



Small Steps, Big changes

How community-based healthy eating initiatives contribute to the health and well-being of communities in Kent

Introduction

Healthy eating contributes significantly to the “*being healthy*” national outcome for children and young people in *Every Child Matters*. It features prominently within Priority 2 of the Kent Children’s and Young Peoples Plan 2008-11 *Positive about our future* and is a priority area for Kent County Council and its partners within the NHS in Kent.

Poor diet, concern about obesity levels, the increase in weight related conditions such as type 2 diabetes and rising hospital admissions for preventable medical conditions all have a massive impact on the health of the nation. Key initiatives and strategies including *Change4Life* and *The National Healthy Schools Programme* have been developed to counter this worrying trend. Alongside these, Kent County Council has been piloting a range of community-based healthy eating initiatives aimed at increasing knowledge, confidence and awareness of the importance of healthy eating and to change attitudes and behaviour around the consumption of a balanced diet for families.

The Pilots

Between 2007 and 2010 KCC planned and delivered a range of community-based healthy eating pilot projects which were robustly evaluated by Bostock Marketing Group Ltd. The initiatives attracted £450,000 and were delivered in partnership with:

- NHS West Kent
- Eastern and Coastal Kent NHS
- Food Standards Agency
- National Children’s Bureau
- Government Office for the South East

The pilot projects were delivered across Kent, with a targeted focus on families with the poorest diets and health inequalities. The five pilot projects were:

- Pilot 1: Community cooking skills (comprising Community Chefs and the Kent Cooks! school-based cooking competition)
- Pilot 2: Fruit and vegetable bag scheme

- Pilot 3: Healthy eating training
- Pilot 4: Increasing school meal uptake
- Pilot 5: National Children’s Bureau health challenge – providing support to children, young people, families and their schools to help them make and sustain positive lifestyle changes

Increasing knowledge and confidence

How healthy eating pilots increase knowledge and confidence to enable people to make informed choices

The healthy eating pilot projects have led to participants demonstrating greater knowledge and awareness of a range of issues including food preparation and preparing healthy meals, minimising waste, using seasonal and fresh ingredients and reading food labels.

- The proportion of the sample of participants recognising the Eatwell plate rose by 14 percentage points, from 82% prior to participation to 96% after participation.
- The proportion always reading food labelling rose from 24% prior to participation to 32% after participation across all pilots.
- The proportion of participants taking part in the healthy eating training reading food labels for information about fat rose from 49% to 66%, reading information about sugar rose from 33% to 52% and reading information about salt content rose from 30% to 51% after participation.
- The proportion of the sample of participants taking part in the Community Chefs cooking courses that said they were very confident in preparing raw foods at home rose from 38% to 53% after participating in the courses.

“[she] thought she was no good at cooking but getting to the final has given her the belief that she can cook.” –
 Comment by a parent of one of the Kent Cooks! finalists.

Increasing Skills

How healthy eating pilots increase skills

Community Chefs and the school-based cooking competition Kent Cooks! both saw significant skills development amongst participants.

In the Community Chefs cooking courses participants were more likely to follow recipes and experiment with new foods. The finalists in Kent Cooks! learned new skills in food preparation and were able to put the theory they had learned into practice.

In terms of the nature of ongoing changes resulting from the Community Chefs pilot project, results suggest a shift from the basic changes of eating more healthily to eating a more varied diet and cooking more food from scratch as a result of acquiring increased confidence and new skills on the courses.

- 84% of participants said their cooking skills had improved as a direct result of taking part in cooking courses with the Community Chefs.
- An increase in confidence in preparing raw foods at home was evidenced with 38% of Community Chef course participants stating they were very confident at the start of the course, rising to 53% when evaluated towards the end of the course.

“We had young people at the session last night; they cooked a pasta dish from scratch for their mates. We affected over 91 kids on that scheme. What we are doing is saying to the kids that there is life outside fast food restaurants, just have a try.” – Organiser of a Community Chef cooking course.

Changing behaviour

How healthy eating pilots enable people to make positive changes to their diet and behaviour

Significant changes in behaviour have been identified. Here are some examples of how the healthy eating pilots have made a difference:

- Over two thirds of respondents (67%) said they had changed what they ate recently/since taking part in the healthy eating pilots – this includes trying more varied food, more home cooking, reading labels and reducing salt intake.
- 24% of participants that took part in the healthy eating training were monitoring their salt intake compared to just 3% before the training. Likewise 24% of participants were monitoring their sugar intake, compared to just 7% who did before the training.
- Of the participants that took part in the Community Chefs pilot 21% said they were trying more varied types of food, compared with 2% at the start of the pilot.
- Of the pupils that took part in the health challenge, 88% of primary school pupils and 56% of secondary school pupils planned to continue completely or partly with the changes they had made.

“I know from talking to some mums, they said they had tried the Community Chef recipe at home, which is a massive step forward and the kids at the school who had never tried some of the vegetables that we’d grown for example, red cabbage and marrows, actually crossed that bridge. This is a massive improvement.” - Organiser of a Community Chef cooking course.

“My kids eat more healthily, they’re always asking me now to get more fresh stuff in.” – Participant in healthy eating training sessions.

Increasing the uptake of school meals

One healthy eating pilot project had the specific aim of increasing the uptake of school meals. As part of this pilot four different interventions were trialled.

- Midday Meals Supervisor Training.
- Partner Support Programme – a support programme for head teachers, governors and teachers aimed at raising the profile of school meals through improved communications with partners and encouraging greater awareness of the positive impact of healthy eating on learning and attainment.
- Improved dining room environment – making the dining area more appealing and improving the eating environment.
- Enhanced food offer – introducing new food and a flexible approach to selection.

Evidence from the evaluation of the school meals pilot has revealed

- A blended approach, incorporating a range of interventions relevant to the school is the best way to have an impact on the uptake of school meals.
- Improved relationships between midday meal supervisors, senior staff within the school, school meal contractors and Kent County Council can be identified as a result of taking part in the pilot project.
- Achieving buy-in from a senior level within the school and adopting a whole school approach is critical to achieving success.
- It is essential that children are involved and consulted on any proposed changes.
- Any changes to school meals should be considered as part of the wider Healthy Schools agenda.

“The intervention itself has managed to bring all parties together [the head, kitchen staff, KCC and the contractor] and thus enabled better communication and the sharing of common goals.” – Participant in the school meals pilot.

Wider outcomes

The healthy eating pilots have led to many wider outcomes for individuals, organisations and communities. Here are some examples of how they have affected people's lives.

“The children are very pleased with the changes, as discussed at the school council meeting – and are all very excited about it! They like in particular that the pudding no longer gets cold and have mentioned that lunchtimes are more like dinner times at home.” – Participant in the school meals pilot.

“It's not just about cooking – it's not about teaching people it's about empowering people.” – East Kent Community Chef.

“Anything that gets adults through the school doors surely has benefits in terms of getting them involved in the running of the school.” – Member of school staff talking about the effect of the fruit and veg bag pilot on parental engagement.

“Because we had a crèche it was the first time that they'd [participants] left their children and they still talk about how valuable that was because some of them are now going back into paid work and it really prepared them for that.” – West Kent Community Chef coordinator.

“It has helped highlight the importance of healthy eating.” – Teacher from finalist school involved with Kent Cooks!

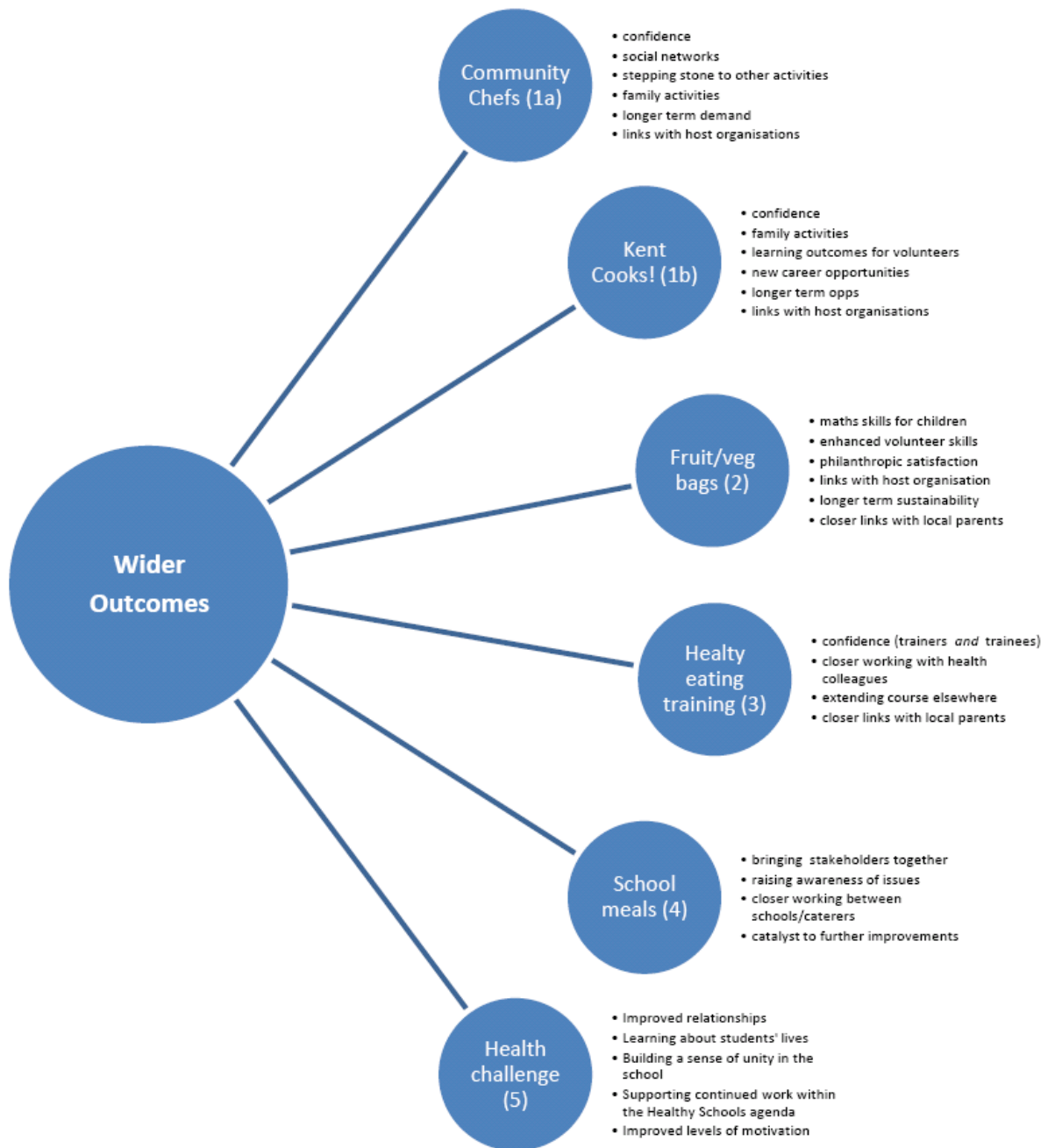


Diagram based on original developed by Bostock Marketing Group as part of the document: A summary of the findings of the evaluation of the Kent healthy eating pilots – Bostock Marketing Group Ltd, 2010.

Useful links

More information about the community-based healthy eating pilots can be found at

www.kenttrustweb.org.uk/community/healthy_eating_projects.cfm

More information about Healthy Schools can be found at

<http://home.healthyschools.gov.uk/>

More information about Extended Services can be found at

www.kenttrustweb.org.uk/community/com_schools06.cfm

More information about Client Services can be found at

www.kenttrustweb.org.uk/School/client_home.cfm