



The Keep Growing Aberdeen Seedling Sharing Project

Final Report | November 2020

Delivered by: Community food initiative North East of Scotland (CFINE), Tullos Community Garden, One Seed Forward, Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership (ACHSCP)

Coordinated by: Community Growing Development Worker (CGDW) CFINE

Project Evaluation led by: Health Improvement Officer Food & Health (HIO) ACHSCP

Table of contents

Executive Summary	3
Section 1	
1.0 Introduction.....	4
1.1 Food growing as a health improvement strategy.....	4
1.2 Policy and strategic context.....	5
1.3 The project 'theory of change'.....	6
1.4 Project setting	6
Section 2	
2.0 Evaluation aim and questions	7
2.1 Evaluation setting.....	8
2.2 Evaluation methodology and design	8-9
2.3 Scope of the evaluation.....	10-12
Section 3 Discussion of findings	
3.0 Project outcome findings	13
3.1 Evidence for health improvement.....	13-15
3.2 Evidence for improved mental health and wellbeing.....	15-16
3.3 Evidence for improved dietary behaviour.....	16-17
3.4 Evidence for new skills	17-18
3.5 Evidence on improved partnership working.....	19.
4. Key messages/ Recommendations	19
4.1 What went well	19
4.2 What can be improved.....	19
4.3 Limitations	22
5. Conclusion.....	23
6. Next steps	23
7. References	23

Executive summary

The impact of food growing as a model for community food resilience during a global pandemic.

This evaluation report sets out the evidence for the effect of the Keep Growing Aberdeen (KGA) project as part of a broader food growing strategy. The Aberdeen city food growing strategy 2020-2026 aims to provide everyone in the City to grow their own food and promote the benefits of food growing, healthy foods, and a quality environment across the City. Drawing on the Keep Growing Aberdeen (KGA) project. The record identifies benefits in terms of.

- Growing activity at home during lockdown
- Improved mental health.
- Knowledge of food growing skills as a life skill.
- Community participation
- Improved dietary habits.
- Pro-environmental behaviours

It was challenging to demonstrate direct links between food growing and improved dietary habits because it seems complex by participants' perception that some of the seedlings grown are either herbs or vegetables. This does not consider the higher cost of healthy eating at a time of economic uncertainty for some. Nevertheless, the evidence shows that the growing has impacted participants' experience of healthy eating, including their food choices and readiness to try new foods and their interest in food that is grown.

Three key elements from the evaluation

This evaluation findings suggest that there are three crucial emphasis on food growing as a set of activity that people can participate, learn, and benefit from, which can optimise its impact:

1. Growing must be something that all communities take part in, this is an entitlement because of the associated Health and social wellbeing benefits, which include access to sustainable foods (Food security) and pro-environmental behaviours (organically growing your own food is sustainable and nourishes the soil by using safe and natural products).

2. Growing should be experienced in different contexts.

It should not be a one-off experience but continuous and should be inclusive.

3. Growing experiences should be integrated with other activities, rather than stand-alone activity. People should be encouraged to see the connections between growing, a healthy diet, and a healthy environment and how it inter-connects positively with community health and wellbeing.

I.0 Introduction

1.1. Food growing as strategy for health improvement during lockdown.

Food is a key part of our daily lives, not only for the energy and nutrients to survive but as something to enjoy and celebrate. Eating well and staying active is important for both our physical and mental wellbeing. (1)

During the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, many households may have found themselves with limited access to food due to financial or health reasons. Some will have been experiencing food insecurity prior to the pandemic. (1) Current literature reveals that regular contact with plants, animals and the natural environment can improve our physical health and mental wellbeing (1)

Gardening and community food growing has been highlighted by several studies to be beneficial for adults and children with challenging physical or mental health problems. (2) Such activities can relieve the symptoms of serious illnesses, prevent the development of some conditions, and introduce people to a way of life that can help them to improve their well-being in the longer term. (2)

This report evaluates the Aberdeen city food growing strategy based on its impact in improving health and wellbeing during a global pandemic. Food growing presents a spectacular opportunity for individuals to have hands on experience of their natural environment and learn more about the food that they eat.

The health and social benefits of people's involvement in practical food growing experience is widely recognised in many literatures. A recent study recognises that food growing is a valuable learning resource for people and their communities. "... taking part in activities, e.g., gardening, growing food, and conservation enables people to see the interconnections between healthy eating and lifestyles, environmental quality, and well-being." (3) There is a growing body of evidence to show the

benefits of food growing such as the development of skills, positive attitudes to learning,

improved mental health, healthy eating, and pro environmental behaviour, and it is recognised that this equally applies to young people from special populations (2)

The KGA seedling sharing project was first launched in April 2020 as a pilot in the Torry area during the pandemic by CFINE community growing development worker (CGDW) and other partners. It was aimed at providing access for

people who are shielding or self-isolating to grow their own foods and improve mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic.

The project received £500 funding from the Aberdeen City Green space funding to develop and evaluate the project.

After a successful pilot in Torry with increased interest, further funding from SHMU provided the chance for KGA to further develop its work citywide and this became a collaborative health improvement venture between Community Food Initiative North East of Scotland (CFINE), Tullos Community Garden, ACC, One Seed Forward and Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership (ACHSCP). The collaboration sought to develop the project, including its structure, content, delivery, and to use it as a social learning tool, and a model for food resilience based on existing resources and practices within the local food growing strategy.

One of the key project processes is to work with community growing groups and key stakeholders to design an approach that improves mental health and well-being and reduces social isolation during the lockdown.

It used a co-designed logic framework, and resources that support a digital approach to nutritious and sustainable food growing. The social media engagement with participants and the wider community aims to enable and inspire people to get involved in growing their own food, knowledge of good nutrition and reduce social isolation.

The framework consists of the following domains:

(1) Improve mental health and wellbeing (2) Improve dietary habits (3) Community empowerments (4) develop and strengthen partnership working.

While each area shared a common overarching framework and approach towards growing it was anticipated from the start of the project that the team would adapt the delivery of the project to fit local circumstances. A central focus for the project and its evaluation has been to work to identify and work with participants who grew indoors, outdoors and families with young children.

This evaluation report provides an overview of relevant research literature and outlines the design and development of the evaluation before setting out details of the methods and process and impact findings from the evaluation.

The critical challenges encountered by the project were: staff availability for seed distribution due to lockdown restrictions or personal circumstances, low interest in some activities, consistency of monitoring participants, funding to upscale the project, staff, and participants awareness of the overall aim of the project and high support needs of updating project status via social media.

Overall, the project was not resource intensive. It avoided setting up unsustainable expectations and succeeded in mobilising the interests and skills of partners.

1.2. Policy and strategic context

Current legislation and planning processes have focused on enabling people to grow their own foods.

In 2014 the Scottish Government published the Good Food Nation Bill, its vision was that by 2025 Scotland would be a “Good Food Nation, where people from every walk of life take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from, the food they produce, buy, cook, serve, and eat each day” (4)

To help deliver this in 2015 the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act was adopted, and Section 119 of that act requires all local authorities to prepare a food-growing strategy for their area.

At a city level, Aberdeen's Community Planning Partnership's Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) and the city's first growing strategy

(Aberdeen growing food together 2020-2026) sets further objectives which this KGA project works to deliver.

As a cross-cutting theme, community food-growing can help deliver many of the LOIP stretch outcomes; at a particular level, LOIP stretch outcome 13 states that no one in Aberdeen will go without food due to poverty by 2026. (4) The LOIP incorporates the Anti-Poverty Strategy aims and is the local Child Poverty Action Plan for Aberdeen. One of the Improvement Aims to deliver the outcomes by ‘increasing community food growing in schools, communities, and workplaces by 2021’.

(4) And community food growing will continue to be part of Aberdeen's policy and strategic priority.

1.3 The project 'theory of change.'

The original project theory of change emphasizes the importance of coordinating a change in parallel across several different community domains in a lockdown setting. Such improvements in these domains of the restricted environment are intended to increase the engagement of individuals and families on lockdown in food-related activities, decrease their risk of food insecurity and loneliness, leading to an improvement in their wellbeing. If people's wellbeing is improved, and they can easily access the foods they have grown, then the quality of life is enhanced. This will have positive impacts not just for the participants but also for the community and boost their morale.

1.4 Project setting

The KGA project was implemented firstly in Torry in the south of Aberdeen. This is in the 2nd decile of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, meaning it sits within the highest 20% of deprived areas with exceptionally high income and education/ skills deprivation. Then was rolled out citywide.

Figure 1. below shows engagement with different community groups. A total of 264 seedlings was distributed.

Number of packs distributed.

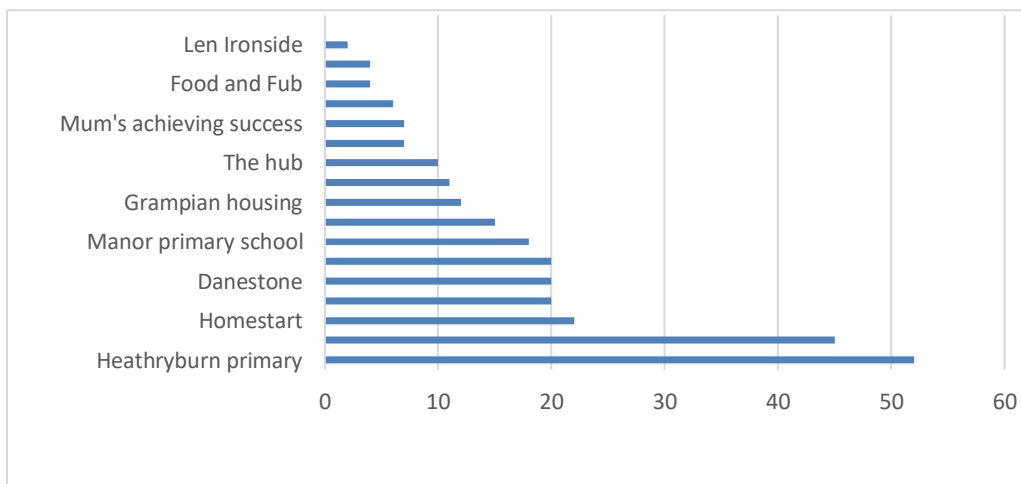
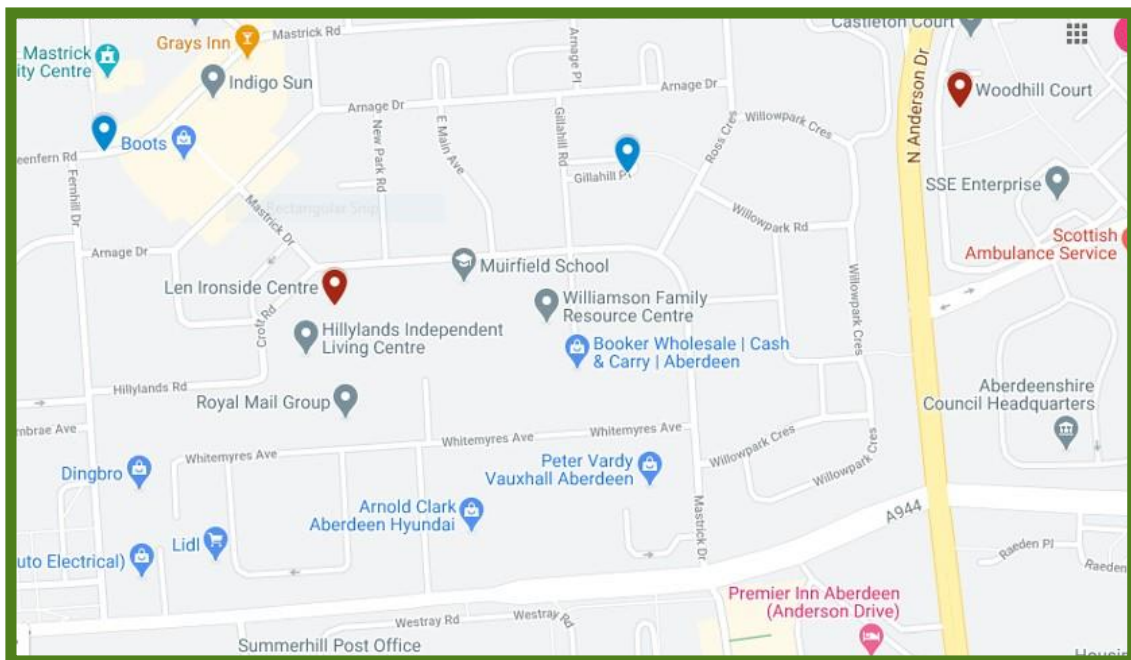


Figure 1. Community groups and proportion of seedlings received.



Map of project setting:
https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1bJ4TLG83gPKC_kaTuLYeyv9vt2J_YIST&usp=sharing

2.0 Evaluation aim and questions

This evaluation sets out to present a full and transparent account of the processes, learning, and impact of the KGA project in a lockdown setting for people shielding, self-isolating and young families during the pandemic.

The evaluation aims to examine the implementation, context, and perceived impacts of the project. The assessment is designed to answer the following questions:

- What are the characteristics, context, and processes of implementation of food growing as a model for community food resilience during a global pandemic?
- What are the perceived effects of the Keep Growing Aberdeen project on the health and wellbeing of individuals who are shielding, self-isolating and families with young children?

2.1 Evaluation setting

Figure 1 sets out basic data on the different groups and proportion of growing packs received. We had difficulty including all groups for the interview as some were not available to take part.

Community groups interviewed.



- Heathryburn primary parent group
- Food and Fun
- Castlewood Garden
- Homestart
- Inchgarth Community Centre

2.2 Evaluation methodology and design

The evaluation uses case study methodology (5), drawing upon multiple data sources, including staff interviews and project documentation. The evaluation follows a logic model (5) which guides the planning and evaluation of the project to identify the underlying processes or mechanisms that have brought about a change in the outcomes of the KGA project and the way the context has influenced these outcomes. Each component contains activities and indicators to allow for evaluation. Consequently, the evaluation assesses the initial project theory of change regarding the role of the co-designed community food growing approach in a time of global pandemic. The evaluation comprised of involvement, survey, and interviews.

The specific objectives were to determine:

1. What health improvement opportunities were delivered because of the KGA project?
2. If the KGA project improved mental health and wellbeing.
3. If the KGA project improved nutrition knowledge and attitudes toward cooking and healthy eating in participants
4. If the KGA project improved people's social skills i.e., learn new skills (Community empowerment)
5. If the KGA project improved partnership working
6. Review the issues and challenges faced, lessons learnt and key messages which could strengthen opportunities for future health improvement project development; this objective is presented as the recommendations.

Phase 1: Questionnaire

(i) Content of Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of five sections.

Section 1 assessed participants status, and types of seedlings received. If seedlings were grown successfully.

Sections 2 and 3 assessed food growing knowledge before taking part in KGA and intentions for after project follow-up. Participants were questioned about growing routines and cooking habits, likelihood to cook their own meal, and enjoyment experienced from growing their own food.

Sections 4 and 5 examined psycho-social health and well-being by assessing participants' self-esteem using a modified version of the Rosenberg self-esteem scale and social anxiety using the Social Anxiety Assessment scale.

(ii) Administration of the questionnaire

Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of the KGA project (follow-up). No personal identifiers were recorded therefore it was not possible to match follow-up responses. All answers were treated confidentially.

(iii) Statistical analysis

Completed questionnaires were autoanalysed in Microsoft forms. Data collated from group coordinator (Homestart) was coded and entered on an electronic database and statistical analysis undertaken using IBM SPSS Statistics v19. The data analysis included frequency distributions and the valid percentages.

Phase 2: interviews

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were used to allow participating groups to identify their own experiences and perspectives of the project design, implementation, and outcomes. The interviews sought evidence from groups about how and why they decided to participate, how the project added value to their group or organisation and about the value of a whole community food growing approach and investigated what impact they think these have had and what could be done to improve health outcomes for people within the community. The findings are summarised under the relevant evaluation objectives.

i. Interview eligibility, selection and recruitment

Community groups that received the most growing packs and project staff were eligible to take part. In total 5 community group coordinators and 3 project staff were interviewed.

ii. Interview process and data collection tools

Community group coordinators and managers took part in a semi-structured interview to explore their perception of the development, implementation, context, and outcomes of the project. Interview was conducted via telephone and Microsoft teams. There was a semi-structured interview schedule to guide the conversation with staff and groups. This also included a questionnaire to collect anonymised information about participants and their engagement with project related activities from the perspective of the coordinators.

Project documentation and data collection tools

The project was monitored by capturing critical aspects of its delivery. These aspects included project inputs (funding) project engagement with community groups, project activities and outputs (such as social media activities) and interim project outcomes such as uptake of the project activity being carried out. Table 1 below sets out the project data captured tools.

Data recording and analysis

Qualitative data collected from the interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. All transcripts were analysed thematically using the computer assisted qualitative data analysis system, NVIVO12. This provided us with a set of themes that was used alongside the themes that emerged from the interviewers' reflections to complete the report.

The interviews were analysed again to verify the findings and conclusions. This involved a thematic analysis of the transcriptions with the additional aim of selecting appropriate quotes to add to the report.

Ethical Issues

Ethical approval was not needed for the evaluation. However, Informed consent was sought from community groups. They were emailed an information sheet detailing their role in the evaluation of the project. Potential participants were given a consent form to sign to document their agreement to take part in the evaluation if they are willing to take part. Participants were made aware that the data they provide would be anonymised at the point of transcription or file entry of questionnaires and stored securely on ACHSCP system. The information is stored only for the appropriate time required for its use and following the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2018)⁷

Scope of the evaluation

The evaluation explored a logic model considering the structure, processes, and expected outcomes of the project.

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes - Impact		
	Activities	Indicator	Short term	Medium term	Long term
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Apply for funds for seedlings and growing kits. - Green space Funds (ACC) - Community resilience funds (SHMU) 	<p>Funds available purchase of relevant materials.</p> <p>Seeds,</p>	<p>Seeds and growing kits distributed to participants</p> <p>Engagement/ involvement of families and individuals</p>	<p>Development of health Improvement resource</p>	<p>↑Community engagement</p>
<p>Project team planning meetings CFINE, ACC, Oneseedforward ACHSCP</p> <p>Kit packing and Seed distribution.</p> <p>Community groups engagement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weekly meetings - Develop digital Recruitment / consent form. - Sign up participants. - Deliver growing kits to participants. - Monitoring - Distribute growing packs to groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creation of sign-up/consent forms for participants Families and individuals receive growing kits - Participants share seedlings grown - Number of individuals, families and community groups who received growing packs 	<p>Experiential learning opportunities and transferable skills Effective recruitment process</p> <p>↑Extracurricular opportunity for families and individuals</p> <p>New skills</p> <p>↑Extracurricular activity for community members</p> <p>↑Skills and capacity building e.g., Gardening, food growing, composting, pruning and harvesting</p>	<p>Empowered staff</p> <p>Established recruitment strategy</p> <p>↑Empowered citizens</p> <p>↑ Access to local grown produce for community members</p> <p>↑Food growing knowledge</p> <p>↑Community participation</p>	<p>↑Partnership working</p> <p>Community cohesion and inclusiveness</p> <p>↑Community food resilience</p> <p>↑Food security</p> <p>↑Mental health and wellbeing</p>

Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes - Impact		
	Activities	Indicator	Short term	Medium term	Long term
Homestart Social media Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cook'n 'connect: A Structured 6 - healthy sessions for people with young children. Engage by posting tips and sharing of progress. Project blog posts, and promotional materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recipe sharing - Healthy menu and home cooking with local produce - Creation of Facebook platform to connect all participants. - Benefits of gardening and food growing shared on social platform. - Pictures of grown produce on social platform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↑Improved dietary habits In children and families / behaviour ↑Social skills ↑Interest in food growing and gardening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↓BMI ↑Empowered community ↑Community participation ↑Behavioural change and healthy habits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early intervention and prevention ↓Childhood / Adult obesity Rates ↑Community food resilience ↓Reduce social Isolation. ↑Mental health and wellbeing
Project outcome Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developments questionnaire - Prepare questions and - Promote poster and links on platforms FB and community web - Select and groups for - Analyse produce report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creation of a validated digital questionnaire Creation of a structured interview questions and guide - Responses collated, transcribed, analysed and reported using evidence-based approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ↑Assessment of project impact on Evidence base for the dissemination of outcomes of intervention Identification of community needs/gaps in service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informs strategic priorities and policies. The Aberdeen growing strategy and LOIP action 1 Development of health Improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovative public health policies improving community health and wellbeing. Translation of evidence-based analysis into practice. Best practice guidance disseminated city wide

3.0 Outcome evaluation findings

The following summarizes the conclusions of the assessments about the impact of the project. Data from Interview and questionnaire respondents (30) show that there were positive impacts of KGA project for improved dietary habits, mental health and wellbeing, social interactions and partnership working. It is notable that, at the point of the assessment several participants were unable to take part because of the ease of the lockdown, or not contactable. Proportion reported is not reflective of the entire number of participants.

3.1 Evaluation Objective 1: To determine if the KGA Aberdeen project delivered health Improvement opportunities. Source: questionnaire, interviews, and literature

- **Resource to support parents to engage their young children in learning about foods and benefits of growing their own foods especially during the lockdown.** 90% of parents who participated responded they engaged with their children while 10% not at all.



“Yes, for me and my daughter we got up in the morning and because it was lovely weather, we just went out and we actually spent quite a lot of time in the greenhouse just chatting and doodling around with our growing bits and you do not realise how quickly time passes when you are in the greenhouse which we were quite lucky we had a wee greenhouse we could use. But it was just nice it gave us a reason to kind of get up and do something, a bit of structure during the lockdown so definitely, it just clears your head. Yes, gave us time and my daughter was learning from it as well which is nice.”

“So, it was a really good opportunity for them to get in and get dirty and kind of really examine what that meant in a way that they were supported to do.”

“The sunflowers were a great hit, they were all measuring them. Bs’ had grown a lot bigger than mine they were about to my daughter’s height so next year she will want to get them bigger than that but yeah the sunflowers were really good. There was a bit of a competition what you are at the minute? It was really good yeah.”

- Increased capacity to deliver a structured and tailored health improvement resource for shielded and self-isolating individuals or families with young children which included a range of topics: cooking skills, social skills, and gardening skills.

"We certainly saw some children absolutely thriving and enjoyed gardening in a way that hadn't within other opportunities that were offered to them. And so even just the opportunity for children to get dirty and dig and plant and experience, you know, coming to an understanding that they water it. And that was just such a learning experience, for some of them. And there were a couple of children in particular who got involved in some of the side projects, the side work."

"That can of planting and growing and access to food growing resources are something that the children in vulnerable areas wouldn't necessarily have access to. So being able to offer it and adapt to their daily activities I thought was really useful"

"The different peas, so many different peas! That was really good and just being able to take my children outside and get them to do it, because it was a pack that they could carry away from the centre it made them want to take part more rather than me just saying "here, I got seeds". They actually took an interest in it and reminding them to go out every day to water them which was good. I don't think they realised how much was involved in growing something."

- Food growing is a sustainable health improvement project that will ensure access to sustainable diets and reduce carbon prints.

"Yes I think cost is a big thing actually, the healthier things cost a bit more than the not so healthy things and I think they think that it just takes so long to grow and takes too much time to grow their own. Some people don't realize that they don't need a humongous garden or a greenhouse to do such a thing and I think this has maybe drawn some light to think, wait a minute, a few pots on a window ledge and you can get something from it."

"Just the keenness of the people to take part to be fair, when I put the post up there was quite a few people and then more and more people came and they just seemed keen to be going away and getting their seeds and things so it was really good. So yes, just the uptake of it actually"

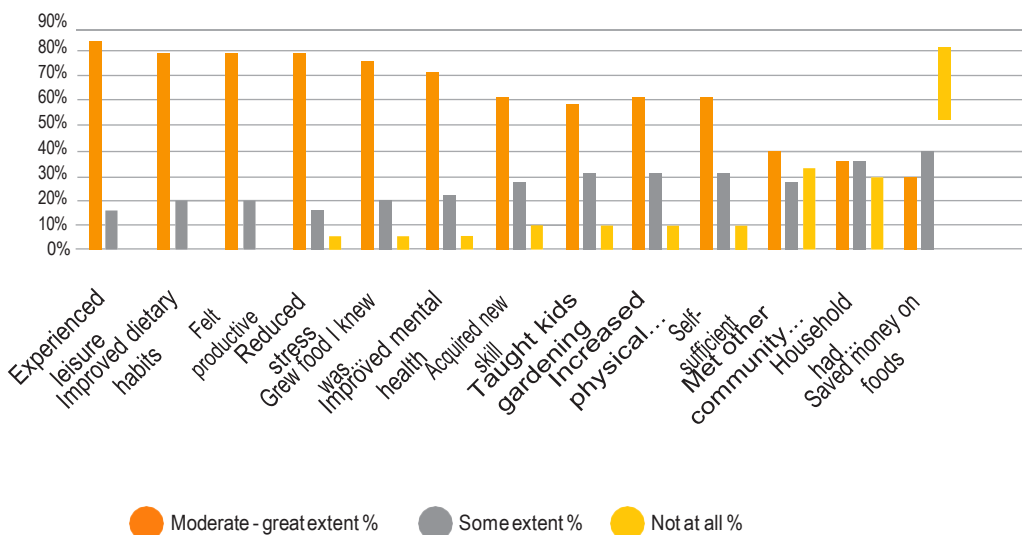
“Definitely tried things that they wouldn’t before. Some people were a bit like, oh I tried it once, don’t like it, you sort of have that discussion with them and you think, as time goes on and we produce some bits to grow and people see how easy it is, because we will incorporate the veg that we are growing into the recipes that we are giving parents then I think that that will make a difference. Sometimes it’s just not knowing where to go and people definitely tried things they wouldn’t have tried, for sure. In fact I think the children would need to try it more than once and they only really tried the stuff once.”

- An effective recruitment strategy has established the KGA project as a stable opportunity to empower the community and could serve as a model for food resilience during global economic crisis.
- Involvement of Community Development Worker (CDWO) and Health improvement officer (Food and Health) Community growing development worker (CFINE) and chair one seed forward in the project brought specialist knowledge and a staffing resource to deliver health improvement opportunity.

3.2 Evaluation Objective 2: To determine if the project improved mental health and wellbeing.

Respondents reported improved health and wellbeing across 13 mental health indicators namely, leisure, productive, reduced stress, new skills, increased physical activity, self-sufficient, grew foods I knew was safe, improved diets being the top reported changes while saved money on foods, household had enough to eat were low on the scale.

Evaluation Objective 2: To determine if the project improved mental health and wellbeing.



“As i have said, it helped me to keep going and it gave me great pleasure to see the seeds coming up and growing into plants.”

“It took some of the boredom out of shielding”

“something to do as a family together and then get up every week or so and see if there was, you know how successful it was, had it grown more, were they going to get a crop even? ”

“I enjoyed watching the plants grow”

“The best thing was just taking part , it took you way from the, don’t want to say real world, but it gave you a purpose and brought families together and communities together which I think was excellent. Having your plants eaten by slugs was probably the worst, or them not growing the way you thought they would, or having the shortest sunflowers out of everybody”

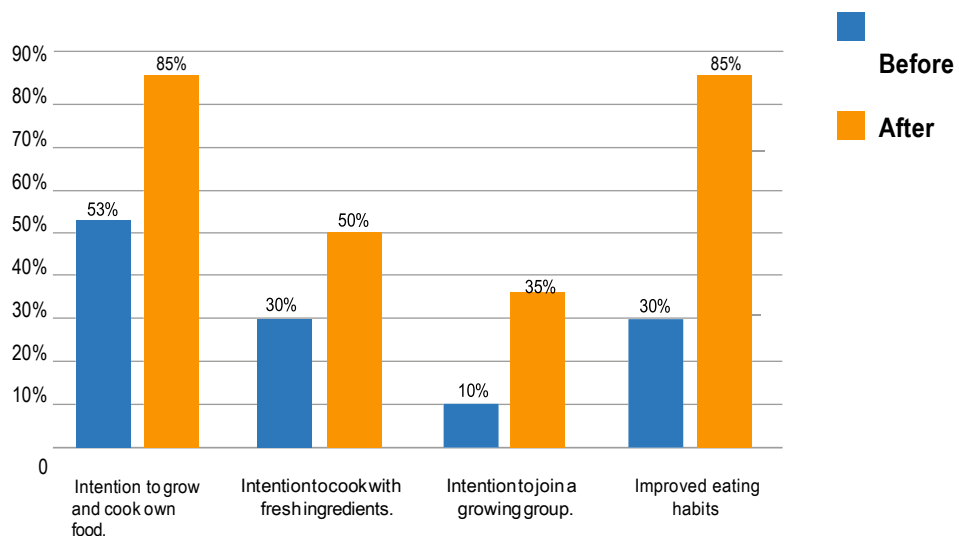
“It’s all about encouraging communication with the group and sharing their photos. So, in that case I think it definitely helped people’s mood.”

Involvement of the cook’ n’ connect a programme for families interested in food and cooking. Interest in food growing and nutritional content of food increased further to 85% (from 53%) of participants after the project.

Case study - Cook’n connect (Homestart)

3.3 Evaluation objective 3: To determine if the KGA project improved dietary habits. i.e., nutrition knowledge and attitudes toward cooking and healthy eating in families with young children. source: Homestart interview/report.

- Families reported improved eating habits across several measures:
- Improvement in intention to continue to cook with fresh ingredients.



“I have enjoyed trying different ingredients, making healthy nuggets, salads, and wraps. We are good with fruit and veg so more ideas has been great, we have tried different meals that are very healthy, have been adding more fruits, herbs and veg to meals, whole family much healthier, Dad is involved, trying new things”

- Considerable shift in cooking habits was reported amongst families:
- Increased enjoyment from home cooking with 6 out of 10 responding positively after the project. E.g.

- The cook ‘n’ connect group reported improved attitudes toward growing and cooking across all measures: ‘being able to grow my own food and cook’, ‘like to cook’, ‘enjoying eating what I have cooked’, and ‘enjoy eating my home grown food with others’.

‘All of it but mostly watching everything grow from day to day, flowers blooming and the safe and tasty veg on my plate’

3.4 Objective 4: To determine if the KGA project improved people’ skills i.e. learn new skills (Community empowerment)

“I have cooked more homemade food, it’s been great cooking home based for kids during lockdown, thoroughly enjoyed it, staff so good and understanding, really helpful.”

- 32% increase in intention to continue growing their own food.
- Majority of families (85%) planned to continue to grow and cook a meal after participating in the cook ‘n’ connect growing project.

“I think I have taken an interest in maybe a lot more of the eco side of things, so myself and my daughter were collecting egg boxes to try maybe the next time to plant things in those as opposed to using the plastic ones, that was what we were maybe discussing doing the next time we were growing which would be quite nice – the compostable ones or the decomposing ones, and maybe trying a few more peas!”

“Growing is now my new hobby”

“Not being scared to try new things, how to make from scratch instead of shop bought. Learned to grow and cook with local ingredients which I had not been able to before, extremely helpful, making things I wouldn’t normally do”

“I think the fact that they had something to do and that something that was so meaningful and that they learned from was really important.”

So before we joined the Project, we had some who had been involved in growing project before had basic skills with lots of encouragement from our coordinators to participate and continue and try growing and Others had never tried growing before, so they were quite excited to get their packs

“Well, it’s definitely gotten information out to families about organizations That are offering support to families. And we do have a lot of families in the Torry area and in regeneration areas, that can also maybe help or take more of a greater part, not with group, but independently do that kind of thing. So good to get the information out to families and let them know what’s going on”

“I increased my knowledge of plant growing “

3.5 Objective 5: To determine if the Keep Growing Aberdeen project developed partnership working.

- Collaborative working between CFINE, ACC, Tullos community garden, oneseedforward and ACHSCP was driven by shared goal to improve health and wellbeing and empower people to grow their own foods.
- The partnership worked together with other Partner project like Homestart Cook’n’ connect a programme tailored to the needs of young families.

- The effectiveness of the project was highly improved through partnership working and this has had important benefits in terms of project longevity.
- The partnership worked together to ensure consistent delivery of the KGA project within the challenging setting e.g. restricted movements.

“Having a shared objective and different skills meant that we worked very well together and there felt like an equal sharing of responsibility and activities which sometimes doesn’t happen in partnerships”

“It was great to see how partners rallied together during the lockdown and put in time and effort to make things happen. It was valuable and necessary to work as a team. It meant i could bounce ideas off other people- decisions were made discussed and decided together. I didn’t feel like i was alone, I had a team working with me”

- Members of the partnership were given the means and opportunities to draw on each of their own personal strengths e.g. knowledge and experience.

"I increased my knowledge of plant growing and also the work of other partners involved found out more about the range of garden groups in different areas"

4.0 Key Messages about growing from the Keep Growing Aberdeen project

We have identified 10 key messages for practitioners and policymakers which are included within this report as they arise in the discussion of finding, they are arranged under five separate, but clearly inter-related, headings:

Whole-community ethos: 80 % of respondents would like to join a community growing group, 50% would like to start their own community growing group with support when asked what next.

- A focus on food growing activities can support and develop a community ethos that places value on healthy lifestyles improving health and well-being, environmental sustainability, building social connections in the community. (1)
- People learn more about benefits and commitment to food and growing when it is reinforced by lived experience. (2)

"When the sunflowers start coming out or whether it's the children walking past and thinking, that's my sunflower and there's a sense of connection to a place. And another thing in it that the children were all so connected with the hopes to have that plant, a physical reminder. I think it's really important for them."

"I mean, I think for four children to make that kind of transformational change in their own families it's very difficult. And I think the kind of housing structure around the campus is such that most people don't have access to a garden.

But that's why the local community projects from growing spaces are so important because it gives folks somewhere to get involved. I'd like to see going forward. I absolutely see the value of Growing and Gardens in a longer term plan for the hub."

"I think in some cases it's lack of garden or an area needed to grow larger amounts of fruit and vegetables and things like that. Obviously, emm, and confidence as well, I would say to keep going and to keep trying and trying new things. And hopefully that can be encouraged.

"I think that some of it is habit, some of it is maybe never having had the experience and you know if we are all together and working together then we can do the growing and then the cooking and showing how easy it would be. People that have come to the cooking groups are often amazed. We buy all the produce, give it to them, and I think it would be the same. You know they are growing that, you say to them this is what you can do. It's just having the confidence a bit isn't it? And then spreading the word. Once a few people have seen and maybe shared success stories then other people are keen to be involved and they give each other tips so I think it is quite a nice community once you get it up and running but it obviously takes a bit of time."

Conclusion:

Following responses from the KGA project, growing activity can be sustained by drawing on local community networks, for example, local growing groups, access to Community growing spaces etc

Developing an integrated approach

Growing activity for families with young children provides clear experiences for children around food and growing; this reinforces positive messages about where food comes from and healthy eating (3)

Integrating food growing with cooking sessions across communities will increase the effectiveness of improving dietary behaviours. (4) 85% of respondents would like to learn how to cook with the foods grown, when asked what next.

“Well just like trying to get parents more involved was the main thing. We had done a lot of cooking and people were really interested in that so, because we saw there were community food growing groups that would be an ideal opportunity, we could grow our own things and then link the two together. In theory as the project moved on and we were growing potatoes and veg and stuff, but when you cook it with parents and families potentially and they would see the benefits of maybe taking some of that home and use it for themselves.”

“Well, obviously a sense of achievement if you're growing your own food. And then I think obviously to encourage people to then cook and eat their own grown food. It's a big sense of achievement if you've done that.”

“I think it's very important to be able to have a project where it's not just, you know, growing, but also sharing the importance of growing your food the knowledge, the skills on what they can make, what difference it can make to flavours that kind of thing.”

“I think that some of it is habit, some of it is maybe never having had the experience and you know if we are all together and working together then we can do the growing and then the cooking and showing how easy it would be. People that have come to the cooking groups are often amazed. We buy all the produce, give it to them, and I think it would be the same. You know they are growing that, you say to them this is what you can cook with it .”

Food Growing education

- To ensure that interest in food and growing is sustained there is need, where possible, to provide food growing education for people. (5)

“Provide more education on when and how to plant”

“Yes, because sometimes people pick up visual better in memory than trying to read it and trying to follow along. Definitely yes”

Food growing activity is an extension of learning, and more likely to be used as a means of developing skills, social and eating behaviours. (6)

“And I think that would have got us to the stage where we’d maybe encourage the children to eat them, eat it or cook it or, you know, examine it, play with it, whatever that might be. And I think that would have been interesting for some of the children.”

“The kids are coming home with some spinach and chard and parties and really excited to eat it because they’ve been part of the process of growing it. So, for me, that would be that it would be to the longevity of it and get it the end. Almost seeing something”.

Mix the old and the young giving a mixture of what we know.

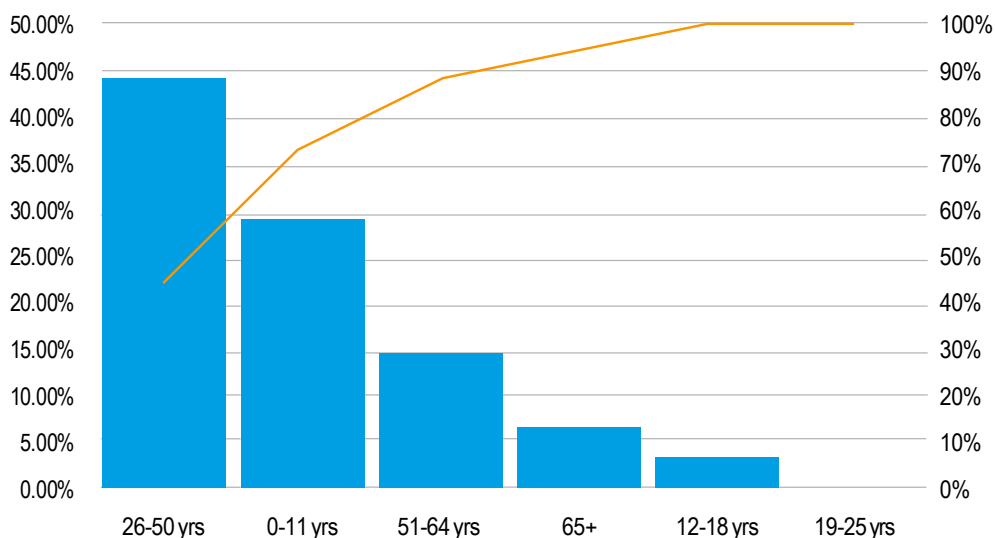
“Definitely tried things that they wouldn’t before. Some people were a bit like, oh I tried it once, don’t like it, you sort of have that discussion with them and you think, as time goes on and we produce some bits to grow and people see how easy it is, because we will incorporate the veg that we are growing into the recipes that we are giving parents then I think that that will make a difference. Sometimes it’s just not knowing where to go and people definitely tried things they wouldn’t have tried, for sure. In fact I think the children would need to try it more than once and they only really tried the stuff once.”

Including everyone

Growing activities such as gardening and sharing food produce, recipes, seeds, etc which involves the young and the old parents, and others from the wider community (community allotments, gardeners, and farmers) add important social, economic and cultural aspects to the experience of growing and eating food

(7)

Percentage age group of participants



The more children and parents are involved in decision-making around food growing and cooking experiences, the more likely it is that what they experience will reinforce positive messages about healthy eating and positive lifestyles. (8)

“Yes actually that would probably be quite good as we have tried that here you know at the youth club. We do like baking projects or making soups or I have done make your own pizzas and things with the kids, and the kids love it actually they just love getting their hands in about and doing that and if they get to eat it afterward, that’s even better. Yes, gosh, all for that sort of thing”

- Growing activity is an excellent way of enabling and empowering people to participate in and contribute to the community (9)

“Just the keenness of the people to take part to be fair, I just thought this is really good, it is up my street but I wasn’t too sure about anybody else but when I put the post up there was quite a few people and then more and more people came and they just seemed keen to be going away and getting their seeds and things so it was really good. So yes, just the uptake of it actually. I think if I had a bit longer to promote or to reach out to more of the groups and share it with more of the classes because we weren’t really, there was nobody here to do that I think there would be maybe even more uptake”

“They’ve planted things that we hope will come up next spring. And we’ve got a couple of sunflowers thriving outside. They’re just still standing despite all the storms. We’ve got various things like instructions that are in pot side.”

Growing activity is an excellent way of learning with family and friends by providing relevant skills and experience in an informal setting (10)

And, you know, lots of them were watering plants, lots of them were keeping an eye. A lot of them were planted. And I think the kind of responsiveness of your staff and cordon around allowing children to overwater and then deal with the consequences of that supply had been too much or why you shouldn’t really tidy pools of muddy water through the complex or whatever. I think the children learned a lot from it. And I think just being allowed to experiment is a huge benefit to their learning, but also to their kind of sense of self and what they relate to and their confidence and their general well-being.

Limitations

There were few limitations in the methodology: Community group interviews were limited to those that were able to be contacted.

Some of the pre-project questionnaires were not captured so it was difficult to tell how much impact or change from baseline to post project. However, some of the questions were asked.

5.0 Conclusion

Across the participant interviews, several themes for the project's future development emerged.

The future development of the project and its effectiveness in helping people to develop social and growing skills would benefit from being expanded across Aberdeen city.

The gardening outcome data from the Food Dignity case study, Team GROW project, and Growing Resilience feasibility pilots, confirm and expand findings from previous research which indicate that gardening improves health, produces nutritionally meaningful quantities of quality food, and provides essential cultural ecosystem services (such as recreation, cultural enrichment, and community building).⁸

Areas for future evaluation on the impacts of food growing will be to quantify and specify personal health changes of participants before the project and assessing relationships between growing productivity and outcomes, and further monitoring and evaluating community-level effects.

In the meantime, the growing evidence for multiple benefits of home and community food growing suggests enabling anyone who wishes to start growing some of their own food to begin with planting seeds. Information from questionnaire and interviews revealed that the project delivered its objective and achieved proposed outcomes (Improved mental health and wellbeing, improved dietary habits, new skills, health improvement opportunity, improved and strengthened partnership working).

Next steps

This evaluation report will be circulated to key stakeholders, funders and be made accessible to all participants.

The evaluation outcome will be discussed with partner organizations so that themes and key messages can be considered where appropriate.

Report will be shared on social media platforms and promoted via local empowerment groups platform and other relevant platforms.

References

1. https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/downloads/COVID_19_-_Food_Fund_-
2. Yost B & Chawla L (2009) Benefits of Gardening for Children. Denver [CO]: Children, Youth and Environments Centre for Research and Design, University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Centre
3. Barratt Hacking E, Scott WAH & Lee E (2010) Evidence of the Impact of Sustainable Schools. London: Department for Education [DCSF]
4. Qualitativecasestudy :https://www.academia.edu/32420108/Yin_Case_Study_Research_Design_and_Methods
5. Aberdeen growing strategy: <https://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-02/Granite%20City%20Growing%20Final.pdf>
6. Thematic analysis: https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007%2F978-1-4614-5583-7_311
7. GDPR 2018: <https://gdpr-info.eu/>
8. What gardens grow: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6372235>



The Keep Growing Aberdeen Seedling Sharing Project

Final Report | November 2020

Delivered by: Community food initiative North East of Scotland (CFINE), Tullos Community Garden, One Seed Forward, Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership (ACHSCP)

Coordinated by: Community Growing Development Worker (CGDW) CFINE

Project Evaluation led by: Health Improvement Officer Food & Health (HIO) ACHSCP