet existing or emerging needs. Thirdly, the social value and impact of support leveraged through the programme and finally, what can be learned from the way that the programme has been set up and delivered to inform NCF's wider work. Institutional ethical approval for the evaluation was gained from the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences Research Ethics Subcommittee in August 2024 (Ref: ETH2324-2961) and fieldwork took place between September 2024 and March 2025.

1.6 Data collection

The aim of the data collection was to be as inclusive as possible with the participants and to seek maximum diversity in views. From the network of 26 hubs the team completed a deep exploration with nine hubs across urban, coastal, rural and small market towns for maximum representation. This involved spending time in and interviewing food hub leaders, staff, volunteers and shoppers at these sites: Soul Foundation (Norwich), Purfleet (King's Lynn), Coastal community (Wells next sea and mobile - with visits to Holt, Wicken Green and Walsingham), Shrublands (Gorleston), The Cabin (Dereham), Love Downham (Downham Market), The Shelf (Diss), The Pantry (Kenninghall), Magdalen Street Pantry (Norwich). It also involved The Food Club at Sheringham.

The team also interviewed a range of stakeholders for their perspective. This included suppliers, Ankose and a local butcher, Norse staff, Public health, Local government, Feeding Britain and Real Farming. Details of the number of participants for the interviews, which ranged from between 15 to 60 minutes are below:

- Stakeholder interviews - 20 people
- Food Hub leader interviews - 13 people
- Volunteer interviews - 12 people

- Shoppers - 22 people

For those hubs not involved in the deep engagement the team ran focus groups (which we called tea time conversations) after two Noursishing Norfolk online network meetings. Five people came to each group. They lasted approximately 40 minutes. Three hubs did not respond to the invitation (or the follow up email) and one did not attend on the day.

Two creative workshops were held with shoppers to articulate, through the use of collage, what the food hubs meant to them. In total, twelve people came to these and the workshops lasted approximately two hours.

Participants were reimbursed with £25 gift cards for interviews and £50 for attending the creative workshops. Participants appeared to be more than willing to contribute to this work and some even commented that it had been an enjoyable and worthwhile experience. No participants expressed distress, even when shoppers, volunteers and hub leaders were speaking about difficult life experiences.

Additionally, the research team completed multiple surveys for the Social Return on Investment (SROI) with 76 shoppers, 21 food hub staff, 15 volunteers, 7 NCF staff and 5 Norse staff members. This enabled the research team to be in the hubs for long periods of time helping participants fill in the surveys and also to observe interactions in the shops and get a real sense of the profile of the shoppers and how the hubs operated.

1.7 Shopper advisory group

For a sense check the research team formed a lived experience advisory group of four people, meeting approximately four times, who helped guide the approach, language and interpretation of the findings. They also helped with the SROI.

2. What did the evaluation demonstrate in terms of a delivery model?

2.1 Support people to move at a pace that suits them to the next point

- ❖ **88% of shoppers felt very supported or supported** using the food hub
- ❖ **96% of shoppers reported the staff made them feel comfortable or very comfortable** using the food hub
- ❖ **99% were returning shoppers** giving good evidence of people feeling comfortable in using the hubs.
- ❖ **62% shoppers have a better understanding of where to go for advice and help** (A statistically significant increase was reported when comparing the means of how shoppers had a better understanding of where to go for help and advice, before using the social supermarket compared to now using the social supermarket)

There was no typical shopper using the food hubs. The research team observed and talked to people in a high levels of crisis, those who also used food banks, working families, people 'just about managing' and people receiving state support.

"The sense we got is that we were dealing with the people who weren't the type of people who were going to turn up to a building like I'm in now and say, can you help me? They it's a very different interaction in a very, you know, very close to people's home." (Stakeholder)

It was apparent that many of the people had highly complex needs, there was a high level of vulnerability and shoppers were in the lowest socioeconomic deciles. Hubs are, in the main, placed in areas of high deprivation. For example, The Purfleet Pantry sits within West Lynn, a borough rated as the 134th (out of 317) most deprived local authority and 56% of households are reported to be deprived in at least one dimension ([ONS Census, 2021](#)). Additionally, 23.4% of residents hold no formal qualifications (one of the highest proportions in the country) ([ONS Census, 2021](#)). In terms of health profile (including wider determinants), it has significantly higher than England average for hospital admissions for self-harm and alcohol related conditions and significantly lower GCSE attainment levels ([PHE, 2019](#)). The Purfleet pantry is part of a larger organisation, the Purfleet Trust, West Norfolk's homelessness charity. The pantry sits next to a large charity shop which increases the foot fall. It is open daily with a constant throughput. Placed in the heart of the community and on the 'school run' many shoppers 'popped in' to check what was available, but importantly commented that it was also for a friendly face and a chat. The pantry also provides multiple other services.

Shrublands Community Food Club, a hub in the heart of a highly deprived housing estate in Gorleston provide a range of opening hours, including after work evening sessions, to allow for the range of shoppers who use the hub. While at the hub, the researcher met shoppers with differing needs and reasons for using the hub. For example, one lady who was gluten free and coming on her day off as it was so much cheaper to purchase products essential to her diet; another in ill physical health; a single mum who was about to be evicted from her home; a couple who shopped and started volunteering regularly due to poor mental health and clearly were flourishing through their involvement.

The following quotes and the case study give a sense of the diversity of shoppers that the hubs are seeing. What was clear was that while many were living in poverty and in higher areas of deprivation, the food hubs were reaching other poorly accessed populations such as elderly populations struggling with loneliness and families living just above the free school meal requirements (described by hubs as 'just about managing') with working parents struggling to make ends meet. Further, hubs were reaching those living in rural poverty.

"When we launched, we had a group of ladies that come to seated exercise and on the face of it, do not look like they need a social supermarket. But when you start to hear their stories that they're living in a house that they've had since the 60s, that's a pain to heat. They are on their own." (Hub leader)

"I think that there is a layer of households who work who, unfortunately, just tip over the threshold for support. For me they are the most vulnerable." (Volunteer)

"I just think the rural outreach, reaching those corners that are quite invisible." (Stakeholder)

"I'm off work. I'm being made homeless, you know? So everything is ...it's not just the food element, it's the social element as well. You know, these people, they are so lovely, so welcoming and so non-judgmental, which is the most important thing I must say. But I use it predominantly because I literally don't have a penny." (Shopper)

"Being retired and you know the house is sorted. But you kind of still feel like nowadays you never know what's going to happen, you never know what could kind of upend everything. So I guess, like, it's that sort of, you know, safety net I guess would be what I'm saying this place is." (Shopper)

"We don't want to overuse it. I am kind of wary that there are people in greater need." (Shopper)

"We're in the centre of the community, we're really local, we're easy access for people, we're on the school run. So for people who perhaps wouldn't have considered using us, they do use us because they see where we are. I think the fact that we're so welcoming and all the staff talk to shoppers, you know, in a really friendly manner." (Hub leader)

“We're getting those people that are struggling with all kinds of problems and they're coming to the shop because they really cannot make it, be that people that are not employed, they're on Universal Credit and they come in because their money is not lasting the month and they are really struggling. We're getting the old people who obviously lost one of the benefits. What's really sad is people that work really, really hard, you know, mums and dads that work really hard and their wages aren't getting to the end of the month. And so, yes, we'll see those sorts of people.” (Hub leader)

“The thing that stands out for me is the fact that a lot of these people come in and they feel that no one cares for them. And when you extend that hand of friendship and actually understand their problems you can offer them the food grants. I had a gentleman say to me what you're going to *give* it to me and it's like this disbelief that anyone would help him.” (Hub leader)

“There are some people that you would hope wouldn't have to use us in the long term and it's kind of a stop gap while they need us. But then you go to somewhere like [rural village] which is full of old people and they're using it for a different need. Their need is more of being able to access fresh fruit and vegetables. I wouldn't like to think that it was just a short stop gap for them. You know, I think they really would miss having that and I think it's a bit of a lifeline for some people. We have some people that sort of, you know, really look forward to it and they may not see that many people in the week.” (Hub leader)

Case study:



Increase in own agency - Amanda is in her mid 60s. She had worked for many years in a senior role in the public sector supporting vulnerable people. After being part of many restructures she decided to take early retirement. Soon afterwards, the cost of living crisis hit with the war in Ukraine and rising utility and food prices, and suddenly her fixed income did not meet her outgoings. Panic set in as she struggled to see how she could manage until her state pension started and she didn't qualify for any state support.

Her heating was turned off, and she had several months when she hadn't eaten a proper meal. She also needs to eat gluten free products which are more expensive. She took a friend to the food hub, based in a small market town. She said, “I didn't think it was for people like me, I didn't think it was right to be using it.” The second time she took her friend, she said, “I thought, get over yourself and then it was amazing the support I got. They always point me to gluten free products that I might have missed and the vegetables are really important to me.” She said of her experience, “this has really wobbled me as I have always been independent and self-reliant and now it is tough. I have worked for over 40 years and how can you have done that and be my age and you can't put the heating or hot water on. The more I have come, the more I feel greeted like a long lost friend. There is no judgement. For me, life is a series of hurdles that you have to find a solution to. This is the solution to my current situation. It is very important to me to have a sense of control over my life and this place has given me a solution and has helped my sense of wellbeing so that I can manage other parts of my life.” (Shopper)

Consistent across the hubs, was the welcoming and friendly experience with **96% reporting that the staff and volunteers in the food hubs made them feel comfortable. Shoppers (88%) felt supported** no matter what the challenge they faced was, with support often provided within the hub through the staff or volunteers or an agency visiting the hub (e.g. CAB or Age UK). Shoppers feel safe and are supported in 'their place' at their pace to move to the next step, whatever that might be.

"People will tell you in that safe space that you know it's become their shop more than ours now it's their space. You'll often find that someone that we know and see regularly will bring others in that need support that haven't been ready to speak up."
(Hub manager)

"Just everyone's got a massive list of challenges in their lives, a lot of people have got huge challenges that we couldn't even comprehend and just to know that the simple factor of someone's period products is sorted, those little 'tick ticks', they don't have to worry about that and they can also access spaces that are set up with kindness and compassion." (Stakeholder)

"My outlook is the biggest thing because I'd met brick wall after brick wall after brick wall, so I will say that you know, to actually have been at the point where you can start making choices. Feel supported. All of that. I think that's it's wonderful what they've done." (Shopper)

"Fruit, vegetables and bread because we live on that sort of thing and [grandson] likes to get a packet of biscuits every now and again. And it is the support as well and being directed to different places and things that you don't know exist until somebody actually says well were you aware? All of that has been, well, we're trying to build ourselves back up again and we're being supported while we do it."
(Shopper)

"I don't ever come out. I stay in the house because I have anxiety. So obviously coming out into the the big wild and coming here. I mean, (volunteer) is so sweet. She's so funny. it's helped me get out of the house knowing that I can look forward to actually going shopping and going to do something by myself for once."
(Shopper)

"The most important thing is we are still alive, and that's how serious it got. The most important thing has been that we can get fresh fruit, vegetables and actually live, and have the choice, and feel like we have choices and you know, and that we're supported, that there's people around us. All of it, the whole of it." (Shopper)

"We are able to get two bags of coal because we got a grant for the coal. So it's £3.50 a bag where it should be £9 a bag. We have no heating or hot water at home and so that means we can light our fire at the very least, the chimney runs through [grandsons] room and it heats his room... I don't have any heating in my room at all." (Shopper)

Where the hubs are not able to provide the support within, staff and volunteers were signposting or referring to other services and **62% of shoppers reported have a better understanding of where to go for advice and help**. Each hub has a range of partners that they work with locally.

"I am being sign posted and supported. I feel a little bit more upbeat. I have more energy. I'm not as ill as I was. I'm getting proper food. I know that I can feed little man and that's seriously important to me and he has choices, and he's happy."
(Shopper)

I've accessed, like I say, the benefits check. Citizen's advice bureau, because I didn't actually know there was a CAB in Diss, I just knew that everywhere else had just gone and that I couldn't get an appointment in Thetford... But the hub have also pointed me towards different people, different experts who can answer questions."
(Shopper)

"We've been keen to get our services into the Nourishing Norfolk network... because from my perspective the people that it helps are the exact same people that have the sort of problems that we help to tackle. The Nourishing Norfolk offer gives us is a great opportunity to kind of hunt for those people." (Stakeholder VCSE)

"It's of course massively beneficial for them to be able to have advice in one area somewhere that they can trust somewhere that they know, somewhere that they feel comfortable." (Stakeholder)

"It is really important that when we're referring people or when we're signposting people, that we have confidence in the place we're referring them to. And we do with [food hub] without a doubt, so that is a really good partnership." (VCSE)

"We are now a trusted partner for mental health because we're doing more signposting into statutory people, they're now noticing us and sending people our way, so it's actually they're like, oh, OK, there is this, this asset out there." (Hub leader)

"Utilising the links that we've already got within the community, the fact that we're established, we've been here a long time." (Hub leader)

The surveys indicated that whilst many were accessing other support services, almost half said they were not utilising other services which represents an opportunity to provide other 'wrap around' services. See Table below.

Other services that shoppers have received support from in the last year	Percentage ¹
Citizens Advice	17.6%
Law	1.3%
Food Bank	22.4%
Health & Social	14.5%
Age UK	6.6%
Advice	5.3%
Cooking	5.3%
Money	6.6%
Prefer not to say	0%
None	46.5%
Other	3.9%

¹ Sample (n=76) shoppers from the Social Return on Investment survey. Shoppers could choose more than one category

2.2 Communities serve themselves, creating pride of place, connectivity and reduced isolation

- ❖ **272 volunteers serving their local communities with 44,203 volunteer hours each year.**
- ❖ **80% of shoppers felt an increased sense of belonging and community** (A statistically significant increase was reported when comparing the means of how shoppers felt they belonged to the community, before using the social supermarket compared to now using the social supermarket)
- ❖ **56% of shoppers felt less lonely and and isolated** (A statistically significant increase was reported when comparing the means of how lonely shoppers felt, before using the social supermarket compared to now using the social supermarket)
- ❖ **78% of food hub staff and 73% of volunteers felt an increased sense of belonging and community**

It would not be a stretch to see the foodhubs as a catalyst for transformational social change in communities. There was certainly much evidence of hubs being part of the social 'glue' of the community. This is how a hub leader described this.

"I think we've given people's sense of belonging and we restored their faith in humanity a little bit because of the genuine kindness, it's that sense of we're not alone, they feel good about the fact that they are listened to, they might then try and do something for someone else so pass on that type of kindness. For people to know that out there, there are people who really do care about me, and I am valued and I am lovable and that then hopefully has a knock-on effect about how they interact with other people. I can't prove that. I've no evidence for it, but that's the

sense that that I get is that we are hopefully changing the fabric of society a little bit.” (Hub leader)

Feeling a sense of community and engaging in the social interaction essential to human health is demonstrated in the quotes and case study illustrated below.

“You could get cheap stuff from Lidl but you’ve got to drive there or get there on the bus. You’re not going to talk to anyone, are you?” (Hub leader)

“Connecting. It’s a place to connect. Whether that’s between a caseworker and a client or for them to feel more connected to themselves on their own personal journey. And our sessions connect with other people in the same position as them, which is really powerful for them and then for me, rewarding.” (Hub leader)

“I’ve got ADHD so I get really overwhelmed when there’s too many things going on and when you’ve got loads of people and you’ve got all this big shop to do, it’s nice just to come in here. It’s been a big stepping stone for me. It has changed my world view in life.” (Shopper)

Case study - feeling part of the community



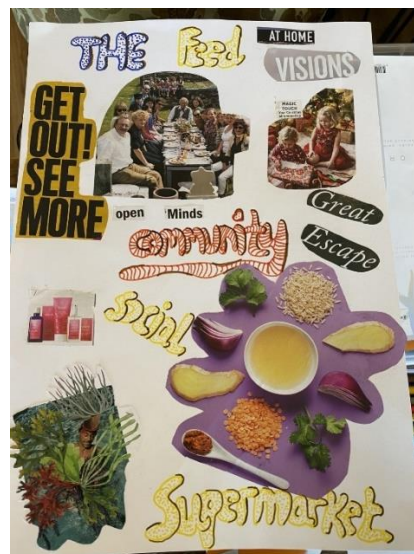
Brenda uses one of the pop-up shops in a small village. Initially she brought her dad to the shop. He was widowed and lonely. They visited a couple of times and as their confidence grew, stopped a little longer to sit and to have a cup of coffee at the communal table. It has done the world of good for both of them, she said, “It’s just brilliant, I mean, the first time I came, I think me and dad stopped maybe 5 minutes and we were in and out but the next time we stopped a bit longer and then we got chatting to people and getting to know and see the same people. That little bit of friendship.” Brenda had been off-work a long time and realised she had become isolated too and had lost confidence in going out. She got the bus to a market town to do their shopping but was finding mixing with people increasingly hard. She said to us, “I was stuck indoors and coming down here, talking to everybody and you know, it is just getting out of the house. And confidence as well, when I used to get on the bus I would sit with my head down, but now if someone looks at me I’ll talk back, I never use to, I’d just sit there. Like I say, it’s not just the shopping, it’s the meeting up.” (Shopper)

When asked to tell the research team in three words what they valued about their hub, words that are linked to positive human interactions and connection dominated (see word cloud).



Figure : A word cloud capturing some of the outcomes of shoppers (size of word differs according to how often stated).

A sense of community was illustrated by one participant in one of the creative collage workshops (image below). In describing their piece, they said: I was new to the area, and I didn't want my family to miss out and a big thing was the Santa at Christmas which they did for us. I feel "at home" here, they are very open minded, and the place is a great escape. I value the healthy food and toiletries and the wellbeing support.



A sense of place and pride of place was illustrated through the qualitative work:

"It was amazing to me that I would be able to help people in the place I work. I'm very proud to be from Norfolk and wanted to serve my community and learn about support available." (Hub leader)

"I think it has brought the community together. I've seen people in there that I've never seen them in all my life and they live near us." (Shopper)

"We are plugging that little gap of where you used to 50 years ago go into the post office, talk to the person behind the counter, get your sugar, have a gossip. I don't think it is food anymore. I think it was food at the beginning. I think now it's the sense of community and a safe place." (Hub leader)

"I really feel like it's the heart of the community. Which I would say that our clients and volunteers and staff all agree with. How connected our clients feels to the community is part of the assessment criteria at the three month and six-month mark to see how we're doing. And we have overwhelmingly high percentages for people feeling like they are connected to their community and coming here has really helped with that." (Hub leader)

"Since the cafe is open it's all part of it. Yeah, it's the community for us, us volunteers and the people, the members that we get in, they come to the cafe as well and they always say this is fantastic." (Volunteer)

"I think it's a bit of a lifeline for some people. We have some people that really look forward to it and they may not see that many people in the week. So they do their shop, which is really important in those villages because there is nowhere else that they can get those goods and then they come and have a cup of tea and a chat with people and a catch up. And you know, everyone's kind of looking out for each other, and that's really lovely. People who didn't know each other before. But now, I can hear them kind of looking out, you know, and making sure each of them are OK and giving them each other their phone numbers if they need each other which is really nice." (Hub leader)

"Otherwise, it's just we're giving people access to low-cost food and it's not that, it's the conversations, it's the fact that we might be the only person that someone speaks to each day. It might, it might be just knowing that relationships are being built and formed over weeks because there's routine and people know." (Stakeholder)

"They're more than just a shop. Like they get to know the people in there, the regular volunteers or the regular stuff. It's more of a community feel, feeling part of your community and belonging and that support. And I think the wrap around support that they can offer as well into additional groups, activities, services, I think it's all as one, isn't it." (Stakeholder)

"We've seen a small army of people across the country of big hearted, totally compassionate, community minded people becoming retail experts and professional bargain hunters because poverty and a lack of access to affordable, nutritious food has become a most pressing issue in their communities that they care so much about." (Stakeholder)

"I do see a lot of that glue being reinserted through the social supermarkets and those wrap around services." (Stakeholder)

Contributing to, and being part of, the community around the hubs was important to suppliers too. This supplier would be happy to advocate for other suppliers working with their communities in a similar way:

"The community's been good to me and over the years, and if I can help I will. This seemed to be something that I could do to help the community, and I really wanted

to do it. I find it a very rewarding thing to do. Normally you know you don't have the chance to do something for the community and this is something I can do and it's something that my shop can do. You have a sort of a good feeling for doing it. I think your staff realise that you're trying to help. I think we should try and do more and if you know something else came up that we felt that we could do I think we would do it. We would only be too pleased to."

The hubs are a unique point of connection and offer a place to reduce social isolation and foster connection across all.

2.3 Food hubs are a good place to introduce wider health support and have potential in the prevention space

- ❖ **62% of shoppers wellbeing has improved** (A statistically significant increase was reported when comparing the means of how shoppers felt their well-being had improved, before using the supermarket compared to now using the social supermarket).

Nourishing Norfolk is clearly providing a wider prevention role around health and social care. The research team could see the opportunity for the network to become prevention hubs for local communities similar to that of children's centres or family hubs. Keeping food at the forefront and as the mechanism by which people will come in, but building upon and being recognised for the prevention elements that hubs are providing through trusted relationships, a sense of belonging and wrap around support from partners in a place communities feel safe in. Local Government can clearly see the role hubs are having within this space already.

"Multipurpose community assets within areas. I was really interested with family hubs when the family hub model was being rolled out. A sort of hub and spoke model to me, the food hubs are a perfect example of a spoke where there are places that people just go on a day-to-day basis. They're very open access. They're very good spaces for families to come and be signposted to where they need to be signposted, and also get that very immediate support. Some need that on their doorstep. I would love to see greater investment in those kind of assets within communities and seeing those as a way to address multiple opportunities and challenges that might look very different from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, but can be a very sort of flexible, responsive offer to people." (Stakeholder)

"My perception would be that our social workers or/and frontline practitioners, and will refer families into those social provisions. So that is very much about a kind of prevention, helping families, helping older residents, helping people with care needs to access something locally." (Stakeholder. Local government)

"Helps offer people opportunities to address things around their housing, around their income, around employment, and so on. I think it's a place where that kind of almost social prescribing community connector role can happen." (Stakeholder)

"There are probably three different elements for me. There's something about reaching communities that perhaps don't want to or don't engage with the public sector. There's something about really supporting our practitioners and frontline workers to find the right solutions for their families and people with care needs and then kind of a bigger bit about pathways for volunteers to careers and the other elements that support skill building and community connection." (Stakeholder)

"It's a real lifeline, having it all in one place, knowing that actually when they're there, there's volunteering opportunities, there might be opportunities to link in with advice providers or to take part in other events and activities that kind of preventative work, absolutely from an organisational perspective that that will feature really highly." (Stakeholder)

"No disrespect to people who work at local authorities and councils, but it becomes caught up in layer and layer of red tape and I think the dynamics and the speed of which this has spread has been not just because it's been a success, and people believe in it. It's been because you can just get it done and there's not been a plethora of red tape. " (Stakeholder)

Adult social care at Norfolk County Council is looking to 'leverage the power of people and communities to prevent and deflect demand' through a 'Pre-Front Door Preventative Approach'. They are looking to build place-based preventative offers in partnerships. They are asking: What could communities do for themselves if professional services got out of the way, and What can communities do with some support from Social Services. These asset-based approach offers a real opportunity for synergies and partnership working in the hubs. Information on the Human Learning Systems approach being taken in Adult Social Services can be found at this [link](#). This is essentially based on the premise that people have complex needs that cut across different services and relies on the strength in communities and building alliances. This case study on [community renewal](#) might be helpful in understanding the approach: *People engage support most effectively when there is trust and a personal relationship with someone who understands their lived experience. Yet services in this neighbourhood tend to rely on referrals or self-referrals to services run by distant professionals...* Bringing together services as groups of humans rather than as generic "partner organisations"... working with residents and partners on a human level.

This stakeholder quote exemplifies why Nourishing Norfolk are well placed for this sort of alliance:

"I see Nourishing Norfolk as helping organisations like mine [local government] to work and evolve more. Giving power and freedom to those local community groups, I think they're taking that decision, making that empowerment to these very local groups. And sometimes we need our handheld to do that."

2.4 Platform for individual growth

- ❖ **55% of shoppers feel more confident** (A statistically significant increase was reported when comparing the means of how confident shoppers felt, before using the social supermarket compared to now using the social supermarket)
- ❖ **58% customers feel a greater sense of security** since using the food hub
- ❖ **37% customers feel a greater sense of control over their life** since using the food hub
- ❖ **54% of shoppers feel the things they do in life are worth while since going to the food hub**
- ❖ **56% of shopper's children have had an increase in opportunities**
- ❖ **88% of food hub staff and 50% of volunteers feel more confident**
- ❖ **76% of food hub staff and 48% of volunteer have increased skill sets in retail communication and inter-personal skills**

There was much evidence of holistic support, helping people to develop agency and supporting individuals on their pathway into independence. It is worth noting the comment by the hub leader on the time that this sort of work takes.

“It's getting people realising we're more than just one thing because people are multifaceted and that's what I'm trying to inculcate here is that it's person centred that people will come for one thing, but actually there are multiple things going on in their life to resolve. So we might support them the food. The food is just not the issue, it's everything else, isn't it, loneliness and everything. ... This is an access point and we're trying to give that wrap around care. It does take time.” (Hub leader)

“I started coming here for the food and then getting used to talking to the people in here. And then [the hub leader] said, well, what about this? And what about that? And then she really helped me with the CV. Very friendly, very informative.” (Shopper)

“It is the support as well and being directed to different places and things that you don't know exist until somebody actually says well were you're aware? All of that has been, well, we're trying to build ourselves back up again and we're being supported while we do it.” (Shopper)

“You're supporting people to have hope and to have ambition and to see opportunities, so you're not kind of just putting a sticking plaster on an issue.” (Hub leader)

“We call the shop the hook. It's really the least important thing that we do, I think. Obviously it's vital at the time for the people that come in, but generally we know the

people that are struggling to access affordable food. If there's loads of other things going on, even if it is just that they've had an unexpected bill, maybe they're on their own. That means that they don't have family to go to and therefore they'll need more community. So the food is really just, it's just a hook.” (Hub leader)

Several hub leaders and volunteers also expressed the importance of getting the balance right to ensure that support did not tip into encouraging dependence.

“We can't just keep giving people free stuff. We're not helping long-term. So the best things that we see is when we give someone £50 credit, is to help someone with their budget to know it's only £10 a week and you need to budget for your family for that. That's the kind of thing that makes you think we're actually getting somewhere. We're going to do this together as opposed to us just saying you've got credit for whoever you want. That really helps. Taking like really baby steps with people.” (Hub leader)

“It's made quite clear from the start that, you know, our role here is to help you to not need this anymore.” (Hub leader)

The following case study (Helen) illustrates the powerful nature of what the food hubs are doing in terms of offering holistic support and a pathway to independence. It is worth noting the ongoing 'light touch support' (*there is always someone to encourage me if I am down and I just need a private chat about something that is bothering me*). This requires highly skilled staff, volunteers, time and a space to do this in.

Case study - shoppers story of growth and independence for her and her child



Helen is young woman with a partner and a four-year-old daughter. She has two older grown-up children. Helen had always struggled being in crowds, finds chatting to mums outside the school gates intimidating and so has always found it difficult to find the 1:1 support she needs to grow her confidence. She has used food banks in the past, they were embarrassing but she “got over that”. She said her daughter was “living off” tinned spaghetti and she was buying the 8 for £10 meals from Iceland or anything she could throw in the oven like chips and pasta. She felt low in spirits and didn't have the drive to

cook and to make the life changes she knew she needed. She hated not having the energy to play with her daughter and inherently felt it was wrong that she wasn't eating proper food that would be good for both of them, but it all felt too complicated. Helen signed up at the Social Supermarket because she needed some food. This is her story in her own words.

“I mainly came in for the cheap shopping at first and the free fruit and vegetables and the hub leader spotted that I wasn't good, and she offered me some 1:1 support. From there I did the cooking class and learned different ways to cook. The tutor encouraged me to involve my daughter in cooking as she's more likely to eat new food and be less picky if she helps in the preparation. I bought her a little knife set and she cuts up the vegetables with me. Before, I used to just chuck frozen stuff on trays and put it in the oven. There's always good veg here I am eating a lot healthier, and she loves the fruit and veg. She likes roasted vegetables, and we were taught how to make vegetable nuggets during the school holiday class, she loves making them and dipping them in sauces. I'm making sweet potato chips tonight. I'd just run out of ideas for cooking and felt there was no reason to do it, but I had got fed up of eating the same thing every week with the 8 for £10 frozen meals. Here we learn how to make proper meals and sit down and eat it together afterwards. Coming here has given me so many opportunities, learning new things, and there is always someone to encourage me if I am down and I just need a private chat about something that is bothering me. We did Christmas dinners from scratch at one of the classes and I learned how to make proper gravy, I didn't know how to do that. I'd looked stuff up online, but it was gobbleddegook but

here they explain, and the recipes are made easier. We learned how to make cooking sauces from scratch. We learned how to make cheese sauce, and I absolutely love stuff like that. I'd had a lot of food parcels in the past and we always got chickpeas, but we learned how to make humous from the tinned chickpeas in here, just plain or with garlic but I've experimented with adding spices like smoked paprika. I brought some in here for the others to try. I know how to make a goulash and things to make with tinned tomatoes. Things like this have really perked me up a lot more, it is not as hard as I thought it was. Her older brother eats £1 pizzas, and I keep saying, get up, cook. I wish I had something like this when he was younger.

I feel much more energised now, I walk everywhere, and I have even given up smoking. We go to the woods. We packed up a picnic during the holidays. She loved it. I would never have even thought of doing that before or that a child would like that. I thought you had to take them somewhere expensive. Thanks to this place, I have been able to save little bits of money which I am using so she can have a 5th birthday party. What is nice is that she understands money. I don't want her to know things are hard, but it is also good that she also knows you can't have everything. She can see me pushing myself and that is preparing her. They can tell when something is wrong with me here and they just give me that bit of extra encouragement. I really like that, I feel that I have got friends here. Everyone is shocked at how different I am over the last year. I was the girl that sat in the corner, I wouldn't speak to people who were not familiar to me. I feel much more confident talking to people now. I am still wary, but my daughter is getting more confident and I think, if she can do it, so can I. I am a lot more relaxed. I used to be so stressed, but I wanted to do the right things for my daughter. I am now thinking with my daughter at school I can think about my future. I am helping with the community gardens and my daughter will come to that so she will know where food comes from. Because of this place and the skills I have learned I have been offered an apprenticeship. I am nervous, but I am excited for the future." (Shopper)

There were multiple examples of individual growth as a result of their involvement in the hubs amongst food hub and NCF staff, as well as volunteers. For example, **88% of food hub staff and 50% of volunteers feel more confident**. Furthermore, **76% of food hub staff and 48% of volunteer have increased skill sets in retail, communication and inter-personal skills**.

Case study - shopper moving into employment



Claire had left her role working at a nursery for 20 years after a challenging period. "I was at home doing nothing. And I kind of felt like I needed. I needed to do something, get out of the house and do something. And I'd already been to the shop as a shopper. Yeah. So I kind of bit the bullet. Very nervously bit the bullet and applied to be a volunteer". Claire said she "hit the ground running in a way because part of the volunteering is talking to people and making coffees and teas and things, but it's quite easy for me to talk to people... And then the lady that ran it, [food

hub staff] she, you know, would kind of give me little jobs and things to do to get me kind of like used to being in the shop So it could be like cleaning shelves or, you know, stocking, putting out of things like that". After a period of time, a paid position became available and Claire applied and was given the post. She described the impact it had after leaving my previous job, "my confidence had taken real you nosedive. So getting out and doing something new. Cause. I mean, I've never done retail before. Yeah, at all, because I went straight into childcare from school, so I had no, no other job. It really, really boosted my confidence and myself esteem and greatly and to try something completely different cause I mean I would never have thought of working in retail. And you know, so I'm really enjoying it now." (Hub staff)

Case study - young person benefitting from work experience



Alex is a young person who had a place at college and knew that during the course they would need to present to other people and also work in groups. He knew that his lack of confidence and anxiety was going to hold him back. He approached the food hub with a parent to ask for work experience and ended up working throughout the summer and then carried on when they were on their course.

The volunteers are all good with people and recognised Alex's needs, especially that he struggled to make decisions or to initiate work. They broke tasks down and made them specific and quickly recognised that he lacked confidence and worried about "getting it wrong". In a different and less supportive workplace he could wrongly have been labelled as lacking initiative. The change in Alex is notable. He is now applying for a part time job with an employer, for which the hub can provide a reference. He is leading small groups during placements for his college course. He interacts really well with other staff and shoppers, initiating conversations and maintaining eye contact. For the volunteers and hub leader they feel they have given him the bridge he needed to interact with people in a work and professional setting. They would be happy to do this again as it has given them all a sense of satisfaction and is rewarding to see a young person start to flourish. (Volunteer)

2.5 Safe place for disability or difference

As discussed in section 2.8, shoppers are treated with dignity. They are also seen as a safe space.

"The food hub can just be the entry point for people because it's safe. You know, it's a safe space for people and they come for the food and they leave with sort of confidence and opportunity." (Hub manager)

Food hubs support individuals from all age groups as illustrated in the survey, with respondents ranging in age from 19 to 89 years of age. Parents spoke of how much their children enjoyed visiting the hubs too.

"Every time it's open, I pop in, my daughter too, we love it." (Shopper)

The hubs evidently provided a safe place for disability or difference as explained by one woman "When I come in here, I'm not the lady in the wheelchair." Several others commented that they were comfortable in a place that accepted their, and their children's disabilities and behaviours.

"Because there's so many people in there (local supermarket), I've got about ADHD so I get really overwhelmed when there's too many things going on. And when you got loads of people and you've got all this big shop to do, it's nice just to come in here and just do the pop in, so yeah, it's nice." (Shopper)

The research team also noticed examples of highly supportive practices where small food items, such as tinned plum tomatoes and Rice Krispies had been put aside for shoppers

who especially liked these. People who needed gluten free products were also provided for and directed to new items they might like to try.

2.6 A model that can respond to a crisis

Food hubs are clearly having a wider role preventing shopper's needs escalating into crisis, whether that be food specific and avoiding use of foodbanks or more widely addressing the complexities shoppers and their families are often facing. Opportunities to provide support included supporting benefit applications, advocating on shopper's behalf through phone calls to services or accessing much needed school uniforms. The research team observed multiple examples of staff and volunteers coming alongside shoppers in distressed states, calmly unravelling what the most pressing need was, and exploring how the hub could support to help prevent further escalation. All of this was done through providing a 'hook' through food, a warm space, discretion and a cup of tea. This went a long way to support de-escalation and to help explore options to move forward. Sometimes it was just through simple acts of kindness.

"Promoting independence in adults, sometimes it's just that small act of kindness that can prevent someone falling into crisis." (Stakeholder)

It was also clear that 'light touch' mental health support is intrinsically part of the role of staff and volunteers.

"When you look at the amount of conversations I had over somebody struggling on their mental health, just in passing, they weren't referrals, they weren't solutions necessarily, but we just had a natter about that thing that's niggling them and checked in for where they were in the previous conversation, just to have to check in with somebody, I don't think you can underestimate that." (Hub leader)

De-escalation and crisis prevention was also happening through legal and housing advice, debt management, income maximisation, through partnerships with CAB, Shelter and Norfolk Community Law Service. Local Government services recognised that food hubs were reaching people that were not likely to, and that the hubs enabled much earlier intervention. Hubs also provided a place for local statutory services to refer to, which provided a stable place for a person to move out of crisis.

"I think the network feels like it kind of gives a sort of more stable base for people to access as they move in and out of crisis. How this [NN] is likely to stave off longer term problems and promote independence. There's an increase in the people in crisis who have either taken their own life or have attempted to, and there there's got to be some correlation there between hardship, lack of connection or financial pressures. It might be worth linking in with some of those kind of avoidable death types and speaking to the coroner and public health as well." (Stakeholder)

Such provision is a huge asset to the county as well as potential cost savings to statutory services and could build upon this ability and seek funding to support their continued role.

2.7 Reduces a sense of financial pressure

- ❖ **76% of shoppers worry less about being able to meet usual monthly expenses (not statistically significant)**
- ❖ **64% shoppers reported that the savings have meant they have been able to afford small things which give them or loved ones pleasure** (A statistically significant increase was reported when comparing the means of how savings made by shopping at the social supermarket have meant that shoppers could afford small things which gave them or their loved one's pleasure, before using the social supermarket compared to now using the social supermarket)

Worries about security are emotionally draining and psychologically damaging. Maslow's hierarchy of needs points us to food and housing security being the most fundamental of human needs (Maslow, 1943) . Without security people are unable to meet their more advanced needs around a sense of belonging and self-esteem.



Graphical representation of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943)

It was important therefore to see if whether money saved, however small, gave shoppers greater financial security and also opened up some enjoyment too. We found that **75% of shoppers reported reduced financial concern around their household finances**. The surveys also explored people's experience around the savings they had made from using their hub. **56% of shoppers felt that since using the hub, they had been able to give their children an increase in opportunities**. Furthermore, **64% shoppers reported that the savings have meant they have been able to afford small things which give them or loved ones pleasure**. These quotes give insight into what these financial savings meant to people.

For this shopper, the financial savings meant she could turn her heating on:

"I have got cancer, which they can't do anything about. So you know I need warmth. I can't be in a cold house...I need the warmth, I'd rather be hungry." (Shopper)

For others the savings meant they had a family trip to the beach, another could buy school uniform.

"I am able to put money towards my son's activities." (Shopper)

"You can get small treats, and you can justify having them." (Shopper)

"I am able to do more with my grandchild." (Shopper)

"Yes, helped us so that when my daughter started high school I could use the savings for her bus fare which is out of catchment (school to meet her additional needs)." (Shopper)

"They gave us woolly hats, slipper socks... they gave us deodorant, shampoo, things like that. This year, the hub's given us a flask and cup-of-soups and things like that, so you don't have to keep boiling the kettle. You can put it in a flask, it's a small reduction on your electric bill. Do you know that sort of thing? It's all important stuff." (Shopper)

"We have the expression, 'the pillow of safeness'. This place where you usually can come and find something for low price or even when they give you something for free, it's not much, but you think oh thank goodness I have some pasta on the shelf." (Shopper)

"It does make a big difference. Being able to get things where you can actually have a choice of meals in a week. It affects your emotional outlook as well. It affects everything. Yeah. Being able to stay warm, have a hot meal. Those things are imperative, and if you can't do that, it's more than that. You feel like a failure when you've got children around you. You know, they're wondering why everybody else has got this, that and the other, and you're scrambling over a meal and it makes you feel very unsuccessful when actually you are absolutely doing a lot more than other people are having to do in order to get by." (Shopper)

"It has been an absolute godsend. I can't begin to tell you where we would be without it, because I don't even want to think about that." (Shopper)

"I go once a week because I live at a distance from it so I have to consider petrol and other journeys. I combine it with another journey but we do it because we get warm, we get fed, we get, you know, a hot drink, [my grandson], gets milk or juice or a hot chocolate or whatever and he gets to play with the toys. We talk to people. Then when I go home, I then work flat out. You know, because I actually feel revived, which is not something that you would actually consider, but when you work from home and live alone." (Shopper)

"Yeah, one lady she just said that she could do baking, whereas before she wouldn't have been able to afford to. She brought us in an incredible lemon cake, actually, that she'd made with all that stuff from the supermarket. She was able to do things that she wouldn't have been able to do otherwise. That was lovely when she did that." (Hub leader)

When asked about savings from the items she had just bought, this shopper said being able to buy other fresh items was important:

“If you buy meat or fish, which you'd have to do because you can't get it here, you don't think, ‘Oh my God, I can't spend like, you know £6 on a piece of meat today’, you don't feel so badly about that, so from that point of view it's making an impact.”
(Shopper)

At one of the creative collage workshops this is how a shopper (A single mother of two autistic children with health needs herself and needs to have three meals a day) described the wider impact to her and her family.

“This is a story with two pictures: Before is the red side (on the left). I was stressed, kept going in circles (watch), it never stops, the nets show how I was trapped. I was drowning (under sea picture). I was so stressed about food and this is symbolised by the crumbs/small bits of food that were left. After is the blue side (on the right). I'm up high out of the sea. I can breathe. “I can now give them snacks, I can make healthy foods now, I can give them treats now. A KitKat might feel like nothing, but when you have nothing, it makes them excited.”



2.8 Basic food needs are met with dignity

Dignity principles. The research team asked people about their experiences of using the hubs and whether they had ever felt embarrassed. The framework the research team used for this was [Nourish Scotland and The Poverty Truth Commission, Dignity in practice, tools for community food providers](#) (2018). These are: A sense of control; Able to take part in community; Nourished and supported; Involved in decision-making; Valued and able to contribute.

In the qualitative interviews participants clearly articulated that food hubs provided them a 'shopping experience' rather than 'a handout', and a more dignified approach to food insecurity. Participants reflected that they may have been nervous or embarrassed attending for the first time, but this quickly diminished - often because hub leaders and volunteers were warm, welcoming and remembered their names and special dietary requirements. In the surveys, **12% of shoppers reported feeling embarrassed using the food hub but the data suggest this quickly diminished with 58% feeling that their embarrassment reduced after the first visit and 25% after the second.**

"If I got up this morning and then I was really upset about something. I wouldn't feel, you know, embarrassed or anything to do that because they have made us feel so welcomed throughout the time they've been open." (Shopper)

"That was a weird feeling. I was embarrassed, thinking to myself, you know, hide your head, hang your head, but now, total turnabout of thoughts on the whole thing." (Shopper)

"I think the way it's laid out in a supermarket type way. Gives people the dignity to be able to purchase what they want to purchase with the amount of money that they've got." (Volunteer)

"Humanising. I think you know we try not to be a scary place. We try and break down that stigma, that potential societal stigma that people might feel about using it." (Hub leader)

"People don't feel embarrassed coming in anymore. They know us and they know that we don't judge them. In the first few months you just see people coming in with their eyes down but somehow, we've given them that confidence to actually ask for help." (Hub leader)

"We didn't want to create just like a dependency of people coming to get either free or discounted food. It was very much about giving people dignity in terms of letting them be involved in that process. And, you know, people did want to pay for their food. They didn't necessarily want handouts." (Stakeholder)

"Seeing people enjoying themselves and with a smile on their face when they are at the social supermarket and getting their shopping (note that I am using the word shopping there) and they are joking with the volunteers and their fellow members." (Stakeholder)

- ❖ **88% of shoppers have greater capacity to meet their food needs** (A statistically significant increase was reported when comparing the means of how easily the shopper could meet their food needs before using the social supermarket compared to now using the social supermarket)
- ❖ **Shoppers indicated that on average they take home the equivalent of 4 meals from a Social Supermarket visit.** A statistically significant positive correlation was observed between the number of meals taken home and the number of children in the home under the age of 18 years, which implies we are meeting the needs of families with children. This positive association was not found when the number of adults in the household was analysed potentially indicating the importance weighted on providing for children.
- ❖ A significant positive association was found, with the **number of meals taken home from the social supermarket predicting shopper's perceptions of being able to meet their food needs more easily.** This implies it is not about just visiting and making a purchase, it is the number of meals people can make. Therefore, hubs need the stock in the hubs for meals, visiting is not enough it is leaving with a proportion of food that meets meal needs that is paramount. That being said, having snacks etc. might still attract those who are coming for social connection and to feel part of a community and reducing social isolation. But if the aims are around eating better meals then hub need to be able to provide meals to meet food needs.
- ❖ The percentage of shopping that came from the social supermarket varied ranging from 5%-100% with an average of 31%

Quantitatively, **88% of shoppers reported food hubs were positively impacting on theirs and their wider family's capacity to meet their food needs since using the hubs.** The qualitative data gives insight into people's perceptions of this.

"From each visit I'll probably get a couple of meals out of it, but they tend to be snacky things or to make a light lunch rather than a substantial meal." (Shopper)

"It's amazingly cheap. I mean milk. Godsend again. It's only a pound for four pints." (Shopper)

"People tell me they want mince, sausages and chicken, they're the three things we would like in here. I just cannot access it cheaply enough." (Hub leader)

"I sort of just come and see what's here. I don't come with things in mind because you never know what's going to be here. I think more frozen foods, they don't have much frozen food. I think you'd rather know that they would definitely have this and this, especially the fruit and vegetables, and maybe meat sometimes would be good too. It isn't a meal. You can't buy a meal in there. When they have eggs and cheese that is good. And there's certain things that you look at and you think, oh gosh, that is too expensive. Things that you eat for a meal cause in there there's lots of biscuits and lots of cereals, it's quite processed food in there. It needs to demonstrate good food awareness, good nutrition awareness because otherwise

you're not educating, you're educating the wrong way. I think the idea of it is absolutely brilliant though, and I think there's nothing quite like it.” (Shopper)

“We have some really elderly people that come in here that don't use the bus now to go into [market town] and they really need to be able to get food and fresh food as well. I think it's really important. I've been trying to build up the amount of fruit and veg, dairy, bread and things like that because they can't access that anywhere else nearby. And small individual portions of mince beef and things like that have been fantastic for these sort of the older generation, you know, just a one person meal.” (Hub leader)

“Whenever you go in it's always a very diverse group of people which is nice. I think they have tried trialling some of the food for different ethnic backgrounds. There are a lot of Ukrainian refugees, and they've come in and suggested so they have started trying to get those in.” (Shopper)

“Instead of saying I must have broccoli and tomatoes and potatoes this week, this is more like people used to shop decades ago, or when they worked on the land you would eat from what was available.” (Shopper)

2.9 Healthier diets, increased vegetable and fruit intake and growing foods

- ❖ 71% of shopper's feel their children are eating healthier foods (A statistically significant increase was reported when comparing the means of how shoppers felt **their child was eating healthier food, before using the social supermarket compared to now** using the social supermarket)
- ❖ 46% of shoppers feel their food is healthier (A statistically significant increase was reported when comparing the means of **how shoppers felt their food was healthier, before using the social supermarket compared to now** using the social supermarket).
- ❖ 67% of shopper's children report eating more fruit and vegetables
- ❖ 38% of shoppers report eating more fruit and vegetables When comparing the means of portions of **fruit and vegetables eaten before using the social supermarket compared to now** using the social supermarket; a statistically significant increase was observed for vegetable consumption). Despite an increase in mean portions for fruit consumption the difference did not reach statistical significance. This might this be because of the need for cold storage of some fruit, or that fruit is not as widely available, that people already bought enough fruit or is it not seen as important to people.
- ❖ A significant positive association was found, with the percentage of food obtained from the social supermarket predicting shopper's perceptions of being able to meet their food needs more easily, eating more fruit and vegetables, and feeling their food is healthier.

Lack of access to affordable nutritious food is a major contributor to the 19 years difference in healthy life expectancy (71y vs 52y) between the most affluent and deprived communities in the UK ([ONS](#), 2022). It was clear from the data that there is huge potential for Nourishing Norfolk to influence the diet of those that are accessing the hubs whether this is through the food provided or wider education around healthy eating. There are examples of this happening already, however much more could be done. Norwich Research Park is the most concentrated and highly cited centre for Food and Nutrition Research in the UK. This unique opportunity provides the potential to tap into knowledge and expertise to support such improvements. The research team recommend Nourishing Norfolk work with colleagues such as Professor Maria Traka and Dr Laura Bardon at the Quadram Institute to explore whether small changes could be made to products provided by the warehouse to see if the nutritional benefits of regularly bought products could be improved. They could also recommend how food products could be combined in 'grab bags' to encourage a well-balanced meal with provisions available. There is also great opportunity to access the new course provided by Professor Anne Marie Minihihane and Dr Nikki Garner at the UEA, Nutrition in Action, which seeks to educate the workforce around supporting healthy eating behaviour changes. Three hub leaders have already piloted and given good feedback on this course. It includes modules on smart purchasing, food labelling, food poverty and eating behaviours. <https://www.uea.ac.uk/course/short-course/nutrition-in-action>

Hub leaders understood the importance of this.

"What I would say is we're not feeding Norfolk, we're nourishing Norfolk. We want our shoppers to have good food and good household products, So it's not all the crap, it's not the stuff that's going out of date, it's not the stuff that Tesco don't want that they can't sell, so they're just trying to give us like, you know, the stuff that isn't great, it's actually good quality food." (Hub leader)

In terms of growing vegetables, fruit and herbs, NN have supported the funding for nine food hubs to do growing projects or to further develop an existing growing project. Report here: [The report\Community Growing Report Graeme.pdf](#)

The variety in this was explained as: "Community events where they'll promote growing and then once you've grown the food its about the harvesting and the cooking or the preserving. That's still inspiring growing. So you can come at it from different angles, but ultimately with a lot of the same impact. And it comes back to that idea of how you improve understanding around nutrition and obviously growing your own fruit and veggies is certainly a part of that at least understanding, even if you can't do it in your own space."

This innovative idea came from The Pantry at Kenninghall (See next photo):



This is a lovely site at The Cabin in Dereham.



As pointed out to us by Dr Graeme Tolley (NCF staff), horticulture represents also many employment opportunities, either in private gardening, horticulture or farming. Being involved in the growing schemes enables people to start in a small way, in a simple format, that might initially be for their mental health, as much as for improving their diet, but gives the opportunity to develop skills into employment.

3. What needed to be in place to make Nourishing Norfolk happen?

3.1 Offering affordable food, a core range and reliable supply

To enable food hubs to operate, they needed to be able to reliably offer affordable food to members. This is a complex undertaking and it was clear from our conversations that the success, in a very short timescale was down to the commitment, creativity and resourcefulness of The Foundation, their partners, hub staff and volunteers. Food and household supplies needed to be found from a range of sources including individual donations, excess food supplies and negotiating discounted and donations from local or national suppliers. Initially NCF were able to support the sourcing and provide advice but too many people and hours were spent sourcing and collecting food which represented an opportunity cost when energies could be put into other activities in their hubs. They were also vulnerable to changes in supermarket policies. It quickly became apparent that a more sustainable method of obtaining affordable food and household products was needed.

" [problematic] buying things from the supermarket because they're using so much volunteer time by people going out and buying something there and and some of the supermarkets limit them to say, 6 items of a product." (Stakeholder)

"Hub staff had been buying from Aldi and they had been buying cases and they just got told very quickly, sorry we have got a new system in place, you can't buy it anymore...and he was desperate to find another source. A lot of the products people are buying from Aldi are loss leaders and they are realising that they are losing money so they don't want people to come in and buy cases so they are putting in systems to stop this" (Stakeholder)

As the demand grew, this also produced challenges for the hubs as suppliers of donations were not able to continue to provide at such a rate.

"Each one, and they're all saying the same thing that we've been getting supplies from various people, but we're now getting too big and people are saying we can supply you...if you wanna pay for it, we'll supply. But we can't keep giving you all of this product." (Stakeholder)

There was an urgent need and many people who were in charitable roles or local government were needing to pivot and supply food. But they needed support, this was very new to everyone and most had no retail experience.

"People are getting involved, like in local authority and people whose jobs aren't about providing food provision...and now they have been given the task of food provision and can you supply...and they need support." (Stakeholder)

This was also the case for NCF, who were keen to support the hubs and could see that supplying regular and reliable food was their biggest need. NCF staff could not have anticipated that they would find themselves in a strategic role around the food system and that others across the UK would be looking to them to learn from their experience.

“I think I love how many conversations it unlocks and in directions that I I might have hoped, but I didn't know that, and certainly weren't guaranteed to unlock. So whether it's talking to gardeners or talking to partners, I don't know, people around the country doing something, I don't think when I came into it ...I didn't think that I'd be talking to people in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Cornwall and Newcastle. I never thought that when I had first sight of this, which was two years ago now, that I would be talking to those people...Or anticipate the extent to which we would be thinking strategically about food.” (NCF Staff)

To address the challenge food hubs were facing, NCF set up a central warehouse from which affordable food could be purchased and delivered to each of the hubs. Starting first in a pilot warehouse space on the Norfolk Showground provided by the Royal Norfolk Agricultural Association, NCF developed the offer of centralised ambient food provision. Due to a highly productive partnership with a local firm, Norse Group, Nourishing Norfolk were able to find a space and support with logistics to operate the warehouse making Nourishing Norfolk the only affordable network in the UK with its own supply and distribution model (Norfolk Community Foundation, 2023). Establishing this was a massive learning journey with many challenges as this quote illustrates.

“We had that learning and Feeding Britain had that learning. These are the supply options quite a lot there. But what wasn't clear when we had a warehouse space, what opportunity is there in bulk purchasing? And what I learnt very quickly is that actually it's very, very difficult to get hold of affordable food. Because you are trying to achieve a price point which is created by the supermarket. Because they, very understandably in terms of getting people into their stores, have loss leaders on their shelves. So strawberry jam, for example, baked beans, cereal products have low prices. I can't access those low prices even at wholesale level. We were in a position where we had to try to provide a supply of food at a price that would enable Members to shop when they cannot even afford the loss leader prices. That's the challenge and it very became very quickly apparent that how on earth am I going to get that price point? The challenge I had to overcome is how do we create a range? And sufficient donations to try to deliver something that across that range delivered savings in comparison to the supermarket and that was also a reliable supply. It cannot be in the ad hoc category. If you want to reliably and consistently stock a shelf, it has to come from a tried and tested supply chain and that was a real head scratcher for several months for us to figure it out.” (NCF staff)

Our interviews with Norse also indicated the value their leadership and staff gained from this partnership.

“Being part of this community and being able to understand the opportunities we are giving by doing the food deliveries. I have enjoyed feeling part of this big change for people and seeing how effective it is.” (Norse staff) and “Seeing the changes we have helped make.” (Norse staff)

“We have the ability to be different to another competitor because we're not just putting in a tender with loads of words. We're actually doing something practical on the ground. When we're going out winning new work around the country, this type of work shows our customers that we understand what their challenges are.” (Norse staff)

“And my understanding is that what it really does [warehouse and delivery] is lets the people that are running the hubs not to have to worry about that part of the offer, so to speak, and that's allowed them to focus more on creating local relationships with farmers or perhaps developing the wrap around services.” (Norse staff)

The food hubs put trust in NCF.

“A big challenge for us and which I completely take my hats off to them. The food hubs placed an awful lot of trust in us during those early months and continue to do so for us to deliver that because when I first published the first prices, they will have looked expensive. And they're thinking, how do I make this work when they're used to going to Asda and filling a couple of trolleys?” (NCF staff)

Two years on, the warehouse **supplies 70% of the food hubs** each week with ambient products and **stocks 85 essential product lines** (Norfolk Community Foundation, 2024). Over **20 organisations have provided donated supplies** since the warehouse was established and around **41,000 units of product have been donated** between October 2023-24. Norse Group have **delivered over 123,000Kg** of net weight food to hubs across over **1,000 delivery trips** covering around **10,000 miles**. There are **24 staff members from Norse** that contributing time to Nourishing Norfolk.



Time saving from the use of the warehouse, the buying power NCF and the partnership with n-able and Norse for deliveries was applauded by all the hubs.

“The amount of time they save me by having food delivered to me every week. I now get milk delivered twice a week, imagine if I'm going shopping 3, 4, 5 times a week and buying 50 lots of milk at a time. That's tiring.” (Hub leader)

“The warehouse is so handy to have because if you are really time short, being able to fill in an order form is really invaluable.” (Hub leader)

“So what does n-able and Norse's support mean to us? It's well, it's actually extraordinary, it is a lifeline. For me to be able to use my time with people rather than ferrying around bookers or the equivalent and trying to find deals. The pull on my time was rather a lot before we partnered with n-able and Norse and then I just think that having it delivered and the drivers are absolutely wonderful.” (Hub leader)

“Buying power that kind of clout that comes with, you know, striking up relationships with the wholesalers, with local growers with, you know that buying power.” (Supplier)

3.2 The community is empowered, maintains control and sets direction

What was evident was that much of the success and unique strength of Nourishing Norfolk was that NCF ensured that the local communities maintained control and set the direction of travel. The hubs have responded to the unique needs of their communities and therefore each one is different in nature, each has its own direction and its own 'essence'. Hub staff spoke of the trust they felt NCF put in them and that this allowed them to flourish and truly feel they owned what they were establishing. This strength was widely recognised. It is not a style that all organisations are comfortable with, if they are more demanding of uniformity and common outcome measures. However, community empowerment is core to NCF values and this was a strength in developing the hubs in partnership.

“They put trust in me, they gave me the money to get started and Claire and Graeme provided so much leadership and practical support, like a template letter to send to a supplier. They recognised that what I needed in this village is different to x,y,z. They just said, get something started now and build from there.” (Hub leader)

“This is ours, and we have been given permission to make it what we want it to be. It works because of the level of collaboration and partnership.” (Hub leader)

“People know that that the folks setting it up have got that vested interest in it being successful and it being run by local people, for local people, it's not somebody in a suit sitting in a stuffy office thinking well, they must need this so they can have that”. (Stakeholder)

"I've always felt that the best way where statutory organisations or organisations that hold power and money is to act as an enabler and to trust that the solution is best generated and delivered by the people who understand the situation best and the community best. I think this is a really good example where the foundation has taken an appropriate role in this, they have leveraged what is there." (Stakeholder)

"Working with a community group and letting them do it differently is not without its challenges, but you know, we trust these people and hopefully it will lead to a greater degree of ownership by those delivering than we had with our previous model." (Stakeholder)

"I think the network have a bit of a balancing act. ... Each place is different and I guess that's what the network allows for is that ... understanding the local need in the local demographic and the local challenges and then kind of refining and kind of fine tuning that balance of what's on offer for people." (Local Government)

3.3 A person-centred approach

Our data gives good evidence to hubs being very mindful of the agency of members, meeting people on their own terms, with no notions of treating food support recipients as passive citizens (Ranta et al., 2024). Please also see our section on 'dignity'. The hubs are a unique point of connection. They offer a place to foster human interaction, reduce social isolation and meet people's wider health and wellbeing needs. Throughout the research period, we observed approaches that were highly person-centred and inclusive. People's names were used, dietary needs and family circumstances were known. Previous conversations were built on. One shopper spoke of being seen and heard, "I'm ignored by most of the world, this place makes me feel noticed and have saved my life by talking to me like I'm a human being not a statistic." (Shopper).

Shoppers spoke of staff kindness and the warm approach they received when visiting.

"They were brilliant, come in, sign up and stuff. It's been very good. Very welcoming. The first time I met her (hub leader), she took my name. The second time I arrived, it's hello (name), so she knew my name. Only the second time I arrived." (Shopper)

"The staff definitely make it. They care about strangers, if you know what I mean. They care about their community, how community should be together, not against each other." (Shopper)

"They're such lovely people here. They're so friendly. They're so helpful. They're so nice. It's the highlight of my week." (Shopper)

"Everyone will always ask how you are. You can cry, you know, and no one is gonna hold it against you for having emotions." (Shopper)

"Ours [food hub] is really small, so they have a coffee and wait their turn to go into it. So while they are having a coffee, there's volunteers handing biscuits out.

Someone's got a dog, they're talking about what they've done in the street. People seem to know each other. Essentially it was a queue for the supermarket, but it was like a coffee morning and I think that is fantastic.” (Stakeholder)

“It's got a family feel because the people who've been coming have been coming for a long time, they've all sort of made their own friendships in there. So they feel it's their project.” (Hub leader)

“It creates a space for connection and the sense of community for people to be seen and heard and valued that that we can ‘see you’. The person feels heard and validated and cared for.” (Hub leader)



The essence of the hubs summarised

Time and again, the issue of trusted relationships features prominently when working with vulnerable and poorly served groups. See for example our previous work with Feathers Futures CIC in Great Yarmouth (a stakeholder interviewed for this evaluation) where long term experiences of neglect, harm and violence, often by people they should be able to trust strongly influenced women's help-seeking behaviours (Hanson et al., 2019). The quotes below illustrate the importance of building long term trusted relationships from a shopper, hub leader and volunteer points of view.

“My feelings around community, I was feeling let down and I think my feelings were at an all-time low. I could have done a lot better if things had been in place at the right time but thank goodness the hub was there. So from a perspective of self, community, wider community, it's a no brainer. It's huge.” (Shopper)

“... then after so many weeks, I've learned their name and I've gained their confidence, and the building's nice, it's got a good feel, so they can approach us and say I've got issues with, I don't know, domestic abuse or health problems and stuff. And then I know that I can then get signposted into the right place for support.” (Hub leader).

“Giving people confidence and they can they know they can trust us. If they've got a problem because they've known us for so long and they've known us from the beginning, they can come to us with their problems and we can signpost.” (Hub leader)

“We have people coming in, they've had a bad day, something has happened... and they go out smiling because, you know, they've got it off their chest... sometimes you just need to tell someone else just to make yourself feel better. If you've got a worry and that's what we will do here, they trust us completely.” (Volunteer)

3.4 Funded and secure

Confidence in the reliability and sustainability of the model is paramount to funders, partners, hubs and the community. As the network is built on existing assets, whether that be existing trusted charities, community spaces such as church halls or people who live and care passionately about their community this has brought a sense of familiarity and security from the get-go. The involvement of NCF and the establishment of the network brought a sense of strength and experience that reassured funders and gave the hubs security and confidence to all.

Of those interviewed when completing the survey, **98.7% (n=74) were returning shoppers giving good evidence of people feeling comfortable in using the service** and provides opportunities for ongoing engagement with shoppers. Hubs are an asset through their established infrastructure and their community-based leaders and volunteers. The synergy with the network enables NCF to channel funds directly and in a very agile way to address community needs quickly. For example, the funding channelled from The Household Support Fund, volunteer training, literacy and digital skills, school uniforms, and cookery skills courses. Additionally, projects that support health such as the dentistry and physical activity projects. Also, where hubs have the appropriate spaces offering 'warm spaces' and community growing projects and targeted supported, for example funding given to support young people not in education, employment and training (NEET), older people and refugee families. It is this symbiosis between the hubs, the network and NCF that is unique and powerful.

“We find that key to the effectiveness of any regional or local partnership of this nature is having that rock solid anchor organisation that can keep things ticking over and offer that layer of protection to grassroots projects across their area. Norfolk Community Foundation have provided that in abundance, they really have.” (Stakeholder)

“They've always been very reactive when we need them to be, but also keeping an eye on that the longer-term solutions. Their reporting is really good and our key stakeholders really like that kind of clarity. It feels like a business-like approach rather than beg, borrow and steal to keep your food hub going.” (Stakeholder)

“It's actually been people listening within the community and thinking I think we need a food hub. And then as the food hub opens, listening to the other things that

people what to engage with. I think has really made Norfolk a beacon of not just good but great practise for other parts of the Feeding Britain network to look towards and to follow.” (Stakeholder)

“I think it's only when you go and see it, that's when you see the magic and that's what makes me feel like we've done something important.” (Stakeholder)

“[Stability to funders] ... there is a desire from funders that grass route organisations are involved in delivery but also concerns around longevity and stability. NCF help provide that confidence.” (Stakeholder)

"People also realise that if you're part of the network, it's steady, it's there, it's not going to go away overnight." (NCF staff)

3.5 Volunteer workforce

As noted in other research with providers of food provision, organisations require a workforce that is adequately trained, and coordination with other services to maximise effectiveness (Vaiciurgis et al., 2024). Whilst most hubs are run by people in paid roles, from being part of a larger organisation, the staffing is predominantly volunteer led. It is clear that the complexity of running a hub is recognised by The Foundation.

“It is quite the challenge to run one of these food hubs. I see that very clearly because you need to wear so many hats. This is a space where you’ve got people who are absolutely phenomenal at working with people and supporting people, and who are phenomenal at telling their story. You’ve got people who are phenomenal at the administrative side of running a charity, fundraising and of reaching out and connecting people and bringing them together around a common purpose. It’s a really tall order to have all of that under one hat. That’s really hard.” (Stakeholder)

A lot is expected of hub leaders and volunteers. It is a highly physical job (see photos) and many, if not most, of the volunteers are beyond statutory retirement age. Hubs are complex operations, giving a huge range of advice and guidance, using sophisticated communication skills and providing (mental) health support. The quotes give insight into how hub leaders and volunteers view their role,

“My remit was to open and run a food shop. Actually, it’s so much more than that. So much more than that. You know, I’m still teaching, you know, I signpost. I’ve had to do more than I’ve ever done in my life, you know, to make sure that we’re making the right money to keep this going. So yeah, it is so much more than that actually. That’s what I love, that challenge.” (Hub leader)

“I think there are people who you’ve helped in their lives and we’ve seen them move on to better but on the negative side, I think they’ve become quite dependent, and their expectation is they’re going to get lots of things for nothing. And that’s the hard thing. Is trying to make it fit that the whole point about the hub is it’s not a food bank,

it's helping you to work with your money and be able to afford the things.”
(Volunteer)

“It's about encouraging people to see they can do other things. It's not about maybe giving money; it's about saying their life will be more fulfilled if they can do this other thing.” (Volunteer)

“I've worked with a lot of adults and learned to read people's faces. And I'm quite good with communication and quite friendly, you know, and I don't think I'm patronising to people. I think I'm confident enough to talk to people in a way that others can't.” (Volunteer)

The challenge of a volunteer workforce is widely known. Many of the volunteers the research team spoke to were particularly drawn to working in the hubs because they were angry about the cost-of-living crisis and the cost of food to families. Others were drawn to it because they had an interest in food, for example ex-chefs and many others used their previous experience in teaching and working with families as they could see how that skill set would be used in the hubs. This is not without challenges though.

“I don't want to diss any of my volunteers because they're absolutely amazing. But yeah, you do get let down quite a lot. That's just the nature of the beast, I guess.”
(Hub leader)

This is how volunteers summarised the value of their hub.



Figure - Volunteer word cloud (size of word differs according to how often stated)

It was clear that a big part of the reward in the role for volunteers was engaging with the shoppers who used their services. Examples below.

“When people come in, they chat to each other, they chat to us and I think it isn't always just about the purchasing of the food, you know that what's going on in their life or whatever. A bit of kindness goes a long way.” (Volunteer)

“It's company, being able to listen, for people being able to offload.” (Volunteer)

However, it was also clear that many of the conversations went beyond ‘offloading’ involved people talking about circumstances that were difficult to hear. Interviews with hub leaders and volunteers included them citing stories about people who used their services. See examples in the section on de-escalation (A model that can respond to crisis). This was substantiated in the interviews with shoppers which

gave us insight into past traumas and the highly difficult life circumstances that people were navigating.

“The team do talk to each other when someone's upset. We look after each other.” (Volunteer)

The research team suggest that trauma informed approaches would be helpful, both in how shoppers are engaged with and how staff and volunteers are supported in their own mental health and wellbeing in the longer term.

4. Who benefits from Nourishing Norfolk?

As part of the evaluation, the team undertook a Social Return on Investment (SROI), the full report from which has been assured and is available on Social Value UK website. SROI is a way of communicating the social value created by an initiative, project or company in financial terms. It is a method for measuring a much broader concept of value that is not usually reflected in, or measured in, traditional accounting processes. For Nourishing Norfolk, traditional methods of accounting would not *fully capture* the wide range of impacts the programme is likely to be having and it is crucial these are considered when making decisions in the future.

“SROI measures change in ways that are relevant to the people or organisations that experience or contribute to it. It tells the story of how change is being created by measuring social, environmental and economic outcomes and uses monetary values to represent them. This enables a ratio of benefits to costs to be calculated.”

(Social Value UK, 2012)

There are two forms of SROI, evaluative and forecast. Evaluative SROI are undertaken retrospectively and utilise outcomes that have already happened whereas forecast seeks to predict how much social value will occur from an initiative based on intended outcomes. As the activities associated with Nourishing Norfolk have been in place for over three years, this SROI was evaluative, and it evaluated the period from November 23 to October 2024 specifically.

Using qualitative and quantitative methods with a range of stakeholders involved in Nourishing Norfolk, data was collected guided by the SROI framework published originally by the Cabinet Office of the UK Government and later updated by Social Value UK (Social Value, 2012). It involved six stages: establishing scope and identifying key stakeholders; mapping outcomes; evidencing outcomes and giving them a value; establishing impact; calculating the SROI and reporting, using and embedding.

To calculate the SROI, the total value created is compared to the total input for the same period through a simple calculation:

Social Return On Investment Calculation

$$\text{SROI} = \frac{\text{Present value}}{\text{Value of inputs}}$$

From the general evaluation and the SROI specifically, it was evident that Nourishing Norfolk had contributed to wellbeing outcomes for shoppers, their children, food hub staff, volunteers, NCF staff and Norse staff. The SROI approach allowed a monetary value to be calculated for each of these outcomes. For example, for shoppers, the greater capacity and opportunity to meet food needs created £3,711,720 of value. The Table below provides an overview of the value created for each of the outcomes found to be material. The sum of these provides the present social value for Nourishing Norfolk which stands at £15,783,644.

Stakeholder group	Well-defined outcomes	Value
Shoppers	Greater capacity and opportunity to meet food needs (for me and my family)	£3,711,720
	Reduced financial concern	£3,135,933
	Increase in self confidence	£2,298,319
	Increased sense of belonging and community	£2,107,263
	Reduced isolation and loneliness	£3,029,572
Children of shoppers	Child is eating healthier food	£755,572
	Increased opportunity for child to take part in youth related activities (education and leisure)	£599,786
Food hub staff	Increased sense of belonging and community	£4,872
	Increase in skills set (communication, support and retail)	£6,806
	Increase in self confidence	£7,024
	Increase in stress	-£4,375
Food hub volunteers	Increased sense of belonging and community	£33,598
	Increase in skills set (communication, support and retail)	£35,131
	Increase in self confidence	£38,860
NCF staff	Increase charitable skill set	£2,459
	Feel sense of pride and achievement	£2,853
	Increased wellbeing/satisfaction in the workplace	£2,208
Norse staff	Feel sense of pride and achievement	£8,530
	Increased sense of belonging and community	£7,512
Total present value		£15,783,644

For the same time period, the total input costs for Nourishing Norfolk was calculated to be £2,414,023. The breakdown of these are in the next Table.

Stakeholder group	Input cost to include	Evidence source	Amount for 1 year (Nov 23-Oct 24)
Shoppers	Cost of food purchased	Transaction total for all food hubs from Nourishing Norfolk data from Nov 23-Oct 24	£658,523
Shoppers' children	No additional costs (covered in shopper total)		£0
Food hub staff	Food hub manager salaries	Number of food hub staff for full 12-month period and for partial year staff multiplied by average salary per hour (estimated at £15). This was determined from a comparative job advert for a food hub staff (https://goodmoves.org/vacancy/a4sp1000000qcg9iak-royston-food-hub-manager) and input from the Nourishing Norfolk Network coordinator who confirmed salaries ranged between £14-16. £15 was chosen as a mid-point and verified with one of the food hubs.	£399,120
	Food staff salaries	Number of other staff for full 12 month period and for partial year staff multiplied by average salary per hour which was estimated at £12. This was determined using a job advert for a similar position Determined from a comparative job advert for a foodbank project worker and sense checked with Shrublands (https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fburnage.foodbank.org.uk%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2Fsites%2F315%2F2023%2F09%2FAdvert-for-Burnage-Foodbank-Project-Worker.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK) and validated by a food hub.	£254,496
Volunteer	Volunteer hours	Total volunteer hours (provided by each hub) x real living wage. £10.42 (from Nov 23-Mar 24) and £11.44 from April 24-Oct 24	£487,441
NCF staff	NCF staff salaries	NCF Staff hours attributed to the running of Nourishing Norfolk	£123,504
Norse	Staff, warehouse, van space, petrol	Provided by Norse	£30,000
Food hub operational costs	Rent	Total rental costs for food hub premises as provided by food hubs for the period Nov 23-Oct 24.	£71,980
	Money spent on food over the year	Money spent on food total for Nourishing Norfolk data from Nov 23-Oct 24 was £555,757. This cost is covered by the input cost for shoppers and would be double counting if included.	£0
	Utilities/over heads/petrol	Total overhead costs for food hub premises as provided by food hubs for the period Nov 23-Oct 24.	£388,960
Total			£2,414,023

This provides a Social Return on Investment for Nourishing Norfolk of £6.54 for every £1 invested.

$$\text{SROI} = \frac{15,783,644}{£2,414,023} = £6.54$$

Therefore, for every £1 to deliver the Nourishing Norfolk Network, there was a return of £6.54 of social value to shoppers and wider stakeholders' wellbeing.

As the process of calculating social value uses a range of assumptions, it is important to conduct a sensitivity analysis to test model robustness and highlight variables that significantly impact on results. This creates a range of **£4.94 to £15.53 social value for every £1 invested**.



5. What role did Norfolk Community Foundation play to enable and evolve this model?

The Nourishing Norfolk programme evolved from a pilot activity in Thetford in 2020. As the leading grant maker of community activity in Norfolk, the Community Foundation has a unique view of emerging community challenges, identified through the applications they receive for grants. During the Covid-19 pandemic the Community Foundation had seen a growing demand from community charities to pivot their offer and provide food in addition to their usual support offer. It was clear that until households could afford to eat, they were not able to tackle issues that led them to, or kept them, in poverty. The Foundation's aspiration with the programme was to understand what levers need to be in place to help individuals and communities to thrive. The following gives insight into these levers as determined from our evaluation. From extensive interviews with stakeholders, for example in public health, local councils and partner organisations as well as the hub leaders all of whom, without exception, had never been involved in setting up a social supermarket we were able to glean the ingredients that enabled the hubs to set up and survive. Insights from this are potential models for other operations.

5.1 Pace and agility

What was evident from the evaluation, was the pace and agility at which The Foundation responded to establish the Nourishing Norfolk network. They recognised need, and had the courage to rapidly pilot and test a new social supermarket at Charles Burrell in Thetford (an area of high deprivation with high needs) as a way to support people with their food. The subsequent speed at which 26 food hubs were established across the county, including rural areas, shows the ability of NCF to react and respond to need at pace.

"Seeing how quickly [Nourishing Norfolk] has spread across all of the parts of Norfolk has been phenomenal ... I've never seen anything that has grown so quickly and effectively like this. There's only one reason that's happened and that's because it works." (Stakeholder)

"I think that the benefit of having an organisation like Community Foundation and all of the local organisations is the speed at which things can happen." (Stakeholder)

"They've always been very reactive when we need them to be, but also keeping an eye on that the longer term solutions. Their reporting's really good for our members and our key stakeholders really, the clarity and the way they present back the data." (Stakeholder)

"I just think the rural outreach... Reaching those corners that are quite invisible" (Stakeholder)

This meant NCF needed for a short time to pivot their offering and illustrate that they could respond, mobilise change and meet need as well as fund those working on the ground to achieve this.

“I think from the Norfolk Community Foundation point of view, from a strategic element, it needed to, I don't use the phrase ‘get its hands dirty’, but it it needed to do something that wasn't quite so top layer so to speak, to really show that it can make a difference. And I think that's been a really impressive change in direction of The Foundation. I think this is one of several examples where they've gone, you know, we're not just going to get the money, we're going to actually get stuck in and we're going to do the work and make this difference.” (Stakeholder - VCSE)

Partners recognised that this would not have been as possible for statutory providers to achieve and illustrates the power of The Foundation.

"No disrespect to people who work at local authorities. I mean local councils, but it becomes caught up in layer and layer of red tape, loads of kind of meetings and often lots of meetings to talk out of things rather than talk into things. And I think the dynamicness and the speed of which this has spread has been not just because it's been a success and people believe in it. It's been because you can just get it done and there's not been a plethora of red tape " (Stakeholder)

5.2 Asset Based Community Development

An asset-based approach builds on the already existing strength and resources (assets) that are found in the community to build stronger, and more sustainable communities (Hopkins and Rippon, 2015, Russell and McKnight, 2022). Firstly, it relies on trust. It requires trusting that the community knows what it needs, and energy is put into enabling the mobilisation of individuals, associations, and institutions to come together to realise and develop their strengths. It is the antithesis of a ‘top-down’, ‘paternalistic’ approach. Secondly, it moves away from a ‘deficit model’ which focuses on identifying problems, and usually putting in costly curative services. Instead, an asset-based approach moves to a ‘strengths-based model’ using the concept of ‘salutogenesis’ (Lindström and Eriksson, 2005) i.e. what makes people well. Taking this approach relies on key components and the evaluation clearly showed that NCF were in a unique position to facilitate these: Identifying champions to drive change, in the case of Nourishing Norfolk, Hub leaders, volunteers and partner organisations), mobilising assets with a purpose (Responding to a need for affordable, nutritious food) and Co-producing outcomes (Working as equals across the Nourishing Norfolk network). See quotes below that support this, which need to be understood in the context of the challenges that all the hubs had when they started, not limited to: No building, no electricity, no fridge, making storage out of filing cabinets and old shelving, no volunteers, as one hub leader said, “It was terrifying”.

“I think the thing that's always struck me about the programme is that it is genuinely an asset-based community development approach. Often in innovation projects they've started with a solution that may have been tested within an area and they are looking to roll that out or expand it to other areas. So, it's almost parachuting in

an agreed model across lots of different geographies. They started with the community and their understanding of the community. They started with the local assets and community organisation that was already active in that area, regardless of whether they had a background in food.” (Stakeholder)

“I think what's really different about this is I think it is genuinely an asset based community development approach, they started with the community and their understanding of the community. They started with the local assets. Norfolk Community Foundation was already active in that area, regardless of whether they had a background in food.” (Local government)

“I saw a ‘how to’ guide that another place had written for setting up a social supermarket [in another county]. If I had read it, I would have never started one. Nourishing Norfolk understood that no one size fits all, but there was common ground. They said, ‘have you thought about x,y,z (such as health and safety and building advice) but never said, you must operate this way’. NN staff are a single point of contact, they are generous. [Works in a larger organisation] - they are envious of the network and what we have here in Norfolk.” (Hub leader)

As noted by one of the hub leaders, “Each hub has got a different personality.” It was hard to capture what was, but each had its own ‘essence’.

When interviewing hub leaders and volunteers, most had no (food) retail experience, but all had a passion to serve their community, and all had in-depth insights into what their community had to offer and what their community needed. One hub leader commented on the conversations that they overheard and likened it to the interactions that people would have had in a village shop or local post office years ago, before they were stripped from communities.

It is well known that social relationships, networks and trust form the social capital of a community and are the bedrock of Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) (Russell and McKnight, 2022). This in turn helps towards building a pride in place, the emotion people feel towards the physical community that they identify with and feel a sense of attachment, belonging and deep-rooted contentedness towards. ABCD accepts that people live in a place for a reason and an intentional effort to build and nourish relationships is the core of ABCD, as is people coming together because they care about something, in this case their hub, in the heart of their community. Success is measured by relationships that are built. These features were all highly evident in our observations of the hubs and through our interviews illustrating the huge strengths of the foundation in achieving a truly ABCD model. This gives confidence in the hubs being part of the fabric of building pride in place. Being a trusted place, rooted in the community and responsive to their needs also gives the potential to offer wider health, wellbeing and care support.

“The community building is really critical.” (Stakeholder)

"Sometimes people just are lonely and rural isolation is massive in Norfolk. We know we have the oldest populations in the country and we have massive problems

with accessibility and people getting to places....we shouldn't underestimate the benefit of in some of these really small places." (Stakeholder)

"I think what each hub has done though is actually opened people's eyes to the kind of need that there is in their communities and also helped to educate some people around why people are in need." (Stakeholder)

"They're more than just a shop. They get to know the people. It's more of a community, feeling part of your community and belonging and that support. And I think the wrap around the support that they can offer as well into additional groups, activities, services, I think it all one, isn't it." (Stakeholder)

"I do see a lot of that glue being reinserted into community through the social supermarkets and those wrap around services. Would you really want that to disappear anytime soon, and would you not rather have social supermarkets become a bit more of an enduring part of community life for people?" (Stakeholder)

"We've seen a small army of people across the country of big hearted, totally compassionate, community minded people becoming retail experts and professional bargain hunters because poverty and a lack of access to affordable, nutritious food has become a most pressing issue in their communities that they care so much about." (Stakeholder)

"I don't think it is food anymore. I think it was food at the beginning. I think now it's the sense of community and a safe place. NN renowned for not having any services because it's so sparsely populated and so dispersed in little villages." (Hub leader)

"I really feel like it's the heart of the community. How connected our clients feels to the community is part of the assessment criteria at the three month and six-month mark to see how we're doing. And we have overwhelmingly high percentages for people feeling like they are connected to their community and coming here has really helped with that." (Hub leader)

"I'm meeting other shoppers that are using it too that I don't know. But everyone says hello, good morning. It's really nice and it's helped me to get to know a few people actually that now if I see them in the street, I'll say hello... It's just a way of getting to know other people in the community." (Shopper)

"My feelings around community, I was feeling let down and I think my feelings were at an all time low. I could have done a lot better if things has been in place at the right time but thank goodness the hub was. So, from a perspective of self, community, wider community, it's a no brainer. It's huge." (Shopper)

"I think it has brought the community together. I've seen people in there that I've never seen them in all my life and they live near us." (Shopper)

"That little bit of friendship. Money saving for one and meeting up with everybody and just having a chat. I mean I know that's not about the shop, but just sitting there having a chat with other people, especially for my dad because my mum died three

years ago, he's living on his own and he just loves coming down he's loving it.”
(Shopper)

“I think we often talk about asset based work and asset based development in our sector. Well, if there are these great private sector assets or public sector assets that are in the Community that are can be drawn upon. And where we can demonstrate the successful utilisation of them for social goods, then why wouldn't we look to work on that basis”

5.3 Convening, mobilising action and leadership

One of The Foundation's particular strengths in the establishment of Nourishing Norfolk was the ability to convene and mobilise action through productive partnerships. This came from strong leadership, a long history of being able to identify and work with partner organisations and knowing the assets within the community. They were uniquely placed to 'pull levers' and mobilise and unlock funds from individuals, Trusts and work with local Government to release funds to establish the hubs. This also extended to connections which enabled a local logistics company to provide warehouse space and delivery models. Norfolk Community Foundation's ability to envision and excite stakeholders across a wide spectrum to partner with their journey to establish Nourishing Norfolk is unique.

“It is setting quite a high bar for social supermarkets and networks in other parts of the country to follow because they have managed to forge those cross sector relationships that makes available the necessary infrastructure and then links to that the necessary supply of food that really can make this a sustainable enterprise”
(Stakeholder)

Dr Graeme Tolley, heavily involved at the start of Nourishing Norfolk, acknowledged the early challenges, such as funding and practicalities and also explained the importance of being able to convene the skills and knowledge needed from partners:

“The other significant challenge was the lack of knowledge and/or understanding around the concept of affordable food hubs at this early stage as these did not previously exist in Norfolk and in fact were fairly recent developments across the UK. It therefore took a great deal of explanation, patience and at times dealing diplomatically with fairly unsympathetic perspectives across different potential stakeholders. One key challenge within this was to also define the difference in relation to food banks and how hubs would complement rather than compete with these services. This relied on bringing together different stakeholders in an area and communicating effectively (and repeatedly) to ensure they understand the nature and aims of the projects. It was important to convene different stakeholders, and we tried to ensure we brought together a variety of partners within the VCSE sector, especially if they already had some engagement in (often emergency) food provision to communities during Covid. We also included local councils (from Parish to District to County depending on the context) as key partners for unlocking funding but also to support with the practical elements of launching food hubs. In some areas the organisation that would become the lead for the food hub was fairly

straightforward; in others it required a number of meetings and discussions to determine who was best placed and how they may work in partnership with other VCSE organisations in the local area.”

NCF convened over 100 influential local funders in sharing all that was already happening as part of Nourishing Norfolk and their vision of the next phase. NCF are skilled at explaining a story and bringing partner stakeholders on the journey to support them, utilising their skills or assets, and also to help unlock any challenges. In the early days, NCF were regularly coming across barriers and challenges both strategic and practical. Diverse examples include gaining planning permission to put porta cabins in community car parks and how to distribute 100 crates of frozen chickens. Dr Graeme Tolley explained it to us like this:

“From the beginning we were very conscious that one size does not fit all. It was essential that each hub was given the basis to develop their model (within the broad parameters of being an affordable food hub) according to the organisation's structure and context, site, geography and the local community. Another key element was to ensure that the model for food hubs was not too restrictive for members (i.e. not means tested based on income) with a key aim being to reduce the stigma that can often be felt by those accessing similar services. At the beginning of establishing the network, I had multiple conversations with Feeding Britain and through them affordable food hubs from across the country, which was invaluable in understanding the opportunities and challenges to be faced.”

Strong leadership was clearly a strength of NCF throughout establishing the network. They also provided professional oversight enabling funders and suppliers to have just one contract rather than multiple with individual food hubs. This approach was both efficient and appreciated.

“I've always been so impressed with the the professionalism brought to the operation in in kind of a sector, which can be a little bit community" (Stakeholder)

“For us it is more efficient as a partner to work through a network, it's far harder to work with 20 or 30 different food hubs in different ways - this network model allows us to be efficient and still have good reach.” (Stakeholder)

“It feels like a business like approach rather than a....kind of beg, borrow and steal to keep your food hub going”

“They are phenomenal....They're mega busy, but they're never too busy for us and I just think I honestly, I don't think we would still be open if it wasn't for them and their support that they've given us.”

The research team observed that there is real power in the collective spirit of the network that NCF have established. Importantly, the network is also viewed as providing stability for stakeholders.

"People also realise that if you're part of the network, it's steady, it's there, it's not going to go away." (Stakeholder)

"Being part of the network means your voice is amplified to a county level. We're all saying the same thing." (Stakeholder)

"One organisation, knowing that it's reaching as many people as we reach, makes more sense to work with us. Together we can say yes to more and do more." (Stakeholder)

These quotes encapsulate the learning and workforce development amongst those in the network and the support they felt.

"It's the network. The whole of it, yes we're all individual but we all come together and help each other, that's pretty amazing. Getting to know a lot of them over the time as well. If you're stuck, then I'm here. There's a big group chat on the work phone, all the hubs together and it's just like, oh, this this isn't working or blah, blah, and they go, have you tried this, or try that or I've got excess of..." (Hub leader)

"Fantastic for our own learning experiences for all of us as individuals and as hubs. The events are fantastic in terms of raising awareness. There's been so many other funding opportunities as well." (Hub leader)

"I think it's fantastic. Quite frankly, we won't be here without them [NN and NCF]. People who give their time for free the accountants and solicitors and various other people who you can access for free." (Hub leader)

"They are phenomenal [NN staff]. They're mega busy, but they're never too busy for us and I just think I honestly, I don't think we would still be open if it wasn't for them and the support that they've given us." (Hub leader)

"I'm like Oh my God, I have no idea what I'm doing sometimes. And you just have to sort of crack on or you just ask someone at Nourishing Norfolk, someone always comes back to you. Honestly, my life is so it's enriched. The support I get is absolutely incredible. I am sort of gently pushed because I don't know why I lost my confidence, and so being gently pushed 'you can do this' such as finding different ways of raising money, getting food into the hub, identifying when people need extra help and signposting people." (Hub leader)

5.4 Innovation

That Norfolk Community Foundation are innovative, work at pace and inspire others to do so was evident during our eleven months of working with them.

“What it does do is constantly expose those grassroots projects to good practise and innovative new ways of working, because even if a project might think, well, how we do, it currently works quite well for us, if they start to hear these new ideas delivering even more desirable results for the people that we seek to serve, then that in itself it particularly fits as it can be shown to open up new sources of food and funding and supports should, after a few weeks, even a few months, even after a year or two, eventually be enough to make those community projects begin to rethink their model and embrace these new ideas.” (Stakeholder)

“I don't think until quite recently we realised just how different it was, what we were doing. Particularly with the warehouse. I know other places up north have got something. But I don't think we realised quite how different we were really in our approach and also our openness to share around that. I mean, we're still showcasing what we do...it does take your time” (NCF staff)

“And I just was really impressed with the skills from the comms team. They were really dedicated, wrote some beautiful pieces, took some great footage and videos and and it's always been a joy working with them.” (Stakeholder)

6. What is the wider learning for Norfolk Community Foundation?

What is evident from the evaluation of Nourishing Norfolk is the ability of Norfolk Community Foundation to: Listen, Convene, Act, Enable, Inspire and Move away. In this case, it was for the establishment of Nourishing Norfolk, but it is clear that there is huge potential to build on such a model to respond to future needs.

The model in place for Nourishing Norfolk is one which works with communities to enable empowerment; for communities to be able to respond with, and build on, the assets and skills they have and therefore to mobilise the changes that are needed by their communities.



References

- ARENAS, D. J., THOMAS, A., WANG, J. & DELISSER, H. M. 2019. A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Depression, Anxiety, and Sleep Disorders in US Adults with Food Insecurity. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 34, 2874-2882.
- BAXTER, K. A., NAMBIAR, S., PENNY, R., GALLEGOS, D. & BYRNE, R. 2024. Food Insecurity and Feeding Experiences Among Parents of Young Children in Australia: An Exploratory Qualitative Study. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 124, 1277-1287.e1.
- BRIAZU, R. A., MASOOD, F., HUNT, L., PETTINGER, C., WAGSTAFF, C. & MCCLOY, R. 2024. Barriers and facilitators to healthy eating in disadvantaged adults living in the UK: a scoping review. *BMC Public Health*, 24, 1770.
- BUTTRISS, J. 2016. The eatwell guide refreshed. Wiley Online Library.
- ELGAR, F. J., PICKETT, W., PFÖRTNER, T.-K., GARIÉPY, G., GORDON, D., GEORGIADES, K., DAVISON, C., HAMMAMI, N., MACNEIL, A. H., AZEVEDO DA SILVA, M. & MELGAR-QUIÑONEZ, H. R. 2021. Relative food insecurity, mental health and wellbeing in 160 countries. *Social Science & Medicine*, 268, 113556.
- FANELLI, S. M., JONNALAGADDA, S. S., PISEGNA, J. L., KELLY, O. J., KROK-SCHOEN, J. L. & TAYLOR, C. A. 2020. Poorer Diet Quality Observed Among US Adults With a Greater Number of Clinical Chronic Disease Risk Factors. *Journal of Primary Care & Community Health*, 11, 2150132720945898.
- FERNANDES, S. G., RODRIGUES, A. M., NUNES, C., SANTOS, O., GREGÓRIO, M. J., DE SOUSA, R. D., DIAS, S. & CANHÃO, H. 2018. Food Insecurity in Older Adults: Results From the Epidemiology of Chronic Diseases Cohort Study 3. *Frontiers in Medicine*, 5.
- GONZALEZ, C. A. & RIBOLI, E. 2010. Diet and cancer prevention: Contributions from the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition (EPIC) study. *European Journal of Cancer*, 46, 2555-2562.
- GUNDERSEN, C. & ZILIAK, J. P. 2015. Food insecurity and health outcomes. *Health affairs*, 34, 1830-1839.
- HANSON, S., BELDERSON, P., PLAYER, E., MINIHANE, A.-M. & SWEETING, A. 2023. "Taking from Peter to pay Paul": The experience of people in receipt of fuel and food vouchers from a UK foodbank. *Nutrition Bulletin*, 48, 500-512.
- HANSON, S., GILBERT, D., LANDY, R., OKOLI, G. & GUELL, C. 2019. Cancer risk in socially marginalised women: An exploratory study. *Social Science & Medicine*, 220, 150-158.
- JOHNSON, A. D. & MARKOWITZ, A. J. 2018. Food Insecurity and Family Well-Being Outcomes among Households with Young Children. *The Journal of Pediatrics*, 196, 275-282.
- LANE, M. M., GAMAGE, E., DU, S., ASHTREE, D. N., MCGUINNESS, A. J., GAUCI, S., BAKER, P., LAWRENCE, M., REBHOLZ, C. M., SROUR, B., TOUVIER, M., JACKA, F. N., O'NEIL, A., SEGASBY, T. & MARX, W. 2024. Ultra-processed food exposure and adverse health outcomes: umbrella review of epidemiological meta-analyses. *BMJ*, 384, e077310.
- LEUNG, C. W., LARAIA, B. A., FEINER, C., SOLIS, K., STEWART, A. L., ADLER, N. E. & EPEL, E. S. 2022. The Psychological Distress of Food Insecurity: A Qualitative Study of the Emotional Experiences of Parents and Their Coping Strategies. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 122, 1903-1910.e2.
- LOOPSTRA, R., REEVES, A. & TARASUK, V. 2019. The rise of hunger among low-income households: an analysis of the risks of food insecurity between 2004 and 2016 in a population-based study of UK adults. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 73, 668-673.
- MADRUGA, M., STEELE, E. M., REYNOLDS, C., LEVY, R. B. & RAUBER, F. 2023. Trends in food consumption according to the degree of food processing among the UK population over 11 years. *British Journal of Nutrition*, 130, 476-483.
- MASLOW, A. H. 1943. A theory of human motivation. *Psychological review*, 50, 370.
- MONTEIRO, C. A., CANNON, G., LEVY, R. B., MOUBARAC, J.-C., LOUZADA, M. L., RAUBER, F., KHANDPUR, N., CEDIEL, G., NERI, D. & MARTINEZ-STEEL, E. 2019. Ultra-processed foods: what they are and how to identify them. *Public health nutrition*, 22, 936-941.

- MOZAFFARIAN, D., APPEL, L. J. & VAN HORN, L. 2011. Components of a cardioprotective diet: new insights. *Circulation*, 123, 2870-2891.
- MULROONEY, H. M., RANTA, R., NANCHEVA, N., BHAKTA, D. & LAKE, S. 2023. Social supermarkets, nutritional implications and healthy eating: exploration of members and their views. *J Hum Nutr Diet*, 36, 2108-2120.
- PETTMAN, T. L., PONTIFEX, K., WILLIAMS, C. P., WILDGOOSE, D., DENT, C., FAIRBROTHER, G., CHAPMAN, J., SPRECKLEY, R., GOODWIN-SMITH, I. & BOGOMOLOVA, S. 2024. Part Discount Grocer, Part Social Connection: Defining Elements of Social Supermarkets. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 53, 1306-1328.
- PUDDEPHATT, J.-A., KEENAN, G. S., FIELDEN, A., REAVES, D. L., HALFORD, J. C. G. & HARDMAN, C. A. 2020. 'Eating to survive': A qualitative analysis of factors influencing food choice and eating behaviour in a food-insecure population. *Appetite*, 147, 104547.
- RANTA, R., NANCHEVA, N., MULROONEY, H., BHAKTA, D. & LAKE, S. 2024. Access, dignity, and choice: social supermarkets and the end of the food bank model in the UK? *Food, Culture & Society*, 27, 1216-1233.
- SAXENA, L. P. & TORNAGHI, C. 2018. *The emergence of social supermarkets in Britain: Food poverty, food waste and austerity retail*, CAWR.
- SCOTT, C., SUTHERLAND, J. & TAYLOR, A. 2018. *Affordability of the UK's Eatwell Guide*. London: The Food Foundation [Online]. Available: <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/affordability-uks-eatwell-guide> [Accessed 17th January 2022].
- SIMELANE, K. S. & WORTH, S. 2020. Food and nutrition security theory. *Food and Nutrition Bulletin*, 41, 367-379.
- STEEL, N., FORD, J. A., NEWTON, J. N., DAVIS, A. C., VOS, T., NAGHAVI, M., GLENN, S., HUGHES, A., DALTON, A. M. & STOCKTON, D. 2018. Changes in health in the countries of the UK and 150 English Local Authority areas 1990–2016: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2016. *The Lancet*, 392, 1647-1661.
- THE FOOD FOUNDATION. 2024. *Food Insecurity Tracking* [Online]. Available: <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-insecurity-tracking#tabs/Round-15> [Accessed 10th March 2025].
- THE FOOD FOUNDATION. 2025. *The Broken Plate 2025* [Online]. The Food Foundation. Available: <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/broken-plate-2025> [Accessed 29th January 2025].
- VAICIURGIS, V. T., CLANCY, A., CHARLTON, K., STEFOSKA-NEEDHAM, A. & BECK, E. 2024. Food provision to support improved nutrition and well-being of people experiencing disadvantage—perspectives of service providers. *Public Health Nutrition*, 27, e36.