



COMMUNITY FOOD FOR THOUGHT

An evaluation of a Canolfan Plant Jig-So Children's Centre project



Evaluation of 'Community Food for Thought'


An EU LEADER funded Canolfan Plant Jig-So Children's Centre project

Executive summary


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September 2018

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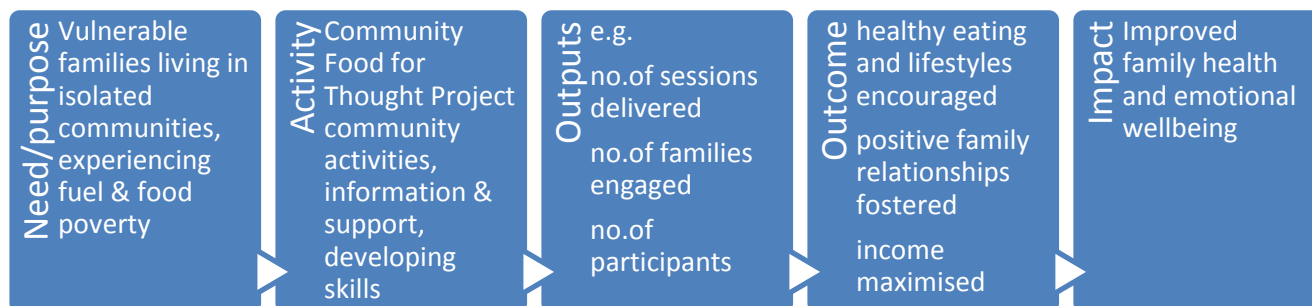
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In 2017 Canolfan Plant Jig-So Children's Centre (Jig-So) applied to Arwain Sir Benfro for funding to support their 'Community Food for Thought' (CFfT) project. The CFfT project set out to work with isolated families in four rural communities, utilising community halls and working with partners to tackle health challenges compounded by fuel and food poverty by engaging them in activities within their communities, providing information and support, and developing skills.

Using a simple 'Theory of Change' the project evaluation has identified what difference the project has made, what has gone well and where Jig-So can learn and improve.

Theory of change model:



The evaluation process has included:

- Collection of data/feedback from participants, staff, trainers and trustees
- Analysis of data and findings
- Compilation of an evaluation report
- Preparation of recommendations for future project activity

The project has worked with all generations within the family to improve health and emotional wellbeing by encouraging healthy eating and lifestyles; fostering positive relationships; and maximising income, thereby reducing stress and anxiety of those families living in rural poverty.

The Community Food for Thought project has delivered joined-up activity to isolated families in five rural communities, improving family health and emotional wellbeing and contributing to happier, healthier and more active children and families. It has also enabled specialist organisations and local businesses to reach those they would not otherwise access.

Key elements of Community Food for Thought most valued by participants included:

- Accessible and local – community based, therefore reducing the need to travel;
- Friendly, relaxed and safe environment;
- Opportunity to try new activities and healthy food;
- Informal and supportive approach to develop skills;
- Enabling the development of peer-to-peer networks (more relevant than formal), reducing isolation and loneliness;
- Understanding how to prepare healthy meals, and other household 'tips' on a budget;
- Welcoming, approachable and supportive staff, with access to a range of information.

Learning from the project included:

- 12 months too short to gain trust of some of those most isolated;
- Need to keep things simple – not be too ambitious;
- Planning ahead – community venues usually managed by volunteers so takes time to organise/contacting people not always easy; community venues / facilities will dictate what activities can be provided (awareness of individual buildings/facilities);
- Staff carrying out initial community engagement need particular skills and experience;
- Importance of having a system in place from the start of the project for data collection.
- For families, project boundaries are blurred and their needs can be met from more than one source.
- Sharing resources between projects (eg recipes from Cross-border kitchen) can be facilitated by Jig-So staff

Recommendations

Location/ understanding community – important that families are reached in their own communities, where they feel comfortable, where they can access venues without too much difficulty (or won't come). Be aware of, but maintain discretion about individual rural community dynamics,

Family-friendly and small group activity – provide informal opportunities in a non-threatening environment to experience new things and in which skills can be learnt and developed, while keeping children safe. Be aware of opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, and enabling informal support networks to be built ().

Lead in – importance of planning engagement, identifying key actors, using all available contacts and following. Seek opportunities for presentation and promotion with other groups eg WI / Meched y Wawr. Tease out skills that could be shared with others.

Intergenerational/ traditional skills sharing – provide 'upskilling' opportunities to people with relevant skills to enable them to become mentors/ deliver their knowledge to others. Support of staff to give individuals the confidence to share skills.

Timing of sessions - keep learning opportunities in short bursts/snippets as there is a small window of time to convey skills when families are together - need to keep simple.

Communication – try to use as many different types of communication, and provide a calendar as much in advance as possible. Look into group text messaging and other ways of reminding individuals about upcoming events (24/48hr notice).

Longer-term – seek to find funding that will cover longer term activity if it is to be meaningful. Be aware of the time needed to engage families and the need to establish a 'good reputation' if word of mouth is to happen

Complementary project working – continue to deliver a range of projects, that to most families come under the 'Jig-So' banner. Focus on the family needs first, and fit the funded projects around the family's needs. Share resources and knowledge.