



IMPACT REPORT 2020



CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S STATEMENT

When I look back over the last year, I find it quite astonishing the challenges we've overcome and what we achieved. When the pandemic hit, we were faced with shutting down our organisation with no possibility of reopening in the foreseeable future. All at a time when people needed us the most. We had to get to work.

We first had to create a distance learning solution to replace our face to face courses. It was critical that we could still reach our target participants, we know many of them face digital poverty as well as food poverty. Our new course can be done with only a phone. Then all our staff and volunteers had to adapt to an entirely new way of working; we had to recruit and train a whole army of new volunteer mentors and new staff.

We then had to reach and recruit people in a completely different way – all our previous recruitment methods were redundant and we needed Covid-secure procedures across all our teams. All of this at a time when all the food we needed for our courses: tinned goods, rice and pasta were in incredibly short supply.

Despite all this, we were able to rapidly and effectively deploy it at scale across multiple locations; and once we'd done that, we added 50% more locations than we had pre-pandemic. The new Mentored Home Cooking Course we have created is not just a stop-gap replacement; our own staff feel that it is as effective as the physical courses we ran previously. We have found that the Mentored course is particularly good for people with poor mental health, disabilities and people with children, all of whom benefit from not having to leave the house.

One of the key benefits of the Mentored course is that it has enabled us to partner with other organisations in a way we have never previously been able to, due to the logistical complexities of the physical course. We launched a partnership with NACRO, a nationwide charity working with ex-offenders, care leavers and people with recent experience of homelessness, and our work together has enabled us to access participants where we know we can make a massive difference, across the country. This successful style of partnering is something we plan to explore more going forward.

Another "benefit" of the pandemic is that it has focused the attention of Public Health on diets and the challenges of eating well for the poorest in society. We saw interest from new areas and we hope that this focus on health inequalities will continue as it can only benefit us, as a leader in this field.



I'm hugely proud of what we have achieved during this challenging year and would like to thank all of our funders, supporters and our dedicated team of staff and volunteers who have all worked so hard this year to make such a difference to the people that we support. Without them, we wouldn't have been able to make such an impact on so many.

Alicia Weston
Chief Executive and Founder
BEM FRSA

THE LAST YEAR IN NUMBERS



927

people

completed the Mentored course

We've been able to broaden our reach through our Mentored courses and we've worked for the first time in Birmingham, North Lincolnshire, Sunderland, Teeside, Newham and Maldon.

We've continued to deliver courses in City of London, Hackney, Haringey, Hastings, Islington, Sheffield, Southwark, Thanet, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest and Wandsworth.



were more confident to cook more



felt less stressed about cooking



said they would cook more following the course



Overall participants identified that they could make an annual cost saving of

£1,040 on food



We worked with

400

volunteers

375

people took part in our face to face courses but these had to stop due to lockdown guidelines.



We reached new audiences through our Mentored courses like single parents, carers, people with anxiety and mental health issues, people with hearing impairments and people with disabilities and chronic conditions who find it hard to leave the home.

“ Thank you for your kindness in preparing the bags with love. You made me feel cared for when I was opening the bags. ”

“ It's an amazing experience and it's not just about the food. Being part of something and having contact with others in the group is a big bonus. I have learnt that healthy, delicious food can be really easy to achieve. ”

“ The course has empowered me and given me confidence to prepare new foods on a tight budget. ”

ONE YEAR ON

We surveyed 60 students one year after the course to see the impact. We asked them about cooking, shopping habits, eating of takeaways, general health and well-being and any financial benefits. Outcomes were wide ranging and showed changes under four themes.

COOKING HABITS

Overall, students told us that they were cooking more from scratch, trying new recipes and feeling more confident in the kitchen than they did before the course.



EATING HABITS

Overall takeaway consumption declined and students told us that they felt able to recreate their favourite take away dishes at home. This also led to them eating more vegetables.

“ I have found the confidence to make dishes I would otherwise buy. I’m cooking with vegetables a lot more than before. ”

“ The course definitely had a huge impact. I save money. I’m using the recipes I was taught and I feel confident to make healthy foods. ”

OVERALL HEALTH

Students experienced a range of health benefits from improvements in energy levels, emotional health and confidence. They also increased their social interaction with their families through the cooking-at-home process.



“ I am saving a lot of money, cooking from scratch is definitely cheaper than buying take aways and ready meals. My health has definitely improved, I feel healthier. ”



GROCERY SHOPPING HABITS

The economic impact was also felt through increased knowledge of efficient shopping methods such as being price savvy and improved planning behaviours. This was also attributed to decreased consumption of pre-packaged foods and takeaways.

The impact of COVID-19 and the restrictions in place has meant that students have struggled to implement all the shopping recommendations taught on the course.

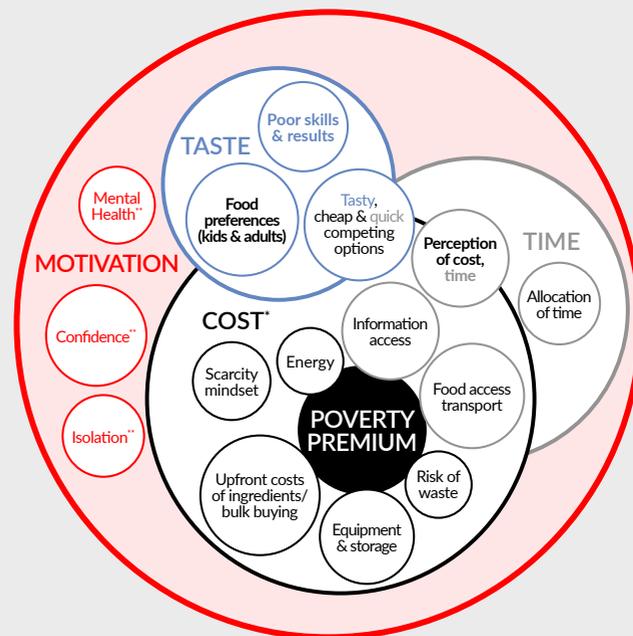


FROM POOR DIETS TO RICHER LIVES

WHY OUR APPROACH WORKS

Bags of Taste tackles food poverty at source, working with the most vulnerable people in need so they can have improved health and diets, increased finances and more independence and control of what they and their families eat. We enable people to feed themselves on a very low budget of below £1 a portion so they can be less reliant on food banks. Our comprehensive programme addresses the structural, economic, psychological and physical barriers that people in poverty face and has a lasting impact.

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO COOKING FOR PEOPLE IN FOOD POVERTY ?



*Barriers disproportionately affecting people in poverty are shown in black & red. All aspects of cost are exacerbated by the Poverty Premium in which people in poverty pay more to access goods & services.
**Academic research suggests that people in poverty have lower self esteem and poorer mental health, as well as greater social isolation.

BAGS OF TASTE ADDRESSES ALL THE BARRIERS TO FOOD POVERTY IN A SEAMLESS INTERVENTION.

We:

- 1. Reach people with limited interest in improving their diets:** do direct outreach & work with others to reach vulnerable & socially isolated participants, who may have little interest in improving their diets – they are the ones we most want to reach.
- 2. Improve diets & health:** all our food is nutritious & high in vegetables, but masquerade as takeaway style recipes that appeal to participants, enticing them to join in our free sessions for the free meal.
- 3. Feed communities:** Peer mentors help participants to cook a free & fun community meal combating social isolation and building community
- 4. Develop motivation & skills:** work with vulnerable people facing food poverty to ensure they have the motivation, confidence and skills to eat well for less than £1 a portion
- 5. Provide short term food access:** Assemble & provide a locally sourced ingredients bag that facilitates transition to cooking at home and allows participants to put into practice what they have learnt, reinforcing learning, building confidence and feeding friends and families.
- 6. Facilitate long term food access:** Ensure all participants have local food sourcing information for every ingredient they have learnt to use so that they can continue to cook for £1 a portion on their own.
- 7. Reduce poverty:** participants make their money go further & save on takeaways.
- 8. Drive volunteering:** Build large volunteering communities who become peer mentors
- 9. Provide heavily discounted equipment:** available to participants to purchase

Key to our intervention is the ability for our participants to go home with locally sourced ingredients bags and cook what they learned in the class for family and friends.

STORIES FROM OUR STUDENTS

J, 58, was referred to Bags of Taste by Shelter. He's currently unemployed and receives benefits. He completed the Mentored Home Cooking Course and was really positive about the experience.

Living on his own, he would often struggle to find the motivation to cook.

" I would just make a sandwich or cheese on toast or literally just pasta and would throw a can of tuna fish in it, and that would be it. "

" I cooked the three meals and as soon as I started cooking and realised how simple it was, how delicious the meals were and how nutritious and healthy they were, I couldn't believe how easy they were, it just motivated me. "

The experience has also given J a new way of connecting with people.

" It was the first time I'd tried WhatsApp; I'd never used it, I didn't even know how to do it. My mentor set me up and helped me, and now I'm actually in touch with a lot of friends on there. So, it's opened up a lot of avenues for me. "

He also joined the Bags of Taste Students Facebook group, where members can share tips and recipes and support each other's progress after the course. He has been discovering new ingredients, swapping meal ideas, and using the computer more.

" I'm glad I joined the group; I'd advise anyone to do that. It is a much wider group of people, so you get more variety of cooking, more recipes. Living on your own during Covid, it's been nice just to interact with someone again. "

He has been following money-saving advice from the course and has been bulk-buying and batch-cooking more. His shopping habits have changed considerably; and eating fresh food has made him feel healthier, more energetic, and he has even lost a bit of weight.

" Bags of Taste is one of the best things I've done in a long time. I can't thank them enough, and the support was fantastic. They were great help, a lovely bunch of people, made me feel very nice and warm and welcome. It gets you into a healthier diet, a cheaper diet, it's just a win-win-win. "

N, 26, was in care from a young age and moved to her council property nearly two years ago. She has mental health problems, including anxiety and depression. She receives benefits and was referred to Bags of Taste by her key worker.

She was concerned about her weight and was keen to learn some more balanced recipes to support a healthier lifestyle on a low budget.

" If I couldn't be bothered to cook, I'd just get a takeaway and I put a lot of weight on. Now doing this healthy routine scheme, I feel like getting my life back on track, and I don't eat takeaways all the time. I do feel like the course helped me with that. "

N joined a weight loss club and cooks more from scratch now. She has been exploring new flavours and eating more home cooked food instead of ready meals.

" The recipes and tips were useful and easy to do. I never thought of making tomato sauce instead of just buying the jars. "

Shopping around for deals and freezing extra products and leftovers has helped her cut down on her food bill and waste. She has swapped her regular snacks for healthier alternatives.

The flexibility of having a one-to-one Mentored Home Cooking Course helped N to learn in her own pace, as she was not comfortable with a larger group due to her anxiety.

" I did everything on my own, which I am really proud of. My mentor was really understanding. There were days when I felt like I couldn't do it because of my mental health. She told me to take my time, and I will be able to do it. She was nice. "

N encourages others to sign up for the course and discover how it can impact their lives:

" Don't keep buying unhealthy food; you can do it from scratch, and it's healthier and cheaper. "

" I felt like I needed to do this for myself and my health, so in the future I'll follow a healthy routine and go to the gym when it opens again. I have a healthier lifestyle now, and I have been happier. "

M has a learning disability, is low in confidence and was initially worried that she would find the course too difficult. She wanted to do the course to learn how to cook meals from scratch and save money and also encouraged her daughter C to participate. M found that the clear instructions and mentoring support via phone, enabled her to cook all three recipes and this has really boosted her confidence. M does not have access to a smartphone or computer but asked how soon she will get more recipes as she is keen to keep cooking new things and build on what she has learnt.

M told us:

“ It's really good for you. I'd recommend anyone to do it. I would never have known I could have made the dishes if it wasn't for the course. My husband loved the food and wants me to cook it again. I'm really proud of myself and it was great to do especially during lockdown. ”

Her daughter C has anxiety and struggles to leave the house but wanted to learn more about cooking so that she could do this with her five year old daughter who has health issues.

C said:

“What was really good about the course was learning new recipes. I made food that I would never have cooked and it was really good to try new things. I added some chicken to the pasta, my little girl is a very fussy eater but ate tonight with no problems. The group was nice and I enjoyed it.”



THANK YOU TO ALL THOSE THAT SUPPORTED US THIS YEAR

WE'RE HUGEY GRATEFUL AND YOU'VE MADE A MASSIVE DIFFERENCE

PARTNER

We work with a range of different organisations across the country like companies, public health departments and housing associations and we'd love to hear how we could partner with you.

VOLUNTEER

We have some amazing volunteers, join them and make a huge difference to people living in food poverty.

DONATE

Each year, we need to raise all our own funds to keep our services going, you can support us by going to bagsoftaste.org and clicking on donate.

FUNDRAISE

Take up a challenge or have a supper club with friends and make a big difference to people living in food poverty.

CONTACT US



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