More than meals: Making a difference with FareShare food

Authors: Judith Mabelis, Ian Montagu and Susan Reid
Date: November 2016
Prepared for: FareShare
At NatCen Social Research we believe that social research has the power to make life better. By really understanding the complexity of people’s lives and what they think about the issues that affect them, we give the public a powerful and influential role in shaping decisions and services that can make a difference to everyone. And as an independent, not for profit organisation we’re able to put all our time and energy into delivering social research that works for society.

We would like to thank all those involved in this research. In particular, Caley Eldred, Director of Fundraising and Marketing and Maria Kortbech-Olesen, Marketing and Communications Manager at FareShare for their contribution in developing the survey and for their invaluable assistance in the production of this report. We would also like to thank the 1,028 clients of the 55 FareShare Community Food Members who gave up their time to participate in this project, without whom this research would not have been possible.
## Contents

**Executive Summary** ................................................................. 2

1  **Introduction** ................................................................. 5

1.1 About FareShare .................................................................................. 5

1.2 Research aims .................................................................................... 6

1.3 Methods ............................................................................................... 6

1.4 Reporting conventions ........................................................................ 7

2  **CFM service use** ................................................................. 8

2.1 Summary of key findings ..................................................................... 8

2.2 CFM client service use .......................................................................... 8

2.2.1 Length of service use ....................................................................... 8

2.3 Meals eaten at the CFM ....................................................................... 9

2.4 Reasons for service use ......................................................................... 10

2.4.1 Reasons for using service ................................................................. 10

2.4.2 Would clients use the CFM if they did not provide food ..................... 11

2.4.3 Main reason for getting food through this service ............................... 11

3  **Impact of receiving food from FareShare’s CFMs** ............... 13

3.1 Summary of key findings ..................................................................... 13

3.2 Food and nutrition ............................................................................... 13

3.2.1 Hot meals ............................................................................................ 13

3.2.2 Increased consumption of healthy food types .................................... 14

3.2.3 Overall rating of the quality of food .................................................. 15

3.3 Wider benefits ..................................................................................... 15

3.3.1 Health and wellbeing ....................................................................... 15

3.3.2 Social impacts .................................................................................. 16

3.3.3 Financial impacts ............................................................................ 17

4  **Access to food and cooking** ................................................ 18

4.1 Summary of key findings ..................................................................... 18

4.2 Going without food .............................................................................. 18

4.3 Cooking and ability to buy food .......................................................... 19
Executive Summary

Introduction

FareShare redistributes food from retailers, manufacturers and producers that would otherwise go to waste to almost 2,500 local charities and community groups (Community Food Members, or CFMs) across the UK. These organisations transform this food into nutritious meals for over 211,000 vulnerable people each week.\(^1\) By saving edible food from being wasted and redirecting it to charities and community groups, FareShare’s work has the dual effect of reducing food waste and tackling hunger and food poverty.

This report presents findings from a survey of 1,028 individual CFM clients from across the UK, providing independent evidence on the direct impact of the work of FareShare on the lives of those who receive the food FareShare redistributes.

The majority of FareShare’s CFM clients get their main meal of the day from the CFM

More than half of clients said they regularly ate their main meal of the day at the CFM

57%

In addition to CFM clients regularly eating their main meal of the day at the service, 56% say that food is their main reason for visiting the CFM. The majority of clients say they find it hard to cook a meal for themselves or their family. The affordability of food prevents a third of clients from cooking a meal.

CFM clients value the quality of the food provided. 93% think the food is good and 27% say that the quality is the main reason they access their food through the CFM.

Clients eat more fruit, vegetables, meat, bread and cereals since accessing the CFM

59%  46%  46%

---

\(^1\) Figures based on 2015/2016 year end data.
A key benefit of FareShare providing food to people through CFMs is that clients are able to have a more nutritious and balanced diet. 59% of CFM clients say they eat more fruit and vegetables since accessing the CFM. Just under half say they eat more meat, bread and cereals.

81% of clients also say that attending the CFM has increased the number of hot meals they eat.

The majority of clients say that eating at the CFM has a positive impact on both their physical and mental wellbeing

52%  
92%

53% of clients say their physical strength has increased since getting food at the CFM and 52% say that their energy levels have increased. In addition to these improvements in clients’ physical health due to getting food from the CFM, there are also a number of beneficial psychological effects. 87% say that eating a meal at the service has a positive impact on how they feel and 92% say that being able to have a meal at the service helps them ‘face the day ahead’.

Food provided to FareShare CFMs also has social benefits

82%

say that eating a meal at the CFM makes them feel part of a community

Food provided by CFMs has had a range of wider benefits for clients. 82% say it makes them feel part of a community and 29% say that what they enjoy most about eating at the CFM is socialising.

Accessing food through CFMs allows people to eat together as a family. 35% of clients visit the CFM with their children and the vast majority of them think it is important to be able to eat together.
Eating at the CFM allows clients to save money that they can spend on essentials

75%

of clients save money as a result of eating at a CFM

The majority of clients say they are able to save money as a result of getting food from a CFM and are using these savings for a wide range of purposes, including paying bills and rent, visiting family and treating children.

Many of the clients of CFMs have difficulties accessing food: 39% say they are regularly unable to buy food and a quarter say they have gone several days without a proper meal in the last year. The majority of clients say they find it hard to cook a meal for themselves or their family and the affordability of food prevents a third of clients from cooking a meal.

Conclusions

FareShare food is making a huge difference to the lives of CFM clients. Not only does the food help to fulfill their dietary and nutritional needs but it also improves their physical and mental wellbeing and allows them to save money. FareShare’s food provision means that many clients are able to get their main meal of the day at the CFM, and that they have a more nutritious and balanced diet. Clients’ physical strength is improved, they feel more able to face the day ahead and they value the opportunity to feel part of a community, meet friends and socialise. In particular clients who are able to sit down and have a hot meal at a CFM are more likely to say that eating at the CFM has a positive impact on how they feel. Most clients also save money by eating at the CFM allowing them to pay for essentials as well as participating more in society. The money that is freed up for CFMs through FareShare food means they are able to give more clients access to a wide range of other essential services. Many clients are regularly unable to buy food, with nearly half saying they have gone without a proper meal in the last month. The affordability of food is the most common reason why clients find it hard to cook a meal. Increasing the level of food provision to charities and community groups across the UK would provide a wide and varied set of benefits to even more of the most vulnerable in society.
1 Introduction

1.1 About FareShare

FareShare is a UK charity that aims to reduce food waste and to fight poverty and hunger.

Food waste in the supply chain is a significant and increasingly high-profile issue in the UK. The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) estimate that food surplus and waste at retail level amounts to around 240,000 tonnes, whilst the equivalent figure in manufacture is 2.4 million tonnes.  

High levels of food waste harm the environment. The United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) highlight that food waste squanders key resources such as water and energy, while the Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) note that greenhouse gas emissions associated with food waste contribute significantly to global warming and climate change.

At the same time, many people are struggling to feed themselves and their families. The latest figures released by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) suggest that food prices in the UK (as measured by the Consumer Price Index) rose in real terms by 8% between 2007 and 2015. DEFRA note that because those on low incomes spend a greater proportion of their income on food, such a rise in food prices is particularly challenging for this group. In 2014, the United Nations' Food Insecurity Experience Scale data estimated 8.4 million people in the UK faced not having enough food to eat, with 4.5% of people aged 15 and over reporting going a full day without anything to eat.

A substantial amount of food waste generated throughout the supply chain is fit for human consumption. According to WRAP 270,000 tonnes of surplus food from the UK food industry could be redistributed to feed people each year. FareShare estimates this to be enough for 650 million meals. The redistribution of surplus food from the food industry is also seen as a key contributor to the achievement of Courtauld 2025 targets and the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 12.3 to reduce food waste across the world.

---

7 Parfitt et al (2016) as above.
8 Courtauld 2025 is ‘an ambitious voluntary agreement that brings together organisations across the food system – from producer to consumer – to make food and drink production and consumption more sustainable’. See http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/courtauld-commitment-2025
9 UN Sustainable Development Goal 12.3: ‘By 2030, halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses’. See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg12
FareShare redistributes food from retailers, manufacturers and producers that would otherwise go to waste to charities across the UK through its 20 Regional Centres. These Regional Centres distribute this food to a network of almost 2,500 local charities and community groups known as Community Food Members, or CFMs. These organisations transform this food into nutritious meals for over 211,000 vulnerable people each week. By saving edible food from being wasted and redirecting it to charities and community projects who supply it to those who need it most, FareShare’s work has the dual effect of reducing food waste and tackling hunger and poverty.

1.2 Research aims

The purpose of this survey is to provide FareShare with independent evidence on the direct impact of their work upon the lives of the clients of Community Food Members (CFMs). This report presents findings on:

- The reasons a CFM client attends an organisation to receive food
- The impact of a CFM’s provision upon the amount and quality of food clients are able to access
- The physical and psychological effects of being able to access food provided by CFMs
- The wider social and financial implications of food provision

This research forms the second part of a wider project conducted by NatCen on behalf of FareShare, and builds upon a telephone and online survey of CFMs conducted between April and May 2015. The project is aimed at constructing an evidence base in relation to the end-to-end impact of FareShare’s work which can be shared with the public and other key stakeholders. The first report focused on the benefits to CFMs of the food provided by FareShare, including financial benefits, the number of clients receiving food and the type of food CFMs are able to offer. This second report explores the impact on the lives of individuals from the perspective of the clients in terms of financial, physical, psychological and social benefits.

1.3 Methods

A pen and paper self-completion survey of individual CFM clients aged 18 and over was conducted between April and June 2016. The questionnaire was sent out to 88 CFMs who agreed to distribute them to their clients. 1,028 CFM clients completed and returned the survey from a total of 55 different CFMs across the UK. This makes it the biggest survey of FareShare CFM clients to date. As with any survey, there are limitations – for example, we cannot be completely sure that the views of the clients that took part in the survey are identical to those of all clients of all CFMs. However, given the number of respondents we are reasonably confident that the findings accurately represent the views of those who receive food from FareShare.

The CFMs that opted in to help facilitate the client survey had all previously participated in NatCen’s 2015 survey of FareShare CFMs. Nine of the CFMs who agreed to support the research were attended by over 100 clients on an average day according to data produced as part of NatCen’s 2015 survey of FareShare CFMs. To help distribute questionnaires to clients of these large CFMs, two NatCen interviewers visited each of them on a pre-arranged date to manage the procedure of completing them.

---

For the remaining 79 CFMs, questionnaires were sent directly to each organisation for the staff to distribute to their clients. The number of questionnaires sent to each CFM was tailored to suit the average number of clients seen by that organisation per day. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a participant information leaflet and a pre-paid return envelope. Respondents were asked to put their completed questionnaires in the envelope, seal it and then either hand it to a member of the CFMs staff or post it directly back to the research team at NatCen.

1.4 Reporting conventions

This report presents percentage figures to illustrate the proportion of clients selecting a particular answer option (or options). These figures are based on the number of valid responses given to the question under consideration.

The report looks at the survey responses by a number of key characteristics relating to the CFM clients and their service use to identify any differences between groups of clients. The characteristics explored were:

- Age
- Gender
- Housing tenure
- How long the client has been using the service
- Type of service the client uses

For detailed information on the demographic breakdown of respondents, please see Annex A.

All quotations included in this report are taken verbatim from CFM clients’ responses to open text questions.
2 CFM service use

2.1 Summary of key findings

- Meals provided by CFMs are playing a major role in fulfilling the dietary needs of many of their clients. More than half (57%) regularly eat their main meal of the day at the CFM.
- CFM clients are accessing food over a long period of time and 51% have visited the CFM for more than one year.
- Accessing food through CFMs allows people to eat together as a family. Over a third of clients visit the CFM with their children and the vast majority of them think it is important to be able to eat together as a family.
- Accessing food is the single biggest reason for clients attending a CFM. 56% say that their main reason for visiting the CFM is for food; meeting people and socialising was chosen by 17% of clients.
- CFM clients value the quality of the food provided. 93% think the food is ‘very’ or ‘quite good’ and 27% say that the good quality food is the main reason they get food through the CFM.

2.2 CFM client service use

We set out to explore the reasons why clients attend CFMs and also look at how long they have been getting food from the CFM and their reasons for using the service.

2.2.1 Length of service use

Figure 2.1 shows that just over half of respondents (51%) have been getting food from the CFM for more than a year. Around a quarter (24%) are relatively new clients of the CFM and have been getting food from the service for less than 4 months.

Figure 2.1 How long CFM service users have been getting food from the service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 week</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4 weeks</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 months</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6 months</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-12 months</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 12 months</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All respondents who gave an answer (956)
2.3 Meals eaten at the CFM

Previous research shows that FareShare provides on average an estimated £7,900 of food a year to each CFM which is so significant to the CFMs, that 19% said they might not be able to continue to operate with this provision. The food provided by FareShare is used by CFMs to offer a range of foods to their clients including on-site meals (hot and cold), snacks and food parcels. The majority of clients say they have eaten hot meals at the CFM.

Most clients eat meals at the CFM, rather than just receiving snacks or food parcels. 56% of clients say they eat lunch at the CFM, 36% eat breakfast and a similar proportion eat dinner (33%). Snacks are eaten by 36% of clients and 13% receive only food parcels.

‘It is really important to me as it means I get out to socialise and enjoy a hot meal’

Respondents were asked how often they eat their main meal of the day at the CFM. 57% of clients eat their main meal of the day at the service, 32% always eat their main meal of the day at the service with a further quarter saying they often eat their main meal there. This highlights that the meals provided by CFMs are playing a major role in fulfilling the dietary needs of many of their clients.

Figure 2.2 shows the breakdown of clients eating their main meal of the day at a CFM. Those living in temporary or supported accommodation are much more likely to ‘always' or ‘often' eat at the CFM compared with those who are tenants or who own their own home indicating that those experiencing challenges with their accommodation are heavily reliant on CFMs for their food.

**Figure 2.2 How often client eats main meal of the day at CFM**

Base: All respondents who gave an answer (999)

Over a third of clients (35%) say they visit the service with their children. The vast majority of these clients (80%) say that it is important to be able to come to the service and eat together as a family.
‘It is nothing short of a godsend. It enables us to eat a proper balanced diet as a family’

2.4 Reasons for service use

FareShare’s CFMs are a diverse range of charities and community groups which provide varied services for different client groups. In addition to providing food, CFMs also offer other services such as advice, training, medical services, leisure activities and give people the opportunity to meet others and socialise.

2.4.1 Reasons for using service

Figure 2.3 shows the different reasons clients give for visiting the service, they were able to choose multiple answer options. Over three-quarters say that they visit the CFM for food, 47% to meet people and socialise and 19% that they go for advice or because they feel valued.

**Figure 2.3 Reasons for visiting this service**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet people/socialise</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of being valued</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice on other issues</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leisure activities</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing advice</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical services</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complementary health</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reason</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: All respondents (1,028)

Of the multiple reasons given respondents were then asked to choose which is their main reason for visiting the service. The most frequently chosen reason is food (56%), followed by meeting people and socialising (17%) and then referral (6%). This shows that regardless of whether people are asked to provide multiple reasons or one main reason for visiting the CFM, food always come out as the top choice.

We explored the characteristics of respondents who say that food is the main reason for visiting the CFM. Those aged under 35 years old (64%) are more likely to say their main reason for using the service is food than those aged 55 and above (52%). Men (61%) are also more likely than women (52%) to say that their main reason for visiting the CFM is food.

These findings highlight the importance to clients of the food that CFMs provide as part of the range of services that they offer and also that food is a higher priority for younger people and for men compared with women.
‘The food has been critical to me being able to eat daily’

2.4.2 Would clients use the CFM if they did not provide food

Respondents were asked how likely they would be to come to the CFM if they did not get meals or food parcels. 62% say they would be ‘very’ or ‘quite likely’ to use the service even if they did not get meals or food parcels. A quarter said they would be ‘very unlikely’ to use the CFM if it did not provide food.

Clearly food is a way of attracting clients to CFMs, however once they are at the CFM they are able to access services they might not have otherwise done. The previous report on the CFM survey showed that as a result of FareShare food provision, CFMs estimate that they are able to free up on average £1,953 a year to invest in other non-food services, for example, around 27% of CFMs are able to offer more social or befriending services, 23% can make more recreational or leisure services available to clients, 22% offer more referral or signposting, and 18% more benefits advice services.

2.4.3 Main reason for getting food through this service

The survey asked respondents to select their main reason for getting food through the CFM and the results are shown in Figure 2.4 below. The top three reasons for getting food through the service are:

- ‘I get good quality food here’ (27%)
- ‘It is my only option’ (22%)
- ‘I can afford to eat here’ (14%)\(^\text{11}\)

This highlights how important the food FareShare provides to CFM clients is, many would have no other way of sourcing good quality food without the CFMs.

---

\(^\text{11}\) 17% chose ‘other reason’ but did not specify what the reason was.
Looking at how views differed by age, we find that the social aspect of getting food at the CFM is more important to older clients than it is to younger clients. 13% of those aged 55 and over chose their main reason as being able to eat with others compared with 8% of those clients aged under 35 years old. These findings are further supported by those reported in Section 4.3.2 which looks at what people enjoy the most about eating at a CFM.

‘I like the food at this service because there is a lot of joy and happiness when I eat…with other people’
3 Impact of receiving food from FareShare’s CFMs

3.1 Summary of key findings

- 81% of clients say that going to a CFM has increased the number of hot meals they eat.
- Clients are able to eat more fruit and vegetables, meat, and bread and cereals since attending the CFM.
- Since getting food from the CFMs a majority of clients have experienced positive changes in physical strength and energy levels.
- The food provided by CFMs also has a positive impact on how the majority of clients feel and helps them ‘face the day ahead’.
- Food provided to CFMs by FareShare has a number of social benefits, including enabling clients to socialise and to feel part of a community.
- The majority of clients say they are able to save money as a result of getting food from a CFM, using these savings for a wide range of purposes, from paying household bills and rent to visiting family and treating children.

3.2 Food and nutrition

Respondents were asked a number of questions about the variety and nutritional value of food they receive at the CFM as well as the impact of the food on their physical and mental wellbeing.

3.2.1 Hot meals

81% of clients say that going to a CFM has increased the number of hot meals they eat per week. 50% of those now have between one and three extra hot meals per week and 41% eat between four and seven extra hot meals per week.

‘The food I get at [the CFM] is usually the only hot food I eat’

‘This service is very important, it allows me to have hot food regularly’
3.2.2 Increased consumption of healthy food types

Previous research shows that CFMs believe that food they receive from FareShare has an important and positive impact on their clients, specifically that this enables them to provide nutritious meals and helps them to improve the diets of their clients. This view is supported by the clients of the CFMs themselves.

‘Having FareShare meals ensures I maintain a balanced diet’

As a result of getting food at a CFM, 59% say they are now able to eat more fruit and vegetables. 46% say they eat more bread and cereal, with the same proportion eating more meat since coming to the CFM.

‘It’s good to have gluten free bread…and there’s usually plenty of fresh fruit and veg. I wouldn’t be able to afford either of those myself, so it’s been an absolute godsend for me to access this service’

This suggests that the food provided by CFMs helps a large proportion of clients consume a wider variety of food and have a healthier and more balanced diet than they would otherwise be able to.
3.2.3 Overall rating of the quality of food

In addition to the importance of the wide variety and nutritional value of the food provided by the CFMs, the survey also indicates that clients value the quality of the food on offer. 93% say the food provided is either very good or quite good.

‘The food is very well prepared and cooked. It is varied and very nutritious and better than I have at home’

Older clients, aged 55 and over are more likely to rate the food as very good (70%) than those aged between 18 and 34 years old (60%). Women (70%) are also more likely than men (58%) to rate the food as very good.

3.3 Wider benefits

3.3.1 Health and wellbeing

53% of clients say that their physical strength has improved since getting food from a CFM and 52% report an improvement in energy levels.

In addition to the positive physical impacts for CFM clients of getting food, there are also a number of beneficial psychological effects. 87% say that eating a meal at the service has a positive impact on how they feel.

‘(An) appetising hot meal served with a smile in good company has done wonders for my mental wellbeing’

92% of respondents say that being able to have a meal at the service helps them face the day ahead, with 65% saying that this helps them ‘a lot’ and 27% that this helps them ‘a little’.

FareShare food provision means that CFMs are able to provide meals on-site to their clients. Clients who get a hot meal from a CFM are more likely than those who do not to say that their physical strength and energy levels have improved and that it has a positive impact on how they feel. 56% of clients who have hot meals from a CFM say their energy levels have improved compared with 42% of those who do not.

This shows that the benefits of providing meals to people is not only in the nutritional value of the food and the physical benefits this brings but also that eating a meal together helps to improve clients’ mental wellbeing.

‘Sometimes if feeling unwell/ depressed the best solution is a good hot meal with friends’
3.3.2 Social impacts

Clients enjoy the social element of eating at a CFM and it makes them feel part of a community. Of the 73% of clients who receive meals at a CFM (either hot or cold), 82% say eating together makes them feel part of a community. Having a meal (30%) and socialising (29%) are key reasons why clients enjoy eating at the CFM, At the same time they appreciate having access to a variety of food (26%) and that they can save money (8%). Although saving money is a less popular response here, section 3.3.3 shows that cost savings are significant to clients.

‘Good quality food and companionship, a brilliant emotional boost as well as help feeding my family’

Figure 3.2 Most enjoyable aspect of eating at CFM by Age

So these findings show that overall clients value the social benefits of eating a meal together, allowing them to socialise and feel part of a community but there are differences between the views of younger and older people. Younger people are more likely than older people to say that having a meal is the most enjoyable aspect of eating at the CFM. 40% of 18 to 34 year olds chose having a meal compared with 19% of those aged 55 or over.

Older people are more likely to say that ‘socialising’ is what they enjoy the most - 40% of those aged 55 or over chose this option compared with 16% of those aged 18 to 34 years old.

‘It means that on one day a week I am not eating alone’

‘I get good friendship and good food’
3.3.3 Financial impacts

Previous research shows that the majority of CFMs believe that the provision of FareShare food means that their clients worry less about money. This survey found that 75% of clients say that they have saved money as a result of getting food from a CFM and are able to spend this money in ways which improve their quality of life. Those who reported saving money were then asked what the savings allowed them to do:

- 79% of clients say they are able to buy food with the savings they have made
- 71% say they use these savings to pay bills
- 65% are able to use these savings to buy clothes
- 58% are able to visit family and friends
- 50% use these saving to pay rent
- 39% are able to treat their children

Clients are also able to increase their employment opportunities as a result of getting food from a CFM. A third say they have used the savings they make to attend a job interview or the job centre, and 24% say they use it to travel to work.

Figure 3.3 Use of savings made since accessing food from CFM

The food provided by FareShare has significant wider benefits to CFM clients beyond providing access to food and improving people’s nutritional intake. CFM clients say that their physical health and energy levels have improved, that they enjoy the social aspect of eating a meal with others which in turn has a positive impact on their mental wellbeing and makes them feel better able to face the day ahead. In addition, they are able to save money, which means they have less financial worries and can pay for essential items but also that they are better able to participate in society through visiting family and friends.
4 Access to food and cooking

4.1 Summary of key findings

- 46% of clients have gone a day without a proper meal in the last month.
- Men are more likely than women to have gone a day without a proper meal in the last month.
- A quarter of clients say they have gone several days without a proper meal in the last year and 12% have gone without a proper meal for a week or more in the last year.
- 39% of clients say that they are regularly unable to buy food.
- The majority of clients say they find it hard to cook a meal for themselves or their family.
- The affordability of food prevents a third of clients from cooking a meal.

4.2 Going without food

Respondents were asked about their access to food, how they feel about cooking and what barriers make it difficult for them to cook a meal for themselves or their family.

46% have gone a day without a proper meal in the last month. Going without a proper meal is associated with gender and this report shows that 50% of men have gone without a proper meal in the last month compared with 39% of women. It can also be linked to the type of accommodation people live in; people living in temporary accommodation or on the street are more like to have gone without a proper meal in the last month (54%) compared with those who own their own home or rent (46%). In addition, those who find it hard to cook a meal for themselves or their family are more likely to have gone without a proper meal in the last month (67%) compared with those who do not find it hard to cook a meal (50%).

One possible explanation for the gender differences is that men are less likely to have access to the right cooking equipment (26% of men do not have access to the right cooking equipment compared with 13% of women) and are more likely to live in temporary accommodation or on the street (16% of men live in temporary accommodation or on the street compared with 8% of women). This relative lack of access to cooking equipment together with higher levels of living in temporary accommodation or on the street might explain in part why men are more likely than women to have gone without a proper meal in the last month.

Respondents were asked what is the longest period they have gone without a proper meal. 25% say they have gone several days without a proper meal in the last year and 12% have spent a week or more without a proper meal in the last year.
4.3 Cooking and ability to buy food

Respondents were asked whether they found it hard to cook a meal for themselves or their family. 60% of clients find it hard to cook a meal, with a third saying that they often find it hard and 27% saying this is sometimes hard.

Those in temporary accommodation or living on the street are more likely to find it hard to cook a meal compared with tenants or those who own their own home (63% versus 52% respectively). 51% of those in temporary accommodation or living on the street also said they do not have the right cooking equipment compared with only 14% of home owners or renters. This might be one explanation as to why those in temporary accommodation or living on the street are more likely to say they find it hard to cook a meal.

Those who said they find it hard to cook were also asked the reasons why they could not always prepare a meal for themselves or their family (see Figure 4.3 below). The most widely chosen reason for this is the affordability of the ingredients (36%), followed by ‘not being physically able to prepare a meal’ (27%) and ‘not feeling confident about cooking’ (25%).

*Figure 4.3 Reasons why clients cannot always cook a meal*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cannot afford ingredients</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not physically able</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not confident at cooking</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't have the right equipment</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't see the point of cooking</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know how to cook</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food provided by carer/meals on wheels</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No specific reasons</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Those who say the reason they find it hard to cook a meal is because they 'cannot afford the ingredients’, they do not have ‘the right cooking equipment’ or they do not ‘see the point of cooking just for myself’ were all more likely to have gone without a proper meal in the last month than not to have gone without a proper meal. Among those who give the affordability of the ingredients as a reason why they find it hard to cook a meal, 72% have gone without a proper meal in the last month. And among those who give either not having the right equipment or not seeing the point of cooking as reasons for finding it hard to cook a meal, 63% have gone without a meal in the last month.

39% of clients are unable to buy food on a regular basis. Some groups report more difficulties than others, with responses varying by gender, age, housing status and the length of time they have used the service.

- 41% of men are unable to buy food on a regular basis compared with 28% of women.
- Around half (49%) of clients aged under 35 are unable to buy food on a regular basis compared with just over a quarter (27%) of those aged 55 and over.
- More than half (52%) of those living in temporary or supported accommodation report difficulties buying food on a regular basis compared with a third of tenants and those who own their own home.

These findings show that men, younger people and those in temporary or supported accommodation are finding it more difficult to buy food.
5 Conclusions

FareShare is making a significant contribution to the resources of CFMs enabling them to make a huge difference to the lives of clients, who number among the most vulnerable in society.

Previous research shows that FareShare provides on average an estimated £7,900 of food a year to each CFM. CFMs estimate that they are able to free up on average £1,953 a year to then invest in other services. So significant is FareShare’s contribution that 19% of CFMs said they might be unable to continue without them. FareShare’s input not only allows CFMs to provide better quality food to more clients but also to provide other services to more clients. CFMs believe that FareShare provision has an important and positive impact on their clients for example through improving their diets and reducing their money worries. This report shows that clients support this view.

The meals provided by CFMs are playing a major role in fulfilling the dietary needs of many clients. Over half of CFM clients say they get their main meal of the day at a FareShare CFM, 93% say that the food provided is either very or quite good and the majority say that it enables them to have a more nutritious and balanced diet.

It’s perhaps unsurprising therefore that the food provided by FareShare’s CFMs is the biggest single reason for clients attending, with half saying it is the main reason they visit the service. But whilst the provision of food is what attracts clients to the CFMs, once they are there CFMs are able to offer them vital services they might not otherwise receive.

Indeed, the benefits of FareShare food provision go far beyond increasing access to food and improving nutrition. Clients say that the food has positive impacts on their physical wellbeing, increasing both their physical strength and their energy levels. It also has a positive effect on their mental wellbeing, helping them face the day ahead, as well as giving them an important opportunity to feel part of a community, meet friends and socialise. In particular those who are able to sit down for a hot meal at a CFM are more likely to say their physical strength and energy levels have improved and that it has a positive impact on how they feel.

Furthermore, 75% of clients say they have saved money by getting food at a CFM. These savings allow them to not only pay for essentials such as bills and clothing, but also to participate in society by visiting family and friends. Many clients say they have no other way of sourcing food and that they are regularly unable to buy food, with nearly half saying they have gone without a proper meal in the last month. The affordability of food, access to the right equipment and not feeling confident about cooking are all factors that clients say prevent them from cooking a meal.

So FareShare’s food provision is crucial to many people and provides them with a wide range of benefits. Given the level of food poverty in the UK, the need for FareShare’s resources is only likely to grow. Increasing the level of food provision to charities and community groups across the UK will provide a wide and varied set of benefits to even more of the most vulnerable in society.
Annex A

1,028 clients completed and returned the questionnaires. The characteristics of the clients who took part in the survey were explored by gender, age, ethnicity and housing status.

An extremely broad range of individuals responded to the survey and ages spanned from 18 years to 93 years old.

- 21% were aged 18 to 34 years old
- 39% were aged 35 to 54 years old
- 30% were aged 55 years old and over
- a further 11% did not provide their age
- 58% were male
- 42% were female

When asked to describe their ethnicity, respondents replied as follows:

- 75% described their ethnic group as White
- 16% said they were Black and Minority Ethnic (BME)
- 9% of respondents did not provide information on their ethnic group.

Figure A shows the housing status of the survey respondents. 17% of those who took part were in accommodation that indicated issues of homelessness which is broadly in line with the proportion of FareShare CFMs whose main focus is the support of people who are homeless.

- 44% lived in rented accommodation
  - 34% in council or housing association and
  - 10% in private rented accommodation
- 13% of respondents owned their own home
- 14% lived in supported accommodation

---

12 People who chose one of the following categories: White-English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British/Irish/Gypsy or Irish Traveller or Other White.
13 People who chose one of the following categories: Mixed/multiple ethnic groups; Asian/Asian British; Black/African/Caribbean/Black British or Other ethnic group.
14 This includes people living in hostels, temporary accommodation (e.g. bed and breakfast, staying with a friend/relative) and people living on the street.