

COMMUNITY
FOOD
INITIATIVES
2019 - 2021

Evaluation of the Community Food Initiative Programme, 2019-2021



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Acknowledgements

safefood conducted the evaluation of the Community Food Initiative Programme 2019-2021 and drafted this report.

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Foreword

The Community Food Initiative (CFI) Programme aims is to positively influence the eating habits of families living in low-income communities. The programme uses a community development approach to mainstream healthy food in the local setting and promote greater access and availability of healthy and safe food in low-income areas.

This report summarises the evaluation of a three-year **safefood** funded programme managed by South East Cork Area Development Partnership CLG, of 14 CFIs in low-income areas across the island of Ireland. It is intended that this report will inform the delivery of future CFI programmes.

Executive summary

Aim

This report aims to evaluate the Community Food Initiative (CFI) programme 2019-2021.

Method

The CFI programme was evaluated using information gathered from several different sources:

1. Questionnaires completed by the Community Food Initiatives
2. Collation of feedback from the CFI leaders, programme participants, steering group members, SECAD and **safefood**
3. Stakeholder views

Key findings

safefood funded 14 organisations to deliver projects from 2019-2021. Almost 5,250 families took part in a CFI activity including small projects and community events.

The programme increased awareness and knowledge around healthy eating and enhanced skills related to cooking, shopping, planning and budgeting. All these are transferable skills that can benefit an entire community. Participants also reported mental health, social and emotional benefits.

Evaluation of the programme highlighted several learnings that will inform future programmes.

- Online delivery was an integral part of the programme due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This approach was very successful and relevant at the time; however, it came with its own challenges and is not suitable for every organisation.
- Two main barriers to delivering the programme were identified, these were the inability to use funding to purchase cooking equipment and the unavailability of nutrition professionals to deliver sessions.
- Some CFIs felt the community events had little impact and found it challenging to reach a wider audience at community events. These events were impacted greatly by public health restrictions during the programme, and this must be considered.

Recommendations

- Use a hybrid approach to deliver small projects, combining in-person, live video and recorded video. The approach should be individualised to each organisation.
- Include the CFI at Home programme as part of the 2022-2024 CFI programme.
- Programme manager to support CFI leaders to identify alternative sources of funding for equipment.
- Explore opportunities for collaboration with nutrition and dietetic stakeholders to support delivery of the programme.
- Facilitate shared learning between CFIs on the delivery of successful community events and engaging a wider audience through CFI leader meetings.

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1 Background

What is food poverty?

Food poverty is ‘the inability to have an adequate and nutritious diet’. It impacts on health, culture and social participation. It’s a complex issue, with no single cause. It is part of the poverty experience and is linked to a variety of factors, including awareness, self-efficacy, access, affordability and availability.

Food poverty on the island of Ireland

Food poverty is a reality for many people on the island of Ireland (IOI). Food poverty was experienced by 7.4% of households in Ireland in 2019, an increase from 7% in 2018 (1). In Northern Ireland (NI) 16% of adults were food insecure in 2020-2021, 9% had low food security and 7% had very low food security (2).

Addressing food poverty and supporting the development of skills relating to healthy eating, cooking and budgeting are actions in obesity policies in Ireland and Northern Ireland. A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan includes an action to ‘Develop and integrate evidence based, effective, community-based health promotion programmes targeted at high-risk groups within all community health organisations’ (3). In Northern Ireland, A Fitter Future for All – Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity includes the outcomes ‘Families, groups and communities in areas of deprivation supported to increase knowledge of good nutrition, practical cooking skills and food budgeting’ and ‘Coordinated approach to address food poverty developed’ (4). **safefood** has a remit to support the implementation of these policies. The Community Food Initiatives programme is one mechanism through which this is achieved.

Community food initiatives

The Community Food Initiative aims to positively influence the eating habits of families with children in low-income communities across the island of Ireland. The programme uses a community development approach to promote greater access and availability of healthy food

in the community. They aim to identify and promote best practice under the following themes:

1. Supporting an increased awareness/knowledge around healthy eating
2. Healthy shopping
3. Budgeting and food/meal planning skills
4. Cooking skills
5. Improving the availability and access to safe and healthy food in the community
6. Preventing food wastage, promoting food safety and hygiene.

Since 2010, **safefood** has funded 44 projects across the island of Ireland. The 2019-2021 programme funded 14 community initiatives. Since 2016 the Community Food Initiatives have been administered at a local level by SECAD Partnership CLG.

Evaluation of the Community Food Initiative Programme, 2019-2021

This document summarises the key findings from the evaluation of the CFI Programme, which began in March 2019 and concluded in December 2021. In 2019 **safefood** provided SECAD with funding to establish the programme. The objectives of the Programme were to:

- Fund fourteen community-based food projects across the island of Ireland, over a three-year period (2019-2021).
- Provide technical support, collective training and facilitate networking.
- Promote best practice and governance in the delivery of community projects.
- Encourage projects to consider long-term sustainability from the start of the Programme.
- Promote shared learning amongst CFIs on the island of Ireland.
- Identify policy and best practice lessons from the Programme and increase awareness of these among key stakeholders across the island of Ireland.

Table 1 The 10 projects involved the CFI Programme, 2019-2021

CFI	Location
Bogside & Brandywell Initiative	Co Derry/Londonderry
Carlow County Development Partnership	Co Carlow
Dublin North West Area Partnership	Dublin 11
Resurgam Trust	Co Antrim / Down
Ballyhoura Development	Co Limerick / Cork
Co Wicklow Community Partnership	Co Wicklow
Inishowen Development Partnership	Co Donegal
IRD Duhallow CLG	Co Cork / Kerry
North Antrim Community Network	Co Antrim
Offaly Local Development Company	Co Offaly
Galway City Partnership	Co Galway
New Lodge Duncairn Community Health Partnership	Co Antrim
South Tipperary Development Company	Co Tipperary
County Armagh Community Development	Co Armagh

Projects were funded up to a maximum of €9,000 or £8,100 per project per year. Funding was provided annually to SECAD who then distribute to the projects. SECAD liaised with projects and **safefood** on budgetary change requests.

2 Methodology

The Community Food Initiatives (CFI) were evaluated using information gathered from several different sources:

Questionnaires completed by Community Food Initiatives

Each CFI completed biannual questionnaires, which documented their activities and progress. These questionnaires gathered a range of qualitative and quantitative information about different aspects of the projects, including

- The total number of families that engaged in a range of CFI activities
- The total number of small projects and community events hosted
- The total number of steering group meetings hosted
- The total number of steering group member organisations
- The total number of organisations involved in community events
- The total number of promotional activities carried out by the CFIs
- What were the main learnings of the process?
- What were the main challenges of the process?

(“Qualitative” research relies on observations and insights drawn, for example, from discussions with CFI leaders. “Quantitative” research produces measurable data, for example the number of participants in each project.)

Collation of feedback from the CFI leaders, programme participants, steering group members, SECAD and safefood

safefood tasked Ipsos MRBI, a market research company, to gather feedback on the CFI programme. Interviews were carried out with CFI leaders, programme participants, steering group members, programme manager (SECAD) and **safefood**. All interviews took place via online video conferencing software. CFI leaders, steering group members and programme

participants were recruited from across the 14 CFIs to ensure inclusion of a broad range of interviewees.

The following interviews were conducted:

- CFI leaders – three interviews, two in Ireland and one in Northern Ireland
- Programme participants – two group discussions including three participants in each group, one group in Ireland, one group in Northern Ireland
- Steering group members – three interviews, two in Ireland and one in Northern Ireland
- Programme manager – one interview with the programme manager from SECAD
- **safefood** – one interview with two **safefood** representatives responsible for managing the programme.

The objectives of this research included but were not limited to:

For the CFI Leaders

- To examine their overall experience of participation including.
 - The application processes
 - The process of engaging, managing and developing the local CFI steering groups
 - The devising and delivery of projects.
- To explore their local experience in terms of
 - Success
 - Key challenges
 - Sustainability of the programme
 - Areas for improvement.
- To explore their overall satisfaction with
 - The support provided by **safefood** and SECAD
 - The administrative structures that are in place.
- To examine areas for exploration and shared learning.

For participants in CFI initiatives

- To examine their overall satisfaction with the programme.

- To examine the impact that the programme has made on them and their families in terms of:
 - Food purchasing
 - Food preparation
 - Food consumption
 - Knowledge, understanding and outlook towards food and healthy eating
 - Changes to their food choices and behaviours towards food
- Areas for improvement for future initiatives / projects.

For Steering Group Members

- To assess their overall view of the CFI programme.
- To examine their involvement in the programme and the benefits to their participation.
- To explore how the programme can be improved for all those who take part.

For the SECAD Programme Manager

- To conduct an overall assessment of their satisfaction with the programme administration and the support received from *safefood*.
- To assess what has worked well and areas for improvement.

For *safefood*

- To examine satisfaction with the way the programme was managed in terms of outcomes and good value for money.
- To examine where the programme has worked well, not worked well and could be improved for future programmes.

Stakeholder views

A survey was developed to allow different aspects of the CFI programme to be evaluated. The survey containing 13 questions was sent out to members of the All-island Food Poverty Network, the All-island Obesity Action forum, the Obesity Policy Implementation Oversight Group and Healthy Eating subgroup in Ireland and the Obesity Prevention Steering Group and Regional Obesity Prevention Implementation Group in Northern Ireland, 133 individuals in total. The survey was opened on 29/11/2021 and remained open until 14/01/2022. Eight people responded to the survey. The response rate was 6%.

3 Results

Work of the Community Food Initiatives (CFI)

The main types of activities conducted by CFIs with the public were

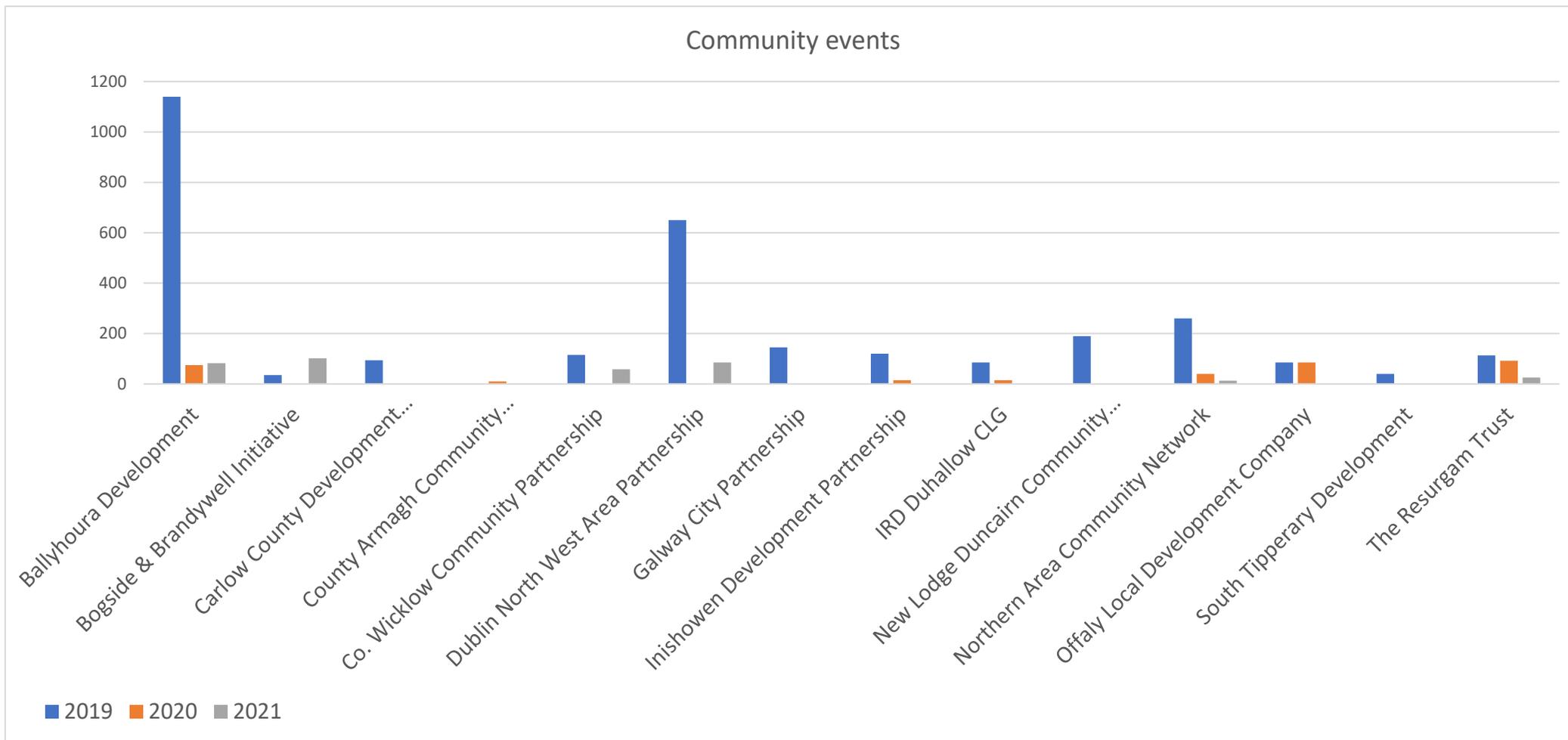
- Activities that developed food preparation and cooking skills including cooking courses, running ‘Healthy Food Made Easy’ or ‘Cook It’ courses and cooking demonstrations.
- Healthy eating activities such as nutrition courses, group talks on topics such as food labelling and healthy lunchboxes, and interactive stands including the ‘Know Your Food Pyramid challenge’.
- Activities that helped develop practical skills such as meal planning, budgeting, shopping, reducing food waste and food safety.

The total number of families that engaged in CFI activities

During the three years of the programme almost 5,250 families took part in a CFI activity. The numbers of participants involved across the CFIs community events and small projects varied (Figure 1 and Figure 2) and this reflected differences in local population sizes and their needs relative to the target population for the CFI. Some of the locations were urban and others rural. During 2020 and 2021 numbers participating were limited due to public health restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

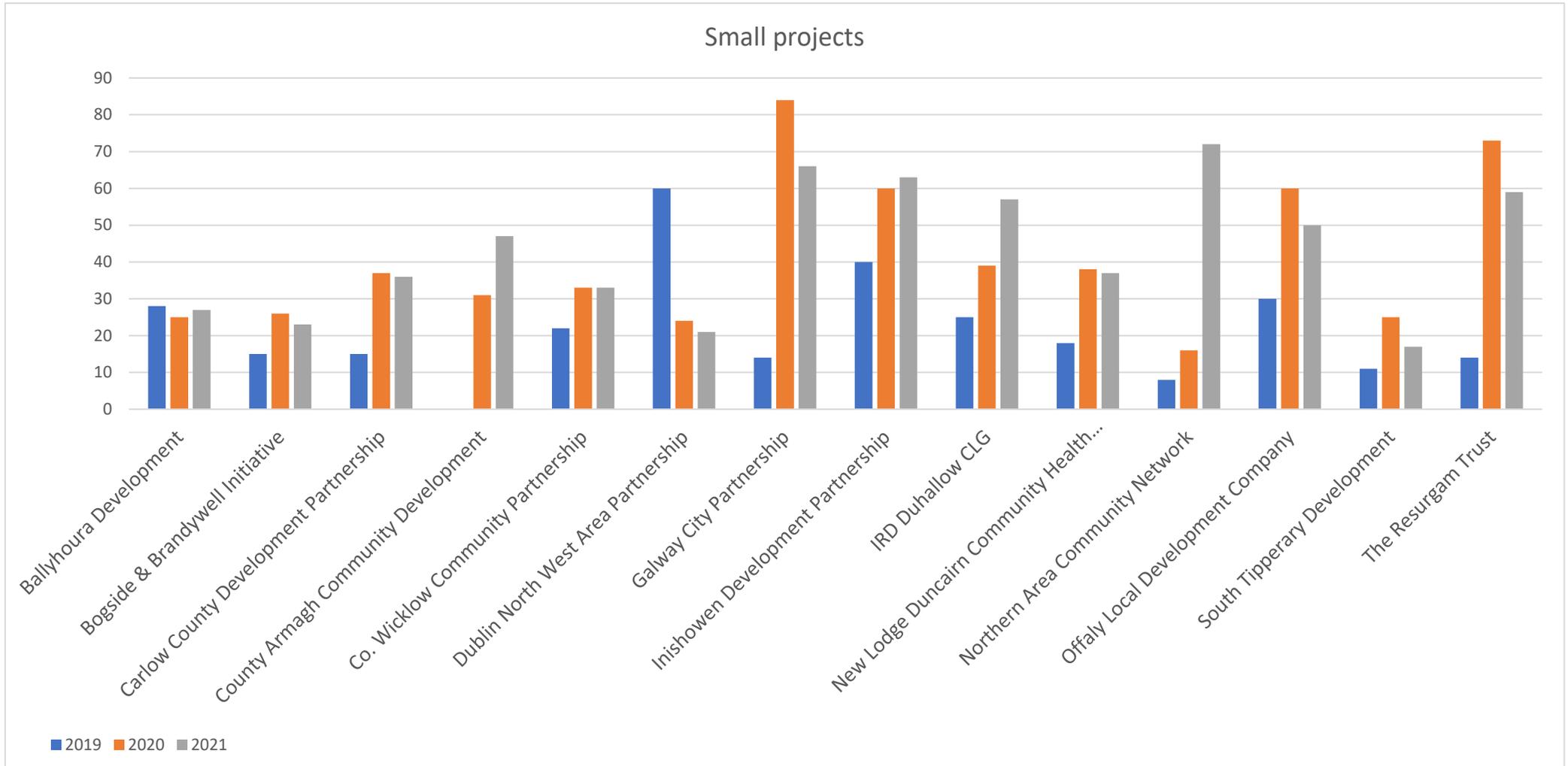
- 3769 families took part in community events from 2019 to 2022 (Figure 1).
- 1479 families participated in small projects across the 3 years of the programme (Figure 2).

Figure 1 Number of people attending community events in 2019, 2020 and 2021¹



¹ County Armagh Community Development CFI joined the CFI programme in 2020.

Figure 2 Number of people participating in small projects in 2019, 2020 and 2021²



² County Armagh Community Development CFI joined the CFI programme in 2020.

The total number of CFI activities

Each year the CFIs must hold two community events and at least two small projects. The CFIs are set a target to attract at least 20 families to each community event and a minimum of 5 people must participate in each small project. The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting public health restrictions that began in March 2020 impacted the CFIs ability to reach these targets. As a result, during 2020 and 2021, the CFIs were given the option of running additional small projects in place of community events.

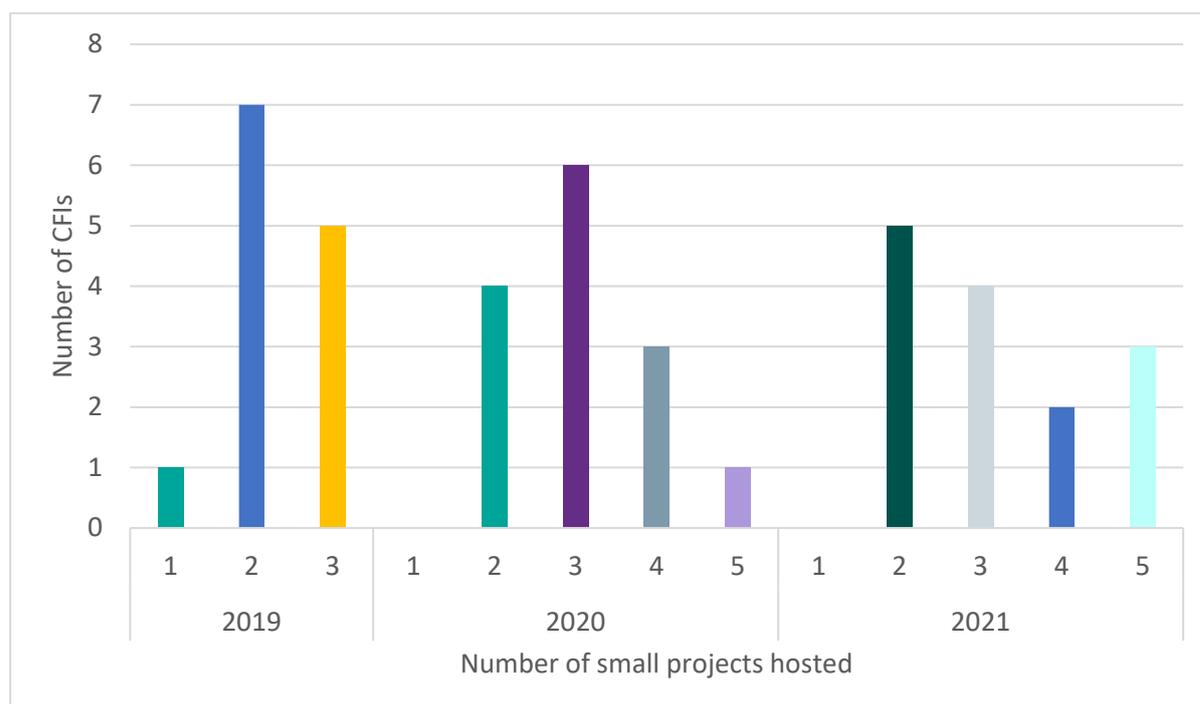
Community events:

In 2019 each CFI hosted two community events; two CFIs did not reach the target of attracting 20 families to one of their community events. SECAD discussed this with each group individually. Seven CFIs hosted community events in 2020 and six hosted community events in 2021. Attendance at these events was limited due to public health restrictions associated with the pandemic.

Small projects:

One CFI did not meet the target of hosting at least 2 small projects in 2019 and hosted one small project. SEACD discussed this with the CFI. Many of the CFIs ran more than 2 small projects with some hosting up to 5 small projects. Five CFIs ran 3 small projects and 7 ran 2 small projects in 2019. Each CFI met the target of hosting at least 2 small projects in 2020 and 2021. In 2020, one CFI ran 5 small projects, 3 ran 4, 6 ran 3 and 4 ran 2 small projects. In 2021, 3 CFIs ran 5 small projects, 2 ran 4, 4 ran 3 and 5 ran 2 small projects (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Number of small projects hosted by the CFIs each year



In 2019 one CFI did not meet the target of 5 participants in a small project. In 2020 and 2021 all CFIs had 5 or more participants in each small project. The number of participants varied across the CFIs with up to 51 participants taking part in a small project. During 2020 and 2021 the majority of projects were delivered online due to public health restrictions. For some this provided the opportunity to engage with a larger audience.

The total number of organisations involved in community events

The CFIs are set the target of involving 10 support organisations in the delivery of community events. Organisations were involved in community events as exhibitors and/or speakers. In 2019, 3 CFIs did not reach this target. SECAD spoke to each CFI individually to address this and support meeting the target moving forward. In 2020 and 2021, the delivery of community events was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The total number of steering group member organisations

CFI organisations are required to form a local CFI steering group. The purpose of the local steering group is:

- To support the design and delivery of two community events each year and to identify participants to support through the small projects
- To promote best practice under the CFI themes

- To work with existing organisations and structures in their area to build long term sustainability for similar activities into the future.

Each CFI is expected to have a minimum of 8 organisations involved in the steering group. In 2019, 3 CFIs did not meet this target. In 2020 and 2021, 5 of the 14 CFIs did not meet this target. Engagement from organisations was challenging partly due to colleagues adjusting to new working practices and many reassigned to different Covid-19 response duties.

Members of the steering group came from a wide range of organisations including public bodies such as the Health Service Executive and Health and Social Care Trust; Local Authorities such as Local Enterprise Offices; community organisations including family resource centres and youth services; agencies including Money & Budgeting services and Citizens Information; and experts/tutors such as registered nutritionists and chefs.

The total number of steering group meetings hosted

Each CFI is required to hold a minimum of 4 steering group meetings each year. In 2019, 2 CFIs did not meet this target. SECAD spoke to each CFI individually about the importance of holding steering group meetings. In 2020 and 2021, 7 CFIs did not meet this target. Many of the CFIs found it difficult to convene meetings due to the pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic, organisations were adjusting to new ways of working and working within public health restrictions. Many steering group members work for government organisations and were reassigned during the Covid-19 pandemic, as a result steering group meetings could not always take place. The CFI leaders continued to communicate with steering group members through phone calls and email and ensured they were involved in decision making.

The total number of promotional activities carried out by the CFIs

The final target set for CFIs was the number of promotional activities carried out. The CFIs are tasked with undertaking at least 10 promotional activities. This includes one-to-one targeting, word of mouth, flyers, posters, social media posts, notices on local radio and community news. In 2019 all CFIs met the target of carrying out 10 promotion activities. In 2020, 4 CFIs did not meet this target and in 2021 3 did not meet this target. In 2020 and 2021, most of the CFIs choose to hold additional small projects in place of community events, this may have impacted on promotional activities as one-to-one targeting is often used to recruit participants for these projects.

Impact on participants

Participants said they enjoyed the programme and found it useful, rewarding and fun. They reported changes in food skills and behaviours. Many of these changes have the potential to be long-term changes. Some of the main changes reported include:

Increased confidence to cook from scratch and experiment with food

The course provided participants with basic cooking skills and the confidence to build on these. Participants reported they felt confident to adapt the recipes they learned to meet the needs of the family or to experiment with new foods and recipes.

“We loved it...Bobby made 2 loaves again this morning and they’re gone already. The kids couldn’t get enough of it. And as for the soup they’ve asked for more to be made tomorrow and Bobby wants some for work too so I’m going to try and double/triple the recipe.” (Participant)

Expansion of recipe repertoire

The programme provided the opportunity for families to try new meals. Participants said the meals they prepared as part of the programme have become staples at home.

“It was just everyday recipes you could cook and some different ideas as well. My girls love the savoury mince and they wouldn’t be wild for trying different things but they love trying it.” (Participant)

Opportunity to cook as a family

Some participants reported getting children involved in cooking recipes and trying new foods.

“The course was great because I don’t cook too often with the girls so it was nice to be able to do it and have other kids on zoom as well. It was so handy

having all the ingredients provided so I didn't even have to worry about that.” (Participant)

This had benefits outside of learning cooking skills and trying new foods, participants reported spending more time together as a family and mental health benefits.

“Some of the feedback that we would have got was, you know, my son wouldn't be in the same room as me before this course. And now he's helping to cook and we're kind of chatting and having a laugh over it. It had a huge impact in terms of kind of mental health and socially for the family just even to do that together. The benefit is far beyond the nutrition in the value of it.” (CFI Leader)

Good ingredients into the home

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic the CFIs had to adapt, and many small projects were run online. Participants were provided with the ingredients they needed to cook meals and could follow along with a demonstration online. The provision of healthy foods into the home removes a significant barrier to preparation for families. Many of the participants said they still had some leftover ingredients that they can use to try other recipes.

“The ingredients were great each week, all healthy recipes and something we hadn't tried before.” (Participant)

Increased confidence in budgeting, planning and maximizing time

Among the improved food and cooking, CFI leaders reported that participants learned how to make meals “stretch” further and how to prepare multiple meals at once. Participants were able to meal plan and learned the skills to confidently make small changes and shop to suit their family's needs.

Ethnic integration

CFI leaders and steering group members highlighted food as a great way of facilitating integration with ethnic communities through practical means. A steering group member noted that one of the families engaged in the programme are now operating a pop-up restaurant in the Inishowen area, demonstrating knock on effects from the programme which may not have happened otherwise.

Social and emotional benefits

It was felt very strongly by steering group members that the impact of the programme was much wider than the direct public health benefit of promoting food and nutrition. A positive impact was noted for emotional health and wellbeing and strengthening social connections.

“Being at home, great benefit of being in own kitchen, facilitator was brilliant and talking us through the recipes and with advice. It was very well organised, it was something different during lockdown, good for mental health to see and talk to others.” (Participant)

“Found it interesting, with zoom cooking. Good to have healthy meal, good ideas during COVID. Helped my confidence in cooking. Social aspect was great.” (Participant)

Local management of the CFI programme by CFI leaders and steering groups

Application process

The majority of the CFIs were satisfied with the application process for the programme. Some CFIs felt there is some duplication, highlighting the requirement to fill in an initial application form outlining their plans for the 3-year programme and if successful a separate yearly proposal for community events and small projects.

Funding process

The majority of CFIs were satisfied with the funding process and the flexible response from **safe food** and SECAD to requests.

Technical support, collective training and networking

Technical support, collective training and networking was organised by SEACD in conjunction with **safefood**. In addition, SECAD provided technical assistance to the CFI Leaders in the preparation of their proposals and in the delivery of their activities.

The following training and networking events took place:

- At the launch of the CFI programme in March 2019, the CFI leaders attended two training sessions, one on social media delivered by the Communications Manager at **safefood** and one on data protection requirements delivered by the Human Resources and Compliance Executive at **safefood**.
- In November 2019, an event was held in Belfast on promoting healthy eating initiatives in the wider community. Three CFIs presented on their work as part of the CFI programme during 2019. Attendees also heard presentations from ASG & Partners, a marketing communications agency on how to promote the work of the CFIs. Members of the Human Health & Nutrition team at **safefood** spoke on resources available to the CFIs and on nutrition themes for projects and events.
- In March 2020, **safefood** and SECAD hosted an event entitled 'The Benefits of Incorporating Healthy Eating & Social Prescribing into Social Inclusion Work'. The event provided the opportunity to hear about the benefits of referring clients to healthy eating and social prescribing initiatives. It also provided an opportunity to network with people working in all aspects of the social inclusion sector.
- In 2021, **safefood** and SECAD hosted two webinars to promote shared learning amongst the Community Food Initiatives. The first webinar entitled 'Delivering Community Food Projects Remotely - Successes and learnings from 2020' featured a number of the CFI leaders sharing the benefits and challenges of moving their projects online as a result of the pandemic. The second webinar entitled 'Designing community food programmes that last' shared strategies to ensure sustainability of the CFIs after the programme finished.

Successes

The CFI leaders and steering group members identified some key success of the programme:

- The flexibility of **safefood** to adapt to the challenges of Covid-19. As a result of the pandemic many programmes could not continue as initially planned, CFI leaders acknowledged that **safefood** were flexible in allowing the CFIs to adapt their plans.

- Food is seen as an effective means to start a conversation about other services and provided an opportunity for the CFIs to engage with audiences they may otherwise struggle to reach.

“It very much lends itself to be able to talk about more things and to sign people into other programmes, other services that they may need, or at least inform them about them, and see where it goes from there.” (CFI Leader)

- Hosting small projects online increased the reach of the programme for many organisations. It removed barriers such as transport, childcare, restricted movement through illness and time constraints.

“I did it all through YouTube because my kids have after school things on the Monday evening and it clashed with the time. So it was great to be able to do it at my own time later on that evening when I was home, after having everything done and got homework and stuff out of the way. So I used a lot of the YouTube, and followed the recipes and I found it great.” (Participant)

“I'm not able to drive and I have issues with my mobility. It's hard for me to get about. So this was good for me that I was able to do it at home. And anything I wasn't able to follow. I was able to do it afterwards on YouTube.” (Participant)

- Community events work best when combined with other events, allowing the organisations to reach larger numbers.

“So what definitely works in person is combining it with other community events we might have on. We had a family day and a line

up of interactive displays shows those kind of things. And we dedicate about half the space to CFI live demonstrations.” (CFI Leader)

- CFI leaders and steering group members welcomed the physical and digital support materials provided by **safe food**, this included leaflets, recipe booklets, posters and portion plates.

And they print reams of stuff for us. And they have provided so many resources for CFI leaders. It is super. Things like portion plates that we can give and say ‘Okay, this is what you should be giving your child like’. And like, you can tell people like only give a child the size of their fist, that’s the portion that they eat. But if you actually see it on plate, it works.” (CFI Leader)

“Everybody loved their 101 square meal book, it couldn’t be bettered. They were saying it was amazing. That they had already cooked a meal from it and were going to cook more.” (CFI Leader)

- The CFIs acknowledged the help and support they received from SECAD. The CFIs reported that SECAD provided valuable knowledge and insights of initiatives and were responsive and encouraging in dealing with queries.
- The experience of being part of the programme influenced many organisations to seek training for their own staff to become tutors for programmes such as ‘Cook It’ and ‘Food Values’. For example, 2 staff members from County Armagh Community Development signed up for the facilitator training for the regional ‘Making the most of your Slow Cooker’ Programme.
- As a result of their involvement in the CFI some organisations received funding from other sources to run programmes promoting food and cooking skills. Galway City Partnership received funding from Healthy Ireland to expand their family cooking project.

Challenges

The CFI leaders and steering group members identified some key challenges including:

- Technological or connectivity issues when running programmes virtually.
- A reduced ability to engage with vulnerable audiences in the online setting. CFI leaders noted the loss of opportunity to build rapport and explore other needs with participants.
- Loss of social engagement for participants in the online setting. In-person cookery demonstrations are followed by eating together and provide the opportunity for bonding for individuals who are often otherwise isolated.
- Some CFIs reported it can be challenging to spend the funds, particularly if the applicants can utilise hours and offers from other groups. For example, CFIs may have free access to a space to provide cookery demonstrations and can use cookery tutors from institutions they already have links with for no additional cost.
- One barrier mentioned for some, was the poor standard or total absence of basic cooking utensils, pots and pans in the home. Whilst only in a minority of cases, this was seen as a potential gap that couldn't be addressed by the funding.
- A few comments were made about the availability and cost of engaging with a registered dietitian/nutritionist. In some areas there was difficulty accessing dietitians working within community settings and finding dietitians working in the private sector often proved difficult and expensive. It should be noted that during the Covid-19 pandemic many community/public health dietitians/nutritionists were redeployed.
- The absence of registered dietitian/nutritionist support for some organisations left tutors in a difficult position in being presented with questions they cannot answer.

***“It puts a lot of onus on the tutor to deliver something but then not talk about elements of it. The position I'm asking them to be in is not always great. All she can do she or he can do is guide them towards other resources. But the population we're dealing with are in need of probably a little bit more than that.”
(CFI Leader)***

Views of Stakeholders

Several national and regional stakeholders gave their views on the Community Food Initiative Programme, 2019–2021, which are summarised here. The response rate was low (6%) therefore the results must be interpreted with caution. Full results can be found in Appendix 1.

- Stakeholders viewed the CFI programme positively and were satisfied with the programmes ability to influence or inform practice and policy.
- Engaging and connecting with members of the community was reported as one of the top benefits of the CFI programme at local level. Other answers included:
 - It enabled communities to reach out to those who may have been isolated during the pandemic and helped them to deliver programmes which engaged people in a meaningful way
 - Helps to support and develop local initiatives
 - Developing links and embedding core nutrition skills programmes at local level
- Three quarters of respondents felt the programme had broader relevance.
- Most respondents felt the CFI programme integrates quite well with existing structures and services.
- Most respondents felt the programme was sustainable long-term.
- Most of the stakeholders said they believe there is probably a future for this approach in improving access to healthy food in the community.
- When asked if there was anything else they would like to add, the respondents mentioned:
 - Ensuring communities use registered nutrition professionals for advice and delivering training has been a success of this programme and this should be replicated to partner agencies. Although challenging for some to make those links once developed its very positive. Personally, I did get somewhat confused over whether transform your trolley and CFI were part of the same funding as in one HLC both ran. Maybe consideration for combining similar projects. Also, CFI can lack flexibility which was a challenge during Covid, and I think the criteria needs reviewed to allow adaption if acceptable.

- Very strict with funding for food only. It would be useful in future to be able to spend on equipment/resources also. Great partnership working.
- A programme for older people
- Very encouraging for the future enhancement of Health & Wellbeing of our local Communities

Other

CFI at Home

Considering the learnings and successes of the delivery of the small projects online, in 2020, **safe food** invited community organisations on the island of Ireland to apply for funding to deliver small projects using the same approach. Community organisations could apply to a maximum of 1500 euros or sterling equivalent. Eighteen organisations applied and completed the programme, 15 in Ireland and three in Northern Ireland. The project represented a total spend of €32,392 and the following organisations delivered the programme at a community level:

CFI at Home	Location
Ligoniel Healthy Living Centre	Co Antrim
South Kerry Development Partnership	Co Kerry
Foodshare Kerry	Co Kerry
South Lough Neagh Regeneration Association	Co Tyrone
Foróige - Knocknacarra Area	Co Galway
Focus Family Resource Centre	Co Cavan
Habinteg Housing Association	Co Down
Bogside & Brandywell Health Forum	Co Derry/Londonderry
Cloyne Diocesan Youth Services	Co Cork
Lus Na Gréine Family Resource Centre	Co Longford
SECAD Partnership CLG	Co Cork
Foróige Croom Youth in Action Project	Co Limerick
Airfield Estate	Co Dublin

CFI at home	Location
Southside Partnership DLR	Co Dublin
Ballymote Family Resource Centre CLG	Co Sligo
Carrigtwohill Family Resource Centre	Co Cork
Foróige Ballinboyle Youth Project	Co Galway
Kells Family Resource Centre	Co Meath

CFI at Home leaders ran programmes that covered the same themes as the CFI programme and took the same approach in terms of utilising **safefood** resources and collaborating with local stakeholders, using existing structures and programmes like Food Values, Cook It or Healthy Food Made Easy.

This community approach also informed the Transform your Trolley campaign in Northern Ireland, a partnership between **safefood** and the Healthy Living Centre Alliance that saw 13 Healthy Living Centres taking part in 2020 and 12 participating in the programme in 2021. In 2021, the Alliance utilised a similar model to the one used to deliver Transform your Trolley to roll out a community programme funded by the Department for Communities in Northern Ireland.

Finally, it's worth noting that the CFI Leaders have been sharing the challenges and learnings of adapting for COVID-19 and this approach has influenced how funding from other organisations has been utilized in the community, examples are funding from Tusla in the Ballyhoura area and from Healthy Ireland in Galway.

Promotion of CFIs

Presentations

The Community Food Initiative Programme was presented to a wide range of groups and organisations. The presentations shared learnings, challenges and the experiences of the CFI organisations.

In June 2020, Carrie Donoghue from Ballyhoura Development community food initiative presented to the **safefood** Advisory Board. The presentation showed how Ballyhoura continued to deliver the Community Food Initiative Programme in the North Cork/East

Limerick area during lockdown of the Covid-19 Pandemic when participants could not come to them.

In November 2021, the Human Health and Nutrition team presented on the programme to the **safefood** Advisory Board. The presentation highlighted the types of projects delivered, the response of the leaders to the challenges posed by Covid-19 as well as the CFI video and the case study booklet.

Webinars

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and public health restrictions, in 2021 the regional events moved to an online format. These events provided the CFIs with the opportunity to share learnings with each other. These webinars were also open to a wider audience of individuals working across the community sector. A number of the CFI leaders presented on the work as part of the CFI programme at these events along with other individuals working in the community sector. Almost 200 people attended the live webinars. The webinars were uploaded to the **safefood** website so they could be viewed after the event. The webinars have been viewed an additional 344 times (as of 22 April 2022).

Other activities

A booklet, which can be viewed at the following link

<https://www.safefood.net/getattachment/9b42b35a-49fb-4835-8b73-2eb8cc6fa4b8/Safefood-CFI-Booklet-2019-2021-Digital.pdf?lang=en-IE>, showcases the work of the CFIs was published in October 2021. The booklet contains examples of community events and small projects hosted by each of the CFIs. The booklet showcases the work of the CFIs and acts as a resource for future CFI leaders and other community organisations running projects relating to food and healthy eating.

Finally, a video, which can be viewed at the following link

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J74vAN9g-Dw&t=2s> was created by **safefood** to further promote the work of the CFIs. The video features CFI leaders from the Triax Neighbourhood Management Team in Derry, Dr Anne Griffin from University of Limerick who is a CFI Steering Group Member for Ballyhoura Development and two participants from the CFI programme.

4 Discussion

safefood successfully funded fourteen community-based organisations across the island of Ireland, to deliver projects over a three-year period. This was an increase from 13 CFIs in the 2016-2018 programme. SECAD were appointed programme managers and administered the programme at a local level and provided technical support to each of the CFI leaders. The programme engaged with almost 5,250 families over a 3-year period.

The programme had a positive impact on families and communities increasing awareness and knowledge around healthy eating. The projects promoted enhanced food skills with participants reporting changes related to cooking, shopping, planning and budgeting. All these skills are transferable and can benefit the wider family and community. The programme had a wider impact on communities that extended beyond the healthy eating themes that it set out to address, positive impacts on mental health were reported by many participants with some describing it as a “*nice, happy place to be*”. The programme provided social and emotional benefits, providing participants the opportunity to connect with others during an otherwise isolating time during Covid-19. The programme was delivered in a non-stigmatising way and that allowed for participants to feel safe and engage better.

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted greatly on the CFI programme. The CFI leaders had to adapt the delivery of their projects in response to the resulting public health restrictions. Each CFI faced a unique set of challenges in their communities. The CFIs showed innovation, creativity, and resilience in their response to these challenges, moving to delivering programmes online. This proved very successful with many CFIs running a greater number of projects each year and engaging with a larger audience. The learnings from this approach will be considered in future programmes.

Long-term sustainability of the projects was promoted throughout the programme. The CFI leaders had the opportunity to attend several training and networking events over the course of the 3-years to develop their skills and knowledge. These skills are transferable into other areas of their work and can be applied to other community programmes. A number of the

CFIs successfully received funding from other sources to continue running healthy eating and cookery programmes as a result of their involvement in the CFI programme.

The programme gained a lot of interest from other stakeholder organisations, some of which integrated elements of the CFI programme into their own initiatives, such as the innovative approach that was taken during pandemic. From an awareness perspective, stakeholders are now more familiar with the CFI work and there are new opportunities to collaborate with existing and new programmes, some examples include the Healthy Living Centre Alliance in Northern Ireland or the Sláintecare Healthy Communities in Ireland.

Key learnings

Evaluation of the Community Food Initiatives 2019-2021 programme highlighted several key learnings. These learnings will inform the approach taken for future programmes.

1. Hybrid model

The Covid-19 pandemic presented many challenges for the CFIs, but they showed innovation and resilience in their response. As a result of the public health restrictions the majority of projects moved to being delivered online. The remote approach to delivering programmes was very successful and pertinent at the time, providing many with the opportunity to engage with a wider audience, however it came with its own challenges and is not suitable for every organisation. A balance is needed going forward, that considers the benefits of remote delivery, including reach and cost effectiveness and the need for face-to-face learning and interactions that were so impactful in previous programmes.

Recommendations:

- Combine in-person, live video and recorded video into small projects to maximise participation. The approach should be individualised to best suit the needs of each organisation and their community.
- Include the CFI at Home programme as part of the 2022-2024 CFI programme.

2. Address barriers

The CFIs identified barriers and challenges to successful delivery of the programme. Two main barriers were identified, these were the inability to use funding to purchase cooking equipment and the unavailability of nutrition professionals to deliver sessions.

Recommendations:

- Programme manager and CFI leaders to identify alternative sources of funding for equipment and signpost to these.
- Explore opportunities for Sláintecare Healthy Communities Food & Nutrition workers to support CFIs in Ireland. The Sláintecare Healthy Communities programme provides increased health and wellbeing services including nutrition in 19 community areas across Ireland.
- Continue to collaborate with the Public Health Dietitians Group in Northern Ireland to support the programme. The group is a network of dietitians working in public health.
- Explore opportunities to collaborate with the Healthy Living Centre Alliance via their Food Health Working Group. The role of the Food Health Working Group is to enable Healthy Living Centres to adopt a pro-active policy and positive practices within their communities, promoting and facilitating a healthier approach to food and nutrition.

3. Community events

Some CFIs felt the community events had little impact when compared to small projects and found it challenging to reach a wider audience. Community events were impacted greatly by public health restrictions during the programme and this must be taken into account.

Recommendations:

- Emphasise the benefits of community events at CFI leader meetings.
- Facilitate shared learning between CFIs to promote the success of these events. CFI leaders meetings provide an opportunity to approach this.

5 References

1. Department of Social Protection. Social Inclusion Monitor 2018 and 2019. Dublin: Department of Social Protection.; 2021.
2. Food Standards Agency. Food and You 2: Northern Ireland. Wave 1-2 Key Findings. Food Standards Agency; 2021.
3. Department of Health. A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan. Dublin; 2016.
4. Department of Health. A Fitter Future for All: Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland 2012-2022. 2012.

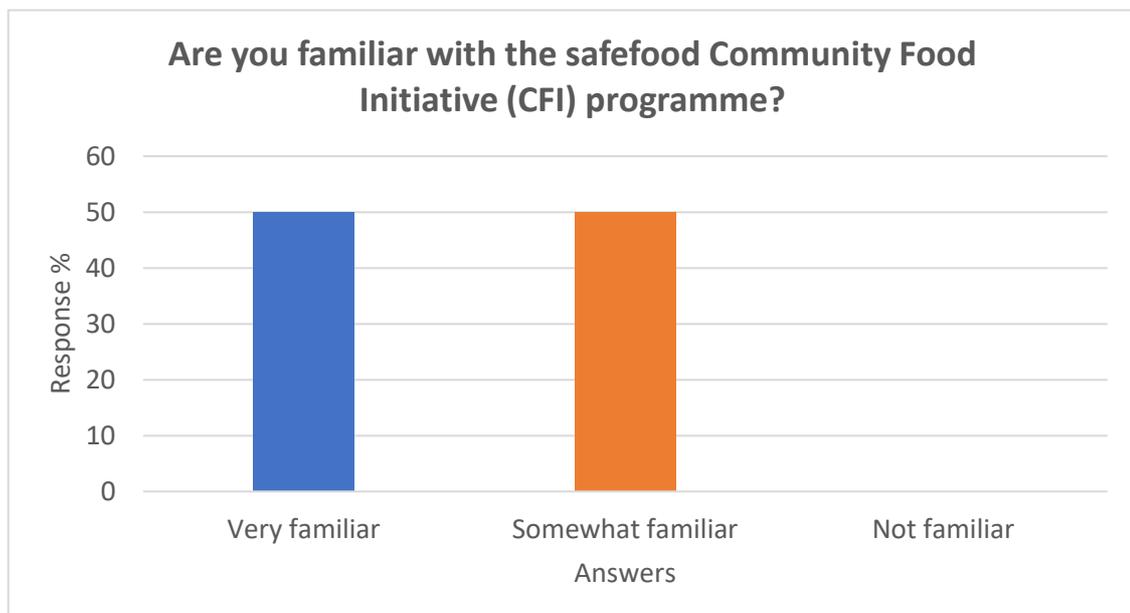
6 Appendices

Appendix 1

Stakeholder survey

Question 1. Are you familiar with the safefood Community Food Initiative (CFI) programme?

All respondents answered this question. Half of respondents were 'very familiar', and half of respondents were 'somewhat familiar' with the CFI programme.



Question 2. If so, where did you hear about the programme?

All respondents answered this question. There were varied responses to this question including:

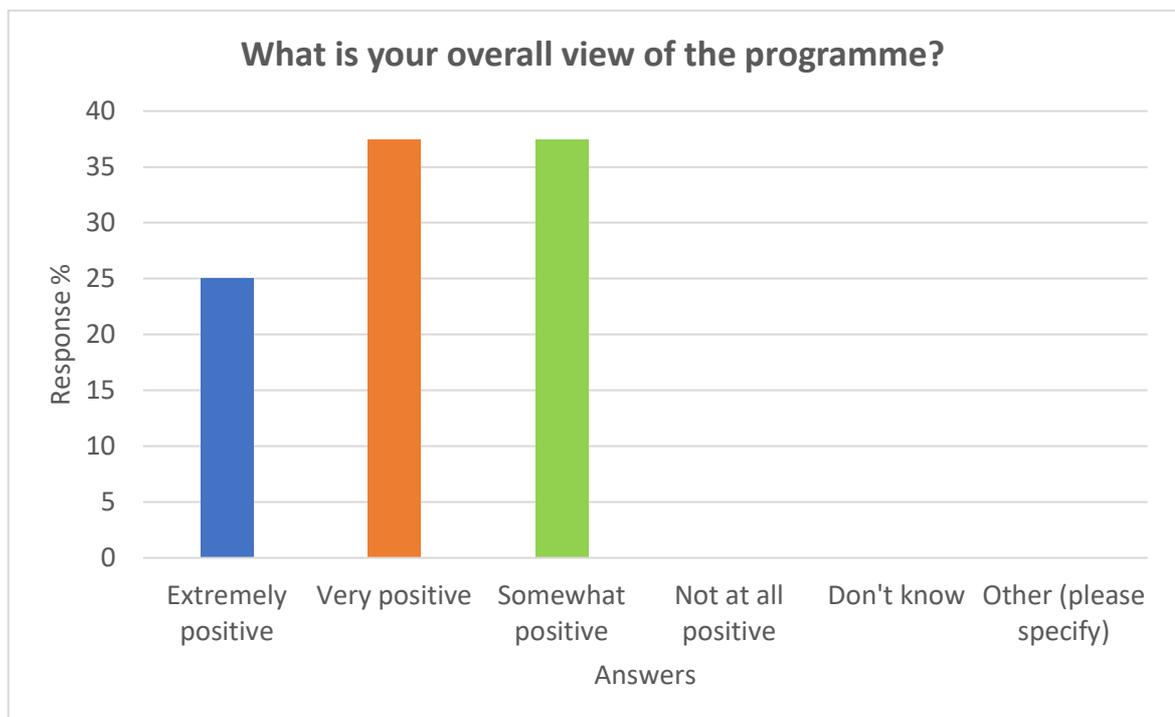
- Through meetings at which safefood is represented
- I am a member of the CFI steering group as a dietetic representative for South eastern HSCT
- Through my role as a Dietitian
- Advertised Locally, my children attended some programmes

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- Information from safefood
- Via ROPIG
- Through various stakeholder group e.g. AIOAF
- **safefood** meeting

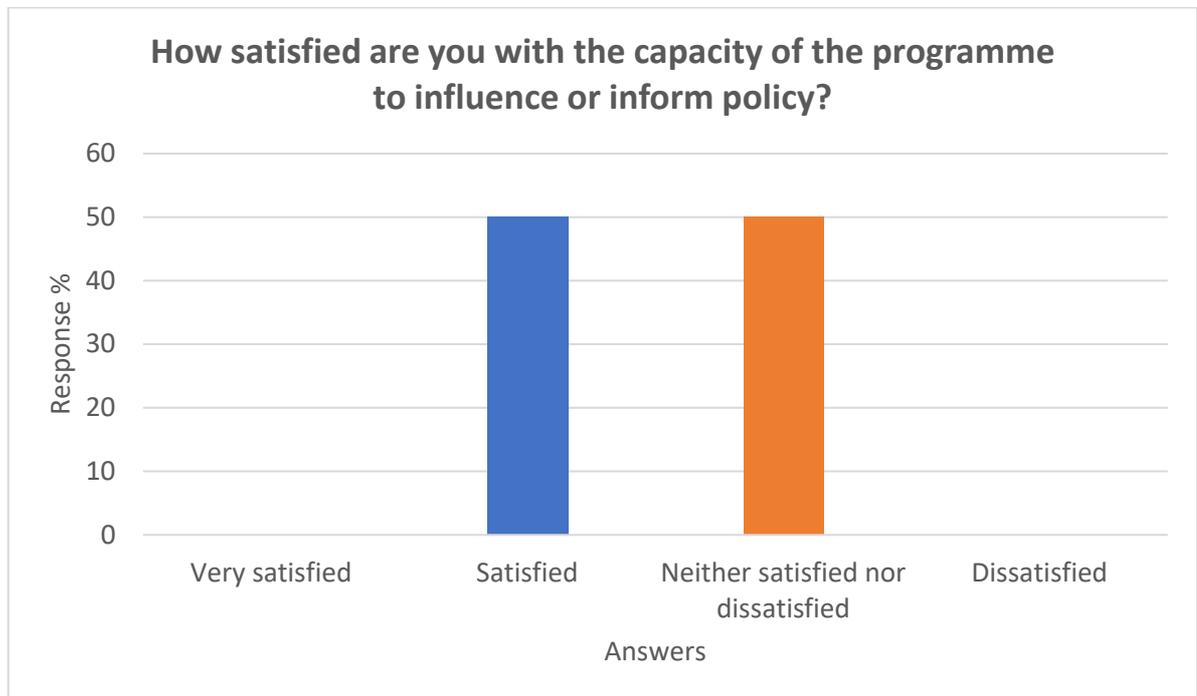
Question 3. What is your overall view of the programme?

Almost two thirds of respondents answered either 'extremely positive' or 'very positive' and 37.5% answered 'somewhat positive'.



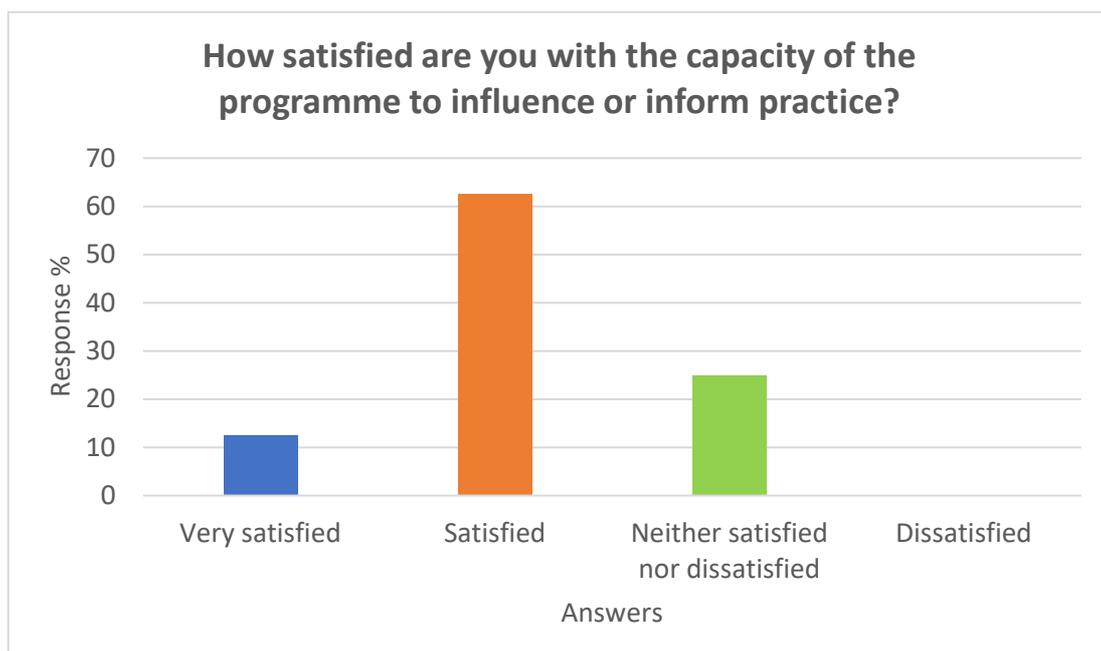
Question 4. How satisfied are you with the capacity of the programme to influence or inform policy?

Half of respondents reported being 'satisfied' and half of respondents reported being 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' with the capacity of the programme to influence or inform policy.



Question 5. How satisfied are you with the capacity of the programme to influence or inform practice?

One respondent (12.5%) reported being 'very satisfied', while the majority (62.5%) reported being 'satisfied'. A quarter of respondents reported being 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied'.



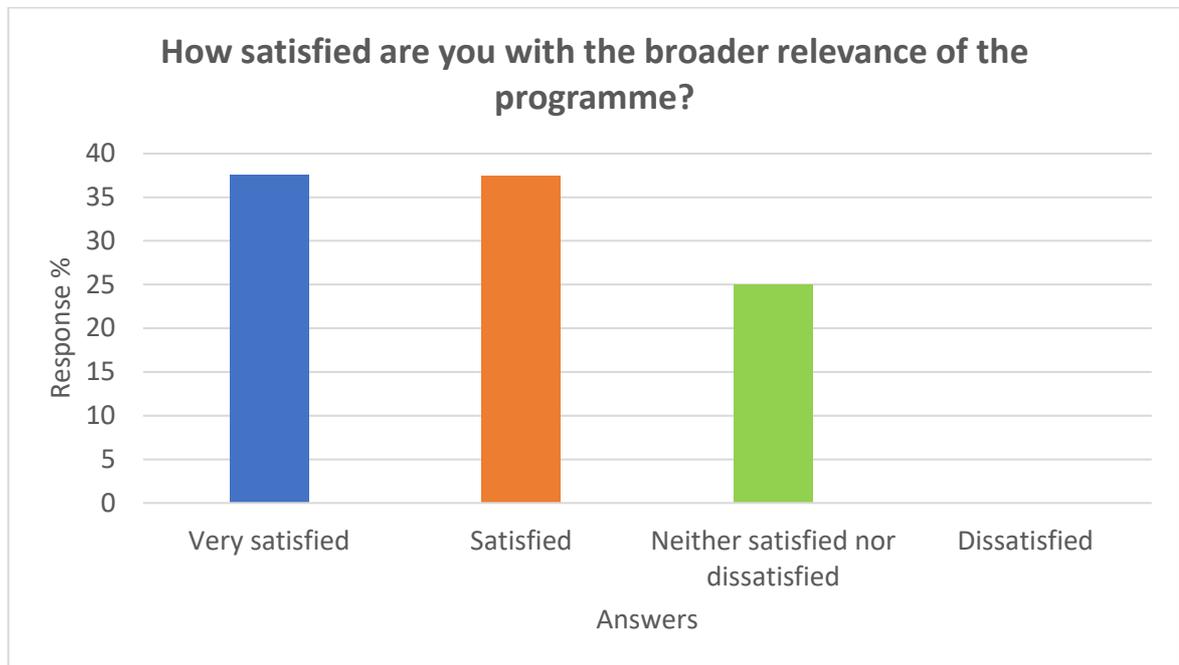
Question 6. How satisfied are you with the long-term sustainability of the programme?

Most respondents (75%) reported being 'satisfied', while 25% of respondents reported being 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' with the long-term sustainability of the programme.



Question 7. How satisfied are you with the broader relevance of the programme?

Most respondents reported being 'very satisfied' (37.5%) or 'satisfied' (37.5%). A quarter of respondents (25%) reported being 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' with the broader relevance of the programme.



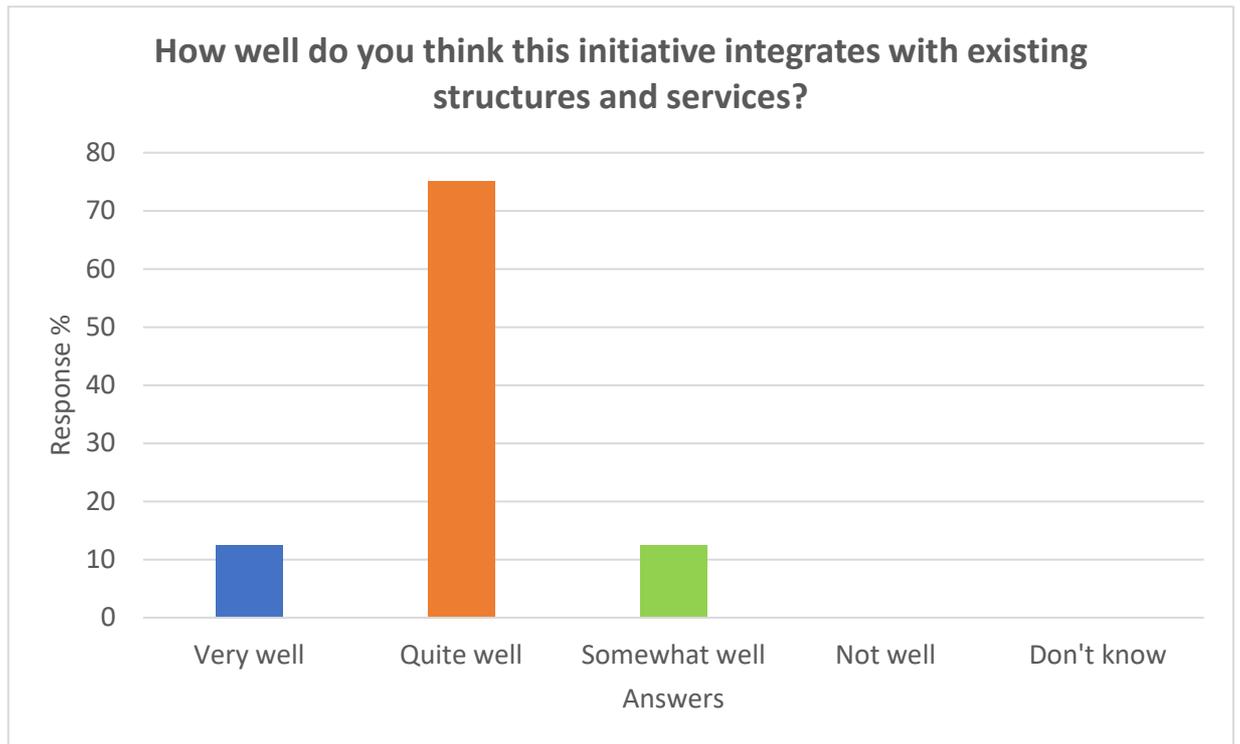
Question 8. What do you regard to be the top benefit of the CFI programme at local level?

Answers included:

- It enabled communities to reach out to those who may have been isolated during the pandemic and helped them to deliver programmes which engaged people in a meaningful way.
- Developing links and embedding core nutrition skills programmes at local level
- Reaching groups with evidence-based nutrition information
- Teaching the next generation about healthy eating and giving them the confidence and skills necessary to cook
- Local Engagement and delivery
- Engagement with service users. The most effective method to effect change.
- It puts a focus on healthy eating and addressing food poverty at local level, but not sure how well it is integrated to influence sustainable and systemic change to address barriers
- Help support and develop local initiatives - peer training works well

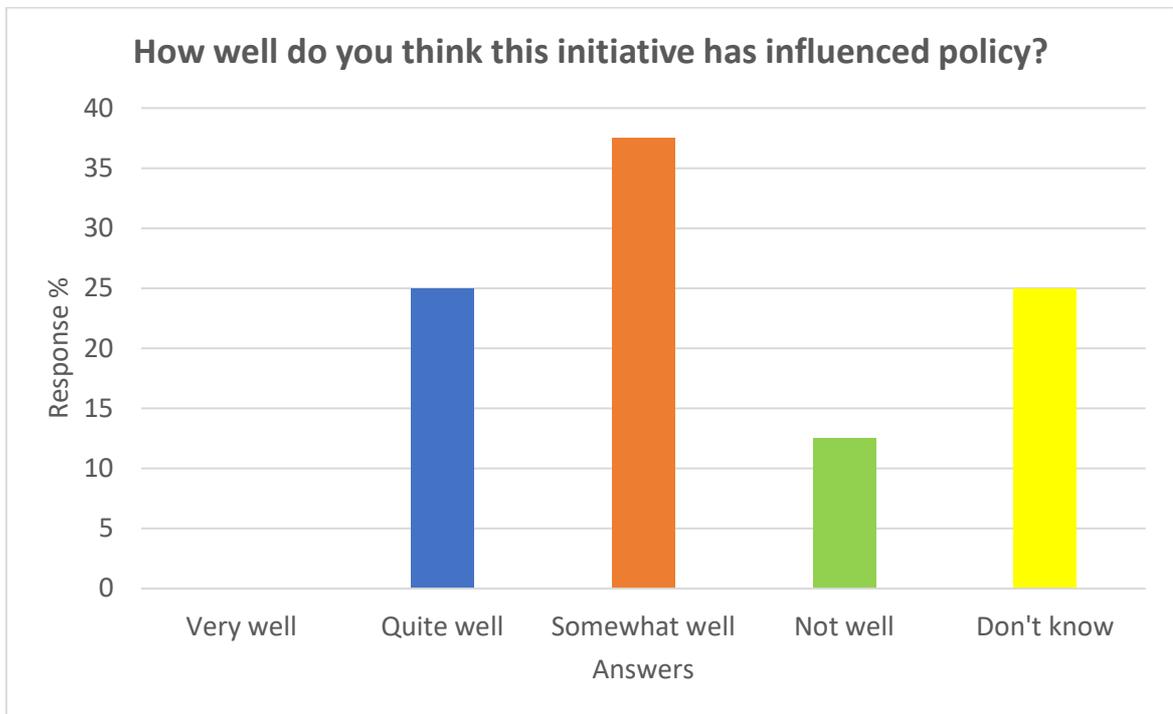
Question 9. How well do you think this initiative integrates with existing structures and services?

Most respondents (75%) answered 'quite well', 12.5% answered 'very well' and 12.5% answered 'somewhat well'.



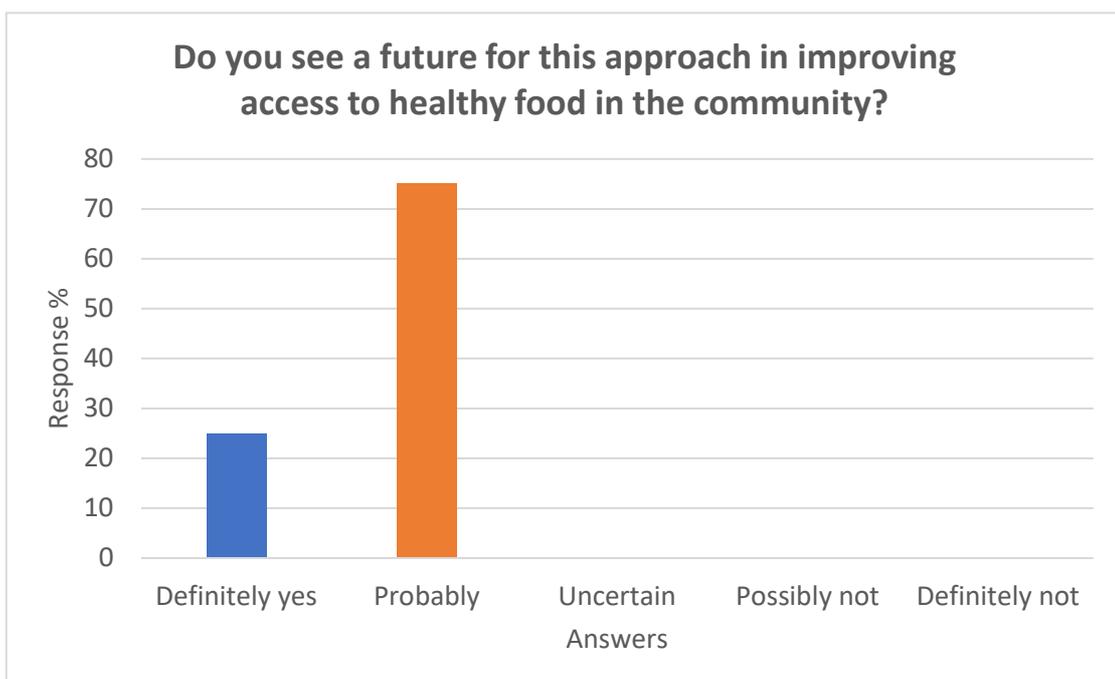
Question 10. How well do you think this initiative has influenced policy?

Most respondents (37.5%) answered 'somewhat well', 25% answered 'quite well', 12.5% answered 'not well' and 25% answered 'don't know'.



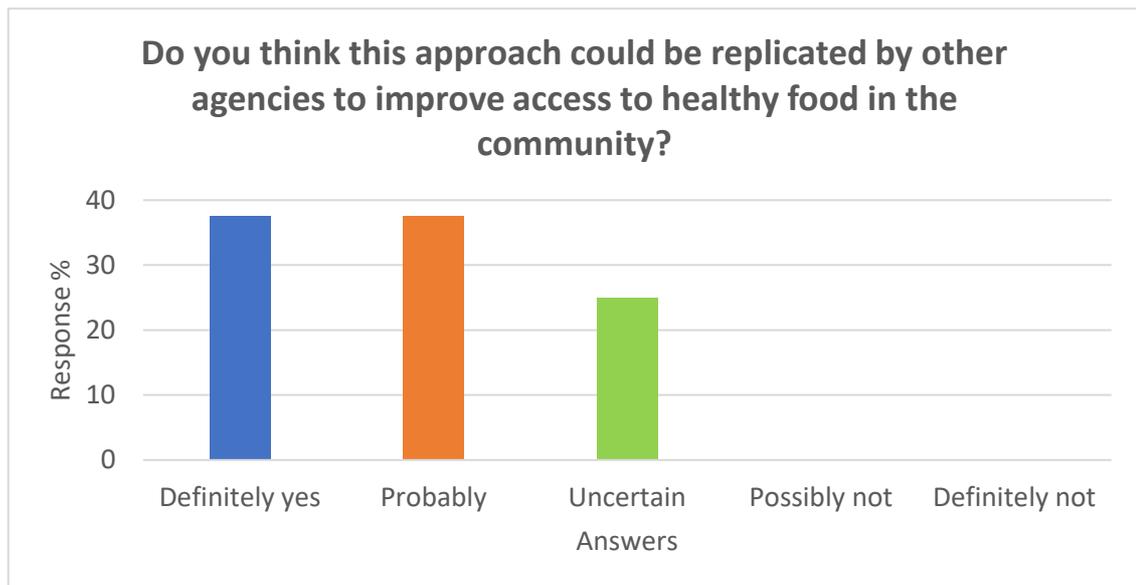
Question 11. Do you see a future for this approach in improving access to healthy food in the community?

Most respondents (75%) answered 'probably' while 25% answered 'definitely yes'.



Question 12. Do you think this approach could be replicated by other agencies to improve access to healthy food in the community?

Ove a third (37.5%) of respondents answered, 'definitely yes', 37.5% answered 'probably' and 25% answered 'uncertain'.



Question 13. Is there anything else you would like to add in relation to the Community Food Initiative programme?

5 respondents answered this question, answers included:

- Ensuring communities use registered nutrition professionals for advice and delivering training has been a success of this programme and this should be replicated to partner agencies. Although challenging for some to make those links once developed its very positive. Personally, I did get somewhat confused over whether transform your trolley and CFI were part of the same funding as in one HLC both ran. Maybe consideration for combining similar projects. Also, CFI can lack flexibility which was a challenge during covid and I think the criteria needs reviewed to allow adaption if acceptable.
- Very strict with funding for food only. It would be useful in future to be able to spend on equipment/resources also. Great partnership working.
- A programme for older people
- Very encouraging for the future enhancement of Health & Wellbeing of our local Communities.
- No

safefood

+353 (0)21 230 4100

Email: info@safefood.net



www.safefood.eu
HELPLINE
NI 0800 011 111
ROI 105 105 105

