



# Building community capacity through a healthy food programme:

An evaluation of LEAP into Healthy Living

September 2024





## Acknowledgements

### **Authors**

Charlotte Wray  
Sophie Hedges  
Rowan Ferguson  
Dakota Langhals  
Claire Dunne

### **With thanks to**

Families, volunteers and practitioners who engaged with HLP between 2017–2024. The monitoring data they provided and/or collected made this learning possible. Thank you to all interview, focus group and survey participants whose knowledge and viewpoints informed this evaluation.

# Contents

---

<b>1</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>2</b>
1.1	About LEAP	3
1.2	About Healthy Living Platform (HLP)	3
1.3	Evaluation aims and rationale	4
1.4	What is Community Capacity?	4
1.5	Key findings	5
<b>2</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1	About Healthy Living Platform (HLP)	8
2.2	What is Community Capacity?	10
2.3	Rationale for this evaluation	11
2.4	Aims and key questions	11
<b>3</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Healthy Living Platform's approach to building Community Capacity</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Reaching the Community</b>	<b>18</b>
5.1	What did HLP do?	19
5.2	Who did HLP reach?	20
5.3	Demographics of HLP participants	23
5.4	What did participants think of HLP?	24
5.5	What did volunteers think of HLP training?	26
<b>6</b>	<b>The impact of HLP on Community Capacity</b>	<b>27</b>
6.1	Access to healthy affordable food	28
6.2	Healthy eating and cooking behaviour changes	30
6.3	Health and Wellbeing	31
6.4	Connectedness to the community	35
6.5	Volunteering	38
<b>7</b>	<b>Partnership working</b>	<b>42</b>
7.1	Enablers of successful partnership working	46
7.2	Challenges and improvements to partnership working.	47
7.3	Impact of HLP partnership ending	48
<b>8</b>	<b>Case study</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Enablers and barriers to implementing the HLP programme</b>	<b>50</b>
9.1	Mechanisms of change	51
9.2	Enablers	52
9.3	Barriers and challenges	54
<b>10</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>58</b>
10.1	Sustainability and the future of HLP	60

---



# Section 1

# Executive Summary



## 1.1

### About LEAP

Lambeth Early Action Partnership (LEAP) is one of five local partnerships which make up A Better Start (ABS), a national ten-year (2015–2025) test and learn programme funded by the National Lottery Community Fund that aims to improve the life chances of babies, very young children, and families.

LEAP is supported by the National Children's Bureau charity (NCB) and works with a wide range of children, families, practitioners, and organisations across Lambeth.

LEAP operates in a focused area of Lambeth. This area was selected based on local need, drawing on a range of local evidence that illustrated greater inequalities for young children in these areas compared with the rest of Lambeth. Broadly, our target area stretches from Stockwell to Myatt's Field, down through North Brixton to the top of Tulse Hill, covering about 20% of the borough.

LEAP has funded and improved more than 20 local services to meet the needs of families through pregnancy and the early years of childhood.

LEAP is a 'collective impact initiative', which means that all our services and activities link together and work towards shared goals to improve outcomes for very young children.

LEAP's aim is to:

- 1 Improve early child development outcomes for all children living in the LEAP area.
- 2 Reduce local inequalities by supporting those at greater risk of poor outcomes.

While LEAP has some targeted services that are only available to families living in the LEAP area, other services are available to all families living in Lambeth. Services fall into two groups:

- 1 Services that work directly with children to help them reach their developmental milestones.
- 2 Services that support children indirectly, by working with parents, early years practitioners and the wider community, so they are better equipped to provide the responsive relationships and positive experiences that children need.

## 1.2

### About Healthy Living Platform (HLP)

Healthy Living Platform (HLP) is a no-cost membership-based service which promotes healthy behaviours and aims to provide an environment that encourages families to eat healthily,

socialise, and be physically active. LEAP started funding LEAP into Healthy Living activities as part of Incredible Edible Lambeth in 2018. The Healthy Living Platform was then established as an independent organisation in 2019.



## 1.3 Evaluation aims and rationale

This evaluation aimed to provide evidence for how Healthy Living Platform (HLP) built community capacity locally in the LEAP area, to inform HLP's future work and to generate broader insights about how community-led food programmes can build community capacity. We conducted surveys to gain insights into local families' experience of participating in HLP and the impact it has had on their lives. We also conducted focus groups with staff and volunteers, and interviewed partners and individuals who have participated in HLP. This data collection enabled us to further explore how HLP

have built community capacity and what changes have occurred as a result of the HLP programme.

HLP focuses on building community capacity through volunteer training and upskilling, improving health and wellbeing, and connecting families with their community and other sources of support. This provides a unique opportunity to learn what works to build community capacity through healthy living activities, and to evidence the difference this makes for young families in a deprived, inner-city area. The findings from this evaluation offer useful insights for Lambeth community programmes and other early years and food programmes.

---

## 1.4 What is Community Capacity?

Community capacity can be defined as 'what people in local communities are able to do to help and support each other' (Harflett & Edwards, 2019). Similar local community food initiatives have identified three different levels to community capacity-building:

- 1 Material capacity such as job roles, physical assets, and infrastructure.
- 2 Personal capacity at an individual level, including self-esteem, health behaviours, and skill development.
- 3 Cultural capacity at a community level, for example co-production opportunities, increased social networking, and connections to other organisations.



## 1.5

### Key findings

This evaluation highlights the extremely positive impact Healthy Living Platform (HLP) has had on the local community and evidences several ways in which HLP has successfully built community capacity within the LEAP area.

- + Families experience financial benefits from participating in HLP.
- + Families who participated in HLP have more knowledge and confidence in cooking and eating healthy foods.
- + Participants attribute improvements in mental wellbeing to their participation in HLP.
- + Families feel more connected to the community.
- + HLP volunteers feel more confident in running activities, have developed transferable knowledge and skills, and feel more connected to the community.
- + HLP volunteers also benefit from being given ownership of projects and opportunities to start up their own businesses.
- + Successful partnership working has enabled greater reach within the community and supported the development of HLP's community capacity.

The evaluation has also highlighted the challenges to building community capacity and the impact of any reduction in HLP's activities due to funding gaps because of the end of the LEAP funding.

- + Funding and capacity were highlighted as areas that have restricted growth and development of HLP.
- + If HLP were not able to continue their work within the area, it would have an immense impact not just on the families they work with but also the organisations they partner with.

---

**“The pantry kind of creates a centre of gravity. So, like something around which other things kind of coalesce ...”**

— Partner organisation





# Section 2

# Background







**There is a strong link between low income and unhealthy diets. Children living in deprived areas are more likely to be overweight than those living in more affluent areas (Guys and St Thomas' Charity, 2018).**

Families often face financial challenges to eating healthily. Often unhealthy choices are easier and cheaper than buying and cooking fresh, healthy food. In addition, evidence shows that there are more likely to be unhealthy food options on high streets in areas with the most deprivation (Royal Society for Public Health, 2015).

Parents with low income or poor housing often lack the time and capacity to avoid unhealthy food choices and prioritise healthy activities. They also often live in areas where there is limited healthy food on offer, with much of the food on offer high in fat and sugar, such as takeaways. (Guys and St Thomas' Charity, 2018)

In addition, parents often lack confidence in their cooking ability or knowledge of how to cook healthy meals. Adding a variety of fruit and vegetables to meals is often seen as an expensive way to shop and so unhealthy alternatives are often chosen. Increasing knowledge and building confidence around what healthy food choices are, and how to cook healthy meals, enables parents to provide healthy food choices for their family.

Changing the food environment in the local area so that families can access healthy food makes it easier to make healthy food choices (Fenton, 2017). There have been some local initiatives

aimed at addressing this issue. One such initiative was LEAP's Environmental Health service which partnered with Lambeth to provide a healthier food environment for children within the LEAP area. However, this service unfortunately ended prematurely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, Lambeth Council have played an instrumental role in the "Veg Power" advertising campaign and signed the Local Government Declaration on Sugar Reduction and Healthier Food (Fenton, 2017). However, many initiatives which aim to tackle healthy eating behaviours look at the problem from a very strategic borough-wide level and do not engage in conversations with individual families to find out what barriers local families face to health eating.

It is important to take an approach at a community and personal level where healthy food and activity is made exciting and available. In addition, an approach where people in the community feel listened to enables them to find solutions together. Food programmes such as Healthy Living Platform (HLP) are instrumental in making changes within local areas.



## 2.1

# About Healthy Living Platform (HLP)

## What is HLP?

Healthy Living Platform (HLP) is a no-cost membership-based service for local families. HLP promotes healthy behaviours and aims to provide an environment that encourages families to eat healthily, socialise, and be physically active. Community-led activities include cook and eat sessions, food growing, and physical activities like yoga, and walking groups (see Figure 1 for overview of HLP activities). In addition, HLP runs weekly pantries, which are low-cost community shops offering members a choice of healthy food for an affordable price (see Figure 1 for pantry locations). Members choose which food items they would like when they attend the pantry and pay either £2.50 for 10 items, or £5 for 20 items at the pantry.

HLP also run Food Ambassador training for local people wanting to volunteer as HLP Food Ambassadors. The Food Ambassador training programme covers a range of topics related to food and nutrition, in addition to teaching essential skills in safe and nutritious food preparation. At the end of the course participants gain an official Food Hygiene Level 2 Certificate.

## Aims

Healthy Living Platform (HLP) aims to make it easier for local communities to lead healthier and more sustainable lives. Their focus is on connecting

people through food across neighbourhoods at a hyper-local level.

HLP's long-term outcome is for "Parents to feel supported by, and connected to their local communities, enabling them to provide a healthy diet and lifestyle for their family." (See [Appendix 3](#) for HLP's Theory of Change).







HLP seeks to do this through:

- + Creating proactive partnerships centred around food (see [Appendix 1](#) for list of partners).
- + Developing and delivering community food-based activities.
- + Campaigning for better access to fresh food for the communities they serve.
- + Using their expertise and knowledge to influence food policies in local organisations.
- + Promoting both the physical and mental health benefits of eating nutritious food.
- + Providing easy ways for corporations, charities, communities, and individuals to reduce waste and use food in more sustainable and economical ways.

## Who is eligible?

HLP is available to all, however priority for attending activities, events, training, and volunteering is given to families with children under 4 years of age, pregnant mothers, dads, and those on low income.

**Table 1** Overview of HLP sessions referenced in Figure 1, with main target beneficiary and an example of the activity.<sup>1</sup>

Session	Definitions	Target beneficiaries
<b>Cook</b> 	Cultural cook-along sessions; air fryer cookery class; bread workshop; Mini-Chefs Sessions; Recipe Kits; Food Ambassador Programme	Parents, children, volunteers
<b>Eat</b> 	Warm Hubs; £1 lunches (Moorlands and Myatt's Field); 336 Community Kitchen;	Volunteers, parents, children
<b>Fruit and Veg bags</b> 	Distributed Fruit and Veg bags to HLP members	Local families
<b>Growing</b> 	Friday Family Fun; Little Green Fingers; Garden Club; Growing Sessions	Children, parents
<b>Physical activity</b> 	Story Stompers; Walking Group; Bump to Baby Yoga	Parents, children, pregnant people
<b>Pantries</b> 	Weekly pantries run by volunteers at Liz Atkinson Children's centre, Moorlands Community Centre, Myatt's Field Community Centre, St Stephen's Community Centre	Local community members
<b>Training</b> 	Food Ambassador training- including food hygiene qualification	Volunteers
<b>Other</b> 	Paid catering opportunities	

<sup>1</sup> Pantries evolved out of Fruit and Veg bags at different times at each of the HLP venues, with the earliest transition starting in 2021 at Moorlands Community Centre.



## 2.2

### What is Community Capacity?

Community capacity can be defined as “what people in local communities are able to do to help and support each other” (Harflett & Edwards, 2019). ‘Capacity’ is a very broad concept that can include physical resources or infrastructure as well as relationships, skills, values, attitudes, knowledge, and health (Lavergne & Saxby, 2001). Community capacity-building therefore focuses on improving the opportunities, skills, and knowledge in a local area to better meet needs and achieve shared goals. The evaluation of Local Food (Kirwan et al., 2014), a nationwide programme aiming to make locally-grown food accessible and affordable for local communities, identified ‘capacity-building’ at three different levels:

- 1 Material capacity such as job roles, physical assets, and infrastructure.
- 2 Personal capacity at an individual level, including self-esteem, health behaviours, and skill development.
- 3 Cultural capacity at a community level, for example co-production opportunities, increased social networking, and connections to other organisations.

HLP’s view is aligned with this definition of community capacity. When asked what community capacity means to HLP, the CEOs mentioned the following key areas:

- + **Infrastructure**; such as access to spaces and places which enable HLP to have kitchens that support the community.
- + The **capacity of individuals**; the importance of having an understanding of what the community can and want to contribute.
- + Supporting the community to take a **strength-based approach, building community confidence** and providing practical ways for the community to **share their skills and knowledge**.



## 2.3 Rationale for this evaluation

This evaluation aimed to provide Lambeth-specific evidence around giving power to communities and community-based approaches to building capacity and resilience. Many food programmes, including HLP, recognise the power of food and cooking together to connect communities and improve people's confidence, wellbeing, and skills. However, many programmes frame these outcomes as unintended or additional benefits, rather than explicit goals, and are unclear about the ways

in which their specific activities can achieve these outcomes.

HLP explicitly focuses on building community capacity, through volunteer training and upskilling, improving health and wellbeing, and connecting families with their community and other sources of support. This provides a unique opportunity to learn what works to build community capacity through healthy living activities, and to evidence the difference this makes for young families in a deprived inner-city area. The findings from this evaluation will generate useful insights for Lambeth community programmes and other early years and food programmes.

## 2.4 Aims and key questions

This evaluation provides evidence about how Healthy Living Platform (HLP) built capacity within the LEAP community, in order to inform HLP's future work and to generate broader insights about how community-led food programmes can build community capacity.

Through this evaluation we aim to answer the following questions:

Key question: To what extent and how does HLP build community capacity?

### 1 How does HLP define Community Capacity?

#### 1.1 How does HLP aim to build community capacity?

### 2 What are family and volunteer experiences of community capacity within HLP?

#### 2.1 What change have families/volunteers experienced after participating in HLP?

#### 2.2 What are the barriers to change?

#### 2.3 What impact have these changes made?

### 3 What are partner organisations experiences of community capacity within HLP?

#### 3.1 What has the impact of the partnership been on the community?





# Section 3

# Methodology



### Staff workshop

Three Healthy Living Platform (HLP) staff participated in a workshop run by LEAP senior researchers. The aim of this workshop was to explore and document HLP's definition of and approach to community capacity-building.

### Volunteer focus group

Six HLP volunteers participated in a focus group aimed at understanding how volunteers help to build community capacity for people attending HLP sessions.

### Family and volunteer interviews

Ten people participated in these interviews, which included four participants who are currently or have previously been HLP volunteers. The aim of these interviews was to explore their experiences of HLP and discuss the impact that HLP has had on their lives and on the community. Volunteers were purposively sampled by HLP staff to represent a range of experiences, including those who no longer engage with HLP, and representing different activities and different communities. Families were sampled through HLP communications (e.g. newsletters and WhatsApp groups), posters at sessions, and by researchers at sessions. Efforts were made to include families from a range of communities and with a range of experiences. All participants were compensated for their time with a £10 shopping voucher.

### Family and volunteer survey

Thirty-five participants (LEAP families and volunteers) completed an online survey to provide quantitative evidence of changes experienced as a result of participation in HLP activities. This included 11 participants who were volunteers.

The survey comprised 25 questions in total: 15 questions for respondents who had participated in any HLP activity and 10 questions which were only for HLP volunteers. A link to the family survey was sent out through the HLP newsletter and other communications (E.g. WhatsApp groups), and posters and flyers with a QR code linking to the survey were distributed at HLP sessions.

**Table 2** Activities that survey respondents reported participating in

Session Type	Number of survey respondents	Percentage of survey respondents
Cooking and eating session	14	40.0%
Physical Activity (e.g. walking group, yoga)	12	34.3%
Food growing activity	11	31.4%
HLP Pantry	32	91.4%
Fruit and Veg bags	13	37.1%
Food Ambassador Training	6	17.1%

### Partner organisation and service interviews

Six of HLP's partner organisations and services were interviewed to explore their experiences, the impact the partnership has had on both organisations and the local community and the sustainability of HLP's impact beyond the end of LEAP. Partners were purposively sampled by the evaluation team to include collaborations that cover a variety of HLP activities.

### CEO Interviews

We interviewed two previous HLP CEOs to gain insights into HLP's definition and approach to community capacity-building.

### Family Feedback Form

Family Feedback forms were collected as part of HLP's ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Family feedback forms were returned for 194 families who attended a HLP activity.

### Engagement data

Routine engagement data was collected by HLP. This includes information on number of families attending a service.

**Table 3** Overview of data collection methods and number of participants

Data collection method	Participant	N
Workshop	HLP Staff	3
Focus Group	Volunteers	6
One-to-one interviews	Participants	6
	Volunteers	4
	Partners	6
	CEOs	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>
Family and volunteer survey	Families	24
	Volunteers	11
	<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>
Family feedback forms	Families	194
Engagement data <sup>2</sup>		1,589

### Note on terminology

Throughout the report HLP attendees who participated in the evaluation are distinguished using the following terms:

- + **Survey respondents** = HLP attendees who completed the survey.
- + **Participants** = HLP attendees who completed the one-to-one interviews.
- + **Volunteers** = HLP volunteers who completed either the survey or interviews.

<sup>2</sup> This engagement data figure reflects the number of HLP participants who consented to LEAP data sharing. These individuals' engagements can be tracked across time, allowing us to identify repeated contacts with HLP. However, this is certainly an undercount of the actual number of people who attended HLP throughout its lifetime.



# Section 4

## Healthy Living Platform's approach to building Community Capacity





We interviewed two previous<sup>3</sup> HLP CEOs and ran a staff workshop to discuss what community capacity means to HLP and how they aimed to build it. It was clear that building community capacity was a main aim for HLP from the beginning. HLP planned to build community capacity through:

- + Making space available for cooking and eating sessions.
- + Building leadership within the community.
- + Connecting people through food.
- + Giving choice and power to the community.
- + Building confidence within the community. Creating practical ways for people to share skills.
- + Being flexible and responsive to the needs of the community.
- + Upskilling the community and sharing knowledge within the community.

Both CEOs felt that building community capacity threads through everything HLP does and has been part of HLP's planning throughout the LEAP programme. Many of these community capacity goals form part of HLP's Theory of Change (see [Appendix 3](#) for ToC Diagram).

---

**"To connect people and community through food and building that capacity is really high on our list of what we do."**

— CEO

<sup>3</sup> The first CEO interviewed was in post between 2019–2021. The second CEO interviewed was in post between Autumn 2021 – July 2023.



# Section 5

# Reaching the Community





## 5.1 What did HLP do?

Between February 2018 and March 2024, HLP ran 2,051 sessions<sup>4</sup>, amounting in a total of 34,723 individual contacts<sup>5</sup>, which included 706 families.

Starting from just over a dozen sessions at the end of 2017/18, HLP rapidly scaled up its offerings to the community, reaching a peak of 650 total sessions in the 2019/20. From that year, Fruit and Veg bags played

a central role in HLP's overall offering, although they gradually began to take the form of regular pantries that participants could visit.<sup>6</sup>

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are clearly visible in Figure 1. The number of sessions being run took a sharp dive in 2020/21, with Cook, Eat, and Growing sessions seeing some of the largest declines.

**Table 4** Terminology Definitions

	Definitions
<b>Session</b>	A session is defined using the session code and represents a session at which multiple people might be present.
<b>Contact</b>	A HLP contact is the attendance of an individual at a session. One individual can have multiple contacts with HLP.
<b>Participant</b>	An individual person who has given consent for LEAP data sharing.
<b>Pantry Contact<sup>7</sup></b>	One visit to a pantry by one person. This includes everyone who attends the pantry, not just those who have given consent for LEAP data sharing. In the pantry contacts dataset, we cannot identify individuals over time, so we cannot account for repeat attendance.

<sup>4</sup> A HLP session is defined using the session code and represents a session at which multiple people might be present.

<sup>5</sup> A HLP contact is the attendance of an individual at a session (including receiving a Fruit and Veg bag).

<sup>6</sup> Because of the idiosyncratic timings of the transition to pantries for each HLP venue, Figure 1 does not distinguish pantries from Fruit and Veg bags.

<sup>7</sup> Data in the pantry contacts dataset represent visits by individuals to a pantry after the discontinuation of Fruit and Veg bags as a discrete service at a venue. Prior to discontinuation, contacts at pantries were recorded as Fruit and Veg bag contacts, and pantry sessions were recorded as Fruit and Veg bag sessions.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, LEAP continuously monitored local and national provision, public messaging and intelligence, including insights from parents. This review of provision and need helped us determine how LEAP could best support partners and contribute to the wider COVID-19 response in Lambeth. An overview of this response can be found [here](#).

The changes implemented for Healthy Living Platform (HLP) between March 2020 and late 2021 included providing:

- + activity packs in food parcels for Children's Centre clients.
- + backing for Healthy Living Platform in its leadership of Lambeth's emergency food response.
- + a refrigerator, a freezer and a printer to support Healthy Living Platform's work in leading the Lambeth emergency food response and assistance with unexpected costs for LEAP providers of moving to virtual working.
- + A postnatal meal service for parents with newborns. This service aimed to support new parents who could not access services face-to-face owing to lockdown restrictions. The service offered ongoing contact with new parents to offer additional support and signposting as appropriate.

## 5.2

### Who did HLP reach?

This section presents data for individuals who have given consent for LEAP data sharing, referred to here as 'participants'.<sup>8</sup> The total number of HLP participants was 1,589, which includes 801 adults and 788 children. Figure 2 shows the total number of individuals participating in HLP activities during each year and also the number of individuals who took part in HLP for the first time each year. Participation numbers dip in 2020 and 2021, which may be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the switch to some

activities being delivered online and other activities not being run during this time.

#### Pantry attendance

The data in this section focusses exclusively on pantry contacts. The numbers include everyone who attends the pantry, not just those who have given consent for LEAP data sharing. We cannot identify individuals within this data, so cannot account for repeat attendance. We therefore refer to 'contacts' (one visit by one person) rather than 'participants' (one individual person).

<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the actual number of people who attended HLP services is certainly higher than what is reportable here.

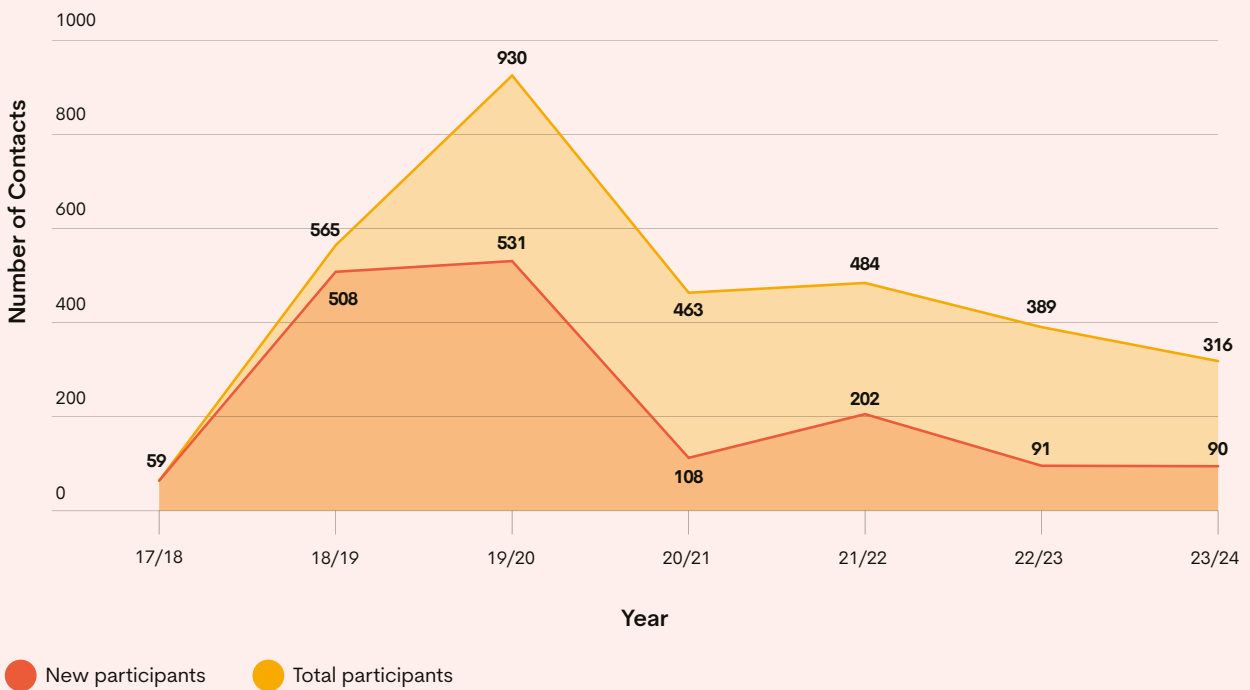


Figure 1 Number of HLP sessions delivered, by year and type of activity



Note Pantry attendance is included in the Fruit and Veg bag category in Figure 1.

Figure 2 Number of new participants each year that HLP has been active (2017–2024)





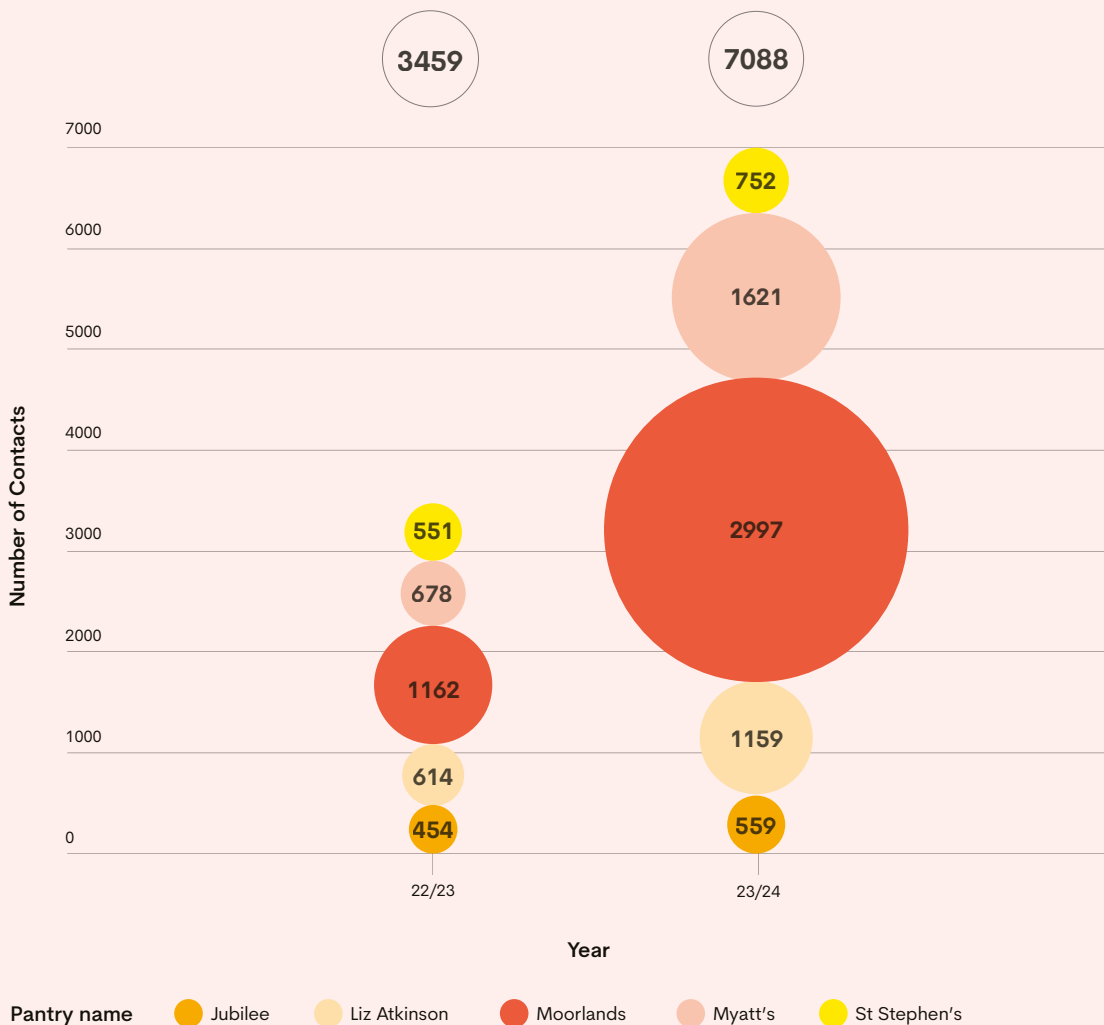


Fruit and Veg bags were initially introduced in 2019 as a result of making contact with a surplus food coordinator that helped to provide the produce. This was a free offer, distributed at various Children’s Centres, supporting families that were on benefits or struggling to afford healthy food.

Around this time, Southwyck House on the Moorlands estate became available as a base for HLP (the team previously had no accommodation and would

access shared hot desk areas at Liz Atkinson Children’s Centre with the LEAP Core Team). Fruit and Veg bags were offered here, and when COVID-19 happened, it was the centre of HLP’s community food support programmes (postnatal hot food offer for families with newborns, hot meals service for local communities and the purchase of large fridges and freezers for freezing batch-cooked meals along with food preparation facilities).

**Figure 3** Number of people attending pantries, by year and setting



**Note** The data represented here represents the total number of contacts at a pantry for one year. It does not identify novel engagement and does not add up from one year to the next.



Southwyck House then became the first food pantry, transferring to the other side of the estate to Moorlands Community Centre when the accommodation at Southwyck House was no longer available. HLP then applied to LEAP's CoCreate Fund to set up three pantries in Children's Centres, and from 2021 started to replace the free surplus food Fruit and Veg bags for a paid service run by volunteers, purchasing fresh food for pantries, subsidised by the Household Support Fund<sup>9</sup> and what families could afford to pay.

For data reporting purposes, before Fruit and Veg bags were discontinued

as a postnatal service at a venue, someone visiting a pantry session would be counted as attending a Fruit and Veg bag session. After discontinuation, they would be recorded as attending a pantry session. Therefore, it is important to note that the data reported in this section refers specifically to pantry contacts made after Fruit and Veg bags were no longer offered as such at a venue.

Across the LEAP programme the HLP pantries have had 10,547 attendances. Figure 3 indicates that pantry attendance has increased year to year for every pantry, With Moorlands Pantry being the most attended.<sup>10</sup>

### 5.3 Demographics of HLP participants

The most common ethnicity among HLP participants was White (36.0%), followed by Black (35.9%), Mixed (14.2%), Other (8.5%), and Asian (5.4%).

HLP participants include 801 adults (81.9% female), of which 40.7% were known to have English as an additional language. The majority (75.4%) of participants were mothers, with 17.6% being fathers. There were 788 children who participated in HLP (48.0% female), of which 27.9% were known to have English as an additional language.

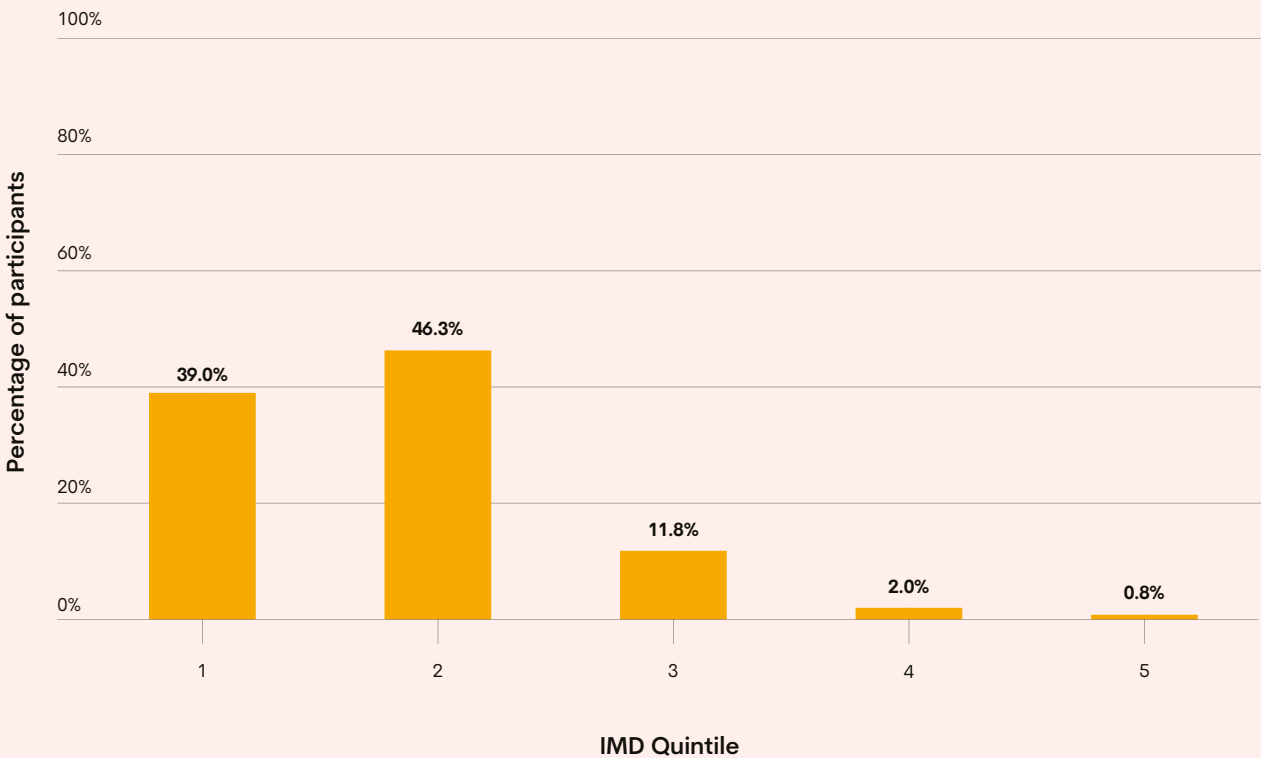
The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) measures relative levels of deprivation across England according to seven criteria (income, employment, health deprivation and disability, education, skills and training, crime, barriers to housing and services, and living environment). Each neighbourhood (consisting of approximately 650 households) in England is given a score, then the neighbourhoods are all ranked. The final IMD score is based on this rank, and therefore reflects how deprived an area is relative to other areas. For the purposes of analysis, we divide areas into five equal groups (quintiles), with areas in group one being the most deprived, and areas in group five being the least deprived.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/household-support-fund-guidance-for-local-councils>

<sup>10</sup> Moorlands has been running the longest, which likely contributes to its wider reach.



Figure 4 HLP participants, by IMD quintile (lifetime to date)



Over the lifetime of HLP from February 2018 to March 2024, participants from across all IMD quintiles have been

represented, with most participants from quintiles 1 and 2 (most deprived, see Figure 4).

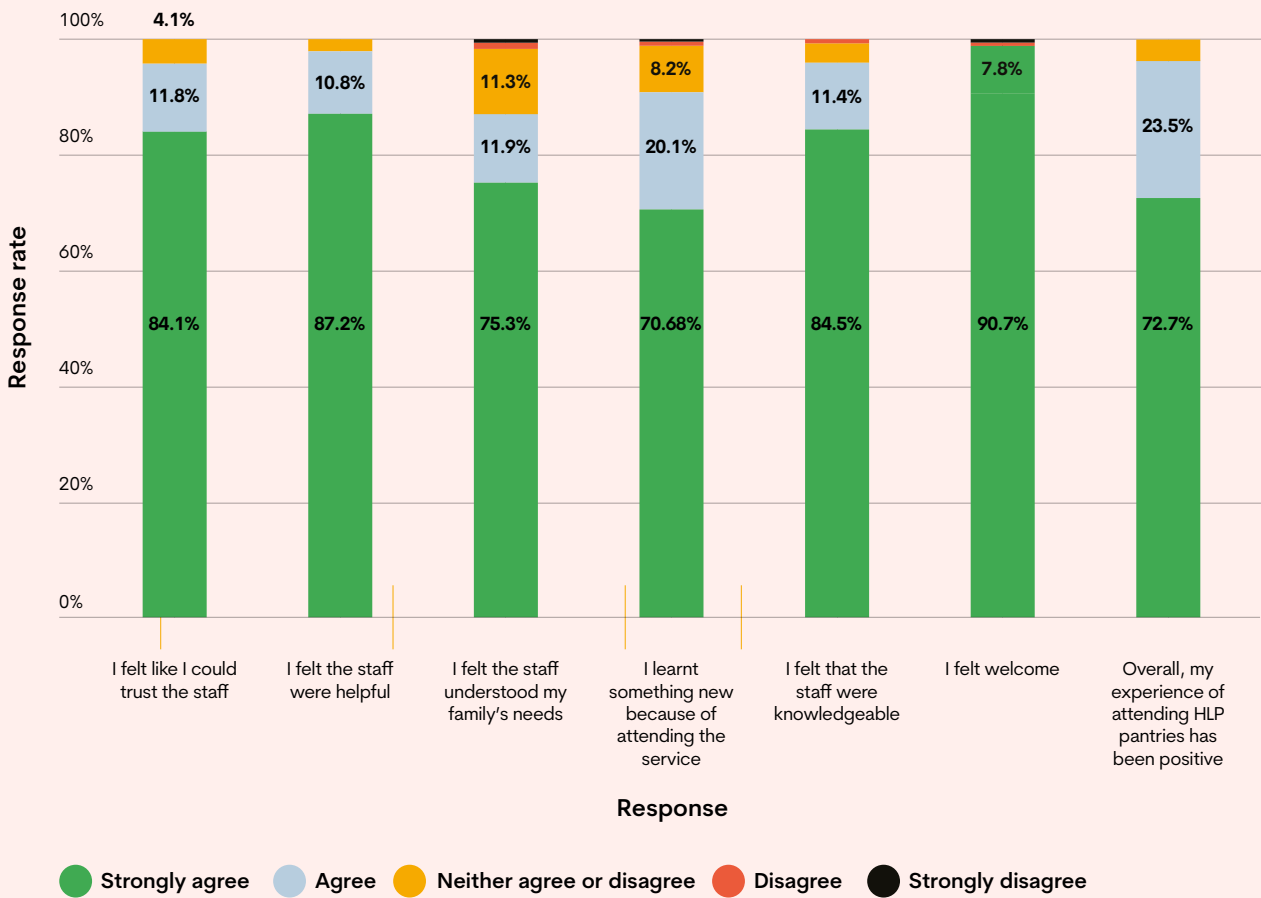
## 5.4 What did participants think of HLP?

Feedback was collected using family feedback forms which were collected termly at HLP sessions. In total, 195 feedback forms were collected. Respondents were asked how likely

they were to recommend HLP to family or friends, on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being 'not at all likely' and 10 being 'extremely likely'. The recommendation score is used to calculate a 'net promoter score', a widely used market research metric. Respondents are classified as 'detractors' (score of 0 to 6), 'passives' (score of 7 or 8) or



Figure 5 Participants' feedback about HLP



'promoters' (score of 9 or 10). Overall, 91.19% of respondents were classified as promoters, 7.25% were passives, and only 1.55% were detractors. This gives HLP a net promoter score of 89.64, which is considered to be an excellent score.

Figure 5 demonstrates that families gave overwhelmingly positive feedback about HLP.

The most positive responses pertained to participants' opinions of HLP staff and atmosphere – more than 84% of respondents strongly agreed that they could trust the staff, that the staff were helpful, that the staff were

knowledgeable, and that they felt welcome at HLP.

The other responses were also overwhelmingly positive, although some more neutral opinions emerge about how well staff understood the needs of respondents' families, and how many respondents learnt something new at HLP sessions. Still, in all questions, respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements at least 87% of the time.



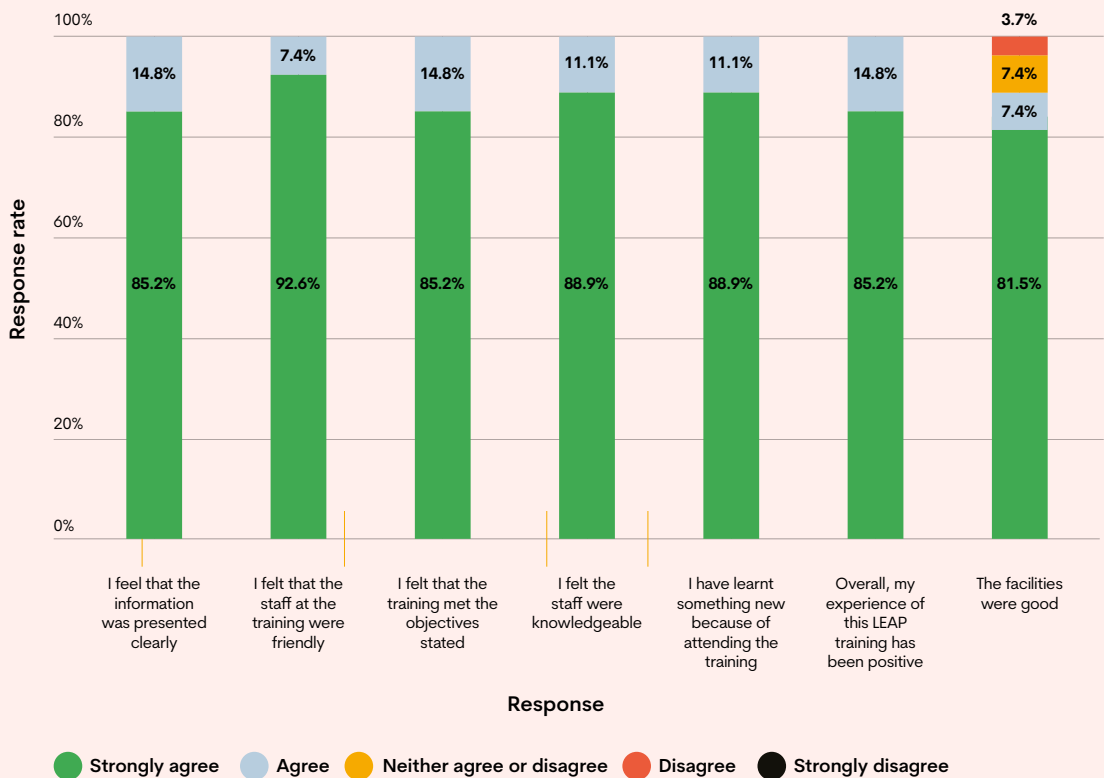
### 5.5

## What did volunteers think of HLP training?

Volunteer feedback was collected at the end of each Food Ambassador training course. Twenty-seven volunteers returned the volunteer feedback form. Responses are reflected in Figure 6. Overall, volunteers were extremely positive about the HLP training. Volunteer respondents were asked how likely they were to recommend the training to family or friends. Overall, 88.9% of respondents were classified as promoters, 11.1% were passives and 0% of respondents were detractors. This gives HLP training a net promoter score of 88.9, which is an excellent score.

When asked about their experience of the training, 100% of respondents agreed they had a positive experience (85.2% strongly agree and 14.8% agree). In addition, 100% of respondents also agreed that the training met the objectives stated (85.2% strongly agree and 14.8% agree), that the information was clearly presented (85.2% strongly agree and 14.8% Agree), the staff were knowledgeable (88.9% strongly agree and 11.1% agree), and that they learnt something new (88.9% strongly agree and 11.1% agree).

Figure 6 Volunteers' feedback about training





# Section 6

## The impact of HLP on Community Capacity

**"I am so grateful and  
the pantry makes a huge  
difference financially."**

— Survey respondent



## 6.1

## Access to healthy affordable food

One of HLP's key objectives is to make healthy food available and accessible. The family and volunteer interviews highlighted several different ways HLP has impacted families' financial situations and enhanced their capacity to access healthy food.

### HLP Pantries

The HLP pantries enable families to access low-cost, high-quality healthy food. Many participants now rely on the pantry for their weekly food. The relatively low cost of the pantry (£5 for 20 items) means that families who participate in HLP can frequently access high quality healthy food that is affordable to them. In addition to enabling access to healthy foods, participants also commented on the impact the pantry has had on their family's finances through spending less on their weekly shopping.

**"We've noticed a big change in the finances like we have reduced by a lot the money was spent in supermarkets whenever we go."** — Participant

To establish an estimate of how much families save per week at the HLP pantry we compared produce acquired at a HLP pantry for £5 to the equivalent shop at a local Aldi supermarket. A family's weekly saving was calculated at £11.65 a week. This equates to a saving of £46.60 a month and £599.20 a year (assuming four pantry attendances a month).

**"I am so grateful and the pantry makes a huge difference financially."**

— Survey respondent

The fact that so many participants interviewed commented on the financial benefits they gain from the pantry highlights the dramatic impact local families would face were this service not to continue, and would inevitably lead to more families needing to access food banks.

**"I am a single mother and my son 15 months old. I don't work and it's hard to keep up with the bills and high cost of living. The pantry helps me survive."** — Participant

Participants also highlight the benefits of HLP activities being free, enabling them to take part in activities that benefit them and their family that they wouldn't otherwise be able to do if they had to pay for them.

**"Well, we are out more often, without spending a fortune. This is ... the difference. This is the positive impact is having in my family that we can do activities, fun, good quality activities. We feel looked after and supported and we don't have to pay for them. I mean, what else can we ask for?"**

— Participant

In addition, HLP activities often provide free or affordable meals. Many participants noted this as an important factor to their engagement as it allowed them to access free or low-cost healthy meals, which they wouldn't have had access to otherwise.





—  
“I feel spoiled. I know it sounds silly. But when you have no one else, to go to a place that they look after us, and sometimes they just, the fact that that they give us food that has been cooked, and I don’t have to cook for five. And I can actually sit down and have, I don’t know, three strawberries. Jeez, I just I just find it very, very grateful.” — Participant

—  
“Yeah, the other pantry in [Moorlands] even you know, there is a kitchen as well so they’re making food. You could buy one or two pounds. So, it’s a really good helpful thing. You could buy a meal for a pound.” — Participant

## Volunteering

Volunteer and partner organisation interviews also highlighted the financial benefits for some volunteers, who have gone on to paid employment or who have started their own businesses as a result of volunteering for HLP. Many volunteers highlighted how the skills, knowledge and qualifications gained through HLP have been hugely beneficial to obtaining paid work and for starting up their own projects. For example, qualifications such as the food hygiene certificate gained through Food Ambassador training have proven to be hugely beneficial to volunteers wanting to set up their own food businesses.

In addition, the majority of HLP staff have previously volunteered for HLP, and it is opportunities like this that enable so many volunteers to go onto paid employment.

—  
“By and large, everybody that we employ has at one point been a volunteer for us. And we’re very proud of that.” — CEO

In addition, volunteers have also gained paid work outside of HLP. For example, one volunteer spoke about gaining employment through networking as a volunteer.

—  
“So yeah, baby yoga ... that’s how I met her. And she stayed for a few sessions ... She just observed how I interacted and what people were saying about me at St. Stephen’s Children’s Centre. And she then knew that I had my own business, she got just chatting, she initially said ... ‘will you cater for a Diwali you know, we’re doing a Diwali festival, can you make some food for that?’. So there’s a few times she employed me to do some private catering for her for the different sessions.” — Volunteer

Volunteers having opportunities to gain paid employment or run their own businesses has had huge implications for their financial situations.

—  
“I’m able to, you know, financially, I’m in a better place like, you know, doing all this work. I can, you know, contribute towards my family and be able to give my children what they need.” — Volunteer



## 6.2

## Healthy eating and cooking behaviour changes

Attending HLP activities has had a positive impact on families' healthy eating behaviours. 65.7% (n=23) of survey respondents reported a positive increase in the amount of fruit and vegetables that they and their children now eat (25.7% increased a little and 40.0% increased a lot). In addition, 28.6% (n=10) reported a decrease in the number of sugary snacks they and their children now eat (17.1% decreased a lot, 11.4% decreased a little).

Respondents also reported changes to what they cook at home, with 57.1% (n=20) of survey respondents reporting that they have tried a new recipe or ingredient from a different culture as a result of participating in HLP. In addition, 74.3% (n=26) of respondents reported a positive increase in their knowledge of healthy, affordable recipes to cook at home (28.6% increased a little, 45.7% increased a lot). Many participants attributed these changes to the knowledge and skills they gained through cooking sessions:

---

**"Cooking sessions, open your eyes in terms of you can cook more vegetarian meals, because everything was vegetarian in the packs."** — Participant

---

**"I've learned to cook more vegetables. Oh, yeah, that's important. I'm using much more vegetables than I ... used to."** — Participant

It's important to note that it wasn't just participants who had attended a cooking course that reported changes to cooking and healthy eating behaviours. Many participants interviewed spoke about how the variety of food and ingredients available at the pantry had also motivated them to try new foods and recipes at home.

---

**"We normally cooking Asian stuff like Chinese, Asian or Eastern European. But here they give us some more Indian flavour ... Here they provided the coconut milk and I was like, why not? Let's try."** — Participant

---

**"We get a lot of healthy foods from the pantry which leads us to cook more healthy recipes."** — Participant

One volunteer who ran cooking sessions also spoke about her enjoyment in participants coming back to sessions with stories of new, healthier meals they have cooked at home as a result of attending Mini-Chef Sessions with their children. She reported that families came back to sessions saying.

---

**"Oh we tried that recipe again and we cooked it for the whole family and everyone loved it."** — Volunteer relaying participant comments at Mini-Chefs



### 6.3 Health and Wellbeing

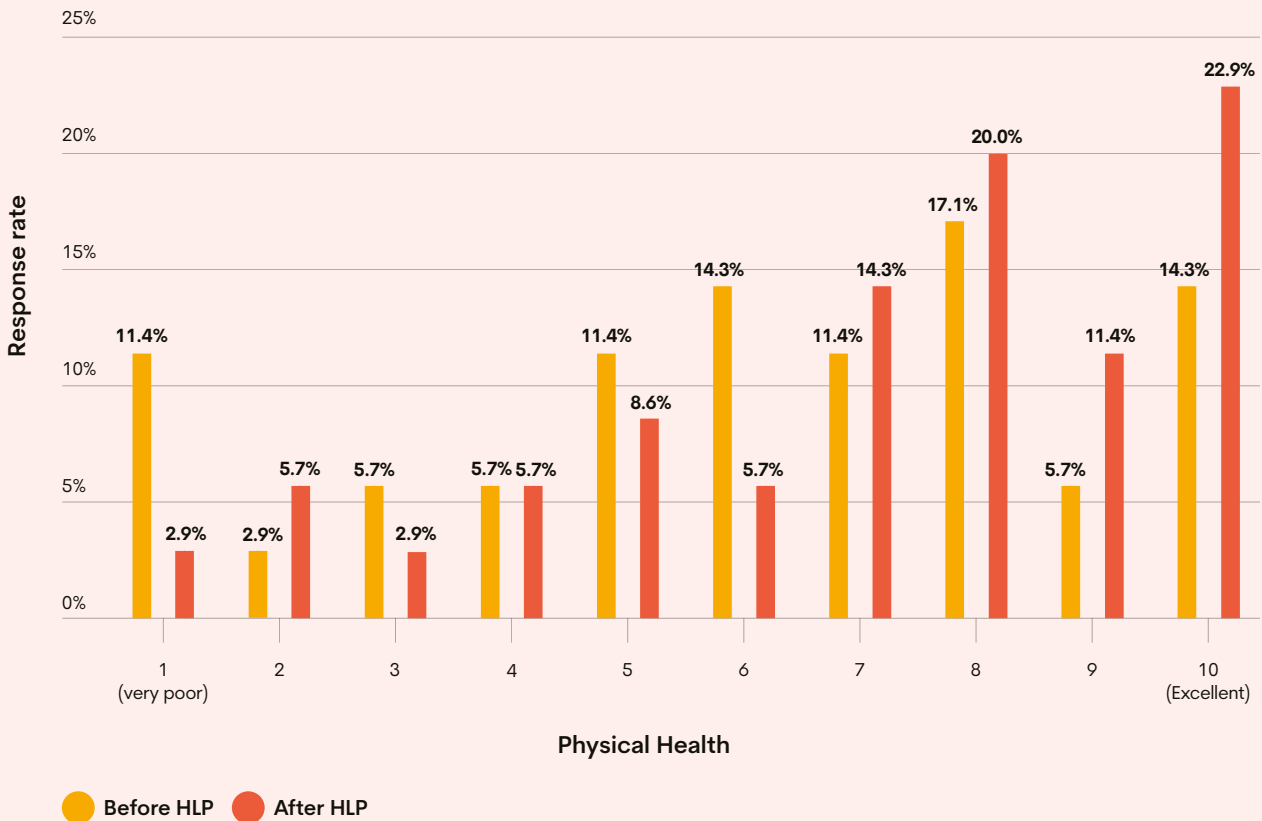
#### Health

Many participants reported changes in health behaviours as a result of taking part in HLP. 51.4% (n=18) of survey respondents reported an increase in the amount of physical activity they now do (34.3% increased a lot, 17.1% increased a little) and 48.6% (n=17) reported an increase in the amount of time spent outdoors (31.4% increased a lot, 17.1% increased a little).

The survey also asked participants to rate their physical health from before

the sessions as well as their physical health after the sessions (at the time of the survey) on a 10-point scale. Reported physical health after the HLP sessions was generally better than reported physical health from before the HLP sessions (see Figure 7). 20.0% (n=7) reported their physical health as 'excellent' (9 or 10) before attending HLP and 34.3% (n=12) reported their physical health as 'excellent' (9 or 10) after attending HLP (see Figure 7). This is an increase of 14.3% (5 people) reporting their health as 'excellent' following attendance at a HLP activity.

Figure 7 Participants' self-report of their physical health before and after taking part in a HLP activity<sup>11</sup>



<sup>11</sup> Survey data includes participants who have attended just one HLP activity as well as participants who have completed multiple HLP activities.

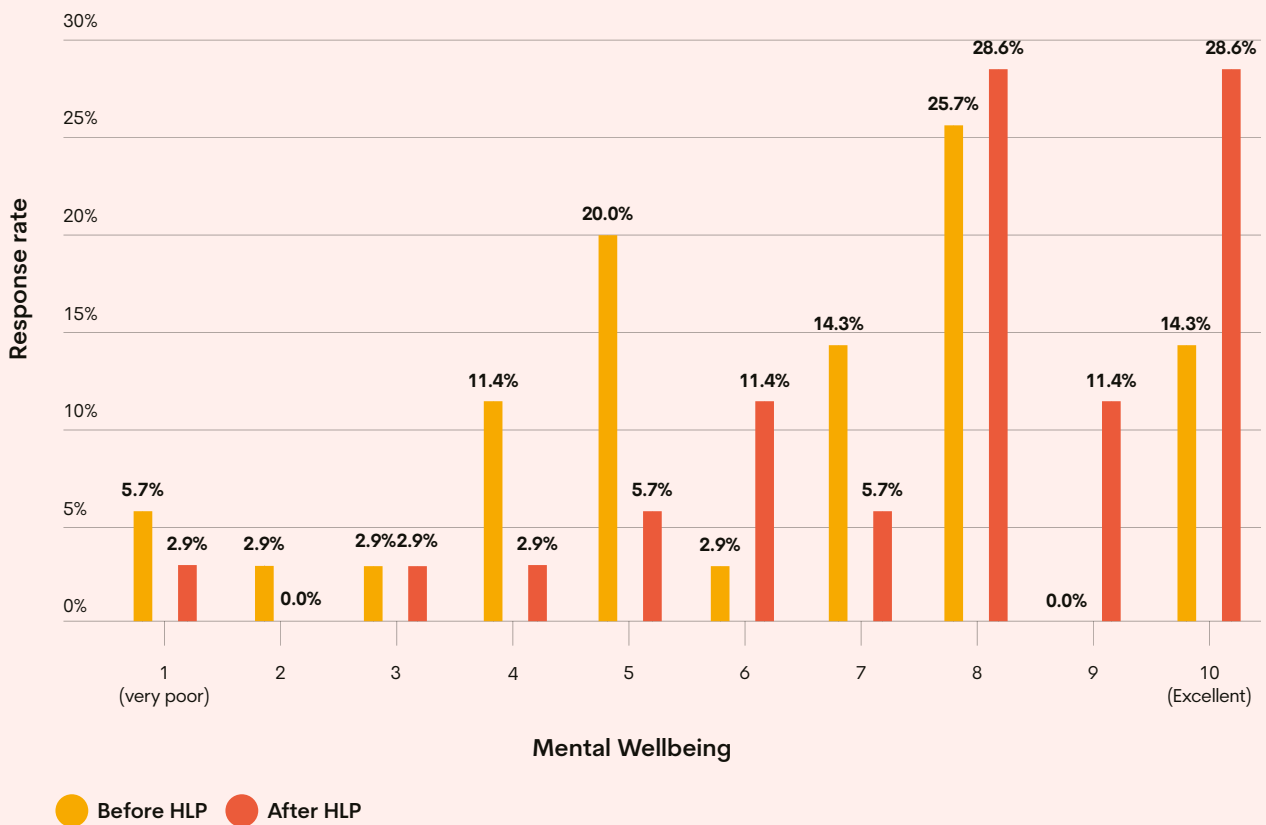


### Mental health and wellbeing

Survey respondents were also asked to self-rate their mental wellbeing before and after taking part in HLP on a 10-point scale (1 very poor to 10 excellent). Results are shown in Figure 8. When rating their mental wellbeing before HLP, 14.3% (n=5) responded with a score of 9 or 10, and 54.3%

(n=19) responded with a score of 7 or higher. When rating their mental health after taking part in HLP, 40.0% (n=14) responded with a score of 9 or higher, and 74.3% (n=26) responded with a score of 7 or higher. This indicates that respondents experienced better mental wellbeing after taking part in HLP.

Figure 8 Participants' self-report of their mental wellbeing before and after taking part in a HLP activity

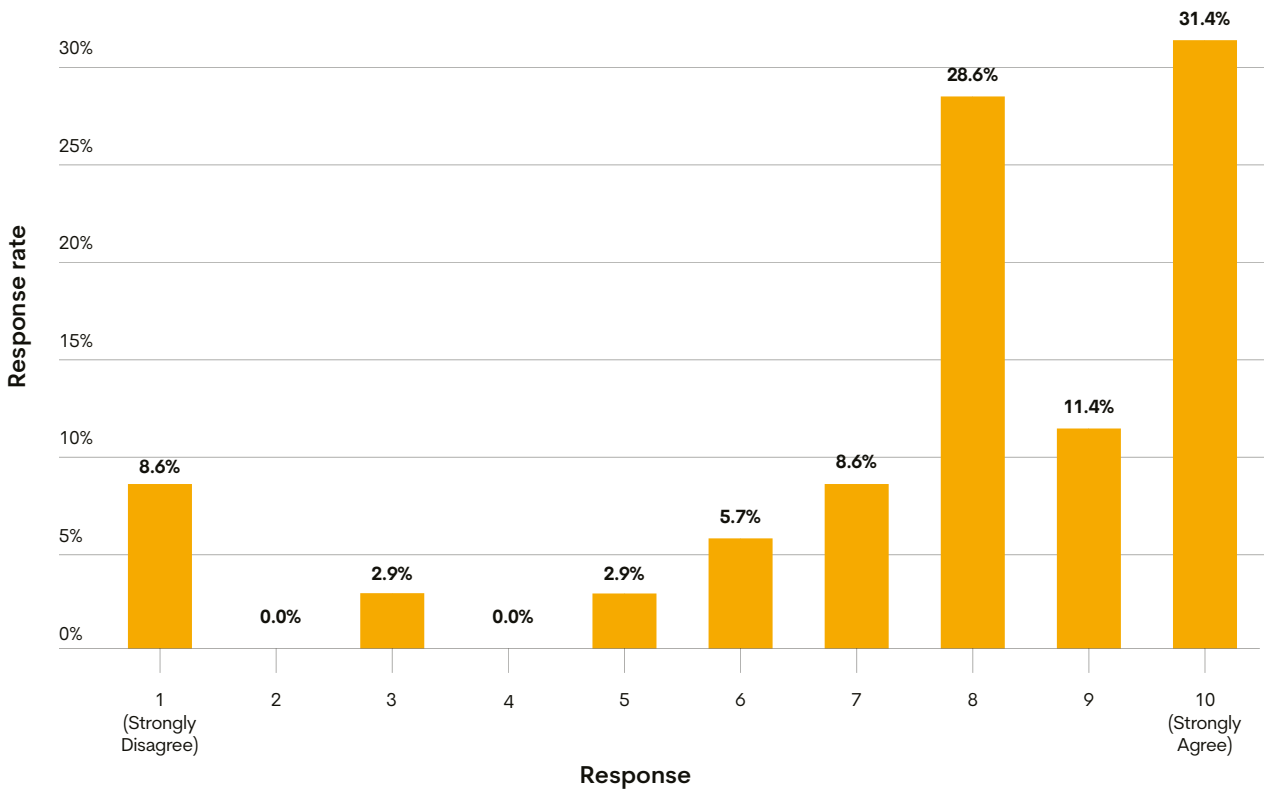


When asked how much they agree with the statement 'I feel less lonely when I come to HLP activities', 42.8% (n=15) responded with a score of 9 or 10, and 80.0% (n=28) responded with a score of 7 or higher. This indicates

that respondents had largely positive agreement with the statement, suggesting a reduction in loneliness when attending HLP activities (see Figure 9).



**Figure 9** Participants' self-report of their feeling of loneliness after attending a HLP activity  
"I feel less lonely when I come to HLP activities"



The participant interviews also highlighted the various ways HLP has helped improve participants' mental wellbeing. Participants interviewed reported mood improvements such as feeling happier after attending a HLP activity. In addition, participants also spoke about the positive impact feeling included and heard had had on their mental wellbeing.

Many of the participants interviewed spoke about how they did not have strong support or family networks nearby, and so feelings of loneliness and isolation were often mentioned. However, many of the participants interviewed talked about the positive impact attending HLP has had on those feelings of loneliness and isolation:

—  
"It was good because it meant that I had people who were in the same position that I could connect with ... so nice, felt less lonely." — Participant

—  
"HLP is a good motivator for getting involved so feel less isolated and lonely." — Participant

—  
"Yeah, alone can be triggering in terms of loneliness. So having someone a friendly face at the park, it makes a huge difference." — Participant

One factor which many participants mentioned as enabling changes to their mental wellbeing was connecting to people within the community at HLP activities and feeling that they were part of something and wanted by HLP.





—  
“I’ve made lots of friends that’s contributed to my mental health.”

— Participant

—  
“You always felt like they always wanted you.” — Participant

—  
“Always feel supported and loved and held by workers or the parents are very welcome.” — Participant

—  
“Feel that my life, I know it sounds a bit cheesy, but my life, my days can be happier. Because I find activities that I can access without having to spend a fortune. And they are fun. They’re activities that involve the whole family, not just me and one of the kids, no, we can all go and benefit from them. And I find it really cool.” — Participant

Volunteering for HLP has had a huge impact on volunteers’ mental wellbeing.

—  
“Through volunteering, it really helped me with my depression. And I came out of it ... And it’s just like, my body, in my mind has just naturally healed coming out through volunteering and joining HLP is the best thing I ever did.”

— Volunteer

—  
“I started off not knowing where my life is going, feeling really, really crap. And just to now, I literally am thriving on projects.” — Volunteer

Volunteers often noted that improvements to their mental wellbeing were driven by feelings of importance and self-worth through volunteering and feeling that they are key to the community.

—  
“It’s a great opportunity help others leave you with the sensation that you have done some for someone in need and that you are important to others.”

— Volunteer





## 6.4 Connectedness to the community

One of HLP's main aims is to connect the community through food. The evidence of this being successful was clear through both the interviews and surveys. Participants, volunteers, and partner organisations all commented on the positive impact HLP has had on the community and on connecting people within the community through food.

When asked to state how much they agree with the statement 'I feel more connected to my local community after coming to HLP', 94.4% (n=33) of survey respondents responded with a score of 7 or higher and 57.2% (n=20) responded with a score of 9 or 10, indicating strong agreement with this statement (see Figure 10).

When volunteers were asked about their feelings of being connected to the community 91.0% (n=10) of volunteer respondents reported feeling more connected to the community and 81.9% (n=9) reported feeling like they meaningfully contribute to the community as a result of volunteering with HLP (responded with a score of 7 or higher, see Figure 11 and Figure 12).<sup>12</sup>

One mechanism for this increase in feeling connected to their community could be changes in participants' knowledge about their local community and about what is going on in the area that they can participate in. For example, 82.9% (n=29) of survey respondents noted an increase in their knowledge of the local community

(37.1% increased a little, 45.7% increased a lot) and 68.6% (n=24) an increase in their knowledge of early years activities (22.9% increased a little, 45.7% increased a lot) as a result of attending HLP activities.

The majority of those interviewed spoke about connecting to the community through attending HLP activities and volunteering. In particular, they mentioned building their own community through coming to activities and connecting with new people they wouldn't have otherwise connected with and supporting each other within the community.

— **"I feel like going to community events has definitely given me a community."**

— Participant

One parent spoke about the importance of connecting to the community during COVID-19 lockdowns and how important this connection was for her at the time. She was able to make connections first online, and then meet in person once restrictions lifted:

— **"I feel like initially we met, like the friends I made we met online ... And then we started seeing each other in community events. So yeah, so definitely met two of my closest friends now through HLP."**

— Participant

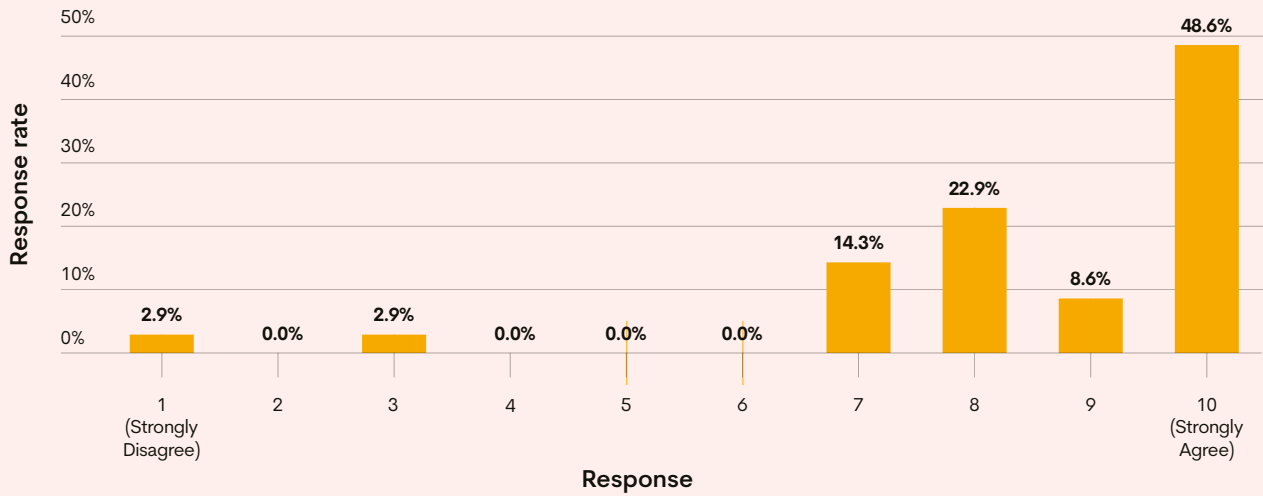
When speaking about what enabled these connections within the community, many participants spoke

<sup>12</sup> Sample size for the volunteer section of the survey was 11.

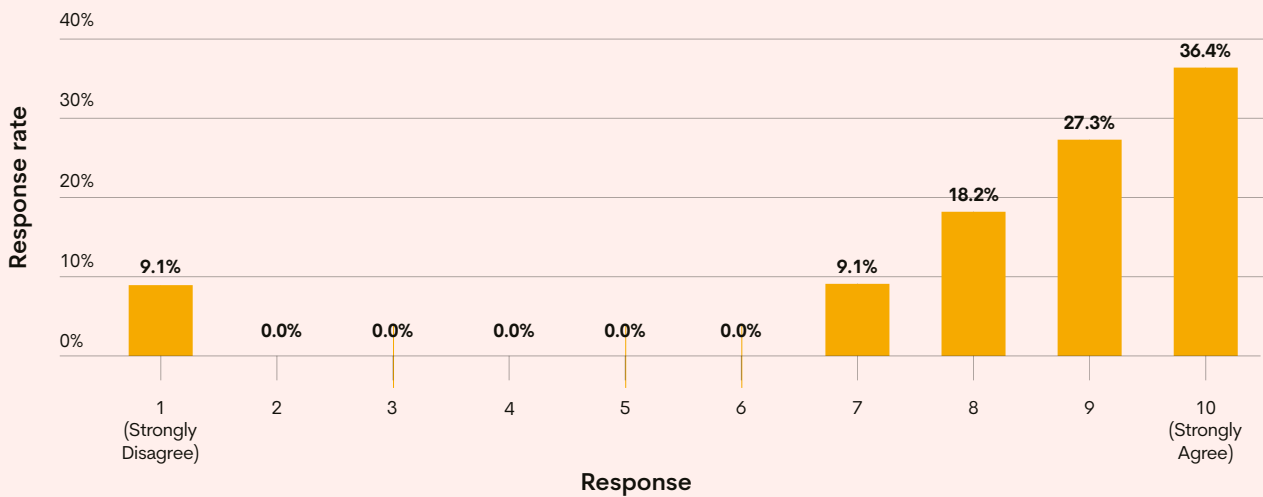




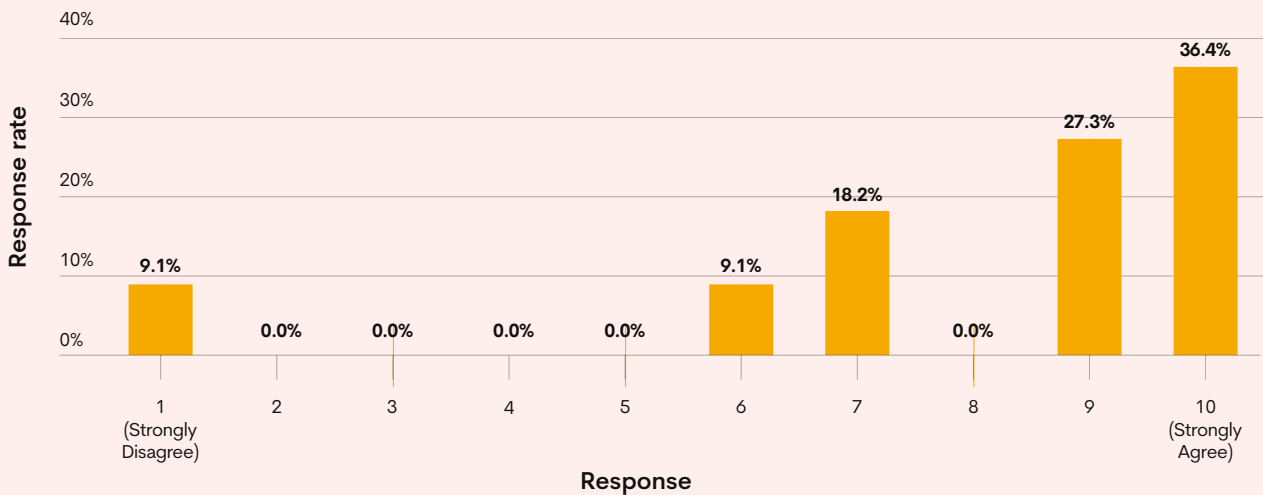
**Figure 10** Effect of attending HLP on participants' feeling of connection to their local community  
"I feel more connected to my local community after coming to HLP"



**Figure 11** Effect of volunteering with HLP on volunteers' feeling of connection with their local community  
"I feel more connected to my local community as a result of volunteering with HLP"



**Figure 12** Effect of volunteering with HLP on volunteers' feeling of contributing to the local community  
"I feel like I meaningfully contribute to what HLP delivers to the local community"





about the importance of shared goals and experiences, and how this has helped them form connections with other participants, who were going through the same thing as them or wanted the same things in life.

---

**“It was good because it meant that I had people who were in the same position that I could connect with. And so nice, felt less lonely.”** — Participant

---

**“I feel like that’s what made it easier, because we’re all basically there for the same reason.”** — Participant

Connection through volunteering and the feeling of helping the community was also a common theme in the volunteer interviews. The volunteers interviewed highlighted the impact volunteering has had on how connected they feel to the community, their sense of belonging, and feelings of supporting the local community with their work.

---

**“I feel quite inside of the community. Inside enough that when I go to places people say hello to me, because they recognise me. Also, that makes me happy because I feel included.”** — Volunteer

---

**“You know, and just being in that confidence came from all the volunteering with HLP and being part of an organisation just belonging somewhere. I’m part of a team, I’m part of a bigger project. I’m a big pond, you know when you’ve got that backing, it really helps.”** — Volunteer

One key factor to community connection being built was the HLP staff. Many participants interviewed commented on how HLP staff encourage connection between participants and because HLP are community focused they help to bring people together.

---

**“I think the most noticeable difference is that they create an opportunity for us to come out and a chance for us to talk to other parents.”** — Participant

---

**“I just want to say thank you, thank you for giving us the opportunity to enjoy the community to take part, to feel supported, helped.”** — Participant

HLP have also had an impact on how successfully their partner organisations are able to connect with the local community. For example, the Breastfeeding Peer Support team commented on how HLP providing food for their walk has been a huge draw for families and has helped participants engage with the service and connect with other participants.

---

**“They’re all different conversations and topics you can’t really remember them. But you just remember this warm feeling when you leaving after. You’re being heard. You know that they have same problems. You’re not alone.”** — Participant (talking about the Breastfeeding Peer Support walking group)



## 6.5

### Volunteering

HLP volunteers are a huge part of the HLP programme and a huge part of HLP's ability to build community capacity. The impact that volunteers have had within the community is not only recognised by HLP but also by HLP's partners. One partner stated:

—  
**"The volunteers themselves are the community."** — Partner Organisation

Since 2018 HLP have run 16 Food Ambassador courses, which resulted in 117 volunteers being trained as Food Ambassadors. Since 2021, 90 volunteers have been active for HLP. HLP volunteer numbers were not regularly recorded earlier in the programme, so volunteer numbers are likely underestimated here.

—  
**"Volunteers get so much out of being part of the project ... All the volunteers I've come to know love their role and get an enormous sense of well-being from the project."**

— Partner Organisation

When interviewing volunteers many recurring themes emerged which have already been addressed, such as financial benefits and access to healthy foods, improvements to health and mental wellbeing, feeling more connected to the community.

In particular, many volunteers mentioned increases in knowledge and confidence and the development of new and transferable skills, which was highlighted in both interviews and the

volunteer survey. Survey results are shown in Figure 13 and Figure 14.

81.8% (n = 9) of volunteers surveyed responded with a 7 or higher to the statement 'I have gained new skills through volunteering with HLP', indicating good agreement with this statement. When asked if they thought the skills they had learnt were transferable, 45.5% (n=5) of volunteers surveyed indicated strong agreement with this statement (response of 9 or 10) and 72.7% (n=8) indicated moderate to strong agreement (response of 7 or more).

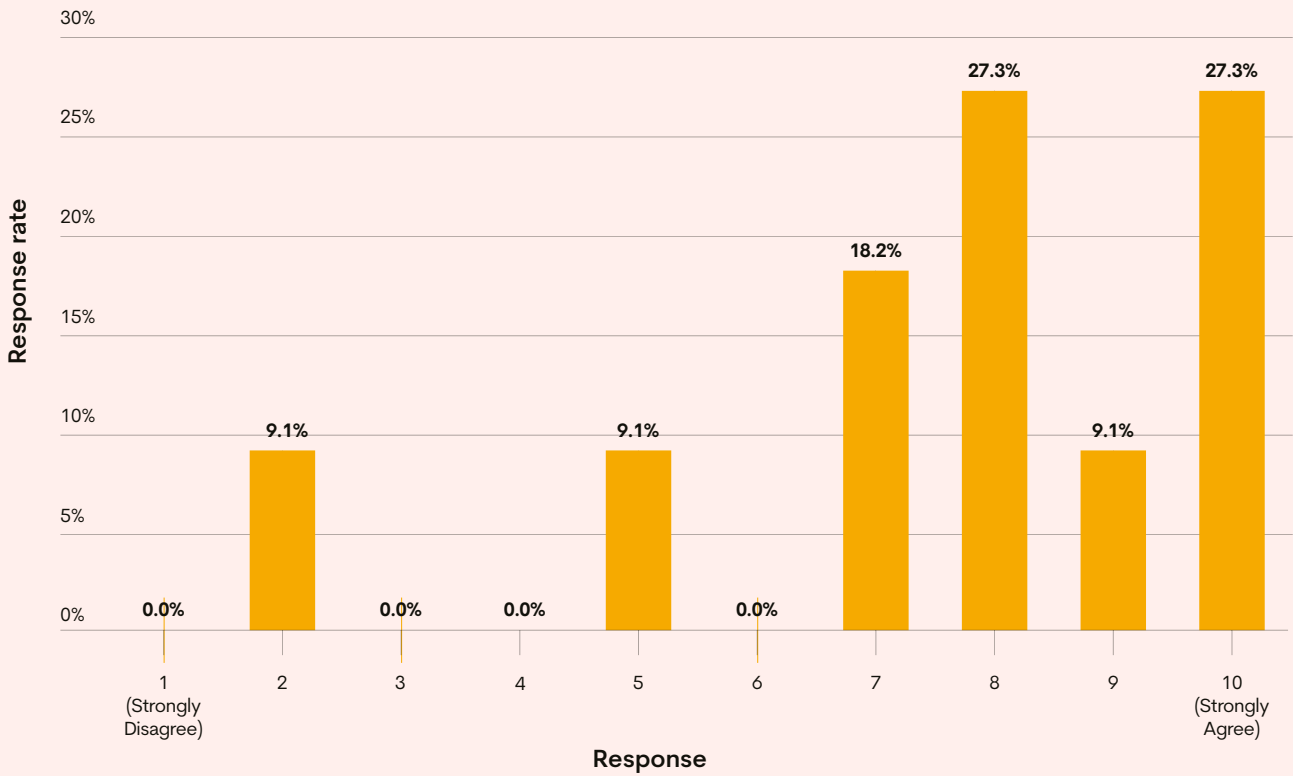
Additionally, when asked more concretely about their confidence in running activities, 45.5% (n=5) of volunteers surveyed indicated strong agreement (response of 9 or 10) that they feel more confident in running activities as a result of volunteering with HLP. This was supported by the interviews with volunteers who also frequently commented on changes to their confidence as a result of volunteering for HLP:

—  
**"I feel more competent confidence now than I was before I started on the HLP I feel like I'm more healthier now eating healthier than I did before. And in that way, when I got the knowledge meant, you know about what it's doing on my body, what I'm eating that way, I'm also helping my children and telling them why they need to eat this and that."** — Volunteer

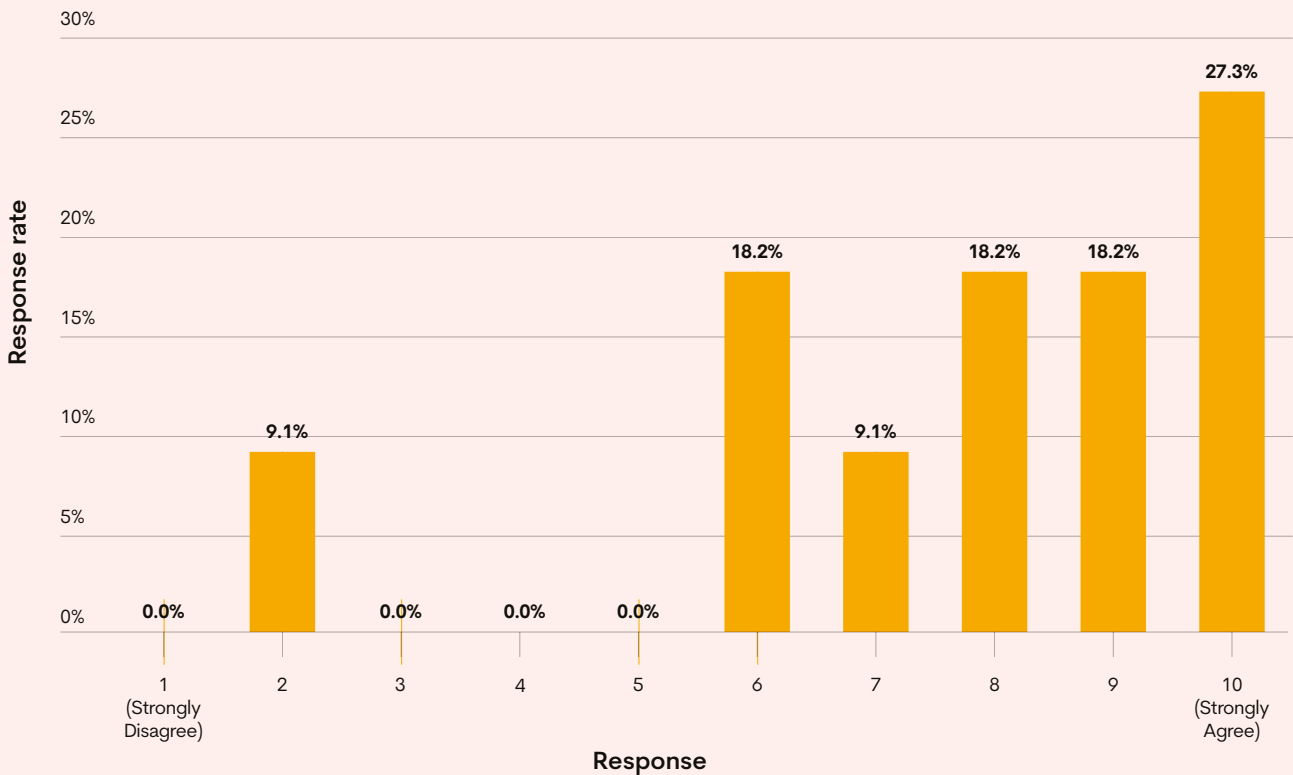
—  
**"It's changes me alone as a person as well. I'm more confidence for myself."** — Volunteer



**Figure 13** Effect of attending HLP on volunteers' development of new skills  
"I have gained new skills through volunteering with HLP"



**Figure 14** Extent to which volunteers agree that the skills and knowledge gained through HLP are transferable  
"The skills and knowledge I have gained through volunteering with HLP can be used in other parts of my life (e.g. at home, at work)"





In addition, many volunteers interviewed commented on how the knowledge, skills and confidence gained through volunteering with HLP have helped them to gain paid employment or start up their own businesses.

**“I gained more confidence to communicate with the community and the teams also.”** — Volunteer

The knowledge and skills that participants gain through HLP is a crucial part of how HLP builds community capacity.

**“People learn through HLP and then pass on knowledge within the community.”** — CEO

New themes emerged through the interviews that were specific to volunteers which included:

### **Ownership, leadership, and opportunity**

Volunteers frequently commented on how HLP provided opportunities for volunteers to take ownership and lead projects independently. In particular many volunteers expressed that the skills and confidence gained through volunteering with HLP were a crucial enabler in them deciding to take those opportunities to lead their own projects, start their own businesses, or go out and gain paid employment.

**“It’s only through just having the confidence to just take ownership and HLP are very good at that let you run with things and being confident and just and just putting your all into it. You do you do reap the rewards later.”**

— Volunteer

### **Encouragement and support from HLP**

Those volunteers who spoke about the benefits of ownership and leadership through their volunteering roles expressed that the encouragement of HLP staff was key to this. They spoke about how HLP staff had encouraged them lead projects and when discussing business ideas HLP had actively found ways to support them with their business development.

**“HLP always encouraged us if you have an idea. And you want to do it with somebody else, or you want to do it on your own, pitch your idea and see, and let’s see if we can make it happen.”**

— Volunteer

**“... It was things like that, where we are encouraged, do you want to take ownership? Do you want to lead on this? Do you have any ideas? If so, come forward.”** — Volunteer



## Sustainability

The skills and knowledge that volunteers gained through training is something that many value and see as skills that will remain with them and within the community.

---

**“Yeah, probably the cooking part. I mean, like that will stay with me.”**

— Volunteer

As outlined in the CEO interviews, this acquisition of new skills and knowledge within the community is crucial to HLP’s approach to building community capacity, with HLP aiming for volunteers and participants to take the knowledge and skills learnt and pass it on within the community.

---

**“We’ve now got those people going out there and passing on their knowledge and their skills to people.”**

— Volunteer

What is clear from the volunteer interviews is that all the volunteers interviewed have taken away a great deal from volunteering with HLP. They speak very highly of their experiences and attribute many life changes to volunteering with HLP:

---

**“I keep encouraging everybody who joins HLP to volunteer. Only through volunteering, will you gain the skill, will you make new friends and network with people and people get to know who you are, take ownership of whatever you do.”** — Volunteer







# Section 7 Partnership working







HLP works with a wide range of different partner organisations and services (see [Appendix 1](#) for list of partners). We interviewed six partners to gain insights into their experience of working with HLP and their opinions on HLP's community capacity-building within the area. The partners interviewed were: LEAP community engagement team, GAIA Enhanced Casework, Breastfeeding Peer Support, Brockwell Greenhouses, Myatt's Field Centre, and Lambeth Council.

The partners interviewed represent the variety of different organisations and services HLP collaborates with. Each partner has a different relationship

with HLP, from partners who primarily signpost into HLP (and vice versa) to those who collaborate with HLP to run activities, and partners who host or fund HLP.

All partners were incredibly positive about their partnership with HLP.

The fact that partner organisations and HLP had the same values and shared goals, objectives and ethos were highlighted as key elements to the success of the partnerships and was a key factor in what attracted the partner organisations to work with HLP in the first place.

---

**"Everything they do is very well thought out. It's very well organised. It's very well promoted, well attended. They've got that, you know, they're sewn into the network in Lambeth. So it's kind of one of those. It's just a bit of a home run, really. The partnership with HLP that nothing really goes wrong."**

— Partner Organisation



## Mutually beneficial partnerships

All partner organisations interviewed commented on the how the partnership with HLP was mutually beneficial. Firstly, the partnerships have been beneficial to families using HLP and the families the other organisations serve. Secondly, organisations also recognised the impact that partnering with HLP has had on their ability to achieve their own aims and improve engagement and reach within the area.

## Reach and engagement

One of the mutual benefits highlighted by multiple partners was that of reach and engagement. As a result of the partnerships, partner organisations and HLP have been able to connect with families that they wouldn't have done otherwise. One way they have gained greater reach is through HLP and organisations signposting into each other and to other services. The success of this is evident in the survey findings, which demonstrated that 48.57% (n=17) of respondents attended an activity they heard about at HLP, 31.43% (N=11) of respondents accessed support or advice from another organisation, and 68.57% (N=24) reported increased knowledge of other early years activities or services. This indicates that families have been able to connect with organisations and services that are much needed to them, that they may not have connected with had it not been for the partnerships between HLP and other organisations.

In addition to signposting, many partner organisations run drop-in sessions at HLP events, which have proven to be hugely beneficial to organisations in increasing their reach within the community. For example, one organisation who ran drop-ins at the same time as the pantry spoke about how this led them to interact with many more parents that they might not have reached and enabled them raise awareness of their service more broadly.

## Impact of HLP on the community

The organisations interviewed spoke highly of the impact that HLP has had on the community. Many of the themes highlighted in the parent and volunteer interviews were also present in the partner organisation interviews. They too commented on the financial and wellbeing benefits to the community, the impact of which the organisations see first-hand. In particular, the organisations commented on the importance of HLP connecting the community, not just with each other but to other organisations that could provide support and advice to those in need.

Organisations also commented on the importance of HLP providing opportunities that mean that members of the community can volunteer and go on to become more independent and take ownership and lead their own projects.

---

**“People who volunteered to run the pantry, now volunteer to do other things here, but they do their own projects which is really nice to see. So we have a lady who volunteered with HLP, and she now runs a jewellery making workshop on Wednesdays, which is lovely.”**

— Partner Organisation

### Organisational changes

In addition to the many community benefits of the partnerships, partners also identified the direct benefits they have experienced as a result of the HLP partnership, such as changes to their ways of working. For example, Lambeth Council expressed that their partnership with HLP has changed the way the council interacts with the food sector. In addition, other organisations recognised the impact their partnership has had on them and the impact they have within the community. For example, one partner mentioned the importance of hosting a pantry at their site and how it has made the centre, and the relationship the organisation has with Lambeth, what it is today.

---

**“The pantry kind of creates a centre of gravity. So like something around which other things kind of coalesce ...”**

— Partner Organisation

Not only has the pantry had an impact on how they interact with the community, but it has also had a positive impact on how they interact with the local council. For example, they have found it much easier to get local councillors to come down and see what is going on, when activities such as the HLP pantry are going on.

---

**“... It’s probably the most important project in making our relationship with Lambeth ... But yeah, it’s kind of it’s made us what we are now.”**

— Partner Organisation





## 7.1

## Enablers of successful partnership working

Partner organisations mentioned many factors that they felt enabled the development of a successful partnership with HLP. Two of the key enablers were flexibility and the HLP staff. The flexibility of HLP to make changes over time in response to the community and to the feedback from organisations was seen as a huge benefit to partnership working. For example, initially one organisation felt HLP were too rigid in their approach and ethos around food, especially around only providing vegan food. They felt that this was initially a barrier to families engaging and meant that they weren't meeting the needs of the community. However, over time HLP have become more flexible in the types of food they provide and instead focused on the community making small steps towards healthier food choices.

---

**"They were quite a hard line initiall ... And I don't think that was winning many friends. Particularly in the communities that we work with... But that's softened over time if you can get people to make an incremental step in the right direction, then there's real benefit in that so that has that's been more their approach it's got better. They're kind of more in tune with their communities now."**

— Partner Organisation

In addition, the HLP staff were mentioned numerous times as having an enormous contribution not only to the success of partnership working but to the success of HLP as a whole. They felt that the organisation and logistical knowledge of the HLP staff meant that often the partnership would run itself, with little input needed from the partner organisation. Many partners commented on the importance of the HLP staff in enabling events to run as smoothly as they do. This praise also extended to the HLP volunteers who were highlighted as crucial to HLP.

---

**"I think the fact that it has been possible for an organisation to do this and achieve so much is something that is really inspiring."**

— Partner Organisation



## 7.2 Challenges and improvements to partnership working.

Despite the hugely positive experience organisations have had partnering with HLP, organisations also commented on some of the challenges they have faced in making the partnership successful over the years.

### Monitoring referrals and measuring sustainability

A number of organisations commented that improvements could be made to tracking people within the service and referral monitoring. For example, they noted that they signpost a lot of families to HLP, but because there is not a process in place to track these referrals, organisations are then unclear about what impact they are having, and the longer-term benefits experienced by families referred into HLP. An improved monitoring system would allow HLP and organisations to more accurately measure the impact that signposting is having on families and would enable partners to measure the long-term impact of the partnership.

### Organisation focus and strategic vision

Two of the partner organisations mentioned that they felt that HLP lacked strategic vision, and because HLP offered such a wide variety of activities it was often hard to determine what their goals as an organisation were. It was suggested that this may have impacted on funding bids, as a clear strategic vision is crucial to funding applications and may have limited the growth of HLP.

### Capacity and funding

All of the partner organisations interviewed commented on capacity and funding issues experienced by HLP. In particular, it was noted that HLP currently does not have the capacity to successfully expand and continue to develop its services. It was noted that the nature of a part-time CEO, and changeover of critical HLP staff over the years has led to a number of communication issues and delays to changes being made at HLP. All organisations agreed that funding is crucial to increasing the capacity of HLP, which would enable the implementation of crucial changes, improvements, and expansions.



## 7.3 Impact of HLP partnership ending

When asked about what impact their partnership with HLP ending would have, all organisations were clear about the immense loss that would be felt should HLP not continue their activities. They all recognised that initially the biggest impact would be to the community who have become reliant on it, not just for financial reasons but also because of the benefits of connecting the community. They also highlighted that it would be a massive loss to all of the organisations that HLP currently partner with and the huge benefits that those organisations currently gain from the partnership.

**“Massive impact of HLP ending. It will initially impact the users first, but also the organisations they work with.”**

— Partner Organisation

**“it would be a significant loss, you know if they were not able to deliver that service.”** — Partner Organisation

**“They’re just totally irreplaceable.”**

— Partner Organisation

All organisations recognised how crucial HLP has become to them and the community. The importance of the partnerships is evident in the fact that the majority of organisations stated that if the partnership were to end then they would be actively seeking to partner with a similar organisation.

**“If it ended, I think we’d very much be seeking it elsewhere or wanting it to continue or advocating for it to continue wherever possible.”**

— Partner Organisation

**“The food pantries are so well known now and so established in the community It would be such a loss should they not continue. They fulfil a financial need and support families who really need it the most.”**

— Partner Organisation



# Section 8

## Case Study

### Journey through HLP – from pantry user to volunteer

Selina<sup>13</sup> was struggling financially during 2022. She did not have enough food for her or her children. After speaking to someone at the Children's Centre, she learnt about the HLP pantry. At first, she was intrigued as it seemed different to a food bank as she would be able to pick her own food which she wasn't used to. However, she was scared about attending because she was worried what people would think. The pantry was based in the school her son used to go to, so she was worried about people knowing her and knowing she was attending the pantry for food.

However, the first day she went to the pantry and met the volunteers she was amazed at how different it was to her expectations, with the staff laughing and joking and making her feel welcome. After that she continued to attend the pantry every week. Every week the staff were warm and welcoming to her. Over time she learnt about how things worked there and after chatting to a volunteer became interested in volunteering herself. Shortly after she was enrolled on the Food Ambassador training course. The training course had a crèche which was a major factor in enabling her to attend and know that her children were being looked after. She met lots of other people like her at the training and had a really positive experience with the training course leader. As English was not her first language, she was worried about trying to keep up with the course content, but the course leader was incredibly supportive with this, making sure that there was no language barrier to accessing the course.

---

**“I can see it has opened the door for me that I feel like one of my dreams is becoming true soon. After I started on HLP.”**

Following on from volunteering with HLP Selina is now being supported by HLP to start her own bakery within the community. HLP have helped her achieve her food hygiene certificate and are also going to help her by allowing her to use their kitchen space. From initially attending the HLP pantry to then becoming a volunteer and now starting to venture out on her own, participation in HLP has had a huge impact on her life.

<sup>13</sup> The individual's name has been changed.





# Section 9

## Enablers and barriers to implementing the HLP programme

**“Part of our skill, our inherent skill and our ability to sell ourselves and our reputation that we have these people are very happy to lend us things.”**

— CEO

## 9.1 Mechanisms of change

LEAP has identified a number of mechanisms of change (see Table 5), which are echoed throughout the HLP evaluation findings, especially in relation to the factors which enable HLP to implement their programme and to build community capacity.

Table 5 LEAP Mechanisms of Change defined

Mechanism of Change	Definition
Confidence	Sense of belief in self as providers and beneficiaries, belief in the quality and goals of the services, and positive self-regard.
Sense of control	Individuals feel able to make choices and have a sense of personal agency.
Trust	Between communities and services and between services themselves, the development of trusting relationships.
Safety	Psychological and physical safety, for individuals and groups.
Social and emotional connection	Individuals feel connected to themselves, their immediate social circles, and wider community. Sense of support and shared values with LEAP.
Partnership	Sense of connection between communities and services, and amongst services themselves.
Collective agency	Communities can make best use of local resources; local knowledge is engaged and valued by the LEAP programme.



## 9.2

### Enablers

#### Staff

The HLP staff and volunteers are crucial to HLP's success. Their supportive, welcoming attitudes were frequently mentioned as helping to encourage parents to attend sessions and helping to alleviate any barriers (such as negative feelings) towards attending activities and seeking support. Their encouraging and supportive attitudes were also highlighted as being crucial to enabling volunteers to take on leadership roles within HLP and go on to run their own projects or set up their own businesses. Staff attitudes were also highlighted as supporting people to connect with each other within the community.

This enabler ties in with two of LEAP's mechanisms of change: trust and confidence. HLP's staff's ability to believe in themselves and HLP, and to gain trust within the community have been a critical mechanism in how HLP have built community capacity.

#### Communication

Participants frequently commented on how good the communication was between HLP and families, from the ease of registering for sessions to being able to easily access information about what was going on and how they could get involved.

#### Volunteering opportunities

Volunteering was also highlighted. It was an important factor in volunteers feeling that they had made improvements to their mental health and wellbeing, that they were more connected to the community and in alleviating financial hardship.

Volunteering has been a huge part of HLP's success in building community capacity and it ties in with several of LEAP's mechanisms of change: confidence, sense of control, social and emotional connection. We have shown through this evaluation the importance of volunteers' confidence and the impact of volunteers having a sense of control over their work through the leadership opportunities provided by HLP. The social connection felt between volunteers and the community, in addition to the sense of support that volunteers feel from HLP, has been highlighted as an incredibly important factor in capacity-building.

#### Accessibility

The provision of stay and play sessions while waiting for the pantry and a crèche during training sessions enabled many more parents to engage with HLP activities and to begin their volunteering journey. Many participants commented that without this provision they would find it difficult to attend HLP.



## Shared goals

Shared goals were mentioned both by participants and by partner organisations. As already mentioned, shared goals enabled successful partnerships to be created. Participants added that they found they were able to connect and bond with other local families more easily at HLP activities because they had shared goals and aims. This enabled better connection within the community. Participants commented on the importance of shared experiences within the community as they found it easier to connect with parents that all want to make the same changes or have the same shared goals. This ties in with the Partnership, social and emotional connection mechanisms of change.

---

**“Shared goals make connection easier.”**

— Participant

## Partnership working

As mentioned in the previous sections, HLP’s ability to build successful partnerships with other organisations has been a huge factor in them building community capacity within the area.

The sense of connection and trust between HLP and their partners has become clear throughout this evaluation as a critical mechanism for successful partnership working.

## Universal offer

During the staff workshop it was highlighted that HLP being a universal service (available to all) is a key factor in building community capacity. Staff felt that the universal offer made HLP more welcoming and meant that families are empowered by self-selecting themselves to participate. It was also highlighted that individual capacity often fluctuates so the universal offer meant that families could access the services as and when they needed it.

This universal offer links to the Collective Agency mechanism of change, as the LEAP community have been able to take advantage of local resources and knowledge through their participation with HLP. As this offer is open to all, it means that more people in the local community have been able to collectively engage in this service.



## 9.3 Barriers and challenges

The evaluation has highlighted some challenges associated with implementing a programme like HLP and their ability to build community capacity, engage families, and facilitate change within the community. The challenges highlighted through this evaluation include:

### Parental time

A number of participants expressed that they wanted to engage more with HLP, either by attending sessions or volunteering, but they felt that they were unable to do so due to time constraints of either caring for children, or because of paid employment which had to take priority. This was also raised in the staff focus group, as members highlighted that they did not think that they catered fully for working parents, as sessions and pantries were often run during the day or just once a week, making it challenging for some families to attend.

### Accessibility

Accessibility of HLP was also raised as a barrier by many participants, predominantly in relation to the HLP pantries and especially for participants with young children. Many participants expressed that locations of the pantries made it difficult for them to attend if they had to take public transport with their children. In addition, the queuing times at some pantries are long and if there was no place for children to

play while they waited, then the wait times were too long for some families. Whilst some pantries offer stay and play during the pantry time, this is not the case at all pantries.

Accessibility issues were also raised by a previous CEO who noted that she felt that some neighbourhoods were better served than others by HLP, due to the location of HLP services. She noted that those that families who were within walking distance of a pantry were the ones who would benefit most from the service.

However, despite the barriers to attending HLP, many participants agreed that the benefits they gained from attending the pantry outweighed the inconvenience of travel and queuing time.

— **“Queuing at the pantry isn’t always doable with a toddler in tow so we haven’t been a lot, but it has been great when we’ve used it.”**

— Participant



**“At the beginning, I thought, is this worth it? Like going with the children, the pushchair, and I have to take a bus, and I thought, oh it was too much. But then you realise how much you save in your weekly shopping, and how much you can cook, and fresh ingredients that my partner and I thought, yeah, we have to do it. We have to make the effort because it’s really good for our family.”**

— Participant





## Reach and engagement

Reaching families most in need is always a challenge for any service. Whilst HLP has put many strategies in place to try and reach a large demographic of families, such as being a service available to all and partnering with other local organisations, it was highlighted that there is still room for improvement in this area. One of the CEOs interviewed commented that she felt that people more in need may have found it harder to access the service, and more could have been done to try and reach them.

---

**“We knew roughly how many people in each wards were born each year. And I don’t think we found all of them at all.” — CEO**

She suggested that although links with hospitals were in place, these links could have been improved as

---

**“People weren’t getting referred into the community services very quickly.”**

— CEO

## Physical assets

HLP’s physical infrastructure was raised as a potential challenge to building community capacity. Physical infrastructure is a key factor in developing the material capacity and sustainability of projects. The development of physical infrastructure could involve the acquisition of large assets such as buildings, or smaller assets such as equipment. However, despite HLP not owning many of their own assets they are able to use their reputation to acquire the necessary resources from other sources.

---

**“Part of our skill, our inherent skill and our ability to sell ourselves and our reputation that we have these people are very happy to lend us things.”**  
— CEO

One CEO highlighted the importance of physical assets for the development and future of HLP. For example, she thought that owning their own office space would dramatically improve their ways of working. In addition, she felt that owning more of their own assets would make HLP less reliant on other organisations for providing equipment and resources.

---

**“We own nothing, which is one of our big longevity problems, because we don’t have a fixed asset base. So, everything we do around equipment, and tangible physical assets, I would say, we either rent or we borrow it.”**  
— CEO



### Funding and staff capacity

Challenges of funding and capacity have been a major theme throughout this evaluation. Issues of part-time staff and staff changeovers were highlighted as limiting HLP's capacity to implement change and growth. In addition, personal capacity of participants may also have been a barrier to local families engaging with HLP. It was raised in the staff focus group that participant personal capacity can fluctuate, having an impact on how much they are able to engage with activities at different times. In addition, it's likely that those with limited personal

capacity may find it more challenging to engage with HLP, thus making it more imperative that HLP continues its work to improve community capacity within the area and engage families with the greatest needs.

A great deal of HLP's ability to build community capacity is affected by funding and funding limitations. Securing future funding would be a huge step towards removing some of the barriers to engagement, and increasing the capacity of HLP, enabling improvements, upscaling, and the continuation of the work they are already doing.



# Section 10

# Conclusions



This evaluation aimed to explore how Healthy Living Platform (HLP) activities build capacity within the LEAP community, both to inform HLP's future work and to generate broader insights into how community-led food programmes can build community capacity.

We did this through conducting focus groups, interviews and surveys with participants who access HLP services, HLP volunteers, HLP staff, and partner organisations and services. We aimed to answer the question 'To what extent and how does HLP build community capacity?', focusing on the experiences of families, volunteers, and partner organisation and the changes that these groups attribute to their involvement in HLP.

This evaluation demonstrates firstly, how community capacity threads through HLP and the activities that they plan and run. It also illustrates how HLP have successfully built community capacity within the LEAP area in many ways:

### Personal capacity

We provide evidence that HLP improves the health and wellbeing of participants through increasing **access to healthy affordable food**, changes in **healthy eating behaviours**, and improvements to **health and mental wellbeing**. In addition, we evidence that HLP enables **knowledge, confidence and skill development** which has led volunteers to go on to paid employment. We also highlight the **financial benefits** families have experienced through HLP.

HLP, as well as highlighting the impact that encouraging **independence**, fostering **confidence**, and supporting participants to be **community leaders** has had on so many individuals within the community. This is an impact that will continue to benefit the community for many years to come.

### Cultural capacity

We also provide evidence of HLP's contribution to encouraging **social networking** and creating opportunities for **connection** in the community through food. HLP as developed successful **partnerships** with other organisations and services which benefit the community and further build community capacity.

### Material capacity

Material capacity was highlighted as a potential area for improvement. While we show the positive impact HLP has on their staff and volunteers and employment opportunities, it was also highlighted that HLP's lack of **physical assets** could hinder expansion. Development in this area would enable HLP to grow.

## 10.1 Sustainability and the future of HLP

Measuring the long-term sustainability of HLP's work is challenging. It was recognised by participants, volunteers, and partner organisations that the knowledge, confidence, and leadership skills the community now have will be sustained past the end of HLP. However, for this to be sustained in the long term new families need to be brought into HLP to continue acquiring and spreading that knowledge within the community.

HLP's work in building community capacity has been hugely successful for many local families, indicating that there is a great need for HLP's work to continue within the community. Increased funding is crucial for HLP to continue their work, increase team capacity, and expand and improve the service, enabling them to continue to build community capacity within Lambeth.





# Bibliography

Fenton, K. (2017). *Health Matters: Obesity and the food environment*. <https://ukhsa.blog.gov.uk/2017/03/31/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment/>

Guys and St Thomas' Charity. (2018). *Bite Size: Breaking down the challenge of inner-city childhood obesity*.

Harflett, N., & Edwards, D. (2019). *Building Community Capacity 7 Economic Case Studies*. [https://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/\\_assets/BCC/Resources/Building-Community-Capacity-Case-Studies-.pdf](https://www.thinklocalactpersonal.org.uk/_assets/BCC/Resources/Building-Community-Capacity-Case-Studies-.pdf)

Kirwan, J., Ilbery, B., Maye, D., & Carey, J. (2014). *The Local Food Programme: Final Evaluation Report*. <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/media/insights/documents/Local-Food-programme-final-evaluation.pdf?mtime=20200106130027&focal=none>

Lavergne, R., & Saxby, J. (2001). Capacity Development: Vision and implications. *Capacity Development Occasional*, 3, 1–11.

Royal Society for Public Health. (2015). *Health on the High Street*. <https://www.rsph.org.uk/our-work/campaigns/health-on-the-high-street.html>



# Appendix 1

## List of HLP's partner organisations and services

- + Age UK social prescribing
- + Baby Steps
- + Breastfeeding Peer Support
- + Brixton Wings
- + Brockwell Park Greenhouses
- + Caseload Midwifery
- + Children's Centres: Jubilee Children's Centre, Liz Atkinson Children's centre, Loughborough, Children's Centre, St Stephen's Children's Centre, Stockwell Children's centre
- + Citizens Advice/ Health & Wellbeing Bus
- + Clear Community Web
- + GAIA
- + Groundwork
- + HENRY
- + Jubilee Primary School
- + Lambeth Council
- + Lambeth Council Housing Support
- + LEAP Community Connector
- + LEAP Community Engagement
- + LEAP FEW's
- + Metropolitan Housing Association
- + Moorlands Estate and Moorlands Community Centre
- + Myatt's Field North Community Centre
- + Myatts Field Park
- + Natural Thinkers
- + Oasis
- + Oral Health
- + Parent Champions
- + Pinnacle Housing Association
- + Sneaky Veg blog
- + St Martins
- + Stockwell Partnership
- + Sunshine Arts
- + Tulse Hill Estate and Family Engagement Worker
- + Unity Matters
- + Urban Canopy
- + Vassall Family Engagement Team
- + Wandle Housing Association
- + Whippersnappers
- + Woodfield Pavilion





# Appendix 2

## List of Tables and Figures

Table number and title	Page
<b>Table 1:</b> Overview of data collection methods and number of participants	9
<b>Table 2:</b> Overview of HLP sessions referenced in Figure 2, with main target beneficiary and an example of the activity	14
<b>Table 3:</b> Overview of data collection methods and number of participants	15
<b>Table 4:</b> Terminology Definitions	19
<b>Table 5:</b> LEAP's Mechanisms of Change defined	51
Figure number and title	Page
<b>Figure 1:</b> Overview of all HLP activities	21
<b>Figure 2:</b> Number of HLP sessions delivered by year, quarter, and type of activity / session	21
<b>Figure 3:</b> Number of new participants each year that HLP has been active (2017–2024)	22
<b>Figure 4:</b> Number of people attending pantries over time	24
<b>Figure 5:</b> HLP participants, by IMD quintile (lifetime to date)	25
<b>Figure 6:</b> Participant's feedback about HLP	26
<b>Figure 7:</b> Participants' self-report of their physical health before and after taking part in a HLP activity	31
<b>Figure 8:</b> Participants' self-report of their mental wellbeing before and after taking part in a HLP activity	32
<b>Figure 9:</b> Participants' self-report of their feeling of loneliness after attending a HLP activity	33
<b>Figure 10:</b> Effect of attending HLP on participants' feeling of connection to their local community	36
<b>Figure 11:</b> Effect of volunteering with HLP on volunteers' feeling of connection with their local community	36
<b>Figure 12:</b> Effect of volunteering with HLP on volunteers' feeling of contributing to the local community	36
<b>Figure 13:</b> Effect of attending HLP on volunteer's development of new skills	39
<b>Figure 14:</b> Extent to which volunteers agree that the skills and knowledge gained through HLP are transferable	39



# Appendix 3

## Healthy Living Platform – Theory of Change

	Interventions (outputs)	Short-term outcomes	Medium-term outcomes	Long-term outcome
1. Delivery	O1 Family activities including communal cooking, gardening, and physical activity classes.	S1 Families engage with the activities and find them enjoyable and useful.	M1 Families have increased knowledge and confidence about healthy diet and lifestyle.	Parents feel supported by and connected to their local communities, enabling them to provide a healthy diet and lifestyle for their family.
2. Training & CPD	O2 Provide Food Ambassador training.	S2 Food Ambassadors access training and gain the skills to manage their own community food projects.	M2 Food Ambassador led projects support the local community to access healthy, affordable food.	
3. Engagement	O3 Provide a universal service which welcomes all families, including those from diverse backgrounds*.	S3 Families, including those from diverse backgrounds, are well represented within the service.	M3 More families, including those from diverse backgrounds, have sustained engagement with the service and feel more connected to the community.	
4. Stakeholders	O4 Develop community food hubs in partnership with community organisations, children centres and other networks	S4 Community food hubs collaborate with HLP and co-produce family activities.	M4 Community organisations are supported to create and sustain community food hubs which benefit LEAP families, leaving a legacy beyond the length of the programme.	
5. Ongoing support	O5 Provide support for people and local groups to set up sessions and services in their communities.	S5 Local people and community groups take a role in running sessions.	M5 Families and community groups develop and run healthy living sessions.	





LEAP

Designed and typeset by [Effusion](#)