

Food Values Pilot Programme Evaluation

Summary Report



Food Values

Evaluation of a Food Budgeting Pilot Programme in the Western Health and Social Care Trust Area

Summary Report

This summary report was prepared by the Community Food and Nutrition Team, Western Health and Social Care Trust, Northern Ireland. It is based on work they conducted in 2009 that was funded by **safe food**.



Publication date: August 2010

ISBN: 978-1-905767-11-3

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Background

Food Values is a short programme showing how to get better nutritional value for money when shopping for food. It has been produced by the Community Food and Nutrition Team (CFNT) of the Western Health and Social Care Trust for use in community/voluntary organisations.

Food Values originated in 2006 in response to a request from First Housing Aid and Support Services for a short programme on budgeting for food that would complement Cook it!¹ The CFNT piloted the draft programme with young women at Shepherd's View in Londonderry and received very positive feedback from participants.

Responding to interest from organisations, Food Values was written up in two versions – with and without cooking included – to allow accessibility so it could be used by groups that did not have cooking facilities as well as those that were already delivering the Cook it! programme. An optional supermarket tour was also included in Food Values.

¹ The is a peer-led, 6 session programme which aims to support people in the community who want to enhance their cooking skills and who have an interest in healthier eating, particularly where cost is a consideration.

In 2009 **safefood** provided funding for a pilot and organisations were recruited to trial the two versions.

Aim of Food values

The programme aims to develop the budgeting skills of participants to help them get better nutritional value for money when shopping for food.

Programme content

Food Values is made up of practical activities covering the following aspects of food budgeting:

- Spending on food
- Menu planning
- Comparing food prices
- Nutritional values
- Making and using a shopping list
- Using food labelling
- Store cupboard
- Hands on cooking
- Cost of convenience vs home-cooked meals.

The basic version includes the budgeting activities but does not include cooking.

The enhanced version includes the budgeting activities as well as cooking together in each session.

Optional supermarket tour enables tutors/facilitators to show their participants how they can get nutritional value for money at their local supermarket.

Pilot organisations

Fourteen organisations, working with a variety of different client groups, were originally recruited from the community/voluntary sector. One was subsequently unable to deliver the programme.

Of the thirteen organisations taking part, each was asked to deliver either the basic or the enhanced version of Food Values. Six of the organisations were also asked to deliver the supermarket tour to their participants. The organisations are summarised below:

Organisation	Basic	Enhanced	Supermarket Tour
Cherish SureStart		✓	
Devenish Partnership Forum		✓	✓
Dry Arch Centre, Dungiven	✓		
Ernevale Beacon Centre		✓	
Francis Street Project	✓		✓
LAST SureStart	✓		✓
Rosewood Beacon Centre	✓		
Shelter NI/Sleight Project		✓	✓
Shepherds View	✓		
Strand Foyer		✓	
Strathfoyle Women's Group		✓	
The Women's Centre		✓	✓
Waterside SureStart	✓		✓

Training for tutors

A total of 18 tutors from the pilot organisations took part in the Food Values training, which was held in September 2009. There were three elements to the training:

Healthy eating workshop (½ day)

For tutors who were not previously Cook it! trained or who wanted a recap.

Food Values training (½ day)

For all tutors, covering the activities contained in the programme.

Supermarket tour training (2 hours)

For tutors from the six organisations piloting the supermarket tour element of the programme.

Programme delivery

The Food Values programme was delivered to participants between September and October 2009. A total of 86 participants from 13 community organisations took part in the programme.

Evaluation

Aim

The aim of the evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the Food Values programme and was targeted at tutors and participants.

Objectives

1. Did training adequately prepare tutors for delivering Food Values programme?
2. Did tutors find the written programme easy to use and deliver?
3. What was the impact of Food Values on participants' knowledge, budgeting skills and practice?
4. What changes in food purchasing were made by participants?
5. How adequate were the support and resources produced?
6. Is there a need for a food budgeting programme?

Evaluation was carried out with tutors and participants using:

- Baseline and follow up questionnaires (tutors and participants)
- Focus groups (tutors and participants)
- Telephone interviews (tutors).

The information collected included:

- Group characteristics
- Views on the training, resources, delivery of the programme and support available
- The supermarket tour
- Changes in food purchasing
- Impact on knowledge, budgeting skills and practice
- Opinions of the course
- How to improve Food Values.

Main findings

Group

Tutors all worked with community organisations and tended to be homeowners, live in a family situation and hold qualifications.

Participants of both basic and enhanced versions of Food Values had a higher level of unemployment and lower qualification level although some were students. They were more likely to live in rental accommodation and while most lived in family groups, a significant number lived alone.

Views on training, resources, delivery and support available

Tutors were generally positive about the training and felt it was informative and pitched at the right level. A small number felt that there was a lot to take in over a short period of time and two sessions would have been better.

The resources provided (bags, shopping list pads and pencils) were popular with all participants apart from younger groups who thought they were 'old-fashioned'.

All tutors enjoyed delivering the course. Most said the content was good and were pleased with the written materials. Some felt that the sessions were not long enough to deliver all the information adequately and suggested an additional session.

All participants enjoyed the course and liked the activities. The combination of cooking with activities in the enhanced version was considered very good.

The questionnaires used for evaluation were a drawback because they took some time to complete.

"I've halved food bill. I took the extra money with me and thought she added it up wrong for my weekly shop, was shocked at how much I had left."



Supermarket tour

Tutors who received the supermarket tour training had mixed views on it. Some did not enjoy it and thought it lacked direction.

All tutors taking part in the supermarket tour felt it was useful however, though some found it required some adaptation to suit their group. Four other tutors who had not been allocated to the supermarket tour training believed it would have been useful.

Participants seemed to find the tour useful in showing where food products were located and nutritional content of foods.

Changes in food purchasing

There was a decrease in average weekly food spend at follow up, among tutors by 21 per cent (£21) and in the basic group by 18 per cent (£16). The main reasons identified for this were: planning more, cooking more and using fewer convenience foods. *"I've halved food bill. I took the extra money with me and thought she added it up wrong for my weekly shop, was shocked at how much I had left."* Participant

An increase at follow up was shown across all three groups in the proportion of their weekly food spend on fruit and vegetables, with the largest being in the enhanced group by 6 per cent. *"I buy less biscuits and treats and more fruit."* Participant

The large majority of tutors and participants had changed their shopping pattern to either one large weekly shop, or one weekly shop + two 'top ups'. After both versions of the programme no one reported that they shopped for food 'when I like'. *"I do a big shop more often to avoid my local small prices."* Participant

Almost the entire enhanced group reported making changes to the way they shop (89%), a large majority of the basic group (68%) and just under half of the tutor group (44%). Reasons for this included planning more, budgeting better and buying more healthy foods. *"I've started to write shopping lists, I am budgeting more and buying own brand goods more."* Participant

"Taught new things, how to properly budget your money and not leave you skint."



Impact on participants' knowledge, budgeting skills and practice

The key skills learned from the programme were menu planning and using a shopping list, budgeting tips, cooking tips and healthy eating. *"Taught new things, how to properly budget your money and not leave you skint."*

Participants' felt more prepared when shopping, because of meal planning, writing a shopping list in advance and adhering more to the list prepared.

At follow up, reading of food labels generally increased: 39 per cent of tutors 'always' checked labels; 54 per cent of the basic group and 65 per cent of the enhanced group 'sometimes' checking labels. *"Learnt to pay more attention to labels and content of food."*

Eating more healthy foods and using fewer convenience foods were the greatest changes that the three groups made to their eating habits. *"I'm eating healthy foods and I'm not eating take-aways all the time, I've learned how to cook a wee bit."*

At the end of the programme, consumption of ready meals and frozen savoury foods 'daily' and 'most days' generally decreased. At follow up, there was an increase across all groups in those reporting that they 'never or rarely' consumed take-away meals. This was especially marked in the enhanced group at 41 per cent.

Preparing a home-cooked meal showed a notable increase with almost two thirds (65%) of the enhanced group preparing this 'daily' or 'most days' after completing the course (compared to 38% at baseline).

Before starting the course the use of leftovers was generally good. This increased considerably at follow-up with all of the tutors now using leftovers and almost all of the enhanced group (92%) and a large majority of the Basic group (64%).

Opinion of the course

With the exception of one participant in the basic group, all respondents enjoyed the course (99%).

Main reasons reported from tutors include: budgeting tips, planning more, greater awareness of food, benefit to group, social and sharing of ideas.

Basic group said: interesting, social and sharing of ideas, budgeting and cooking tips.

Enhanced group said: cooking, enjoyable and fun, labels and nutrition value, budgeting tips and social. *“Working with the young parents and showing them how to save on their food budget – and a healthier way of eating.”*
Tutor

Cooking was identified as the best part of the course across all groups – by 33 per cent of the tutors, 68 percent of the enhance group and 21 per cent of the basic group.

Other aspects that were thought to be good

Tutors – the changes the group made (17%) and warning about the cost of convenience (11%).

Basic – tasting food (18%) and sharing ideas (14%).

Enhanced – everything (22%), tasting (16%), the social aspect (14%)

“Cooking, it really brought the group together, it was really fun and food was delicious.”
Participant

Improvements to the course

- The tutor identified the following improvements that could be made to the course for all the groups: cooking (17%), add a task to the supermarket tour (17%), more sessions (17%).
- Some tutors found that their groups were resistant to change – this was most marked among tutors working with young people’s groups (11%).

“The enhanced course would be better. The supermarket tour being incorporated into the programme for the group cooking session.”
Tutor

The basic group identified: nothing (29%), longer and more sessions (21%), more group involvement (11%).

“More time as very interesting and the group had a lot of ideas to share.”
Basic

The enhanced group identified: longer and more sessions (35%), nothing (22%), more cooking (14%)

“Found it really interesting. Really good and glad we did it, just wish it was longer.”

“There’s nothing to improve, it’s brilliant!”

“I do think that the whole course is very simple and straightforward and in some ways that’s the beauty of it but in other ways you have to get around it in a way that you are not being patronising with it!”
Tutor

Conclusion

The results indicate that there is a need for a community food budgeting programme such as Food Values to develop essential practical skills and allow the opportunity to socialise. Many gained the ability to budget their food spend, plan meals in advance and use a shopping list which led to a change in shopping patterns. In addition, these skills combined with a greater awareness of healthy eating and learning valuable cooking skills resulted in changing the majority of participants' eating habits with many adopting a healthier diet.

As demonstrated several improvements have been suggested for the development of the programme.

We recommend the following improvements are made before the programme is rolled out nationwide.

“I do think that the whole course is very simple and straightforward and in some ways that’s the beauty of it but in other ways you have to get around it in a way that you are not being patronising with it!”



Recommendations

- Develop a pre-training questionnaire for tutors to assess their level of knowledge and to determine if they require additional training.
- Increase the length of the course to five sessions of three hours each with a maximum six participants – and restructure the sessions, e.g. first session
 - an introduction with an emphasis on ‘getting to know each other’ and including some theory;
 - second session – include the supermarket tour;
 - three sessions of theory and cooking combined. Food Values could run in conjunction with Cook it!
 - two additional theory weeks
 - supermarket tour session taking place before the Cook it! sessions start.
- Implement a task for the supermarket tour – either shopping for ingredients for the cooking sessions or individual enhancement tasks. Ensure that the training is carried out in line with the Food Values training.
- Offer an alternative to the free shopping bag, especially for younger groups – e.g. a store cupboard starter pack of suitable food items. An information pack with leaflets and recipes for each participant should be included in the free shopping bag.
- Use the Eatwell plate throughout the course as a guide. Give the information on its use in the first session and use this as a guide for shopping and cooking.
- The Community Food and Nutrition Team, in conjunction with the trained tutors, should investigate making the changes above to ensure that the programme is easy to use among community and voluntary sector organisations.

Please see case studies on the following pages.

Case studies

1. Single mother with one child

Basic group

“Since completing the course I’ve started to menu plan for most of the week. Had never done it before. I also make a list and go shopping once a week for a big shop, when I used to go twice a week. The list making has changed my life. I’m able to survive week to week, as I have to make my money last and budget well. But if I was to go back to the way I was beforehand I know for a fact that I’d starve with hunger for a few days as I’d need to feed my child and would have no money for my food. I find I spend less on groceries, after the initial 1st week where I went through my cupboards, but I’ve money from one week to next now and can manage my money better now because of it. I compare brands, which makes my shopping a lot cheaper.

“Found planning my dinner is a whole lot better as I was throwing a lot of food out, now it’s like this is for dinner...”



Am eating better, more fresh fruit, food with less fat, salt, sugar. My child is eating healthier, copy-cat what mother eats kids eat, used to cook her separate dinners, wasting less food as was making different foods, told her this is what we’re having today, if you don’t eat it. Found planning my dinner is a whole lot better as I was throwing a lot of food out, now it’s like this is for dinner, if you don’t want it then you’re getting nothing else and it’s really worked. Took about a week to change her but is going great now.

I’ve also found that the cereal own brand have less sugar, salt and I’ve noticed my child’s behaviour is a lot calmer since changing them (‘cheerio’s’), whereas with branded cereal my girl would be hyper. They’re a lot cheaper too. Never would’ve thought that own brands would be better and you can’t taste difference.”

2. Student, single mother with 2 children

Enhanced group

“I’ve saved so much by not eating take out and now with the extra money I have I’m able to start my driving lessons that couldn’t before.

I don’t eat ready meals any more and make fresh foods for me and my daughters. I don’t need to make different meals for each of us. I make fresh food daily and have cut away back on ready meals and only have a take out if I’ve been out with friends every two weeks, I’ve saved so much money it’s great, I’m able to start paying off my debts.

I’ve learned how to save money while shopping and not get sucked into buying offers that in the end cost me more money cause I have to throw food out cause it’s past it’s ‘best before’ date.”

3. Married female

Tutor group

“Learnt how to budget my shopping, I was awful before, desperate! I’ve actually saved money since I’ve done the course. I would’ve wasted awful lot before, didn’t realise about freezing. There’s no difference in taste between branded versus own brand. It was an eye-opener. You are definitely keyed into buying big brands, couldn’t believe difference in price and no difference in taste.

I now make a list before going shopping, look in cupboards which I never done before going. Would’ve just went to the supermarket not knowing what I need and just buying stuff, then come the end of the week I was forever throwing stuff out. My daughter used to go shopping with me and buy the own brands and spend about £30 or £40 a week, while I’ll spend £90 a week. I now buy own brand, and save about £40 or £50 a week. I’d also be going to the local shop a few times a week to get milk, bread, chocolate but don’t do that now. Really am saving and eating healthier. We used to have roast chicken for our dinner on Sunday and we’d eat the breasts and throw the rest in the bin, but now I use the chicken for sandwiches the next day and when I make too much food I freeze the food, but before it would’ve gone in the bin.”

4. Employed, single mother with 2 children

Basic group

“I save money on take-aways – was spending £25 a week on take-aways and £20 on M & S meal deals, so now saving £200 a month! Only from doing this course have I changed. Before I would’ve been like if the kids want something and would’ve spent a fortune as I couldn’t be bothered cooking and we ate a lot of take aways, but now I cook more and would plan a bit more and make food last longer, e.g. chicken and waste less food and freeze more.

I also read labels, if high I avoid that food.

Try to use up food instead of wasting food. Looking to see what is in the house to see what I can use up.”

“I’ve learned how to save money while shopping and not get sucked into buying offers that in the end cost me more money...”



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