



# 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

Sarah Hughes

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Canolfan Plant Jig-So Children's Centre  
Pwllhai  
Cardigan  
Ceredigion  
SA43 1DB

☎ 01239 615922

🌐 [www.jigso.wales](http://www.jigso.wales)

✉ office@jigso.wales

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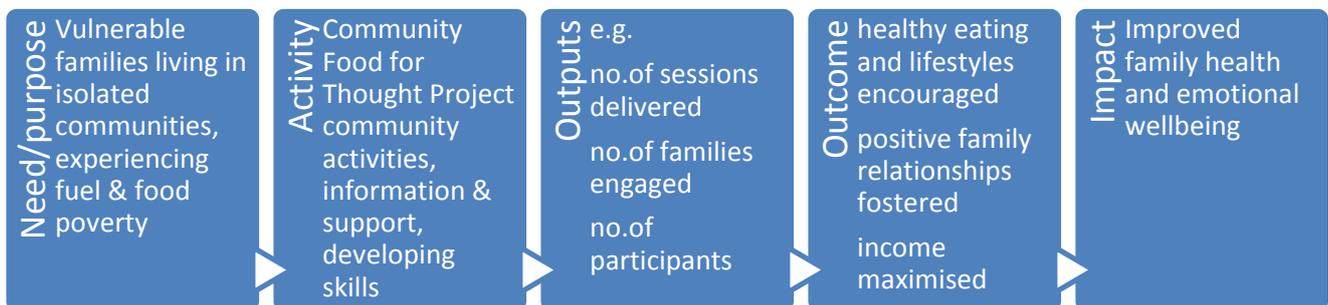
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## Executive summary

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.

## Introduction

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 vulnerable families in four rural communities, utilising community halls and working with partners to tackle health challenges compounded by fuel and food poverty as identified in the LEADER 2014 -2020 Arwain Sir Benfro Local Development Strategy (LDS). This would be done by engaging them in activities within their communities, providing information and support, and developing skills. The aim was to work 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. £40,195 LEADER funding was awarded towards the project ending in July 2018. The total CFfT project costs were anticipated to be £57,421.

The CFfT project fits with the LEADER LDS in that it sought to increase the capacity of local rural communities through a bottom up approach and was testing a new activity in the chosen areas. It met the LDS Priority Theme 3 'Exploring New ways of providing non-statutory local services' and Priority 1.2 'To improve access to information and fostering community networks'.

This project set out to target communities that are amongst the 10% most deprived in Wales in terms of access to services, where the lack of public transport is a real issue in preventing families in rural communities accessing services. It aimed to deliver a new service to communities in north Pembrokeshire both as an intergenerational project to tackle poverty and to test providing a new service locally where it did not duplicate or impact on any existing services. The CFfT project set out to pilot the project in four rural communities namely St. Dogmaels, Boncath, Cilgerran and Hermon.

The aim was to run 2 sessions per month in each community and engage with 12 families per location over the course of 15 months. The sessions would be focused around:

1. **Food Poverty and Food Waste** - The project planned to support local families living in food poverty to have healthy and nutritional meals including basic cookery skills and advice to produce healthy meals on a budget. The project sought to work with and source from local suppliers of produce and ensure the traceability of ingredients, working with the Love Food Hate Waste campaign and the FareShare Food Cloud to collect and distribute surplus food from Tesco's in Cardigan.
2. **Healthy Lifestyles** - The project planned to include fun activities bringing individual families together in a non-threatening environment to encourage and support families to become active and contribute to a healthy lifestyle for adults and children from an early age, building a sense of wellbeing.
3. **Maximising Income** - Targeting families that are perceived as 'hard to reach' and living in poverty, Jig-So planned to look at maximising incomes and ensure that families understand how to manage and control their own financial situation by maximising their benefits; increasing disposable income, financial capability and energy best deals. Turn2Us; Citizens Advice Bureau and other relevant organisations would be invited to sessions.

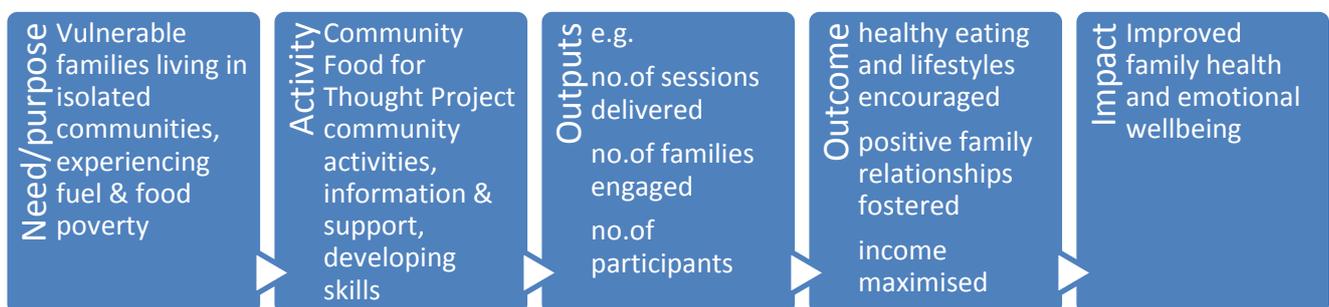
4. **Intergenerational Activities** - Grandparents often take on the caring responsibility for grandchildren for a variety of reasons and many feel isolated and do not participate in community activities such as Luncheon Clubs etc. due to this. The project planned to target Welsh speaking Grandparents and older people within the communities to volunteer their time. Other activities could involve exchange of skills for example: crochet; knitting; art and introduce new activities such as Internet safety.

The project planned to disseminate information about the project by promotion on the Jig-So website, through social media, distribution of printed material, and partner networks. It was anticipated that media releases would be generated across the lifetime of the project to explore opportunities for editorial content via local press, radio and TV.

**Why an evaluation?**

Evaluation is considered by the Jig-So trustees as an essential part of project management and the costs associated with carrying out an evaluation was included as part of the project budget. This was intended to support Jig-So Board of Trustees and management staff to evaluate the impact of project delivery. 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 has produced a report to funders; will support Jig-So efforts to become more effective and provide recommendations to attract further funding if appropriate; improve communications; and motivate staff and volunteers.

Evidence was gathered to understand how the project has targetted vulnerable families living in isolated communities, engaging them in activities within their communities, providing information and support and developing skills, thereby decreasing isolation and addressing local needs, and how successful this has been.

**Methodology**

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

Session feedback forms collected by project staff have been analysed. In addition, bilingual questionnaires (blank copy attached in Appendix 1) were circulated to those who attended the final project celebration. 18 completed questionnaires were returned and the information collated and analysed. Full results are shown in Appendix 2. Three trustees were also interviewed. Observation was undertaken and informal feedback was received from those who had received support from the project, during four sessions attended by the evaluator. The opportunity to speak to two of the trainers and gain their feedback was also taken.

The sessions attended by the evaluator included one in each of the locations identified: Eglwysrwrw (replaced Cilgerran for reasons discussed later in the document), Hermon, Boncath and St Dogmaels. These have provided useful information/ feedback to understand the positive aspects of the project and help shape other future project activity, as well as highlight areas that might benefit from being approached differently.

Findings and discussion have focussed on:

- **Activities and outputs** - what has been delivered, when and to whom (and how satisfied beneficiaries were with outputs);
- **outcomes** - what outcomes have been achieved (including additional unexpected outcomes), for whom and under what circumstances (also intended outcomes that have not been achieved);
- **processes** - information about how outputs delivered, what worked particularly well, or why it didn't work.

## Findings and Discussion

### Project Activity

A total of 99 project sessions have been supported by the Community Food for Thought project, with a total number of 141 participants over the project as a whole. 63 families have attended at least one of the 99 sessions held as part of the project.

#### Number of sessions delivered

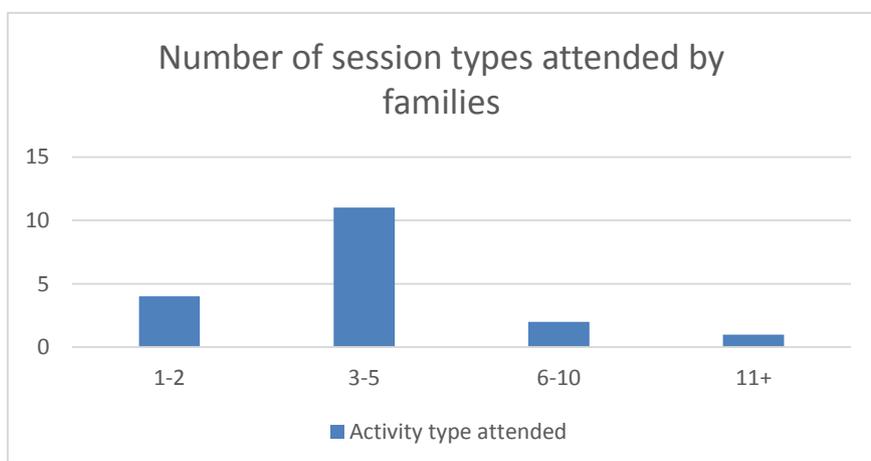
Location	Food Poverty and Food Waste	Healthy Lifestyles	Maximising Income	Intergenerational activities	Total number of sessions*
Hermon	6	3	2	11	22
Cilgerran	4	2	3	2	11
St Dogmaels	11	4	5	6	26
Boncath	8	10	2	3	23
Eglwysrw	5	8	2	2	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>99</b>

\*Does not include those cancelled by Jig-So, but does include those where no-one was in attendance

Location	Number of different families attending**
Hermon	14
Cilgerran	10
St Dogmaels	36
Boncath	19
Eglwysrw	19

\*\* some families attended more than one location

Initially the project ran fortnightly sessions in four communities, using community venues: Cilgerran Hall, Canolfan Hermon, Boncath Hall and St Thomas' Church Hall, St Dogmaels. During the course of the project, Eglwysrw replaced Cilgerran and the Memorial Hall replaced St Thomas' Church Hall in St Dogmaels (reasons discussed below).



Most families who responded to the questionnaire had attended between 3 and 5 different session types, although one respondent and her family had attended 11.

Alongside staff, a range of skills have been demonstrated by local businesses and organisations for example Skills for Well-being, Teacups and Treasures, Deli Delights, Cardigan Bay Fish, SPAN Arts, Movin' Monkeez and Rugby Tots. Two sessions held at Eglwysrwrw and St Dogmaels respectively were engagement days where a range of partner organisation's representatives attended. These included Citizen's Advice Bureau, Dyfed Powys Police, Mid and West Wales Fire Service, Pembrokeshire Community Connectors and the Pembrokeshire Family Information Service. A further two fun days (not counted in the figures) were also held in St. Dogmaels as part of the project.

Sessions were focused around four themes:

### **Food Poverty and Food Waste**

The project has supported local families living in food poverty to have healthy and nutritional meals and snacks (especially during school holidays as many rely in part on food supplied by schools, either free school meals or breakfast/after school clubs). It has delivered basic cookery skills, alongside some more advanced preparation and presentation skills.

Regular advice from staff has been given to support the production of healthy meals on a budget. Healthy food, particularly seasonal fruit and vegetables have been available to taste enabling children and parents/carers to explore new flavours without having to commit to a purchase that may not be then eaten. Sessions delivered by staff and supported by peer-to-peer discussions have included meal planning (e.g. batch cooking), smart shopping, budgeting and basic health messages, understanding food labelling, understanding sugar levels, the importance of 5-a-day and what counts, to ensure that parents also understand the link between childhood obesity and poverty when healthy food is less accessible.

The project has worked with and sourced ingredients and produce from local suppliers. These have included Cardigan Bay Fish, Treasures and Teacups and Deli Delights.

The project has worked with the Love Food Hate Waste officer, Ailsa Guard. Jig-So have an agreement with FareShare Food Cloud to collect surplus food from Tesco's and has been able to use some of this produce at sessions and also distribute to families in need. Jig-So works closely with the Cardigan Foodbank and has made referrals to the PATCH project in Pembrokeshire.

## Cardigan Bay Fish Case study

The evaluator attended a session in Eglwysrwr Old School Community Centre and was able to observe activities and group interaction. The Hall was set up with three activities for children – blocks, small bouncy castle, colouring, and drinks were available for parents and children at all times. In attendance were six parents, one grandparent, seven children (including one baby) and two members of staff, as well as the trainer and evaluator.



Mandy Walters from Cardigan Bay Fish led a session on local, sustainable and affordable healthy produce: how to prepare (dress) crab from Cardigan Bay, and make crab and salmon fishcakes (salmon from the Teifi river). Mandy provided a simple and affordable fishcake making demonstration, and provided edible crab meat (brown and white) tasting, mackerel pate tasting, salmon tasting, spider crab meat tasting. Children were able to take part in activities while parents/carers asked questions and learnt skills with Mandy. One parent commented: “nice that once I start to wean my son, it’s a meal we can eat as a family – my daughter and us all together”. Another commented: “time to learn something new, but in a relaxed environment”

Mandy had brought sea themed colouring sheets for children and SeaFish recipe leaflets for parents to take away. All went home with a crab cake and fish cake to cook and try.

The session broke after 40 mins for children to have a fruit snack prepared by staff (lots of choice, colourful, child size bites) – children were encouraged to choose items and put into individual pots to try new flavours. This was followed by informal opportunities for parents and children to go up and speak individually or in pairs to Mandy (less intimidating) and the evaluator observed parents talking amongst themselves, but also heard peer-to-peer support and encouragement: “might have the confidence to try that [*crab dressing*] now”



Parent

Other feedback gathered from participants included:  
“location really good as I don’t drive”

“live in Crymych – been to Hermon, Boncath, Eglwysrwr”

“like coming to these sessions – know that the children will be safe, looked after”

Feedback gathered from the trainer included – “I welcome the opportunity to share ‘local produce’: healthy food – fish – fresh and simple – with parents/carers with young children. I want to show it doesn’t have to be expensive. We are currently promoting the Wales-wide ‘Year of the Sea’ to demonstrate to people what seafood’s available on their doorstep and how to prepare it – it’s good to raise awareness”.

## Healthy Lifestyles

The project has provided a series of taster sessions for parents and/or grandparents with babies/toddlers to learn how engaging in activities together in a non-threatening environment can not only be fun but also to give families the confidence to help themselves. The focus for the sessions has been to encourage and support families to become active and stay well. As well as physical activity, the creative arts have been used to promote wellbeing, and several sessions have focussed on preventative measures for family health and wellbeing. Taster sessions led by trainers have included Rugby Tots, Movin' Monkeez, Skills for wellbeing and SPAN Arts botanical printing and mask making. At a creative session in Boncath, one parent commented : "I have enjoyed having a bit of time to be creative; a relaxing activity to do with my daughter". Community safety was also covered and the local Police Community Support Officer came to sessions to talk about various topics including road safety and internet scams.

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### Rugby Tots

Rugby Tots run fun, structured play sessions to take children on a journey of sporting imagination with engaging and energetic coaches supporting them every step of the way whilst teaching how to catch, pass, kick, run with the ball and play as part of a team.



John from Rugby Tots Carmarthenshire provided taster sessions for families to experience the activities, with a discount offered to those who wished to join a more regular class.



Several parents' feedback comments stated that they and their children had enjoyed rugby tots the most.

"Me and my little boy loved rugby tots! It is such a good way to get them socialising and active with other children, and the instructor was so good and patient, even with the younger children that couldn't really understand the instructions! Rugby tots was such a lovely group to be part of."

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The SPAN Arts trainer provided feedback to the evaluator at a Hermon event which involved a stroll down a village lane with several families to collect plant materials, and then activities in the Canolfan. Parents and children created a mandala on the floor (out of plant materials), as well as pressing collected materials into air drying clay. Parents had enjoyed a gentle stroll 'on their doorstep' which was free. One participant commented: "it's a welcome opportunity to be creative as a group".

Feedback gathered from the trainer included: “I really welcome the opportunity for SPAN to engage with young families – it’s always hard to find funding to deliver workshops to small groups – so great to be invited into rural areas. From experience elsewhere, I know how important it is for them to find time in their busy schedules to come and have some ‘me time’ – mentally some ‘switch off time’ to be creative but learn new skills in a relaxing, family orientated environment.”

## **Maximising Income**

Families have been provided with information to support them to maximise incomes and understand how best to manage and control their own financial situation by maximising their benefits; increasing disposable income, financial capability and energy best deals. Information and informal support has been available at all sessions, and specific topics have been delivered by Turn2Us and Citizens Advice Bureau staff, for example their ‘Warm Homes’ initiative.

In addition, the relaxed environment of the sessions has enabled peer-to-peer sharing of ‘top tips’, in particular using online and social media to keep up-to-date with the latest offers, getting value for money and local shopping knowledge.

Due to the small nature of the groups, several participants have also been able to speak to Jig-So staff individually and in confidence, when a potential crisis point has arisen in their lives. Staff reported that they were able to support each participant to overcome a particular issue, both through short-term solutions (for example providing a food parcel), and identifying longer-term solutions and organisational support to address steps that hopefully mean a crisis point will be averted in future.

A participant, who became a Jig-So volunteer during the course of the project, sharing her practical experience, commented:

“I very much enjoyed the sessions with the Jig-So Leader project.

Getting to help with sharing hints and tips I’ve picked up was very rewarding, and I know that for myself and my daughter we find the social aspect invaluable.

I do hope to see these sessions again as they are such a fabulous resource to lots of people in the community.”

## **Intergenerational Activities**

Sessions have been organised for all ages supporting intergenerational learning. Activities have been aimed at building skills for parents/carers, as well as providing enjoyable opportunities for children. Even the practice of sitting together as a group, eating and having time to talk (while children were safe and entertained) were valued by participants. Rhian Green of Mudiad Meithrin gave welsh language ‘taster sessions’ including basic conversation skills and singing welsh nursery rhymes.

Peer-to-peer learning has been a key part of the skills exchange, enabling familiarisation via hands-on and practical learning, (for example trusted and recommended website tools) and the establishing of informal networks to take place. Staff, working in partnership with Bookstart, Bookstrust Cymru have been able to share the pleasure of reading and stories

with participants as well as distributing the Bookstart packs to families. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) sessions were also part of the programme.

Staff and volunteers have been encouraged to assist with play through Welsh songs, nursery rhymes and traditional games, led by Mudiad Meithrin's Rhian Green. Other activities have involved an exchange of skills such as sewing and the introduction of new activities and services, for example Internet use and safety. The approach to sewing was to do something fun (Christmas stockings) and by learning a simple technique such as sewing a button onto something nice, participants would then have a skill for practical use, for example mend and repair. Unfortunately due to reasons beyond the control of the project, the sewing sessions did not develop as anticipated, and may be worth revisiting in future.

A fun day for all ages held in St Dogmaels enabled families to come together in an enjoyable and creative way. Quotes from participants included:

- “We've had a fab day, kids really enjoyed meeting up with friends and meeting new people. They enjoyed all the different activities – something for all of them and with the age range of 12 to 5 years it is often hard to find something for them all to do in one place. They all found the magician funny and entertaining and loved their balloon creations. Lunch was yummy as usual.”
- “Brilliantly organised. Children had loads of fun. Lots to do. Thank you”
- “What a fabulous day we have all had. The children have had a variety of fun activities to do all day! The magic show was superb, the jewellery making was so much fun and there were things to do for all age ranges! A big up to the Jig-So team for organising a fab fun filled day.”
- “An absolutely amazing day for the grandchildren and adults too. All the children have had an exciting and fun-filled day. Thank you so much for putting on such a special day.”

### **St Dogmaels**

The evaluator attended the last project session – a celebration event to which all past participants were invited. The hall was laid out for play (caterpillar tunnel, soft play, and colouring), information stands, and a healthy buffet lunch which was followed by entertainment and movement (dancing). Jig-So staff and trustees were in attendance (not just project staff). Eighteen families were represented and over 50 people sat down to eat food together at a large U-shaped table. The buffet included food made from healthy recipes that had been made previously in various sessions. The evaluator observed even the youngest children being encouraged to sit down to a meal and trying new and different foods. All adults (parents, carers, grandparents) who participated were presented with a 'Building skills' certificate recognising the activities they had undertaken.

## Project Outputs

The following outputs were identified in the LEADER funding application. Column one shows the particular indicator, column two shows the anticipated result at the start of the project and actual achievement at the end of the project is recorded in the third column.

Indicator	Expected Achievement	Actual Achievement	Comments
Number of networks established	4	0	5 informal networks were established amongst individuals attending each community venue/ location, but these are unlikely to continue as 'formal networks'
Number of jobs safeguarded through supported project	0.5	0.5	Additional hours (existing staff)
Number of pilot activities undertaken/supported	1	1	1 new initiative
Number of information dissemination actions/ promotional and/or marketing activities to raise awareness of the LDS and/or its projects	4	8	Includes: Posters/flyers Social media (facebook) Jig-So website Staff/friends/word of mouth Direct email to contacts Presentation Certificates Attendance at others events/ newsletters Media releases
Number of participants	144	141	63 families
Staff trained	2	2	12 volunteers involved
Volunteers trained	24		with project (assisted with session delivery)
Number of training sessions	12		

## Staffing

Two part-time members of staff have been employed to deliver the project, managed by Jig-So's Executive Manager. As is often the case with voluntary organisations, the securing of short term funding has meant that project staff members have changed during the course of the project. At least one of the officers at any one time has been a welsh speaker, enabling the project to deliver bilingually. Staff were responsible for engaging with families and other local providers, delivery partners and school staff where appropriate, as well as co-ordinating the delivery of each session. Staff received a range of training as part of their professional development (list below) and delivered Bookstart, Book Trust Cymru resources to families. Other Jig-So staff with particular skills (for example sensory play) and Jig-So resources (for example play equipment) were also available to this project when required.

### Training that project staff received:

- Positive Behaviour
- British Sign Language
- Safeguarding
- Home Fire Safety
- Sensory training
- Yoga and mindfulness
- Walk Leader
- Mental Health First Aid
- Autism Awareness
- Positive touch

It was clear from the questionnaire responses and other feedback gathered that the staff resource is the key aspect valued by those who have received support, alongside the session provision. This was not only in respect of hosting the session, but they were also identified as welcoming, friendly and approachable, reliable and respected:

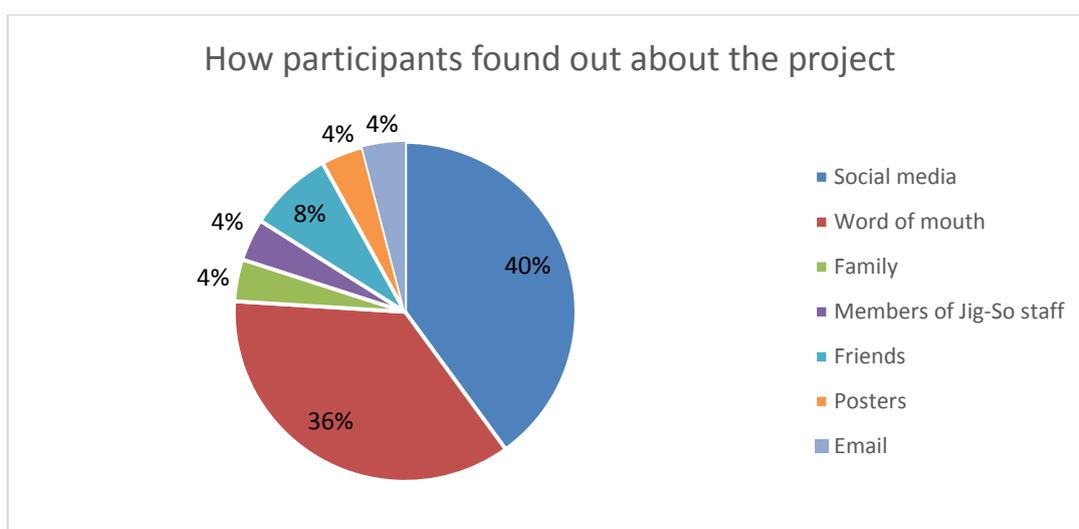
- “Thank you Jig-So. Brilliant team. They are very welcoming and encouraging.”
- “The Jig-So staff are always helpful, attentive and provide encouragement. They go above and beyond their duty at all times. Thank you!!!”

### Volunteering

12 volunteers have taken part in the project, helping to run sessions, assisting with preparation of refreshments, supporting families to participate and sharing experiences.

### Promotion of sessions, project and LDS.

Respondents to the final questionnaire clearly identified social media and word of mouth as the most used means of finding out about the project.



All publicity material was produced bilingually and carried EU, LEADER and Arwain Sir Benfro logos, as did marketing information used on social media. Staff referred to the funding source when promoting the project.

## Project Budget

Item of expenditure	Anticipated Cost	Actual Cost
Staff	£23,578.08	£22,740.09
Trainers	£1,600.00	£2366.88
Literature and Marketing	£1,200.00	£603.80
Hire of Halls	£3,840.00	£5836.50
Cost healthy food / activities	£1,728.00	£3116.48
Evaluation	£4,712.50	£3930.00
Volunteer Time	£17,226.00	£9944.89
Overheads @ 15%	£3,536.71	£3411.11
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>£57,421.29</b>	<b>£51,949.75</b>

£36,365.18 funding was received from Arwain Sir Benfro (EU LEADER) and matched by Pembrokeshire County Council's Families First funding and volunteer time in kind. The spend was £5471.54 less than anticipated in the initial budget, mainly due to a reduction in volunteer time. More of the budget was spent on hall hire, trainers and activities as a greater number of sessions were delivered than first anticipated.

## Project processes and outcomes

### Project promotion

In this project's case, social media has been a well-used mechanism for people to find out about what is going on locally and Jig-So's facebook page enables this to happen. However, it cannot be relied on solely as a means of communication and several feedback sheets reflected the fact that they had only heard about a session a day or two before. Word of mouth is often a powerful community tool, but requires community engagement well in advance of the sessions. Sessions were free and open to all families in any particular areas, and that was widely welcomed by the participants. However one consideration identified by staff was that a free session meant that people don't always commit and while flexibility is important, it makes session planning less easy to manage from a staff point of view.

### Community engagement

Community engagement is important to understand the individual community's dynamics, as well as enabling complementary activity to be delivered and to gain wider community support. To gain the trust of families who may be disadvantaged and in need, time is needed and establishing a regular and familiar environment, local and accessible to families, is key. One of the trustees reflected on the fact that this project had demonstrated that a year was too short to be in a new area and with a new project – getting to know families, finding venues that worked took six months plus, and it had felt that the project was 'just getting going' when it was time to wind it up.

It was apparent that in St.Dogmaels (where Jig-So has previously held some sessions) numbers attending were greater – although this might also be down to the fact that it is a larger community than the others in Pembrokeshire. Linking to already trusted and non-threatening communication channels can also enable engagement. A positive example of this was where one community venue had been proactive through its' own communication channels, and another community through the local school, which engaged several participants.

Engagement work requires identifying key community champions, and while most are usually positive, some individuals can also stifle engagement. Staff identified two communities where, having spoken to key individuals such as school and meithrin staff to inform them of proposed activity (as well as ensure no duplication would occur), it became evident that the session details had not been disseminated. Reaching the 'right person' had proved difficult in one case and clarity of the message had been identified as an issue. On reflection it became clear that in one community other actions (unconnected with the project) had had an impact on the perception of the project.

### **Language**

Use of appropriate language was flagged up by staff and trustees as also having had an impact on engaging new families. European and grant funding language is often unclear to potential participants. Jig-So staff had promoted the 'LEADER' funding, and one individual had fed back that initially she had not felt the project sessions were for her as she was not a leader. One participant commented that she felt there was too much information / writing on the promotional material, and that short, repeat reminders would help as she need lots of notice.

### **Timing of sessions**

Several different aspects of timing were identified as having an impact on the project. These included:

- **Time of day** (clashes with nap, other activities) As all families are different, 'nap time' for all children could not be avoided and therefore had an impact on whether families would attend or not. Where other activities happened in and around the session, the regular time slot was chosen not to clash with other known activities e.g. Cylch Meithrin. However one-off events also had an impact on session attendance, for instance school sports day where family members went to support older children and siblings.
- **Repetition of sessions** (weekly, fortnightly etc.) Trustees, staff and participants all identified this as having had an impact on project attendance. Initially sessions had been run fortnightly, but this had not helped families remember which week the session was running. Families (particularly those who may lead less structured lives) struggled to remember which week the session was on. In the last three months of the project, trustees decided that sessions should be delivered weekly, which was received positively by participants and resulted in repeat attendance. One participant commented that a weekly (or even monthly) session made it much easier to remember: "better now routine – weekly best as get to know that "every Monday" Jig-So for example".

- **Session length** (short bursts) One participant identified the family friendly sessions as a different (but welcome) approach to ‘upskilling’. Although staff assisted with children, providing age appropriate activities, they did not provide a crèche, and therefore the time available to ‘learn’ was limited to short snippets with an understanding from the trainer that parents would be also responsible for their children. Participants appreciated the flexible and friendly approach to learn new skills, in a manageable way. Staff commented that ‘upskilling’ was potentially quite difficult while continuing with parental responsibility, but that the sessions with short bite size pieces, had been effective.

### **Small group activities**

By providing sessions in local venues, groups were generally small and informal. These spaces provided space for peer-to-peer support (as witnessed by the evaluator and staff), opportunities to meet new people, thereby developing community peer networks. An example of this was when one parent was able to demonstrate to others various online voucher code and comparison web sites that she uses to try to get the best deals on goods and services. This was accompanied by discussions on internet safety and access.

Comments made by participants about what they enjoyed most about a session, included:

- “good opportunity to socialise with others and different ages” mother of home-schooled child
- “I love coming to leader sessions a chance for me to meet new people”
- “speaking and meeting new people”
- “building skills and making friends”
- “meeting new people”

From a trainer’s perspective the ability to work with a small group enabled them to tailor sessions, reach into communities they might not otherwise deliver in, and in one case, gain confidence. A fledgling enterprise owner (and past Jig-So parent) had not thought about sharing her skills with others and with the encouragement of Jig-So staff delivered sessions that were well received, and enabled her to develop an additional aspect to her enterprise.

### **Informal and taster sessions**

Sessions provided through the project followed Jig-So’s regular family friendly approach. Informal learning opportunities were provided with demonstrations, information and practical skills sharing, within a community space. Participants were given access to try new healthy foods, while talking together about best budget options and peer-led solutions, for example swapping for seasonal and cheaper options (bulk, non-branded). Taster sessions allowed participants to explore what activities and food they might enjoy, without having to commit to spending their often limited funds. In addition, the informal while professional approach lent itself to individuals feeling able to ask for help. Staff spoke about their contact with one family facing food poverty, where attendance at a session had meant that a crisis had been avoided. Food had been accessed for a child, and the parent’s anxiety had been reduced. Comments received from participants included:

- “time to learn something new, but in a relaxed environment”
- “great – really enjoy Jig-So sessions”
- “like coming to these sessions – know that the children will be safe, looked after”

- “I had a wonderful time decorating cakes with Rhian [session leader] whilst Charlotte [staff] decorated cupcakes with my girl. I would love to do this again and learn some more new skills. Thank you.”
- “friendly trainer made it easy to learn

### **Community Venues**

A key aspect of the project was to provide sessions locally, thereby addressing participants' lack of transport, and reducing rural disadvantage. Access to sessions was enabled for several individuals who did not drive, or have access to a vehicle. Without public transport available, they clearly valued the fact that the sessions were held in their local community. Initially the project ran fortnightly sessions in four communities, using community venues: Cilgerran Hall, Canolfan Hermon, Boncath Hall and St Thomas' Church Hall, St Dogmaels. Due to poor attendance and other community specific factors, along with a growing demand in Eglwysrwrw, trustees decided not to continue with Cilgerran and move to Eglwysrwrw Old School Community Centre instead. Due to the limited size of the kitchen available in St Thomas' Church Hall, the Jig-So trustees decided to move the project to larger premises in St Dogmaels: the Memorial Hall.

The community venues chosen were informal and known to participants new to Jig-So, providing familiarity and potentially breaking down a 'barrier'. Comments made by attendees included:

- “don't drive so wouldn't go anywhere else – brilliant to have it in the community”
- “Important to socialise in own community”

Staff reflected that in terms of project management, availability of venues and their resources limited what could be provided, for example St Dogmaels where Jig-So initially hosted sessions in St Thomas' Church Hall but it became apparent that it was too small (because of numbers and what was needed for skills development). As a result the sessions moved to the Memorial Hall for use of their kitchen. The lack of Wi-Fi availability in rural halls was also identified as a consideration for some trainers, for example if wanting to give presentations. Only Canolfan Hermon had Wi-Fi.

**Volunteers** – during the course of the project, volunteers were mainly drawn from those already engaged with Jig-So. It was hoped to attract members from the wider community to become involved in the sessions, sharing skills intergenerationally. Accessing local community groups, for instance Merched y Wawr and the Women's Institute as originally anticipated, took longer than expected as they have meeting schedules planned yearly in advance. Therefore the short length of the project has meant that staff were unable to make the most of these opportunities, especially in the early stages of the project. In addition, it became clear that to support individuals to become mentors or share skills takes time and encouragement - an example was given of a grandparent, a retired mechanic, who might have shared some basic car safety checks – oil level, tyre pressures etc. but who did not feel confident to take a session (he has since been persuaded to do so as part of a different project).

## **Project outcomes summary**

Participants, staff, trainers and trustees have identified that project delivery has resulted in the following outcomes:

- Supported community networking (informal)
- Engaged 'hard-to-reach' and isolated families
- Improved social inclusion of participating families
- Improved family nutrition and wellbeing of participating families
- Highlighted potential reasons for childhood obesity amongst participating families
- Built self-esteem of participating families
- Fostered positive relationships amongst participating families
- Enabled informed choices by participating families
- Reduced financial and emotional stress of participating families
- Increased financial knowledge and budgeting of participating families
- Maximised income for participating families living in poverty
- Created opportunities for participating families to use Welsh language outside the school environment (and bilingually)
- Increased school readiness and learning of children in participating families
- Increased opportunities for family activity outside the school
- Increased social integration of vulnerable and isolated children
- Reduced safeguarding issues by avoidance of family crisis points, hence increasing safety of children
- Encouraged skills development and identified training and employment opportunities amongst participating adults
- Highlighted the issues of local food poverty
- Tackled child poverty issues at a local level
- Reduced loneliness of isolated people

Feedback from the questionnaires identified a number of changes made by participants, as well as those planned for the future.

### **Healthy eating and lifestyles encouraged**

Changes already made by participants included:

- "More activities with my girl as well as cooking different types of healthy meals"
- "Myself and my son have been exercising more through the Rugby tots, swimming and Movin' Monkeez. Also learned great cake making and decorating skills"
- "Eating healthier foods"
- "Eating more healthy"
- "Willing to cook more"

Planned changes in future included:

- "Even more exercise, cooking from scratch, attend more sessions with Jig-So - as I will be on maternity leave I will have more chance to attend"
- "Preparation of healthy meals"

## **Positive family relationships fostered**

Changes already made by participants included:

- “Make time for crafts and play”
- “Positive attitude to all aspects of life”
- “Try out more activities at home”

Planned changes in future included:

- “Attend more Jig-So activities”
- “Try to get involved with more activities (joining Rugby Tots)”

## **Income maximised**

Planned changes in future included:

- “Defnyddio’r cyngor i baratoi bwyd ar gyllideb” [*use the advice to prepare meals on a budget*]
- “Go back to work with the skills I have gained”

## **Additional outcomes**

Other outcomes identified by participants included:

- Facilitating peer-to-peer networking (building community connections)
- One family identified the group session as an opportunity to mix with other people and develop language skills (for their toddler), as they only spoke Welsh in the home, and were therefore given the opportunity to hear English.
- Skills gained could be used to gain employment
- Opportunities to mix bilingually

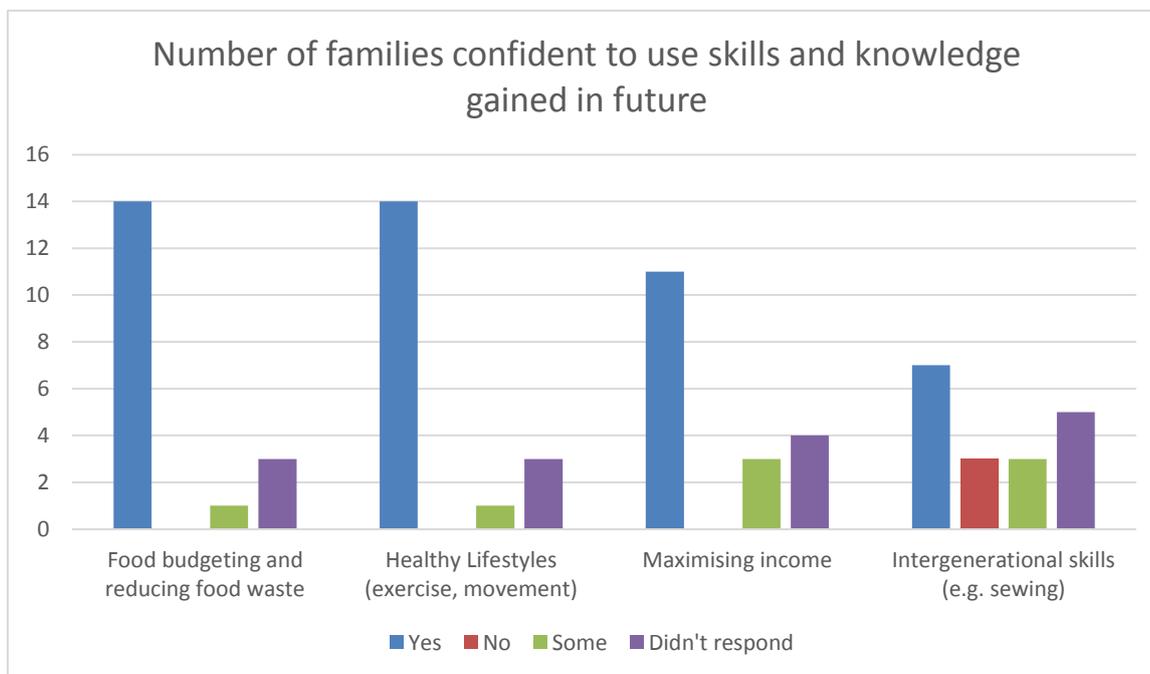
Trustees and staff identified the following additional outcomes:

- Over time, a number of families gained confidence and accessed other Jig-So initiatives. Five families accessed the Cross-border kitchen project, and nine adults took part in the Active Inclusion project as a result of being engaged through the LEADER project;
- Provision of exotic and soft fruit introduced new and healthy flavours and textures to families, and they were able to take leftover ‘fruit boxes’ home;
- Several participants have gone on to become regular Jig-So volunteers, supporting other families;
- As a result of a demand identified but not delivered by the project, six parents attended an Emergency First Aid course funded by Jig-So and received an accredited qualification;
- Feedback has helped to develop the Jig-So strategy for outreach work in North Pembrokeshire, and demonstrated need which has informed the development of new Jig-So services;
- Providing opportunities and developing individuals’ confidence of those who may have a skill to share, supports fledgling enterprises in the local community and develops self-worth, but takes time.

## Project Impact

### Improved family health and emotional wellbeing

Participating families have identified a number of ways in which the project has had a positive impact on their future lives. Those responding to the questionnaire clearly felt that skills they had gained, would benefit them and their families in future.



While not enough time has passed to judge the longer term impact of the project, feedback received gave an indication from the majority of participants that they would continue to apply the knowledge and skills gained. Many of the feedback forms showed people's appreciation for the opportunities provided for them and positive responses to what had been delivered. While each element was relatively straightforward, enabling those living in isolation to come together locally, built connections and friendships that will have lasting impacts on families' lives. Simple steps from moving more, top tips for food budgeting, 'bite-size' training to develop skills, to accessing, tasting and choosing fruit and other healthy food were all reported to be felt within families' grasp. These small, sustainable changes to lifestyles will lead to improved health and wellbeing of families.

Importantly Jig-So continues to operate through other funding streams, enabling families to access other Jig-So services, for example the Cross-border kitchen and Children's Centre in Cardigan. In the immediate future Jig-So plans to continue to support families in the St Dogmaels and Eglwysrwrw areas through its Big Lottery funded project. This will meet demand for further activity that has been shown from existing participants and both communities are accessible by bus. Individual families in the Boncath, Cilgerran and Hermon areas have been encouraged, and are able, to attend Jig-So sessions in Cardigan, as well as the two Pembrokeshire locations.

**Value for money**

In the field of family support, a relatively small amount of money has enabled two part-time staff to deliver project activity to a significant number of rural and isolated families over 12 months. It has supported community venues (through the payment of hire costs) and local producers and enterprises that have provided goods and services to the project. It has also engaged public and third sector organisations, enabling them to access families and adding value to their projects and outcomes. Experience and learning from the project will be taken forward into future Jig-So activity.

## Conclusion

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 provided capacity for 'hand-holding' and support, and 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 (for example recipes from Cross-border kitchen project) can be facilitated by Jig-So staff.

Several participants identified activities, support and information required in future. Funding will continue to be sought by the Trustees to cover new and emerging aspects of work, not yet funded through other initiatives. Families will continue to be supported through other Canolfan Plant Jig-So Children's Centre projects and learning from this project will help inform the Trustees' decisions.

## Recommendations

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

**Small group activity** – provide a non-threatening environment in which skills can be learnt. Be aware of opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, building self-esteem and confidence and enabling informal support networks to be built.

**Lead in** – be aware of the importance of planning engagement, identifying key actors, using all available contacts and following up. 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 to short bursts/snippets as there is a small window of time to convey skills when families are together.

**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 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.

**Family friendly** – continue to provide informal opportunities for skills development (not a formal learning environment), keeping children safe and parents/carers still able to learn new skills and experience new things (need to keep simple).

**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.

**Appendix 1**  
Blank final questionnaire

## Community Food for Thought project

1. How did you first find out about the project (e.g. posters, flyer, social media, word of mouth)

.....

2. What activities have you undertaken as part of the project? (Tick all that apply)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> First Aid Talk                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Energy Best Deals                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Movin' Monkeez                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Turn2Us                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Baking & Cake decorating                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sewing machine skills                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Bookstart (reading)                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rugby Tots                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Home Fire Safety                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Early Language & Sensory Play             | <input type="checkbox"/> Cooking & Healthy eating                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal safety (PCSO)                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Fish filleting and affordable meals      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jewellery making                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Food preparation on a budget             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Circus skills                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Other.....                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> St Johns Ambulance                        | .....   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Creative skills (e.g. botanical printing) | .....   |

3. As a result of attending any of the sessions above, what changes (if any) have you made in your day to day living?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

4. What changes (if any) do you hope to make in the future?

.....  
 .....  
 .....

5. Do you feel confident to use skills and knowledge gained in the future? (Tick)

Food Budgeting & Reducing Food Waste	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Some
Healthy Lifestyles (exercise, movement)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Some
Maximising income	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Some
Intergenerational skills e.g. sewing	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Some

6. In future would you attend further sessions provided by Jig-So in your area? (Tick one)

- Yes       No       Maybe

Any suggestions for future activities?.....  
 .....  
 .....

7. Any other comments?.....  
 .....  
 .....

*Thank you*

## **Appendix 2**

Full results of final questionnaire

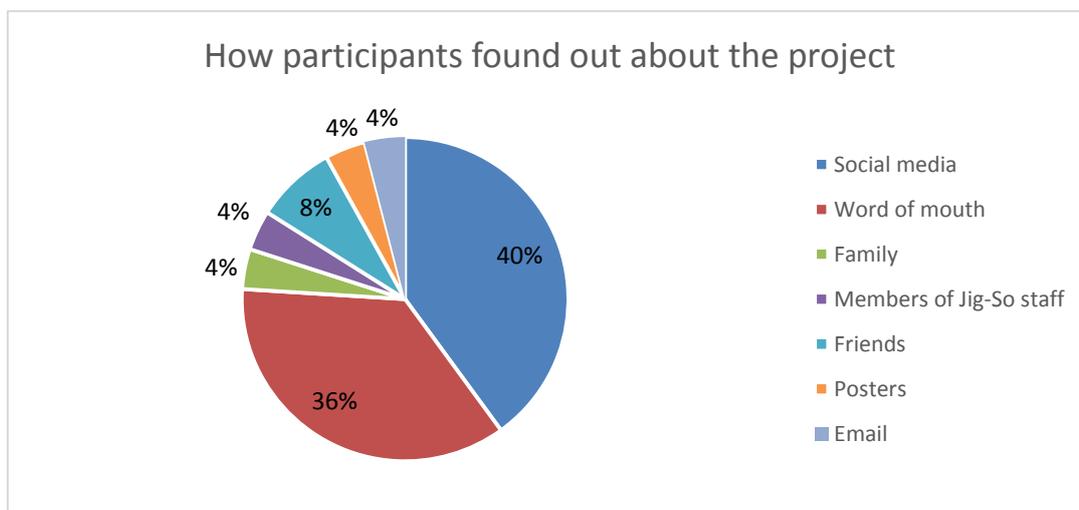
### CFfT Questionnaire data captured

18 final Questionnaires returned (18 different family groups)

1. How did you first find out about the project?

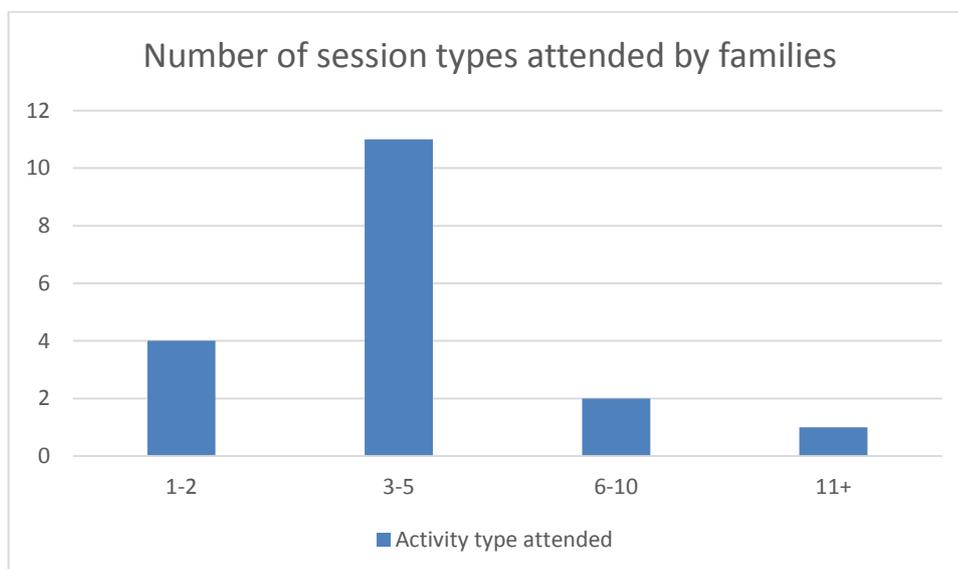
Social media (10)	Friends (2)
Word of mouth (9)	Family (1)
Members of Jig-So staff (1)	Posters (1)
Email (via Canolfan Hermon) (1)	

Some responses were 'social media and word of mouth'



2. What activities have you undertaken as part of the project? (does not include repeat attendance at same session type)

No. of session types	1-2	3-5	6-10	11+
No. of families	4	11	2	1



3. As a result of attending any of the sessions above, what changes (if any) have you made in your day to day living?

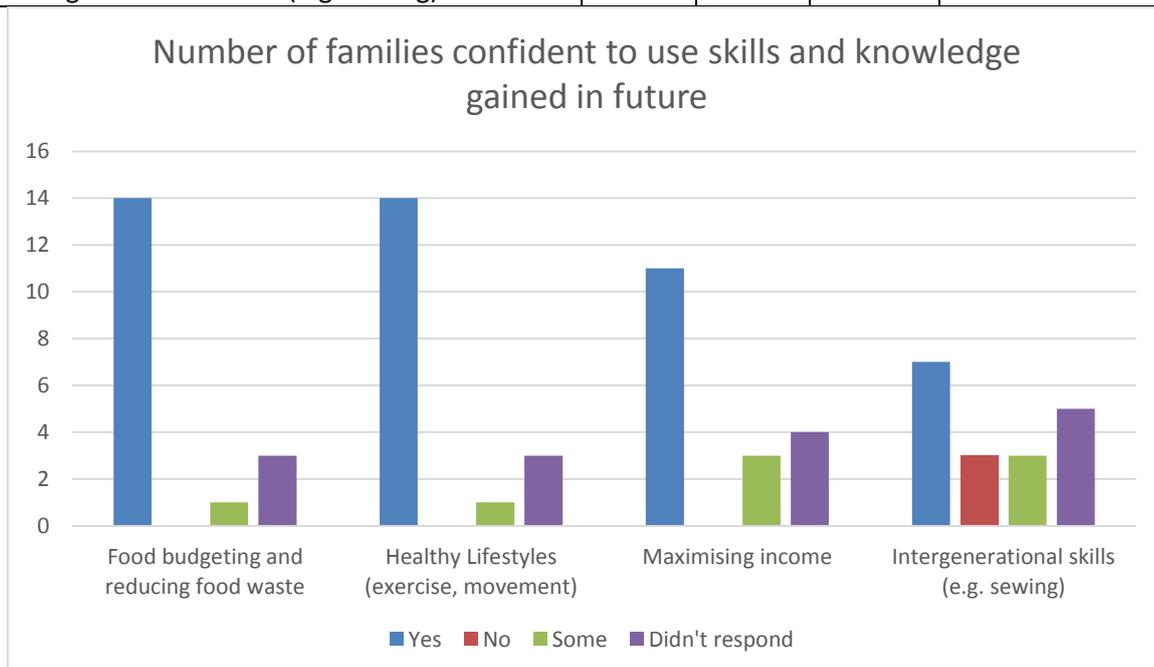
- More activities with my girl as well as cooking different types of healthy meals
- Myself and my son have been exercising more through the Rugby tots, swimming and Movin' Monkees. Also learned great cake making and decorating skills
- I can now do first aid!
- Eating healthier foods
- Eating more healthy
- Make time for crafts and play
- Positive attitude to all aspects of life
- Try out more activities at home
- Teimlo'n hyderus i ddefnyddio cymorth cyntaf os fydd angen [*feel confident to use the skills if there is a need*]
- Willing to cook more

4. What changes (if any) do you hope to make in the future?

- Even more exercise, cooking from scratch, attend more sessions with Jig-So - as I will be on maternity leave I will have more chance to attend
- Attend more Jig-So activities
- Go back to work with the skills I have gained
- Preparation of healthy meals
- Try to get involved with more activities (joining Rugby Tots)
- Defnyddio'r cyngor i baratoi bwyd ar gyllideb [*use the advice to prepare meals on a budget*]

5. Do you feel confident to use skills and knowledge gained in the future?

Skill area	Yes	No	Some	Didn't respond
Food budgeting and reducing food waste	14	0	1	3
Healthy Lifestyles (exercise, movement)	14	0	1	3
Maximising income	11	0	3	4
Intergenerational skills (e.g. sewing)	7	3	3	5



6. In future would you attend further sessions provided by Jig-So in your area?

Yes	No	Maybe
17	0	1

Any suggestions for future activities?

- I would love to see more dance activities/ musical activities
- Cooking is very useful skill to continue with, anything active e.g. swimming, dancing, gym tots is very helpful to promote exercise
- More advertising
- First Aid for children, children's cooking sessions
- Better advertising e.g. direct messages to raise awareness. Timings could be better to avoid after lunch nap time
- More provisions (groups) where children of multiple ages can be included (e.g. under 1s as well as toddlers)

7. Any other comments?

- Fantastic group – really appreciate all the free activities and helpers at group who help with multiple children!
- Many of the sessions I went to things were meant to happen but a lot of times we just sat and played which was a bit disappointing but most of the time we really enjoyed
- Grandchildren enjoyed
- Thank you Jig-So. Brilliant team. They are very welcoming and encouraging.
- The Jig-So staff are always helpful, attentive and provide encouragement. They go above and beyond their duty at all times. Thank you!!!
- Rydym wedi mwynhau y sesiynau. Diolch yn fawr. *[We have enjoyed the sessions. Thank you very much.]*
- It was lovely. Taylor enjoyed the activities and also the running around and interaction with other toddlers