

COMMUNITY COOKERY SKILLS PROGRAMME

IMPACT AND EVALUATION REPORT:

**Manchester
Public Health**

March-May 2026



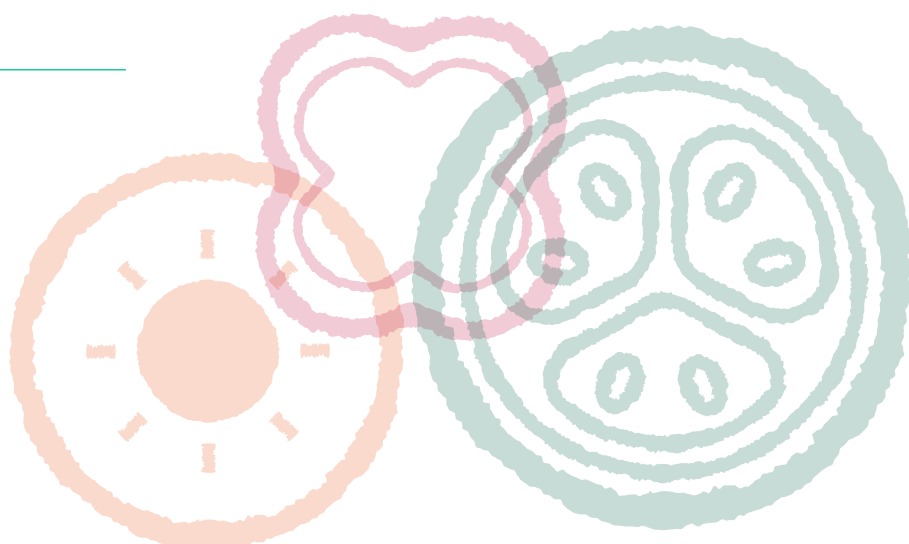


**Our Community Cookery Programme at
Northmoor Community Centre in Manchester**

COOK!
with the Vegetarian Society

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1. Executive Summary

Overview of the Project

The Northmoor Community Centre Cookery Programme was commissioned by Manchester Public Health and delivered by the Vegetarian Society at Northmoor Community Centre. The programme consisted of six practical cookery sessions designed to help participants develop the skills, confidence, and motivation to prepare healthy, affordable meals from scratch while strengthening social connections within the local community.

The programme focused on hands-on learning and incorporated food hygiene and safety, knife skills, ingredient preparation, meal planning, food budgeting, vegetarian and plant-based cooking, batch cooking, and safe food storage. Participants also received ingredient bags each week to recreate recipes at home and reinforce learning between sessions.

A total of 15 participants completed the programme, with strong attendance and retention throughout the six-week delivery period. Additional participants attended the first session but withdrew before Session 2 and have not been included in the evaluation.

Key Findings

The evaluation, which combined baseline and final participant surveys with tutor observations recorded throughout the programme, found positive outcomes across all six areas of the evaluation framework.

Key Outcomes

- **86% reported feeling more confident cooking than when they started the programme.**
- **93% reported being more likely to cook a wider range of dishes in the future.**
- **Participants more than doubled their social connections within the group, increasing from an average of 2.5 people known before the programme to 5 people by the final session.**
- **The tutor rated the group as very confident in preparing balanced vegetarian and vegan meals and described participants as clearly confident and engaged by the final session.**
- **Tutor observations showed consistent improvement in knife skills, food preparation, hygiene practices, recipe adaptation, time management, and overall confidence in the kitchen. Participants became increasingly willing to experiment with unfamiliar ingredients and prepare meals independently.**

93% of participants reported cooking more food from scratch by the end of the programme.

Average fruit and vegetable consumption increased from 2.8 portions per day to 3.1 portions per day.

The social impact of the programme was particularly noteworthy. Participants developed strong friendships and peer support networks throughout the six weeks. The final session was described as highly emotional, with participants expressing how much they had enjoyed the programme and how much they would miss the group. Participants presented the tutor with a thank-you card and gift in recognition of the positive experience and supportive environment that had been created.

The programme also created benefits beyond the immediate participant group. Several attendees were active volunteers within Northmoor Community Centre and are expected to apply their learning through the weekly community diner and other food-related activities, creating opportunities for wider community benefit.

Recommendations

Based on the evaluation findings, the following recommendations are proposed for future delivery:

- 1. Maintain the practical, hands-on delivery model**, which proved highly effective in building confidence and encouraging behaviour change.
- 2. Continue providing take-home ingredient bags**, enabling participants to practise new skills at home and reinforce learning between sessions.
- 3. Consider childcare provision where resources allow**, reducing barriers to participation and enabling fuller engagement with sessions.
- 4. Support sustainable community cooking beyond the programme**, helping host venues develop the capacity to continue cooking activities through volunteer training, equipment provision, community leadership, and support to secure future funding. This would help maintain the confidence, friendships and healthy cooking habits developed during the programme while extending the benefits to future participants and the wider community.

The findings of this report demonstrate that community cookery programmes can be an effective tool for improving cooking confidence, encouraging healthier eating habits, reducing social isolation, and strengthening community wellbeing. The success of the Northmoor Community Centre Cookery Programme provides a strong case for continued investment in community-based food education initiatives as part of Manchester's wider public health strategy.

2. Introduction

Background and Objectives

The Northmoor Community Centre Cookery Programme was commissioned by Manchester Public Health and delivered by the Vegetarian Society in partnership with Northmoor Community Centre. The programme was developed in response to the recognised link between food insecurity, health inequalities, and low confidence in cooking, and sought to provide residents with practical skills and knowledge to support healthier, more affordable eating habits.

Delivered through a series of six workshops, the programme aimed to help participants develop the confidence and ability to prepare nutritious meals from scratch while building understanding of meal planning, food budgeting, food storage and the use of vegetarian and plant-based ingredients. The programme also sought to create opportunities for social connection through shared cooking experiences and communal meals.

The programme was designed as a practical, hands-on learning experience. Participants were encouraged to develop a range of cooking skills including knife skills, food safety, ingredient preparation, batch cooking, and meal planning while learning how to prepare affordable meals using fresh ingredients and wholefood protein sources. Weekly ingredient bags enabled participants to practise these skills at home between sessions, helping to reinforce learning and encourage behaviour change beyond the classroom environment.

The programme's objectives were to:

- **Build participants' confidence and practical cooking skills.**
- **Increase the amount of healthy food cooked from scratch at home.**
- **Improve knowledge and use of affordable vegetarian and plant-based ingredients.**
- **Encourage greater use of vegetables and fruit in everyday meals.**
- **Support participants to shop, cook, and plan meals more economically.**
- **Strengthen social connections and community wellbeing through shared food experiences.**

By addressing both practical cooking skills and the wider social factors that influence food choices, the programme aimed to contribute to Manchester Public Health priorities around prevention, reducing health inequalities and supporting community wellbeing.

Structure of the Report

This report provides an evaluation of the Northmoor Community Centre Cookery Programme and presents evidence of its outcomes and impact. The evaluation draws upon participant surveys, tutor observations and qualitative feedback collected throughout the programme.

The report is structured as follows:

Methodology

outlines the evaluation framework, data collection methods and analytical approach used to assess programme outcomes.

Project Implementation

describes the design and delivery of the programme, including workshop content, resources, and delivery arrangements.

Participant Demographics

provides an overview of participant engagement and programme context.

Outcomes and Impact

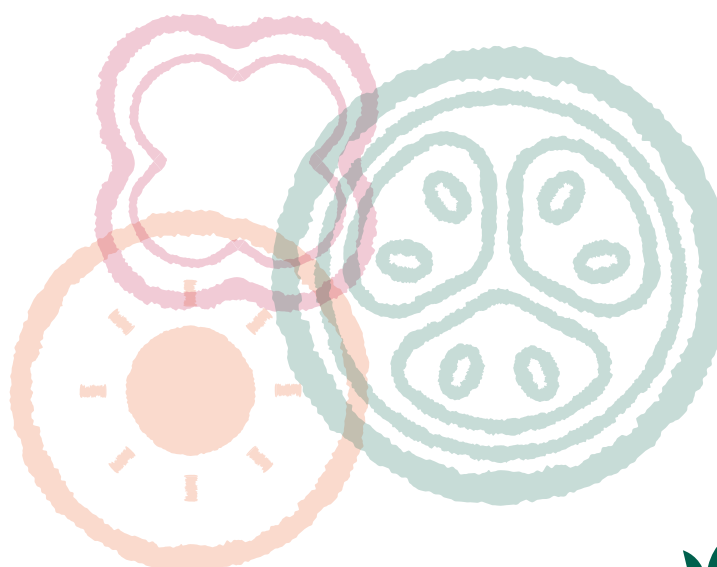
presents the findings from participant surveys and tutor observations across the programme's six outcome areas.

Discussion

considers the significance of the findings, lessons learned and the longer-term legacy of the programme.

Conclusion

summarises the overall impact of the programme and sets out recommendations for future delivery. Together, these sections provide a comprehensive assessment of how the programme supported participants to develop cooking skills, build confidence, improve eating habits, and strengthen community connections through food.



3. Methodology

Evaluation Framework

The evaluation framework for the Northmoor Community Centre Cookery Programme was designed to assess progress across six key outcome areas:

- **Improved cooking skills**
- **Improved knowledge of vegetarian and vegan proteins**
- **Cooking more food from scratch**
- **Improved confidence in food and cooking**
- **Increased use of vegetables and fruit in meals**
- **Increased social connection and sense of community**

The framework combined participant surveys and tutor observations to measure changes in skills, confidence, behaviours, and social outcomes over the course of the programme. Self-assessment data was collected at the beginning and end of the programme and supplemented by tutor observations recorded throughout delivery.

The evaluation was designed to focus on practical outcomes and behaviour change, reflecting the programme's objectives of helping participants develop the confidence and motivation to cook healthy, affordable meals at home while strengthening community connections.

Data Collection Methods

Three primary methods were used to evaluate programme outcomes:

1. Session 1 Participant Survey

- **Participants completed a baseline questionnaire during the first session. Questions explored existing cooking habits, confidence levels, use of fresh ingredients, fruit and vegetable consumption, and existing social connections within the group. Open-ended questions also captured participants' attitudes towards cooking from scratch.**

2. Session 6 Participant Survey

- **At the final session, participants completed an anonymous follow-up questionnaire designed to measure changes in behaviour, confidence, and attitudes. The survey explored participants' experiences of cooking from scratch, use of vegetables, confidence in cooking, willingness to cook a wider range of dishes, and the social connections formed during the programme. Open-text questions provided additional insight into participants' experiences and perceived outcomes.**

3. Tutor Observations

- **Structured tutor observations were completed throughout the programme. These recorded evidence of practical skill development, food safety practices, recipe adaptation, confidence, participation, and social interaction. A final tutor reflection captured overall progress and outcomes at the end of the programme, including participants' confidence in cooking balanced vegetarian and vegan meals and the strength of group relationships.**

Analysis Techniques

A mixed-method approach was used to analyse programme outcomes:

Quantitative Analysis

- **Data from baseline and final participant surveys was compared to identify changes in cooking behaviours, confidence, cooking from scratch, fruit and vegetable consumption and social connection. Results were summarised using descriptive statistics and percentage changes where appropriate.**

Qualitative Analysis

- **Open-text survey responses and tutor observations were reviewed to identify common themes relating to confidence, behaviour change, learning, and social connection. These insights were used alongside the quantitative findings to provide a richer understanding of participant experiences and programme impact.**
- **The combination of quantitative and qualitative evidence enabled the evaluation to assess not only what changed during the programme, but also how participants experienced those changes and the factors that contributed to successful outcomes.**

This evaluation design ensured a rich understanding of both measurable outcomes and participant experience, while respecting the need for safety, inclusivity, and low-barrier engagement.

4. Project Implementation

Description of the Workshops

The Northmoor Community Centre Cookery Programme was delivered through a series of six weekly cookery workshops designed to help participants develop the skills, confidence, and motivation to prepare healthy, affordable meals from scratch. The programme was commissioned by Manchester Public Health and delivered by the Vegetarian Society at Northmoor Community Centre.

The first five sessions focused on practical, hands-on cooking, with participants working together to prepare a range of vegetarian and plant-based dishes using affordable wholefood ingredients and accessible cooking techniques. Recipes were selected to introduce participants to new ingredients, flavours, and cooking methods while remaining suitable for everyday home cooking and family meals.

The programme was designed as a progressive skills-building course, with each session introducing and reinforcing practical food knowledge alongside the recipes being prepared. Participants were supported to develop core cooking competencies including food hygiene and food safety, knife skills, ingredient preparation, seasoning, and the safe use of kitchen equipment. The programme also explored how to select good-quality produce, make the most of affordable ingredients and prepare nutritious meals on a budget.

In addition to practical cookery skills, participants learned techniques to support longer-term behaviour change at home. Sessions included guidance on batch cooking, portioning, freezing, safe food storage and reheating, helping participants make efficient use of time, reduce food waste and increase the affordability of home cooking. Particular emphasis was placed on low-cost wholefood protein sources such as lentils and beans, helping participants build confidence in preparing nutritious meals on a budget.

Each session incorporated discussion around meal planning, value for money and reducing food waste. Recipe packs included full recipes, cooking instructions, food storage guidance, and ingredient costings, helping participants understand how the dishes could be recreated at home within a household budget.

A key feature of the programme was the provision of ingredient bags after each session. Participants were given reusable bags at the start of the programme and encouraged to bring them back each week to be replenished with the ingredients needed to recreate the recipes at home. This approach reinforced learning between sessions and encouraged participants to put newly acquired skills into practice within their own households.

The final session differed from the previous workshops and acted as a celebration of participants' achievements. During Sessions 4 and 5, participants worked with the tutor to design dishes for a shared celebration meal. Working in pairs, participants selected recipes, planned menus and prepared dishes using skills developed throughout the programme. The final session provided an opportunity for participants to demonstrate their learning, showcase their achievements, invite friends and family, and celebrate the progress they had made over the six weeks.

Timeline and Schedule

The programme commenced on Tuesday 24 March 2026 and was delivered through six sessions at Northmoor Community Centre. Sessions were held weekly, with a two-week break during the Easter school holidays to accommodate childcare needs and the schedule of the venue, before delivery resumed.

The programme followed a progressive structure, with each session building upon skills developed in previous weeks:

- **Session 1:** Shakshuka and garlic mushrooms with spinach.
- **Session 2:** Red lentil pasta sauce and pasta.
- **Session 3:** Refried beans, black bean salad, rice and burritos.
- **Session 4:** Aubergine and lentil curry, rice and broccoli slaw.
- **Session 5:** Lentil dhal, potato and pea pastry and quinoa.
- **Session 6:** Participant-designed celebration meal and showcase event.

Attendance and retention were strong throughout the programme. Of the 15 participants who completed the programme, 14 (93%) attended five or more sessions and 9 (60%) attended all six sessions. An additional two residents attended the first session but did not continue with the programme. This high level of participation helped participants build confidence incrementally and contributed to the strong outcomes observed in the final evaluation.

Resources

The programme was delivered by an experienced lead tutor supported by catering assistants. This additional support helped ensure sessions were delivered safely and effectively while providing adequate support for participants during practical cooking activities.

Workshops utilised a range of portable cooking equipment and kitchen tools, allowing participants to gain hands-on experience preparing meals from scratch. Fresh ingredients, recipe packs, and weekly ingredient bags were provided throughout the programme, ensuring participants could both learn during sessions and continue practising at home.

Northmoor Community Centre provided the venue and played an important role in participant recruitment and engagement. The programme also benefited from the involvement of community volunteers and existing community networks, helping to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for participants. Several attendees were themselves active volunteers within the centre, creating opportunities for learning from the programme to be shared more widely through existing community food activities.

5. Participant Demographics

Participation Overview

A total of 15 participants completed the Northmoor Community Centre Cookery Programme, which consisted of six practical cookery workshops delivered at Northmoor Community Centre. Of the 15 participants included in the final evaluation, 14 attended five or more sessions and 9 attended all six sessions, demonstrating a high level of engagement and commitment to the programme. Participants contributed actively to practical activities throughout the course and to the final celebration session.

Approach to Demographic Data

No formal demographic information was collected from participants. This approach was adopted to maintain a low-barrier and welcoming environment, ensuring that the focus remained on food, learning and community participation rather than personal circumstances or background characteristics.

Community Context

The programme was delivered at Northmoor Community Centre, a venue serving a community identified as experiencing significant health and socioeconomic inequalities. The programme was commissioned by Manchester Public Health to support residents to develop cooking skills, confidence, and healthier eating habits through a practical, community-based approach.



6. Outcomes and Impact

The Northmoor Community Centre Cookery Programme delivered positive outcomes across all six areas identified in the evaluation framework. Analysis of participant surveys and tutor observations demonstrates improvements in cooking skills, confidence, cooking from scratch, knowledge of vegetarian and vegan proteins, fruit and vegetable consumption and social connection. The table below provides a summary of the key quantitative findings.

Quantitative data summary

OUTCOME AREA	BASELINE	END OF PROGRAMME	KEY CHANGE
Cooking from Scratch	Participants cooked an average of 8.0 meals from scratch per week.	93% (13 of 14) reported cooking more food from scratch than before attending. 50% reported "a lot more", 43% "some more", and 7% "no change".	Strong increase in scratch cooking behaviour.
Cooking Confidence	29% described themselves as very confident cooking from scratch. 18% were not confident or only a little confident.	86% (12 of 14) reported feeling more confident cooking than when they started.	Marked increase in confidence and independence.
Range of Foods Cooked	41% reported cooking lots of different dishes. 24% reported a very limited range or only a few different things.	93% (13 of 14) reported being more likely to cook a wider range of dishes. 71% were much more likely.	Greater willingness to use new ingredients and recipes.
Vegetarian & Vegan Protein Knowledge	No baseline measure collected.	Tutor rated the group very confident in cooking balanced vegetarian and vegan meals. Plant-based protein substitutions were demonstrated successfully by most participants.	Strong evidence of increased knowledge and application.
Fruit & Vegetable Consumption	Average intake: 2.8 portions per day. 19% achieved 5-a-day.	Average intake: 3.1 portions per day. 21% achieved 5-a-day.	Modest improvement in fruit and vegetable consumption.
Community & Social Connection	Participants knew an average of 2.5 people before the programme.	Participants reported being friendly with an average of 5.0 people in the group and had met or spoken with an average of 2.7 people outside sessions.	New friendships and relationships developed throughout the programme.

Improved Cooking Skills

Tutor observations showed clear improvements in cooking skills across the six-week programme. Participants became increasingly confident preparing ingredients from raw, using knives safely, following recipes independently and adapting dishes to suit their own tastes. Throughout the programme, tutors observed strong engagement with hands-on cooking activities, increasing confidence when using unfamiliar ingredients and greater independence in decision making.

By the final session, the tutor rated the group's overall cooking skills as highly confident. Improvements were noted in chopping techniques, time management, food hygiene, communication and confidence when seasoning and tasting dishes. Participants were increasingly able to make independent choices about preparation methods and ingredient substitutions rather than simply following instructions.

Participant feedback supports these observations. Several participants reported learning new cooking techniques, improving knife skills and becoming more confident preparing vegetables and cooking with unfamiliar ingredients.

Tutor comments:

“Improved chopping skills, better time management, better communication. They felt like they were in MasterChef.”

Improved Knowledge of Vegetarian and Vegan Proteins

Across the six sessions, participants were introduced to new ingredients, flavour combinations and cooking techniques designed to demonstrate how affordable and nutritious vegetarian and plant-based meals can be.

Tutor observations recorded growing confidence in the use of plant-based ingredients throughout the programme. Participants became increasingly willing to experiment with unfamiliar foods and were observed discussing how recipes could be adapted and recreated at home. Tutors noted that several participants, who initially identified as meat eaters, reported a changing perception of vegetarian food and a greater willingness to cook these dishes for themselves and their families.

By the final session, the tutor rated the group as very confident in cooking balanced vegetarian and vegan meals. Participants successfully demonstrated the use of plant-based proteins and created dishes that included vegetables, carbohydrates, and protein sources. The tutor also confirmed that plant-based protein substitutions were successfully demonstrated by most participants.

The programme helped participants broaden their understanding of vegetarian cooking and showed how using simple wholefoods can create satisfying, nutritious meals without increasing food costs. This contributed directly to the programme's aim of promoting healthy, affordable eating habits within the community.

Tutor comments:

“They were mostly meat eaters but their perception towards vegetarian food was changing, and they said they will try these recipes at home. It gave them a wider approach towards vegetarian cooking and how many varieties they could try at home.”

Cooking More Food from Scratch

One of the programme's primary aims was to increase participants' confidence and ability to cook meals from scratch at home. Participant feedback suggests the programme was highly successful in achieving this outcome, with 93% of respondents reporting that they were cooking more food from scratch by the end of the six-week programme. Half of participants reported cooking “a lot more” from scratch, while a further 43% reported cooking “some more” from scratch than before attending the sessions.

Tutor observations support these findings. Throughout the programme, participants regularly prepared ingredients from raw, including chopping vegetables, using fresh herbs and spices, and cooking with a variety of grains, pulses and plant-based proteins. Tutors also recorded increasing levels of independence, with participants making decisions about preparation methods, seasoning and ingredient substitutions with growing confidence.

A particularly encouraging finding was the number of participants who discussed recreating recipes at home between sessions. The ingredient bags provided each week enabled participants to practise new skills outside the workshops, helping to reinforce learning and build confidence in everyday cooking. Several participants described applying techniques and ingredients from the sessions to their own cooking and adapting familiar recipes using ideas learned from the programme.

These findings suggest that the programme not only increased participants' cooking skills but also encouraged meaningful behaviour change, helping residents prepare more meals from scratch and rely less on convenience foods and ready-made products.

Participant quotes:

“I will use more fresh vegetables.”

“I've learned adding new ingredients to my old recipes.”

Improved Confidence in Food and Cooking

Improving confidence in cooking is key to enabling other outcomes in this programme and participant feedback shows clear progress over the six sessions. At the end of the programme, 86% of participants reported feeling more confident cooking than when they started, with many describing greater confidence using new ingredients, preparing vegetables from scratch and adapting recipes to suit their own tastes.

Participants also reported feeling more positive about cooking generally. Final survey responses frequently referred to increased confidence, learning new skills and feeling motivated to try different foods and cooking techniques.

Tutor observations mirrored these findings. Across the programme, participants became increasingly independent in their decision-making and more willing to experiment with unfamiliar ingredients. By the final session, the tutor described the group as “clearly confident and engaged”, noting improvements in communication, problem-solving and overall confidence in the kitchen.

This growth in confidence is particularly important because it increases the likelihood that participants will continue cooking healthy meals at home after the programme has ended. Participants left with not only new skills but also the belief that they could successfully apply those skills in their everyday lives.

Participant quote:

**“I feel more positive and learnt knife cutting skills.
More ingredients that I have never used before.
Meeting different people.”**

“I tried recipes at home. I feel more confident in my kitchen.”

Increased Use of Vegetables and Fruit in Meals

Participants reported making greater use of fruit and vegetables in their everyday cooking as a result of attending the programme. Survey data indicates a positive shift in participants’ eating habits, with average fruit and vegetable consumption increasing from 2.8 portions per day at the start of the programme to 3.1 portions per day by the final session. The proportion of participants achieving the recommended five portions a day also increased during the programme.

Participants consistently reported using more fresh vegetables since attending the sessions. In the final survey, the majority stated that they were incorporating fresh vegetables into their cooking more often, with many identifying this as one of the most significant changes they had made as a result of the programme.

Tutor observations supported these findings. Across the six sessions, participants prepared a wide variety of fresh ingredients and became increasingly confident using vegetables, herbs, spices and plant-based ingredients in their cooking. Participants also demonstrated a growing willingness to try unfamiliar ingredients and explore new ways of incorporating vegetables into everyday meals.

While behaviour change in dietary habits often takes longer to establish than cooking skills, the programme has clearly helped participants take positive steps towards increasing the amount and variety of vegetables they eat. Many participants reported discovering new ingredients, recipes and cooking techniques that they intend to continue using at home.

Participant feedback:

**“I will use
more fresh
vegetables.”**

**“These sessions teach me
how to cook healthy, less
oily and tasty meals with
vegetables.”**

**“Use more fresh
vegetables.”**

Improved Social Links in the Community

One of the most notable outcomes of the programme was the development of new friendships and stronger social connections between participants. Throughout the six-week programme, participants worked together to prepare meals, share food and discuss their experiences, creating opportunities for meaningful relationships and a greater sense of belonging within the group.

Survey data demonstrated a substantial increase in social connections across the group. Before the programme, participants knew an average of 2.5 people attending the sessions. By the final session, participants reported being friendly with an average of 5 people within the group and had spoken to or met an average of 2.7 people outside of the workshops.

Tutor observations recorded increasing levels of interaction and peer support throughout the programme. Participants regularly shared cooking experiences, discussed recipes, and helped one another during practical activities. By the final session, the tutor described the group as having a “strong sense of group/community”, noting that participants listened attentively to one another, shared food openly and celebrated each other’s achievements.

Many participants identified the social aspects of the programme as one of their favourite elements. In addition to learning new cooking skills, participants valued the opportunity to meet new people, work as a team and share experiences with others from their local community. These findings demonstrate that the programme contributed not only to healthier cooking habits but also to greater social connection and community wellbeing.

Participant feedback:

“Trying cooking differently and socialising.”

“The variety of ingredients, learning new cooking skills, friendships formed, being given ingredients to take home.”

“Making friends and enjoying the time and I always wait for the next class.”

Data Analysis

Data from baseline and final participant surveys was compared to assess changes in cooking behaviour, confidence, dietary habits and social connection. Tutor observations collected throughout the six sessions provided additional evidence of skill development and behaviour change. Together, these quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrate clear progress across all six programme outcomes and provide strong evidence of positive impact for participants attending the Northmoor Community Centre Cookery Programme.



7. Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

The Northmoor Community Centre Cookery Programme set out to improve cooking skills, increase confidence, encourage healthier eating habits and strengthen social connections through a series of practical, hands-on cookery sessions. The findings presented in the previous section demonstrate positive outcomes across all six areas of the evaluation framework, with particularly strong results relating to cooking from scratch, confidence and community connection.

One of the most significant findings was the increase in cooking from scratch. By the end of the programme, 93% of participants reported cooking more food from scratch than before attending the sessions. This suggests that the programme successfully achieved its primary aim of supporting participants to prepare healthy, affordable meals at home. The practical nature of the sessions allowed participants to build skills through repeated practice, while the ingredient bags enabled them to reinforce learning between sessions by recreating recipes at home.

The increase in confidence reported by participants appears closely linked to these behaviour changes. Participants not only developed new technical skills but also became more willing to experiment with unfamiliar ingredients, adapt recipes and make independent cooking decisions. Tutor observations indicate that confidence grew steadily throughout the programme, culminating in a group that was described as highly confident, engaged and capable of preparing meals with increasing independence.

The programme also demonstrated that healthy eating interventions can deliver benefits beyond dietary outcomes alone. While fruit and vegetable consumption increased modestly, the social outcomes were particularly noteworthy. Participants formed new friendships, supported one another during sessions and reported continuing contact outside the workshops. The strong sense of community observed by tutors suggests that cooking together can provide an effective means of reducing social isolation and creating opportunities for meaningful social interaction.

Another noteworthy finding was participants' growing confidence in vegetarian and plant-based cooking. Several participants reported a changing perception of vegetarian food and a greater willingness to prepare these dishes at home. This is particularly encouraging given the programme's focus on affordable, nutritious meals, as plant-based ingredients such as beans, lentils and pulses can provide cost-effective alternatives to meat while supporting healthier eating habits.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the programme succeeded not only in developing cooking skills, but also in creating the confidence, motivation and social support that help individuals apply those skills in their everyday lives. The combination of practical learning, take-home ingredients and a welcoming group environment appears to have been central to the positive outcomes observed throughout the programme.

Comparison with Initial Objectives

The Northmoor Community Centre Cookery Programme was commissioned to help residents develop the skills, confidence and motivation to cook healthy, affordable meals at home while also encouraging social connection and healthier eating habits. Evidence collected throughout the programme indicates that these objectives were successfully achieved.

Particularly strong outcomes were recorded in relation to cooking from scratch, cooking confidence and community connection. Participants also demonstrated increased confidence using vegetarian ingredients and reported making greater use of fresh vegetables in their cooking. Changes in dietary habits often take longer to establish than changes in skills or confidence, meaning the six-week timeframe may not fully capture the longer-term impact of the programme on eating behaviours. The programme nevertheless established positive foundations for longer-term behaviour change.

Overall, the programme delivered strongly against the objectives outlined in the original proposal and aligns closely with Manchester Public Health priorities relating to prevention, healthy eating and community wellbeing.

Lessons Learned

Practical, Hands-On Learning Drives Engagement

The programme's strongest outcomes were achieved through practical cooking activities rather than classroom-style learning or demonstrations. Participants developed confidence by preparing recipes themselves, tasting food, experimenting with ingredients and learning alongside others. Tutor observations showed increasing independence throughout the programme, with participants becoming more confident making decisions about preparation methods, seasoning and ingredient substitutions as the weeks progressed.

Learning Continues Beyond the Session

Providing ingredient bags after each session proved to be an effective way of extending learning beyond the workshops. Participants regularly discussed recreating recipes at home and reported applying new skills and ingredients in their everyday cooking. This opportunity to practise between sessions appears to have played an important role in supporting the programme's strong outcomes relating to cooking from scratch and confidence.

Social Connection Enhances Learning

While the programme's primary focus was developing cooking skills, the social aspect became an important element of its success. Participants supported one another during sessions, shared ideas and experiences, and developed friendships over the six-week programme. The welcoming group environment encouraged individuals to try new things and contributed to high levels of engagement and attendance throughout the programme.

Delivery Reflections

The diversity of the cohort was a notable strength of the programme. Participants represented a broad mix of ages, ethnic backgrounds and life experiences, creating opportunities for the sharing of different food traditions, cooking ideas and perspectives. Engaging such a diverse group can often be challenging, making this a particularly positive aspect of the programme.

Attendance and retention were generally very strong, with most participants attending the majority of sessions. As is common in community-based programmes, a small number of participants withdrew during delivery. The programme also generated interest from local residents after it had begun, with requests for additional participants to join. As the sessions were designed as a progressive skills programme, new participants could not be accommodated mid-programme. However, this did result in a small number of vacant places later in the programme when attendees withdrew. Future programmes may benefit from exploring ways to manage waiting lists while maintaining the integrity of the learning journey.

A key learning point related to childcare provision. Some participants attended with pre-school children because they did not have access to childcare. While this enabled them to participate, there were occasions where caring responsibilities affected their ability to fully engage in the sessions. On one occasion, several young children were present in an adjoining space, creating additional challenges from both a delivery and health and safety perspective due to the use of hot equipment and cooking appliances. Previous programmes that included funded childcare support achieved good results in reducing these barriers to participation. Future delivery should consider childcare provision where resources allow.

Another operational learning point concerned volunteer support. The delivery model assumed that venue volunteers would provide practical assistance with set-up and close-down activities. In practice, this support was not always available, requiring the delivery team to bring in an additional assistant for several sessions to ensure smooth and safe delivery. Future programmes should look to either secure volunteer commitments in advance or budget appropriately for additional staffing support where required.

Legacy of the Project

The impact of the Northmoor Community Centre Cookery Programme is likely to extend beyond the six-week delivery period. Participants left the programme with practical cooking skills, increased confidence and a greater willingness to prepare healthy meals from scratch, providing a foundation for longer-term changes in cooking habits and dietary behaviours. Many participants reported recreating recipes at home during the programme and expressed intentions to continue using the skills and techniques they had learned.

The programme also created strong social connections that are likely to endure beyond the final session. Participants consistently highlighted the value of spending time with others, learning together and developing new friendships. The tutor reported that the final session was particularly emotional, with several participants expressing how much they had enjoyed attending

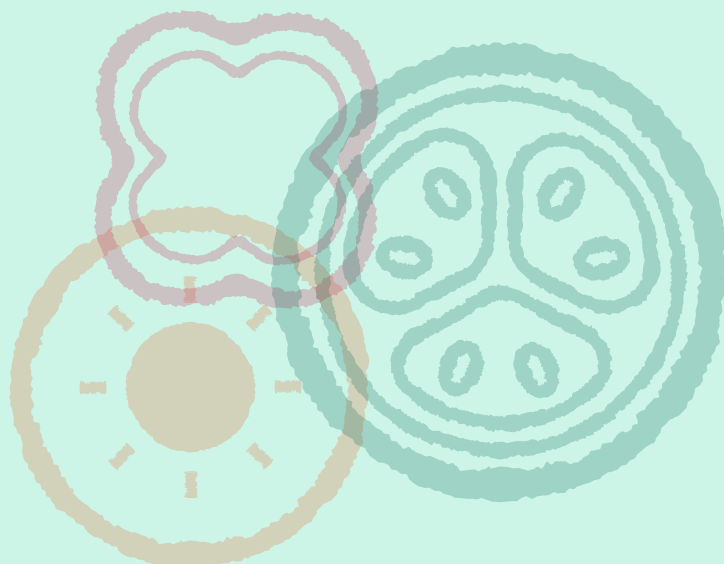
each week and how much they would miss the group when the programme ended. Many spoke about the sessions providing valuable time for themselves away from the demands of work, family life and caring responsibilities.

The strength of these relationships was reflected in the participants' response at the end of the programme. Group members organised a thank-you card and gift of chocolates for the tutor, expressing their appreciation for the support, encouragement and sense of community that had developed during the sessions. While not a formal evaluation measure, this gesture illustrates the positive and meaningful connections that were formed through the programme.

The programme's impact also has the potential to reach beyond the direct participants. Several attendees are active volunteers within Northmoor Community Centre, supporting the weekly community diner and other food-related activities. Through the programme, these volunteers developed new skills, confidence and ideas for incorporating a wider variety of vegetables and plant-based dishes into meals served to the wider community. This creates the potential for a multiplier effect, whereby the knowledge and confidence gained through the programme can benefit many more local residents.

The strong emotional response at the final session also highlighted the importance of finding ways to sustain activities beyond the life of funded programmes. Several participants expressed disappointment that the sessions were ending and spoke about how much they valued the opportunity to learn, socialise and spend time focusing on their own wellbeing. This suggests there may be value in supporting community venues to develop ongoing cooking activities that build on the relationships, skills and confidence established through programmes such as this.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the programme has left a legacy not only of improved cooking skills, but also of stronger community relationships, increased confidence and greater community capacity to promote healthy, affordable eating. The success of the programme provides a strong case for continued investment in community-based cooking programmes as a means of improving wellbeing, reducing isolation and supporting healthier food choices within local communities.





8. Conclusion

Summary of Outcomes and Impact

The Northmoor Community Centre Cookery Programme has demonstrated clear and positive outcomes for participants across all six areas of the evaluation framework. Delivered through six practical cookery sessions, the programme provided a supportive environment in which participants developed cooking skills, increased their confidence, strengthened social connections, and explored new approaches to preparing healthy, affordable meals at home.

Particularly strong outcomes were recorded in relation to cooking from scratch. By the end of the programme, 93% of participants reported cooking more food from scratch than before attending the sessions. Participants also reported greater confidence in preparing meals independently and a stronger willingness to experiment with new ingredients, techniques, and recipes. Tutor observations supported these findings, highlighting improvements in food preparation skills, confidence, and decision-making throughout the programme.

The programme also encouraged positive changes in dietary behaviour. Participants reported making greater use of fresh vegetables in their cooking and demonstrated increased confidence preparing balanced vegetarian and plant-based meals. While longer-term follow-up would be required to fully understand the sustainability of these changes, the programme established strong foundations for healthier eating habits.

One of the most significant findings was the strength of the social connections developed during the programme. Participants formed new friendships, supported one another's learning, and described the sessions as an important opportunity to spend time focused on themselves and their wellbeing. The emotional nature of the final session provided powerful evidence of the positive relationships and sense of community that had developed over the six weeks.

The programme also created benefits beyond the immediate participant group. Several attendees are active volunteers within Northmoor Community Centre and are well placed to apply their learning through community food activities, including the weekly community diner. This creates opportunities for the programme's impact to reach a wider group of local residents and contribute to healthier food choices across the community.

Importantly, the programme demonstrated that community cooking initiatives can support not only healthier eating habits, but also confidence, wellbeing, and social connection, highlighting the value of food as a tool for wider public health improvement.

Particularly strong outcomes were recorded in relation to cooking from scratch. By the end of the programme, 93% of participants reported cooking more food from scratch than before attending the sessions.

Overall, the findings suggest that the programme successfully achieved its objectives and made a valuable contribution towards Manchester Public Health priorities relating to healthy eating, confidence building, social connection, and community wellbeing. The combination of practical learning, take-home ingredients and a supportive group environment proved highly effective and provides a strong model for future community-based delivery.

Future Recommendations

Based on the findings of this evaluation, the following recommendations are proposed for future delivery:

1. Maintain the Practical, Hands-On Delivery Model

- The practical nature of the programme was central to its success. Future programmes should continue to prioritise hands-on cooking activities that allow participants to learn through doing, build confidence and develop skills in a supportive environment.

2. Continue Providing Take-Home Ingredient Bags

- Ingredient bags were consistently highlighted as one of the most valuable aspects of the programme. They encouraged participants to practise skills at home, recreate recipes with their families, and reinforce learning between sessions.

3. Consider Childcare Provision Where Resources Allow

- Childcare emerged as a barrier for some participants. Where funding permits, providing childcare support could improve accessibility, reduce distractions during sessions, and enable fuller participation from parents and carers.

4. Support Sustainable Community Cooking Beyond the Programme

- One of the clearest messages emerging from the programme was the desire for cooking activities to continue beyond the initial six-week course. Participants formed strong friendships, developed new skills, and described the sessions as an important opportunity to spend time focused on their own wellbeing. Many expressed sadness that the programme was coming to an end.
- Future programmes should explore ways to support host venues to embed cooking activities within their regular programme of community events. This could include training volunteers, developing simple session plans, providing equipment, supporting community-led cooking groups, or helping venues secure funding for ongoing delivery.
- Particular opportunities exist where participants are already active volunteers within the host organisation. At Northmoor Community Centre, several attendees support the weekly community dinner and other food-related activities. By building the confidence and capacity of these individuals, the benefits of the programme can extend well beyond the original participant group and contribute to healthier food choices across the wider community.
- Creating sustainable opportunities for people to cook, eat and learn together would help maintain the friendships, confidence and healthy habits developed during the programme while ensuring that the long-term benefits of the investment continue to grow.

9. Appendices

Appendix A - Evaluation Framework

Outcome	Indicator	How will we collect it?	When will we collect it?	Who will collect it?
Improved Cooking Skills	Demonstration of effective food safety practices (handwashing, reducing cross-contamination, etc.)	Tutor observation	Across all 6 cookery workshops	Tutor
	Demonstrates recipe adaptation ability (adapts seasoning/ingredients based on preference/availability)	Tutor observation	Across all 6 cookery workshops	Tutor
	Demonstration of preparation and cookery techniques (safe knife skills, appropriate cooking heat/timings)	Tutor observation	Across all 6 cookery workshops	Tutor
Improved Knowledge of Vegetarian and Vegan Proteins	Ability to cook balanced vegetarian and vegan meals (demonstration of including protein, carbs, and vegetable components in celebration meal)	Tutor observation	Session 6	Tutor
	Ability to substitute meat/poultry or fish with vegetarian ingredients (demonstration of using plant-based proteins in dishes when meat would often be used)	Tutor observation	Session 6	Tutor
Cooking more Food from Scratch	Frequency of preparing and cooking ingredients from raw (vegetables, grains/pulses etc.)	Survey	Comparative between Session 1 and Session 6	Project lead
	Reduction in use of ready-made elements (sauces, jars, meal kits etc.)	Survey	Comparative between Session 1 and Session 6	Project lead
	Evidence of home-cooked meals between sessions	Participant photos Informal check-ins (tutor report)	Across all sessions	Tutor
Improved Confidence in Food and Cooking	Positive language used when talking about food and cooking	Survey	Comparative between Session 1 and Session 6 (plus, focus group responses)	Project lead
	How likely people are to cook a wider range of dishes	Survey	Comparative between Session 1 and Session 6 (plus, focus group responses)	Project lead

Increased use of Vegetables and Fruit in Meals	How many portions of fruit or vegetables are eaten per week (include examples of a portion)	Survey	Comparative between Session 1 and Session 6	Project lead
	How many meals per week contain 1 or more full portions of vegetables or fruit	Survey	Comparative between Session 1 and Session 6	Project lead
Increased Sense of Community	Participants initiate conversations about food and cooking	Tutor observation	Comparative across all sessions	Tutor
	Participants share personal experiences or recipe ideas	Tutor observation	Comparative across all sessions	Tutor
	Participants engage with each other to support or help in cookery tasks	Tutor observation	Comparative across all sessions	Tutor



Appendix B - Session 1 Baseline Survey

Cooking Food from Scratch

How many meals do you usually cook from scratch each week?

(Write a number)

How often do you prepare ingredients from raw (e.g., chopping veg, cooking grains/pulses)?

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Most of the time

Every time I cook

How often do you use ready-made sauces or meal kits?

Every day

Several times a week

About once a week

Less than once a week

Never

Confidence in Cooking

When you think about cooking from scratch, what words come to mind?

(Write up to 3 words)

How confident do you feel cooking meals from scratch?

Not confident

A little confident

Mostly confident

Very confident

How would you describe the range of foods you currently cook?

Very limited

A few different things

A good variety

Lots of different dishes

Fruit & Vegetables

How many portions of fruit and veg do you eat per day?

(Write a number)

How many meals per week include at least one portion of veg or fruit?

(Write a number)

Sense of Community

How many people here did you know before starting the sessions?

(Write a number)

Appendix C - Session 6 Final Survey

Cooking Food from Scratch

How many meals do you now cook from scratch each week?

(Write a number)

How often do you now prepare ingredients from raw (e.g., chopping veg, cooking grains/pulses)?

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Most of the time

Every time I cook

How often do you now use ready-made sauces or meal kits?

Every day

Several times a week

About once a week

Less than once a week

Never

Since starting these sessions, are you cooking more food from scratch?

No

A little more

Some more

A lot more

Since starting the sessions, are you using more fresh vegetables?

No

A little more

Some more

A lot more

Will these sessions change the way you cook in the future?

Yes

No

How will these sessions change the way you cook in the future?

(open text)

Confidence in Cooking

How confident do you now feel cooking meals from scratch?

Not confident

A little confident

Mostly confident

Very confident

APPENDICES

Do you feel more confident cooking than when you started?

No

A little more

Some more

A lot more

How would you now describe the range of foods you currently cook?

Very limited

A few different things

A good variety

Lots of different dishes

How likely are you to cook a wider range of dishes now?

Not likely

A little more likely

Somewhat more likely

Much more likely

How do you feel about cooking now that you've completed the sessions?

(Open text)

Fruit & Vegetables

How many portions of fruit and veg do you now eat per day?

(Write a number)

How many meals per week now include at least one portion of veg or fruit?

(Write a number)

Sense of Community

How many people in this group are you now friendly with?

(Write a number)

How many people in this group have you spoken to or met outside sessions?

(Write a number)

Overall Reflection

What have been the best things about the sessions?

(Open text)

How many sessions did you attend?

(Write a number)

Appendix D - Tutor Observation Tools

Weekly Tutor Observation Checklist

Introduction

Tutor observations were completed after each workshop session to assess group progress, skill development, confidence and social interaction. The observation form focused on group-level outcomes rather than individual participants and provided evidence alongside participant surveys.

Session Information

- Session Number
- Date
- Tutor

A. Cooking Skills

Tick all that apply:

- Majority followed good handwashing and hygiene practices
- Most avoided cross-contamination (clean boards, tidy workspace)
- Most used knives safely and appropriately
- Most followed recipe steps independently
- Group asked useful clarifying questions
- Several participants adapted seasoning or ingredients independently
- Group completed tasks within expected time

B. Cooking from Scratch Behaviours

Tick all that apply:

- Most participants prepared ingredients from raw (e.g. chopping vegetables)
- Fresh ingredients used widely across the group
- Group showed interest in cooking from scratch
- Observable improvement since previous session

C. Social Connection

Tick all that apply:

- Group initiated conversations about food and cooking
- Several participants shared personal experiences or recipe ideas
- Strong peer support observed during tasks
- Active participation in food tasting and discussion
- Clear increase in group confidence and interaction since Session 1

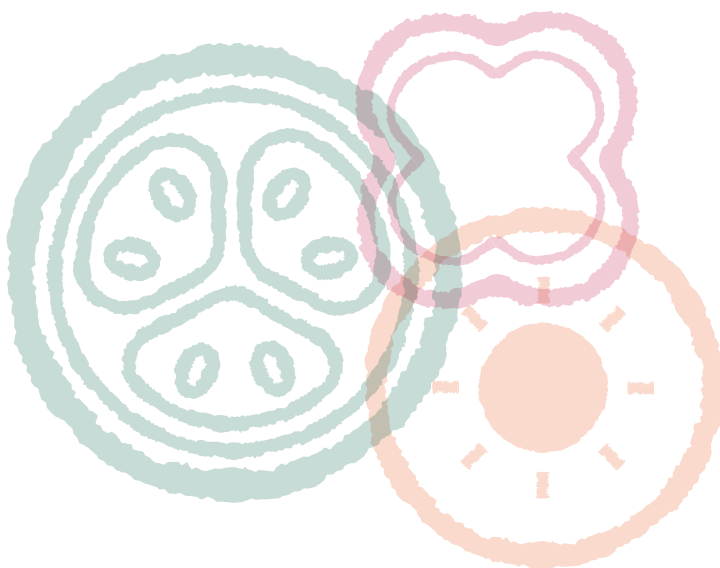
D. Vegetarian and Vegan Protein Knowledge (Session 6 only)

Tick all that apply:

- Group produced balanced vegetarian or vegan meals (protein + carbohydrates + vegetables)
- Most participants named appropriate plant-based protein sources
- Group demonstrated appropriate substitution of meat or fish with plant-based alternatives

E. Quick Notes

Please record any notable observations, examples of learning, participant comments or highlights from the session.



Final Tutor Reflection

Introduction

The final tutor reflection was completed following the showcase session and provided an overall assessment of programme outcomes. The reflection focused on the collective progress of the group rather than individual participants.

1. Overall Cooking Skills

By the final session, how would you rate the group's overall cooking skills?

Options:

- Very limited
- Basic
- Competent
- Confident
- Highly confident

Please provide evidence to support this assessment.

2. Cooking from Scratch

Compared to the start of the programme, the group now:

Tick all that apply:

- Regularly prepares ingredients from raw (e.g. chopping vegetables, cooking grains and pulses)
- Shows confidence cooking meals from scratch
- Talks about cooking at home between sessions
- Confidently makes choices about preparation and cooking methods independently
- Confidently adapts dishes to suit personal preferences

3. Vegetarian and Vegan Protein Knowledge

Overall, how confident is the group in cooking balanced vegetarian or vegan meals?

Options:

- Not confident
- Somewhat confident
- Confident
- Very confident

Were plant-based protein substitutions demonstrated successfully?

Options:

- Yes, by most participants
- Yes, by some participants
- No
- Not observed

4. Confidence and Engagement

By the final session, the group's confidence could best be described as:

Options:

- Hesitant
- Mixed
- Generally confident
- Clearly confident and engaged

5. Sense of Community

Which best describes the group dynamic by the final session?

Options:

- Individuals mostly working alone
- Some interaction between participants
- Supportive group interactions
- Strong sense of group or community

Please provide an example that demonstrates this group dynamic.

6. Overall Impact

In a few sentences, how would you describe the overall impact of this programme on the group?

Appendix E - Detailed Quantitative Results

Introduction

The tables below summarise the quantitative findings gathered through participant surveys and attendance records. These results provide additional detail behind the outcome measures presented within the main report.

Note: Fifteen participants completed the programme. Fourteen participants completed the final evaluation survey, and percentages reported throughout this report are based on survey responses received (n=14) unless otherwise stated.

E1. Summary of Outcome Measures

Outcome Area	Baseline	End of Programme	Change
Average fruit and vegetable portions per day	2.8	3.1	+0.3
Average number of people known in the group	2.5	5.0	+100%
Participants reporting increased cooking from scratch	N/A	93%	Positive
Participants reporting increased cooking confidence	N/A	86%	Positive
Participants more likely to cook a wider range of dishes	N/A	93%	Positive
Tutor assessment of confidence cooking balanced vegetarian meals	N/A	Very confident	Positive

Note: Baseline and end-of-programme measures were collected using participant questionnaires completed during Sessions 1 and 6.

E2. Session Attendance and Retention

The programme achieved strong attendance and retention throughout delivery.

Measure	Result
Participants completing the programme	15
Additional participants attending Session 1 only	2
Participants attending 5 or more sessions	14 (93%)
Participants attending all 6 sessions	9 (60%)
Average sessions attended	5.6

E3. Cooking From Scratch

At the end of the programme, participants were asked whether they were cooking more food from scratch compared to before attending.

Response	Number of Participants	Percentage
A lot more	7	50%
Some more	6	43%
No change	1	7%
Less	0	0%

Total reporting more cooking from scratch: 93%

E4. Confidence in Cooking

Participants were asked whether they felt more confident cooking than when they started the programme.

Response	Number of Participants	Percentage
More confident	12	86%
No change	2	14%
Less confident	0	0%

E5. Likelihood of Cooking a Wider Range of Dishes

Response	Number of Participants	Percentage
Much more likely	10	71%
Somewhat more likely	3	21%
A little more likely	0	0%
No change	1	7%

Total reporting greater willingness to cook a wider range of dishes: 93%

E6. Social Connection

Measure	Baseline	End of Programme
Average number of people known in the group	2.5	5.0
Average number of people participants had spoken to or met outside sessions	N/A	2.7

These findings demonstrate a substantial increase in social connections between participants over the course of the programme.

Appendix F - Programme Delivery Summary

Introduction

The Northmoor Community Centre Cookery Programme was delivered over six sessions and designed as a progressive skills-building course. Each session introduced new techniques, ingredients and concepts while reinforcing learning from previous weeks. Alongside practical cookery skills, participants explored food safety, budgeting, meal planning, batch cooking, food storage and the preparation of healthy, affordable vegetarian meals.

Programme Overview

Session	Key Skills Developed	Example Dishes Prepared
Session 1	Food hygiene and safety, knife skills, vegetable preparation, seasoning, cooking with fresh ingredients	Shakshuka (or tofu alternative), garlic mushrooms and spinach
Session 2	Batch cooking, freezing and reheating, cooking with lentils, budgeting and meal planning	Red lentil pasta sauce and pasta
Session 3	Cooking with plant-based proteins, preparing grains, meal assembly, balancing meals	Refried beans, black bean salad, rice and burritos
Session 4	Cooking with herbs and spices, preparing balanced vegetarian meals, combining flavours and textures	Aubergine and lentil curry, rice and broccoli slaw
Session 5	Menu planning, cooking with pulses, pastry skills, alternative protein sources	Lentil dhal, potato and pea pie, quinoa
Session 6	Independent cooking, teamwork, menu design, applying learning from previous sessions	Participant-designed celebration meal and showcase event

Cross-Cutting Learning Themes

Throughout the programme, participants explored a range of topics that were integrated across multiple sessions:

- Food hygiene and food safety
- Safe knife skills
- Preparation of vegetables and fresh produce
- Selecting good-quality ingredients on a budget
- Vegetarian and plant-based protein sources
- Batch cooking and meal planning
- Freezing, storing and reheating cooked food safely
- Reducing food waste
- Preparing healthy meals using affordable ingredients
- Confidence in adapting recipes and cooking independently

Celebration Session

The final session acted as a showcase and celebration of participants' achievements. During Sessions 4 and 5, participants worked with the tutor to design dishes for the event. Working in pairs, participants selected recipes, planned menus and prepared food using the skills developed throughout the programme.

The session provided an opportunity for participants to demonstrate their learning, share food with invited guests and celebrate the progress they had made over the six-week programme. It also served as an important opportunity for reflection, with participants discussing the impact the programme had had on their confidence, cooking habits and social connections.

Appendix G - Participant Voices

Introduction

Participant feedback formed an important part of the evaluation process and provides valuable insight into how the programme was experienced. The quotes below have been selected from the final participant survey and illustrate some of the themes explored throughout this report, including increased confidence, healthier cooking habits, new skills and stronger social connections.

Building Confidence

"I tried recipes at home. I feel more confident in my kitchen."

"I feel more confident now to cook."

"A lot more confident."

"I feel more positive and learnt knife cutting skills. More ingredients that I have never used before."

Learning New Skills

"I've learned adding new ingredients to my old recipes."

"I learned new skills on cooking, cutting etc."

"Cooking different ingredients in food."

"I am more confident in using different ingredients and making different dishes."

Healthier Cooking Habits

“I will use more fresh vegetables.”

“Use more fresh vegetables.”

“These sessions teach me how to cook healthy, less oily and tasty meals with veggies.”

“I feel like I’ll do more chopping and will make food from scratch and within budget.”

Community and Connection

“Trying cooking differently and socialising.”

“Making friends and enjoying the time and I always wait for next class.”

“The variety of ingredients, learning new cooking skills, friendships formed, being given ingredients to take home.”

“Trying cooking differently and socialising.”

Enjoyment and Wellbeing

“Feeling great. More confident. And fun.”

“Very good.”

“Confident.”

“Excited and more confident to use new ingredients.”

Participant Reflections on the Best Things About the Programme

“Trying cooking differently and socialising.”

“Learning to cook, different methods of cooking and practising English.”

“The variety of ingredients, learning new cooking skills, friendships formed, being given ingredients to take home.”

“Tasting and eating healthy food freshly made, making friends and enjoying the time.”

“More fun and confident.”

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