



Celebrating 100 years supporting  
rural communities in Derbyshire

1924 - 2024



Feeding Derbyshire

## Feeding Derbyshire Community Pantries Pilot

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# EVALUATION REPORT

Including  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Produced by  
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**Rural Action Derbyshire**  
August 2024



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We would like to thank the community pantries across Derbyshire for their support and cooperation in contributing to the research for this report. Their hard work and compassion running the pantries to support local residents makes a real difference in their communities.



## INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

The Feeding Derbyshire Community Pantries (FDCP) project, launched in May 2021 under the broader Feeding Derbyshire initiative, aims to provide affordable and sustainable food solutions across Derbyshire. Managed by Rural Action Derbyshire (RAD) for Derbyshire County Council (DCC), the pilot was initially funded for two years and extended due to its success. The evaluation of FDCP focuses on its effectiveness in alleviating food poverty and insecurity, utilizing a blend of statistical data and qualitative insights to assess successes, challenges, and future opportunities.

## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The Feeding Derbyshire Partnership, established in 2014 and coordinated by RAD since 2017, evolved to address food insecurity exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The FDCP pilot was introduced to transition from emergency food models to sustainable community pantries, particularly targeting high-deprivation areas and addressing food deserts. The pilot's importance has increased amid the cost-of-living crisis, with the evaluation providing insights for future food security programs.

## EVALUATION APPROACH AND DATA COLLECTION

The evaluation used an action-learning approach to gather both qualitative and quantitative data through interviews, observations, and various reports. It focused on key outcomes such as reducing food bank dependency and improving community resilience. The methodology adhered to ethical standards and was reviewed for rigor by an external academic.

## QUANTITATIVE PERFORMANCE

As of September 2023, the FDCP pilot exceeded expectations with 2,788 members, significant weekly shopper numbers, and substantial savings on food purchases. Despite challenges like rurality and infrastructure issues, the pilot demonstrated strong performance. The need for improved data management was identified to support future growth.

## EXPERIENCES OF ORGANISERS AND STAFF

Interviews and observations revealed diverse origins of FDCPs, challenges in membership management, and issues with food supply and staffing. Support from RAD was crucial, but challenges such as volunteer fatigue, waste disposal costs, and the need for additional support services were noted. Many FDCPs successfully transitioned from emergency food models, showing reduced food bank demand and providing significant social benefits.

## MEMBER EXPERIENCES

Surveys and case stories highlighted the positive impacts of FDCPs on health, social connections, and financial stability. Members reported reduced anxiety, improved dietary habits, and increased social interaction. The data suggests that FDCPs play a critical role in enhancing overall well-being.

## SOCIAL VALUE IMPACT

Using the Social Value Engine (SVE) toolkit, the FDCP pilot demonstrated a substantial social return on investment (SROI) of £4.24 for every £1 spent. The SVE analysis attributed significant monetary value to outcomes like reduced social isolation and improved mental health, supporting the broader impact of community pantries.



### 1 Membership and Impact

- Diverse membership base with varying needs, including working individuals and pensioners.
- Positive impact on mental wellbeing, social connections, and financial stability reported by members.
- Reduction in emergency food demand and transition from food banks to community pantries observed.

### 2 Challenges and Recommendations

- Supply chain challenges, volunteer dependency, and funding uncertainties identified.
- Recommendations include targeted rollout, stabilizing food supply, consolidating the network, supporting staff development, developing a sustainability plan, and enhancing the monitoring system.

### 3 Social Value Impact

- Social Value Engine (SVE) analysis revealed a total social value of £658,419.94 and an impressive Social Return on Investment (SROI) of £4.24 for every £1 invested.
- Broader social, health, and financial outcomes beyond food provision were quantified, emphasizing the project's effectiveness in addressing community needs.

The FDCP pilot has shown significant successes, but also faces ongoing challenges.



## What the FDCP pilot delivered in 6 months

Figure 2: FDCP pilot snapshot of monitoring information for April to September 2023



## What do FDCP members (customers) say

Figure 4: Analysis of FDCP Members' Postcards Survey



## Recommendations

Recommendations include:

- Targeted Rollout: Continue the tailored approach, address gaps in representation, and explore solutions for rural areas.
- Food Supply: Develop central storage solutions and explore local wholesale options.
- Network Consolidation: Enhance communication, hold annual events, and support promotional activities.
- Staff Development: Assess training needs, implement mentoring, and foster collaboration.
- Sustainability: Secure funding, build local relationships, and explore charitable status.
- Monitoring and Evaluation: Improve data management, gather qualitative evidence, and assess impacts on food bank usage.

These recommendations are designed to refine and expand the FDCP model, address food supply challenges, strengthen network cohesion, and enhance monitoring and sustainability efforts.

The findings highlight the FDCP's critical role in combating food insecurity and enhancing community well-being, laying a solid foundation for ongoing development and support.

August 2024



## Section 1: Introduction, Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation

The Feeding Derbyshire Community Pantries project is part of the Feeding Derbyshire programme and network, which has been hosted by Rural Action Derbyshire (RAD) on behalf of Derbyshire County Council (DCC) since 2017/18; this context will be discussed in Section 2. The pilot phase of the Feeding Derbyshire Community Pantries (FDCP) project commenced formally in May 2021; initially funded for two years with a Service Level Agreement (SLA) setting out the aims and targets for the project, to be monitored quarterly by the Public Health team at DCC, the vision was:

**To explore and support the development of affordable and sustainable community food projects across Derbyshire.**

Interim monitoring information demonstrated the value of the FDCP pilot and, in 2023, DCC extended the funding for a further 12 months, so with the project now in a third year there was an opportunity to evaluate progress, assess achievements and challenges, and identify actions for the future. Evaluation of on-going projects and services is an established way of reviewing performance, identifying areas for improvement, and sharing learning for future development; this is particularly useful approach for examining the effectiveness of public health interventions (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2018). The broad purpose of this evaluation was to find out:

**To what extent has the Feeding Derbyshire Community Pantries (FDCP) Pilot been effective in providing affordable food to people experiencing food poverty and/or insecurity.**

The vision, objectives and performance indicators from the SLA (Extract: Appendix 1.) were used to shape the scope and style of the evaluation to ensure an approach and process which would gather information related to the vision and performance indicators as fully as possible. To this end, the approach, and data collection, which are explained fully in Section 3, combined routine statistical information with the experiences and views of people using and organising the community pantries to deliver the pilot. A dynamic action research approach was deemed suitable for this type of community-based project and the most effective way of achieving a fully rounded project evaluation. From the outset, it was important to gather material from diverse sources and use analytical processes, for example, social value tools, to bring a richness to the evaluation findings. The evaluation process will explore where the pilot has satisfied or exceeded performance measures, as well as instances where this has not been possible, considering successes and challenges, along with potential reasons for both.

There is no shortage of eloquent commentary on the many excellent community food projects across the United Kingdom (Feeding Britain, 2024a) which have grown in number during and since the Covid-19 pandemic (Trussell Trust 2020; Feeding Britain, 2020 and 2023a). Undoubtedly, this evaluation examines many of the things already known about the importance of community food projects and the findings chime with the national narrative about the sustainability of emergency food projects and the expansion of community pantries, shops and food clubs (Maynard & Tweedie 2021; Coventry 2022).

The findings, examined in Sections 4 to 7, highlight real-life experience of organisers and members (users) of the FDCP pilots over the last two-plus years. This builds an in-depth picture of the development of community pantries, specifically in Derbyshire, and the findings offers a unique insight into the role and value of community pantries in the county, which should help to inform the future direction of community food programmes across Derbyshire in coming years. As well as being of interest and value locally, it is hoped that the report will resonate with other areas of the country and national partners and contribute to the emerging evidence-base on food insecurity and community food programmes. With this purpose in mind, Section 2 gives an overview of the Feeding Derbyshire context and background which initiated the FDCP pilot.

## Section 2: Background and Context for Feeding Derbyshire Community Pantries (FDCP) Pilot

The Feeding Derbyshire Partnership was initiated in 2014 by Derbyshire County Public Health team working with local partners and was one of the first Feeding Britain pilots (Feeding Britain 2023). Over the next few years, a varied network of community food projects developed across the county which included, food banks, social eating, and Healthy Holiday clubs. In 2017, the co-ordination of the Feeding Derbyshire Partnership was taken over by Rural Action Derbyshire (RAD) and it became part of a portfolio of community programmes delivered by this long-established charity.

Covid-19 was a significant event for community food programmes nationally and their role during the pandemic has been well documented (Feeding Britain 2020, 2023a; Trussell Trust 2020) at a local level, and the value of the Feeding Derbyshire network was visible from the outset. As the Covid-19 situation unfolded, the reach of the Feeding Derbyshire network was an asset in supporting local communities, not least the ability to disperse funding to local projects in a timely manner enabling speedy support to be given to individuals and families. The well-established relationship with Feeding Britain was a major advantage during the Covid-19 crisis; along with vital funding, the advice, support, and encouragement from the Feeding Britain team was invaluable, and Feeding Derbyshire benefited hugely from the shared learning available from the national network.

As important as the crisis response, Feeding Derbyshire (FD) also contributed to strategic and operational planning at county level, which was made possible by the strong working partnership between RAD and Public Health Derbyshire. It became increasingly clear that the impact would be felt for years to come, and that the emergency nature of the food response could not be sustained in the medium to longer term. Whilst still in lockdown stages, Public Health were keen to engage with partners to address the medium and longer term impact of the pandemic and sought funding for a sustainable affordable food programme for the county. In early 2021, DCC elected members supported a Public Health Cabinet Report for investment in the development of a bespoke affordable food and community pantry programme for Derbyshire.

This presented an exciting opportunity to work with existing and new partners to support a transition from a wholly emergency food model to a sustainable approach. The core funding from DCC was complemented with resource from Feeding Britain, along with their specialist support and advice on how to develop an affordable food offer through a community pantry model. Research showed that community shops/pantry projects were operating successfully across the UK, including some franchise models which were assessed for their suitability for Derbyshire. However, DCC Public Health were looking for bespoke solutions to reflect the diversity of the county, rather than a one size fits all approach, and were keen to see the Feeding Derbyshire Community Pantries (FDCP) pilot emerge from grassroots projects so that provision genuinely reflected the needs of local communities across the county.

In May 2021, the RAD Feeding Derbyshire team started work with community food partners on a 2-year pilot phase and Appendix 2 details the partners worked with to develop a pantry and their locations in Derbyshire. As with many pilot projects, 'work with the willing' is often a good starting point; for FDCP this was particularly important because Covid-19 restrictions were still in place, presenting some barriers to recruitment as a consequence of restrictions on personal contact and visits to potential locations. Nevertheless, there was a recruitment strategy that included targeting areas of highest deprivation, and the FD team worked with PH colleagues to identify communities which often correlated with the locations where projects were showing interest in joining the FDCP pilot. Other factors influencing recruitment were isolation and rurality, particularly so called 'food deserts' where people experienced hardship accessing affordable nutritious food, and finally the SLA specified the intention to have a pantry in each borough or district (Appendix 1).

Pantries were recruited from existing food projects who had expressed an interest in moving from emergency food provision to a contribution model; some had tried previously but their efforts had faltered. As the pilot progressed some new partners came forward and the full range of organisations is summarised in Appendix 2. It should be noted that not all partners went ahead with their pantry proposals for a variety of reasons. In some cases, this was after feasibility checks, others refused the FD funding because they did not wish to complete or comply with the conditions of grant funding, whilst in other instances there was not sufficient staffing to support delivery.

A few months in, the vision and direction of travel adopted by DCC and Feeding Derbyshire turned out to be particularly fortuitous as the cost-of-living crisis took hold across the UK and exacerbated the hardships being experienced by local people as a result of Covid-19. From the outset of the FDCP pilot, demand has exceeded expectation and the need to find an alternative solution to emergency food in order to address income related food insecurity has become more important than ever. The Trussell Trust (2023a) identified this in their contribution to a 2022/23 Parliamentary Committee for food security, stating,

*The provision of emergency food parcels to people facing a shortfall in their income is not a sustainable solution ... (...) ... nothing can replace the dignity of households having enough income to buy the food they need for their family" (2023a, p.2).*

There is no doubt that the context for the community pantries has been, and continues to be, challenging and unpredictable. The community food landscape has been impacted by widespread financial uncertainty post Covid-19 and more recently by the cost-of-living crisis. Evidence of food insecurity linked to poverty, the urgent need for action and to find affordable and sustainable solutions is well publicised. In Autumn 2023, The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, reported that,

*Forgoing food has been the most common sacrifice among those going without essentials, with food insecurity - defined as reducing meals, skipping meals or going hungry in the previous 30 days - rising from 5.2 million households in May 2022 to 5.9 million in Oct 2023. (Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) 2023, p.7/8).*

Research by the Trussell Trust (2023b) found that 14% of adults, or their household, had experienced food insecurity in the 12 months up to 2022. It identified that those most at risk were families with children who made up almost half of the cohort, but also highlighted working age adults, particularly single people. It also highlighted that people with disabilities and those experiencing structural inequalities were disproportionately affected by food insecurity. Full details of the report can be accessed via this link [2023-The-Trussell-Trust-Hunger-in-the-UK-report-web-updated-10Aug23.pdf \(trusselltrust.org\)](#)

Evidence collated by the Food Foundation (2023) shows an increasing number of working families experience food insecurity. Their report illustrates this relatively new phenomenon, referring specifically to some key public service workers who have been significantly affected by a cost-of-living crisis, which has tipped the balance of their household finances and caused food insecurity for the first time.

Worryingly, Trussell (2023b) also report that a significant number of people experiencing food insecurity often do not get support with food provision, suggesting that the problem is greater than the figures portray.

Despite the growth in the number of food parcels provided by the Trussell Trust network of food banks and independent providers, more than two thirds of those experiencing food insecurity have not received food aid. (Trussell, 2023a, p.13).

The consequences of food insecurity and the reasons for tackling it hardly needs rehearsing in this arena. There is no lack of evidence on the profound ways it can affect health and wellbeing, with outcomes that are multi-layered and often long term. The Health Foundation (2023) provide comprehensive commentary on the impact of food insecurity, stating that along with the physical outcomes, “(food insecurity) is also detrimental to mental health, being a cause of significant stress and anxiety in affected households”. The Local Government Association (LGA) (2023) recently added their weight to the urgent need to take action to address food insecurity, stating that,

*“Without effective and meaningful intervention, rising food poverty will continue to cause hunger, drive health inequalities and result in poorer life chances.”*

Based on interim monitoring from the pilot, DCC granted a further 12-months of funding for 2023/24. This allowed projects to consolidate their work and, in most cases expand, which was welcomed across the network. It also meant that the FD team could conduct this evaluation whilst concurrently delivering support to existing and potential FDCPs. Subsequently, in October 2023, RAD successfully tendered to continue co-ordinating the Feeding Derbyshire Partnership from April 2024; this new specification includes further development of the Community Pantry and affordable food programme, giving FDCP partners much needed stability in what has been a turbulent climate.

Against this backdrop, the evaluation aimed to carry out a balanced reflection of the FDCP’s first couple of years, bringing together local learning and evidence of what works, so that this can be embedded in future practice to create a sustainable future for affordable food programme in Derbyshire. The evaluation approach and methodology designed to achieve this aim is outlined in Section 3.



## Section 3: Evaluation Approach and Data Collection Methods

As outlined in the introduction, the Feeding Derbyshire Community Pantries (FDCP) pilot evaluation was carried out to answer a broad evaluation question:

**To what extent has the Feeding Derbyshire Community Pantries (FDCP) Pilot been effective in providing affordable food to people experiencing food poverty and/or insecurity.**

The evaluation relied on the co-operation and partnership working between the pilot projects and the RAD team, made possible by the strong relationships that existed in the Feeding Derbyshire network for a number of years. The collaborative approach in the pilot forged trust between the community pantry organisers and the Feeding Derbyshire team at RAD; encouraging those involved to try out ideas and share experiences honestly in order to improve and strengthen the implementation of the project, thus providing a solid foundation for the evaluation.

An Action-learning evaluation approach and social investigation principles were selected to reflect the ethos of the FDCP pilot which had adopted some features of action-learning; characterised by a small number of partners working together closely to learn through their experience, and from each other (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015; Wood, 2019).

In this context, it was important for the evaluation to echo the grassroots approach to developing the FDCP pilot and gain insight into the lived experience of the people organising and using the community pantries. Along with these guiding principles, the evaluation design referred back to the outcomes and performance indicators set out in the SLA (Appendix 1) using these to shape the methodology and data collection and gather information to find out what had and had not worked in the pilot. The overarching SLA outcomes used to inform the evaluation approach are shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Outcomes identified in Feeding Derbyshire Community Pantries Pilot SLA

- ❖ *Reduced reliance and dependency on emergency foodbanks*
- ❖ *Potential to restore and strengthen people's self-esteem and improved mental wellbeing.*
- ❖ *Increase in self-reliance and community resilience by supporting people to help their budgets go further and reduce the risk of falling into debt and crisis.*
- ❖ *Expansion of opportunities to support people with additional 'wrap-around' advice services to maximise their income.*
- ❖ *Opportunities to provide community shop/pantry customers with additional services to support them, for example with their food knowledge and cooking skills.*
- ❖ *Reduction in reliance on grant funding amongst the community food sector in the medium to long term.*

Mixed methodology social research was used to gather information for the evaluation, blending quantitative and qualitative data (Plano and Ivankova, 2016) with the intention of producing a balanced and rounded analysis of the FDCP pilot. Mixed methods research is ideally suited to evaluating community-based projects harnessing descriptive material to 'tell a story' about the lived experience, not simply count numbers (Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017).

Data collection methods were selected to capture the views, opinions, and experiences of those involved with FDCP alongside numerical data:

- Semi-structured Interviews with FDCP organisers. (Template: Appendix 3)
- Observations by researcher and research assistant.
- Monitoring information submitted bi-annually by pantries for Feeding Britain reporting (Summarised in Table 2. & Appendix 4)
- FDCP Membership Comment cards which included fixed and free responses (Appendix 5).
- FDCP Membership Case Studies. (Appendix 6).
- Social Value calculations (Appendix 7)

The wealth of information collected enabled different types of data to be triangulated to increase the validity of findings. Triangulation is considered good practice in qualitative research as a mechanism for challenging and confirming the information gathered giving weight to the findings, “the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena.” (Patton, 1999, cited in Carter et al, 2014).

The flexible nature of the evaluation also meant that when the participants raised issues of interest, these could be explored without coming into conflict with a rigid research design. For example, comments made by the FDCP organisers in the semi-structure interviews were developed for the membership postcards survey, which resulted in the collection of some particularly in-depth data. This evolution proved significant for the social value element of the evaluation, with feedback being used to measure the social impact and illustrate the value of a dynamic evaluation approach.

Evaluating social impact was a significant feature of the design and approach; firstly, because it is a good thing to do and also because the pilot SLA identified resilience, mental well-being and self-esteem as important outcomes so it was essential to look for and assess any evidence of impact on these indicators. Inspired by Maynard and Tweedie (2021) who prepared a social impact report on the My Pantry project, the evaluation combined the Membership Postcard survey results with an appropriate tool for measuring social value (Social Value Engine, 2023); this meant that social value for the pilot was not only described, but also quantified.

This evaluation is not scientific research and makes no claim of replicability to other projects or programmes, it is nevertheless underpinned by strong theoretical social research principles which gives the findings integrity. At every stage, from design to presentation of findings, the evaluation has followed guidance from the Social Research Ethics Association (SREA), specifically chosen to reflect the ethos and philosophy of FDCP pilot. The evaluation did not need or seek ethical approval, but ethical considerations were at its core, including gaining informed consent from participants, confidentiality and protection of data in line with GDPR. Examples of how SREA guidelines (SREA, 2021) have been used are included in Appendix 8 and 9.

The evaluation team, made up of a lead researcher (freelance) and research assistant located in the RAD team, had been involved in the development and implementation the FDCP pilot. That the research team was not external or independent, raised possible conflict of interests, which were recognised from the outset and steps taken to address and reduce areas of potential bias. Significantly the lead researcher ceased to be involved in the operational management of the FDCP project six months before commencing data collection interviews, creating a reasonable separation from the day-to-day project delivery. Also, the research assistant who continued in an operational role, concentrated on the administrative aspects of the evaluation, whilst the lead researcher designed the evaluation, carried out all analysis and report writing. So, although the evaluation team could not be deemed neutral, every effort was made to achieve objectivity in the design, implementation and interpretative stages of the evaluation.

It is worth noting that it is accepted practice for project evaluation to be carried out by internal staff providing risks and benefits are assessed (Better Evaluation, 2013). Also, when evaluating public health and community-based projects, having a researcher embedded within a project can be considered advantageous (Kneale, et al. 2023). In this instance, the engagement of the evaluation team with the pilot FDCPs over a two-year period built trust with the community pantries organisers, which resulted in honest and open conversations, particularly about some of the challenges and risks that the projects face. In essence, everyone involved had walked together through the pilot phase and were all keen to learn from the difficulties as well as celebrate achievements, so candour and openness were paramount.

Overall, the benefits that the evaluation team brought to the process were balanced against the potential for bias, and it was deemed that the evaluation process was an opportunity for the team to use their in-depth knowledge of the FDCP pilot in a positive way. To enhance the robustness of this evaluation process, the approach, methodology and final report have been reviewed by an Associate Lecturer in Public Health, currently working with the Open University, and hopefully the quality of findings presented in Sections 4 to 7 will demonstrate this investment in thorough evaluation planning and academic rigour.



## Section 4: FDCP Pilot Monitoring Information Facts and Figures

Quantitative data provide a useful starting point for any project evaluation, giving an indication of the numbers of people taking up and benefiting from a service or intervention. Feeding Derbyshire Community Pantries (FDCPs) regularly submit project activity data based on the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) set out in the Derbyshire County Council (DCC) Service Level Agreement (SLA). The information is collated and used for quarterly monitoring of the SLA by DCC Public Health, and also submitted to Feeding Britain bi-annually. For the purpose of this evaluation, selected numerical indicators demonstrate the performance of the FDCP project against specific KPI, these are:

- Number of members registered with the pantry (cumulative)
- Number of new members bi-annually
- Number of customer shopping per week
- Cost of weekly shop
- Value of weekly shop
- Amount saved per shop

Data up to end of September 2023 (best available) were used to evidence some key achievements of FDCP pilot, and these are illustrated below; some presentation issues made it difficult to check and verify some data, but the overall numerical information was sound and accurate.

### What the FDCP pilot delivered in 6 months

**Figure 2: FDCP pilot snapshot of monitoring information for April to September 2023**



Information in Figure 2. is combined with other monitoring information to illustrate performance against the main KPIs in the service level agreement, the results are displayed in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Summary of performance against SLA Indicators (Pilot phase + up to October 2023)**

Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	Target Project Lifetime	Actual	Comments/Details/ Action
8 community pantries	8	8	Achieved
1 community pantry per District/Borough (8)	1/8	5/8	Year 3: development work to set up in remaining districts /boroughs
Number of Members	600	2788	Exceeded
Number of shoppers per week	150	528	Exceeded
Cost of weekly shop	N/A	£5 - £7.50	N/A
Value of weekly shop (minimum £25)	£25	£30 - £75	Exceeded
Number of Volunteers (minimum 2 per pantry)	16	47	Exceeded
FDCP Network meetings 3 per year	6	8	Exceeded Plus regular engagement of projects through Network WhatsApp
FDCP Training Sessions 3 per year	6	6	Achieved Intro' setup/Funding/ Loan Sharks/CAB & Welfare Rights/Digital Inclusion/ Healthy Eating & Nutrition; Plus access to Feeding Britain Webinars
FDCP Resource Pack	1	1	Achieved Scheduled for review 2024/25
Customer Case study 1 per year	2	6	Exceeded
Conduct Customer Feedback Survey	1	1	Achieved October 2023

### Discussion of quantitative key performance indicators (KPIs)

From the above summary of performance against selected statistical measures from the SLA, it is evident that the project has successfully delivered eight pantries across Derbyshire to satisfy this important SLA target; these pantries are located in five of the eight district/borough council areas making up the county. The ambition to have a community pantry in each area was not realised during the pilot for a number of reasons, including targeting areas of highest deprivation, the challenge of community engagement in areas with limited infrastructure, and rurality. This is a complex issue which needs further exploration to inform targeted work in under-served geographical communities; action on this is underway, and FD team are liaising closely with Public Health colleagues to target specific communities in 2 of the 3 areas not yet covered. Information shared whilst reporting on the evaluation shows that additional sites have opened successfully in recent months.

During the two-year pilot, as outlined in Appendix 2, the FD team engaged with multiple potential locations, including two that never became operational and others that were still not operational by the end of the pilot, though efforts have continued with these sites. While this is not uncommon in

developmental projects, it is important to recognise that resources were allocated to support areas that ultimately did not reach operational status. The reasons behind this were not fully examined in the formal evaluation due to limited access to, or lack of response from, the organisations involved. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that the projects failed to materialise due to a complex mix of local political challenges, unstable relationships, and an over-reliance on a single key individual to advance the community pantry initiative.

Performance data for the 8 operational pantries show that the uptake of the community pantries has exceeded the SLA target significantly, with membership four times the anticipated level. This is perhaps unsurprising given the prevailing economic climate and the legacy of Covid-19, nevertheless it is a stark illustration of entrenched and increasing food insecurity across Derbyshire. The significant difference between target and actual number of members may also be indicative of modest expectation of the funders and the FD team at the outset of the pilot, yet this was based on the sense check with partners prior to the pilot. During their set-up phase every FDCP organiser voiced concern that they may not secure sufficient members to be viable, suggesting that the extent and pace at which membership increased was unexpected, even for those with considerable experience of community food projects. As a result of higher than predicted uptake, the pilots faced considerable challenges, most notably cost, quality and reliability of food supply; this on-going issue is explored in Section 5.

As well as cumulative membership total, it is also clear that new members join each quarter. This presents a dilemma for community pantry organisers when capacity is not able to meet increasing demand; in some instances, membership schemes have been suspended, albeit temporarily. To add to the complexity, organisers are aware that some members stop using the pantry but remain on the membership register. As a result, some of the FDCP pilots have reviewed their membership systems, an issue raised by organisers during their interviews, discussed further in Section 5.

The SLA specified 'reduced reliance and dependency on emergency food banks' as a desired outcome, and this has been reported, not just by the FDCP projects, but also anecdotally by the FD network of food banks. As such, it is reasonable to assume that emergency food use is reducing and is in step with national trends highlighted in a recently published Impact Report from Feeding Britain, which shows the shift towards affordable food clubs as an option to emergency food offered by food banks (Feeding Britain, 2024b):

*Data released by the Food Standards Agency suggests that Affordable Food Club usage in the UK has, for the first time, surpassed that of food bank usage, reflecting a growing trend towards alternative methods of accessing essential food supplies among UK residents, and a move towards contribution-based models by food providers.*

However, this needs to be confirmed by including this in routine monitoring across the wider FD Partnership.

Another aspect of the statistical analysis is the retail value of each shop, which highlights the financial benefit to pantry members and speaks for itself in terms of reducing household expenditure on food, releasing money for other outgoings, and helping with debt management or savings. The wider impact of financial issues on other aspects of life, including, health and well-being are well rehearsed. However, to ensure that the evaluation does not draw hasty or unsubstantiated conclusions, the wider benefits were discussed in the interviews and further explored in the membership survey, producing a wealth of qualitative feedback to check and confirm any early interpretations.

Statistical information is useful for tracking trends and early identification of any issues that the pantries may be experiencing. For example, increase/decrease in members over a given period of time, shopping activity, seasonal changes, etc. In order for this to be done reliably it is important for data collection and recording to reflect the KPIs; and for presentation and management to be consistent and well-organised. This will be increasingly important as the FDCP network grows and for

the new Feeding Derbyshire contract awarded October 2023, and FDCP members will need to support the FD team in providing robust and meaningful monitoring information.

Alongside FDCP activity statistics, FD/RAD team have provided support, guidance and training for the pilot projects satisfying the SLA outputs; the impact of these achievements will be discussed further in the examination of the qualitative findings.

## Summary and Next Steps

Based on the figures available at the time this evaluation was conducted (Autumn 2023) the numerical information alone suggests that there is considerable success to build on and learn from. Overall, the FDCP pilot has achieved or exceeded the majority of KPIs, and where this is not the case, there are mitigations and actions in place.

The developmental nature of the FDCP pilot meant that data collection and management evolved over the two-year period to meet the monitoring and reporting needs of various stakeholders, rather than following a fixed template from the outset. While this approach provided adequate information on overall performance against KPIs, it proved less effective in reliably mapping historical trends and progress. Additionally, minor anomalies arose due to differing interpretations of indicators and inconsistent reporting by some pilot sites, which have since been addressed through the development of clearer guidelines.

As the FDCP project enters the next phase, data collection and management will need to be reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose and produce performance information that satisfies expectations of all stakeholders, reiterating that data capture and monitoring needs to be further developed. To achieve robustness in the information generated, a streamlined system with consistent and well-organised processes for collecting, accessing, and managing data need to be maintained. It is also important for the system to include both a live 'real-time' element and a reliable process for storing and recalling historical data to enable progress and trends to be tracked in a meaningful way. Adopting this approach will provide an information system that enables monitoring and reporting performance against the Feeding Derbyshire SLA and for RADs internal reporting and planning processes, as well as enhancing any future evaluation.



## Section 5: Exploring the Experience of FDCP Organisers and Staff

### What we did:

- Carried out planned visits to Feeding Derbyshire Community Pantries
- Conducted semi-structured interviews with Community Pantry organisers and staff
- Observed and made notes.

In August and September 2023, the evaluation team visited all eight FDCP pilots to carry out semi-structured interviews with the pantry organisers. These conversations involved staff, paid and unpaid, volunteers, and in some case pantry customers, and all took place at the FDCP venues during opening hours. The approach was designed to minimise impact on staff time and also enable the research team to observe the FDCP in operation and engage with as many people as possible.

The interviews were guided by a question template to guide but not restrict the conversations (Appendix 3), with responses recorded on the question template. For the first few interviews, a dictaphone was used to record participants responses, but background noise at the FDCP venues affected the sound quality and made transcription difficult. As a result, from interview number four onwards, participants responses were recorded by note taking on the template.

As is customary with qualitative research, following each interview the response templates and observations were reviewed to get an early understanding of the information being collated and to assess if the questions were generating relevant and useful material. The evaluation team also made notes of their observations during the visit, and these were used to supplement the interview feedback. This combination of data collection methods yielded a wealth of qualitative material.

Once interviews were concluded, a first sift of the material identified broad themes which were colour coded to create categories, and these were analysed further to draw out specific issues and complexities. Also, from this first sift, information regarding customer experiences and the wider benefits of the FDCPs was used to shape the membership postcard survey discussed in Section 6.

### What Community Pantry Organisers Said:

#### Setting up a Community Pantry

Interview discussions confirmed that there has been no 'one-size' fits all approach to setting up a community pantry in the FDCP pilot; several emerged from established food banks and holiday club provision for families with children, whilst others were completely new ventures, evolving out of needs identified during Covid-19. That said, there are commonalities in terms of some issues and challenges the projects faced during the pilot phase, and beyond.

All pilots explained how the support they received as part of the FDCP pilot, both financial and human, was crucial to the development of their project.

*"Couldn't have done it without you!"*

*"At the beginning you guys were great, we wouldn't have done it without you .. we have such a sense of achievement - thank you!"*

*"You've been there when we needed you ..."*

Specifically, FDCP organisers commented that they would not have managed the set-up and/or transition without the funding and the regular support from the RAD/FD Team. Some mentioned the Resource Pack had been helpful in the early stages of development, all commented on the value of one-to-one support and guidance that was available.

*"Continuous support with monthly meetings in early days"*

*"Funding made all the difference at the beginning ... to get us going"*

*"Timely advice when needed"*

One pantry expressed the view that their project would probably not have continued without FD/RAD support during the pilot phase, citing the sharing of knowledge and experience across the pilot network as a key factor in keeping going.

*"Without you (FD) we wouldn't have carried on, you gave us resilience, sharing that other people had same issues ... otherwise we might have thrown the towel in"*

A number of organisers commented on the positive way their involvement with the pilot had given them the impetus to transition from a food bank to a community pantry, something that they had concerns about and had tried to do in the past with limited or no success.

*"Supported us with move away from stigma of food bank, relooking at food waste and distribution"*

*"Excellent - such a positive transition from food bank to community pantry"*

Transition from Food Bank to Pantry model was less challenging than expected. Staff explained that moving food bank users to a pantry model had been less problematic than anticipated, and whilst some projects retain an emergency food element it is part of a continuum of food and other support and is time limited. This positive outcome has been a significant shift in perception and expectations, and importantly has reduced use of and reliance on the emergency food provision. A case study to support these observations would be useful.

FDCPs organisers indicated that establishing their pantry took longer than anticipated, sometimes the pantry had been a year or more in development; reasons cited include limited finances, lack of suitable premises, insufficient community engagement. The views of the organisers chimes with the reflections of the FD team.

## Operating a Community Pantry: Managing Membership

Reflecting the bespoke approach of the pilot, it was evident from the visits and interview feedback that FDCP membership is considerably more diverse than expected or has previously been seen in a food bank/emergency food setting.

When establishing their pantry offer, some FDCPs used criteria similar to emergency food banks; requiring potential members to show eligibility for benefits, or be referred from an appropriate organisation, for example, Welfare Rights or CAB. Whilst other FDCPs did not base membership on the ability to satisfy formal criteria, and accepted registration using a checklist to assess people's self-reported need for food support. Another pathway to membership was the transition of existing food bank users to the FDCP model, which proved much more successful than anticipated by the pilot sites

During interviews, organisers explained that managing membership could be challenging for a number of reasons. For some, it was eligibility and the assessment of need that was difficult, the absence of formal criteria could open up the pantry to people who may not be financially in need, although this itself is a subjective judgement; equally some staff felt that criteria could be too rigid and excluded some people in need. There is no easy answer and in practice most FDCPs use a hybrid approach. As such, where members can provide evidence of need, for example, benefit claims, have a referral, or are an existing food bank user, it is fairly straightforward to verify eligibility; if this is not possible, then prospective members self-report and organisers take this on face value. It is not a foolproof system but as one organiser remarked;

*"A small number may take advantage ... but most people don't go to a community food project out of choice, they come to us because they need to".*

It was commented that the eligibility conundrum has been exacerbated by the changing demographic profile and personal circumstances of people visiting all manner of community food projects, including pantries. Members are diverse - some are claiming benefits, others are in full-time work or maybe of pensionable age. Some organiser felt that more older people have signed up to a community pantry but would not have previously visited a food bank because of the stigma they may have associated with this support. From the interview feedback it is evident that membership of a community pantry is more complex and nuanced than for a food bank emergency food situation.

In some instances, this has led to waiting lists, as demand has exceeded capacity. Statistics analysed in Section 4 revealed that the uptake of community pantries was significantly higher than anticipated. To manage this, referrals from agencies have occasionally been limited or phased, and pantries have temporarily suspended new memberships to review and update their registers, removing individuals who are no longer using the service. Feedback indicates that FDCPs require ongoing support to address this challenge and would benefit from a protocol to guide their decision-making on membership criteria and management.

Diverse personal and work circumstances of FDCP membership means that patterns of pantry use can vary, depending on whether members are working or not. Some FDCPs have adapted or increased their opening hours to enable all members to access their service. Also, staggering stock replenishment to ensure that people do not miss out on certain popular food items because they cannot visit the pantry first thing in the morning. Some FDCP organisers have tracked usage based on issues like pay date, finding that members who are paid monthly have greater need of the pantry toward the end of the month. In the main pantries said they manage the flow of customers effectively, even if that means adjusting opening times or adding extra sessions or staggering restocking, and they all voiced the importance of being able to support members fairly.

### Operating a Community Pantry: Supply and Purchase of Food and Goods

Unsurprisingly, having sufficient supply of food and goods is a significant and persistent operational challenge for all FDCPs with all organisers identifying issues with Choice - Quality - Quantity of the supplies available to their pantries. The increasing cost of food and other supplies like hygiene products is well-documented because of the on-going economic crisis. In addition to rising costs, some organisers commented on diminishing or fluctuating donations and reduced availability of funding post-Covid. These factors are impacting on stock levels and range of products, a situation which continues to be unpredictable.

Community food projects are highly vulnerable to fluctuations in the global and national food systems, which can change rapidly and are difficult for small-scale initiatives - even the larger FDCP pilots - to navigate. This vulnerability largely stems from their dependence on food redistribution and donations. Even when these projects purchase supplies, the costs are substantial due to their limited access to wholesale prices and lack of direct relationships with food producers.

Several organisers expressed frustration with some of the donation systems operating in Derbyshire; recounting occasions when they travelled to collection point, often at some distance, to be told that all donations had gone. They felt they had wasted valuable time and resources on a "wild goose chase".

Some organisers reported difficulties with reliability of supply, and quality of produce being provided through their FareShare subscription. At the time of the visits and interviews there were some difficulties being experienced because of the closure of the FareShare distribution point at Holmewood. Whilst it is important to acknowledge the challenges that FareShare are dealing with, rightly or wrongly, local community pantries have become reliant on their regular FareShare

subscription. Disruption to this inevitably destabilise the capabilities of FDCP network in terms of choice, quality, and in some cases quantity.

There was some balance to be heard from the FDCP organisers with some describing excellent relationships with local supermarkets and other generous donors and they worked hard to maintain these contacts. Others are exploring opportunities with new business in their local area. All of this suggests that FDCP staff are enterprising, innovative and determined in their mission to secure support for their local community.

Furthermore, the ongoing availability of hygiene products through Derbyshire County Council's Covid-19 management measures was seen as a significant asset by many projects. However, there were concerns among some that this support might be reduced or withdrawn. Similarly, the availability of funding and/or donations from Feeding Britain, and other local organisations was viewed very positively by organisers. Yet, there was also a sense of apprehension that this financial support would not continue for much longer.

Several FDCPs explained that they had set up accounts with supermarkets to purchase ambient items in bulk, but that meeting the cost is unrealistic in the longer term, particularly as funding streams diminish. This raises a fundamental issue of sustainability if food costs continue to rise and FDCPs are not able to access wholesale prices. It is fair to say that Derbyshire's community pantries are not alone in facing this challenge and this issue is on the radar of Feeding Britain as demonstrated by the webinars they have been held on food supply.

Overall, it was clear from the interview feedback that supply of food and goods needs to be addressed promptly for the network to sustain and grow, which should be part of longer-term strategic planning at a national as well as local level. In the meantime, solutions to bridge the gap in the short term have been developed. Since the interviews took place the FD team have worked closely with pantries to address the availability of basic items, for example, ambient produce, including tinned goods. As a result, a model for centralised purchasing, storage and collection of a specific range of ambient foods has been developed; this commenced as a pilot in February 2024 and will be reviewed and reported on later in the year.

### Operating a Community Pantry: Staffing

The staffing models of FDCPs vary. Some are entirely led by unpaid staff - volunteers. Where resources allow, some combine paid and unpaid staff. What is abundantly clear is that in order to operate all rely on unpaid - volunteer - time to some degree. A major staffing concern cited by almost every FDCP was the older age profile of volunteer staff. Many also commented on the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on the health and resilience of both paid and unpaid staff. There is a sense that this continues, with volunteer fatigue an ever-present concern for the FDCPs, *'we get exhausted!'*

This is exacerbated by the heart-breaking circumstances some members are living with. As one organiser commented, they are often dealing with "people right on the edge ...in crisis". This can be hard for volunteers, particularly as they may not be able to immediately resolve the complex problems they are presented with. Taken in the context of comments about staff fatigue, there is a potential cumulative effect of regular exposure to highly stressful situations which should not be underestimated. Furthermore, the staff may themselves be vulnerable and organisers said that some staff, *'Need support to handle emotional situations as they may have their own experiences which build up...'*

The interview conversations revealed a spectrum of challenges for the FDCP staff, paid and unpaid, and organisers identified a number of interpersonal issues that are prevalent in the pantry setting.

For example, members can become confrontational, for example if products were not available, or they wanted to take additional quantities. Both staff and members may be experiencing high levels of stress, which can heighten the emotional tension, and staff can feel ill-equipped to deal with conflicts that arises.

This was highlighted starkly by several pantries reporting incidences of shoplifting. Although a rare occurrence, it is a tough and potential emotive situation for staff to deal with. Given that community pantries are not commercial entities, they are also often staffed by people who live in the area, staff and members may know each other and these factors make it difficult to address theft in the traditional way.

The wealth of information shared by the FDCPs organisers suggests that staff would benefit from support with managing conflict and other difficult issues. There is considerable common ground across the network, which presents opportunities for training and other developmental support, with a focus on personal resilience, coping with stress and dealing with conflict.

### Operating a Community Pantry: Practicalities

A stand-out complaint, in terms of practical problems, was local authority waste disposal charges, which was raised by 6 of the 8 pilots, indicating this is a significant and widespread issue. Whilst this is a matter for the relevant district or borough council, FDCP organisers are keen to tackle this collectively and wondered if the FD team could co-ordinate an approach across the county with a view to reduce this burden.

### Operating a Community Pantry: Beyond Food - Wraparound Support

An aspiration for the FDCP pilot was to use pantry access as a gateway to 'wraparound' support and increase access to a range of services like Citizens Advice (CAB), local authority housing support and mental health services. Visits and interviews confirmed that all FDCPs provide information on support available locally and most link into referral systems for advice agencies like CAB. Frequent examples were given of how linking financial support/advice with access to affordable food had been hugely beneficial to many pantry members; organisers described how when people realise that help is available the impact can be instantly visible, *"come in crying .. go out smiling"*.

Some of FDCP pilots are able to provide additional support 'in-venue', for example offering regular sessions from CAB, mental health, housing support, addiction support; the evaluation team observed some of this in action during a couple of visits. Although the approach is not consistent across all pantries, all organisers shared the belief that a holistic approach to offering support to pantry members is vital, asserting that links to other services are essential to deal with complex cases, *"level of damaged people ... so many broken people!"*

Some of the FDCP pilots work with highly vulnerable people, in chaotic or even volatile situations. This includes people experiencing homelessness, fleeing domestic abuse and coping with serious health issues, including addiction.

*"Helping people at their most desperate ... at their lowest point"*

During one interview a case story was discussed of a pantry member with no living accommodation who became seriously ill and whose life was saved by the intervention of pantry staff; health professionals involved in the case commented that the support and perseverance of the staff went above and beyond and most certainly contributed to the person's survival.

Note: Recent announcements about planned cuts to some services which are currently working with FDCPs may affect the wraparound support offered post April 2024.

## Benefits of Community Pantry Membership: Impact on emergency food provision

As mentioned in Section 4, all FDCPs reported that the pantry offer has reduced demand for emergency food in their local area. This was the case whether they operate a food bank from the same location or not.

Where the FDCP had an existing food bank they had actively supported service users to join the pantry and seen numbers of food bank users fall and as mentioned above and the success of the transition has surprised the organisers. FDCPs in this category continue to provide emergency food to people needing this intervention; however, it is offered as part of a pathway to becoming a community pantry member. FDCPs providing this continuum of support can track their figures to show a link between food bank use and pantries, although these have not been collected routinely so data were not available for the evaluation. This would be a useful addition to monitoring going forward.

Other FDCPs set-up separately from their local food bank, however they have established useful links with each other. The FDCPs in this context reported that food bank colleagues have mentioned that emergency food requests have reduced since the pantry opened, although this has not been verified formally. To demonstrate any association between pantry usage and reduced food bank use would require data collection from food banks within a specified geographical area aligned to the FDCP. Again, this should be an area for development of future monitoring and would be dependent on the co-operation of the food banks.

This information should be considered in conjunction with the FDCP organisers feedback about the changing profile of members and food banks users. It would also be timely to gather and review local information in light of the Feeding Britain Impact Report (2024b).

## Benefits of Community Pantry Membership: Wider Impact

The discussions with FDCP organisers were not solely about operational issues and the interviews also explored their perceptions of how the community pantry had helped their members. Analysis of their comments highlighted a range of benefits, which included social and emotional outcomes, as well as financial benefits.

Organisers explained that some members used the pantry as, 'somewhere to come for a chat,' and as a place where they had made friends; with some commenting it may be the only time they get out of the house. A number of organisers also described how some pantry members had become volunteers at the pantry, which had resulted in increased self-confidence and social skills.

These consequences of community pantry membership were not part of the original brief for FDCPs pilot, but are certainly valuable, if unintended, outcomes in terms of reducing social isolation and improving social and emotional wellbeing. All the more powerful when combined with reduced anxiety often associated with financial worries, contributing to overall mental wellbeing.

To some degree, all FDCPs provide support with healthier eating, providing meal ideas, recipes cards and in some cases cooking demonstrations to encourage members to develop their cooking skills and healthy eating knowledge. Many FDCPs are co-located with a community café so they have scope to provide additional support to pantry members, for example, with cooking skills and practical nutritional advice.

## Benefits of FDCP Network

FDCP organisers cited a number of network features that they felt supported their ability to deliver their project, including, Network meetings and events, and regular 1-1 conversations. They also were finding the WhatsApp group increasingly useful for sharing ideas, information about donations and sharing surpluses of certain products

## Summary - Headlines - Next Steps

The visits and interviews confirmed that Derbyshire's Community Pantry Network is diverse, some have been part of Feeding Derbyshire since inception almost a decade ago, operating as food banks and/or social eating venues, whilst others have been set up more recently. The Community Pantries SLA encouraged the development of bespoke projects rather than adopting a one-size fits all approach; the evaluation findings provided clear evidence that this has been achieved, each pilot is unique, offering tailored support to their membership.

An overriding feature of the interview phase was the energy and commitment felt in every pantry. Without exception the FDCP pilot has been built on the immeasurable goodwill of staff, paid and mostly unpaid. Whilst enthusiasm was never in short supply, honest conversations took place about the challenges and difficult aspects of setting up and sustaining a pantry. Organisers candidly shared heart-breaking stories about the circumstances of some members, problems with staff relationships, local politics and other complex issues as documented in this section.

It was also clear that although each pantry is unique there are common concerns or shared areas of interest, particularly in relation to operational issues, supplies, and supporting staff, which can be best served by working together as a network. The interview findings illustrate the value of the co-ordinated approach already used to establish the pilot sites, but which could be embedded and expanded to roll-out community pantries into other communities across Derbyshire. To help shape this going forwards, below is a summary of areas that FDCP pilots identified they would like support with:

- Food supply - Co-ordination of basic supplies/products, central store for specific/basic/ambient products, piloting now
- Shared/joint publicity and communications
- Mentoring and peer support through continued development of the FDCP Network which is highly valued
- Communications for FDCP Network; WhatsApp group
- Training for staff/ volunteers to increase resilience, capability and reduce stress levels
- Waste disposal costs/arrangements
- Strengthening fundraising potential; support with charitable status

Sustainability within two years was identified as a key outcome in the SLA, but this goal is closely tied to reliance on grant funding, creating a challenging dilemma in the current economic climate. When asked about opportunities for sustainability, respondents highlighted the significant impact of the cost-of-living crisis. This crisis has led to a record number of people experiencing food insecurity while simultaneously increasing the food and fuel costs for the pantries themselves. This double burden has made it impossible for FDCP pilots to achieve self-sufficiency and sustainability within the original timescale. This will need to be addressed as part of the next phase and is likely to require a broader strategic approach with support from national and regional organisations to tackle food costs and supply issues.

The material collected during the visits and interviews showed that FDCP organisers get to know many of their members well, seeing them regularly and listening to their stories. Their observations and impressions offered insight into areas for the evaluation to interrogate further, by asking the members directly about the benefits they experienced. To this end, the wider impact themes raised during the interviews (mental wellbeing, resilience and social impact) were used to inform the questions for the Members Postcard survey. This was seen as an important way of exploring any correlation between the observations of the pantry organisers and the real-life experience of members. The information collected from pantry members is examined in Section 6.

## Section 6: Capturing the Views and Experiences of FDCP Members

Learning more about the experiences of people using the pantries was central to this evaluation; particularly finding out if there are beneficial outcomes, additional to accessing affordable food, which were not being captured by routine data collection. Also, gathering customer feedback was an objective in the DCC service level agreement, so an essential component of evaluating the Feeding Derbyshire Community Pantries (FDCP) pilot.

The interview phase of the evaluation, Section 5, revealed that community pantries did not collect membership feedback consistently or systematically; although a few pantries attempted to gather feedback and case stories, the approach was ad hoc. All pantries said they would like support from Feeding Derbyshire to improve this aspect of their monitoring, and also to help them improve their community pantry offer.

### What we did

- Designed, distributed and analysed a members/customer survey using postcards to collect their feedback
- Collected case stories from the pilot projects

### Postcard Survey of Community Pantry Members

The postcard set out 12 fixed responses in a tick list, with space for members to add their own comments (Copy of Postcard in Appendix 5). It was anticipated that members responses would show to what extent community pantries are helping individuals and families with wider issues and challenges, alongside providing access to affordable food.

The fixed responses were designed to explore, and potentially validate, observations made by FDCP organisers/staff in semi-structured interviews regarding the benefits of using a community pantry; a first sift of interview notes, identified a number of benefit themes which were worthy of examination. The benefits included, health eating, social and emotional wellbeing, and financial outcomes, and these were used to devise the postcard statements, in order to test out whether members feedback would mirror the perceptions of organisers/staff.

To strengthen the validity of the survey results, a social value measures, from a Social Value Engine toolkit (SVE, 2023) were used to develop the fixed responses; this was to allow responses to be directly linked to recognised social value indicators and enable the information gathered to be used to calculate a credible social value measure for the FDCP pilot.

All eight-community pantry pilots took part in the survey and, over a two-week period, invited their members to complete a postcard when they shopped. Postcards were anonymous to encourage pantry members to respond honestly, minimise data protection issues and confidentiality concerns. A sealed box was used to collect completed cards. The survey was voluntary, and consent implied by members' participation.

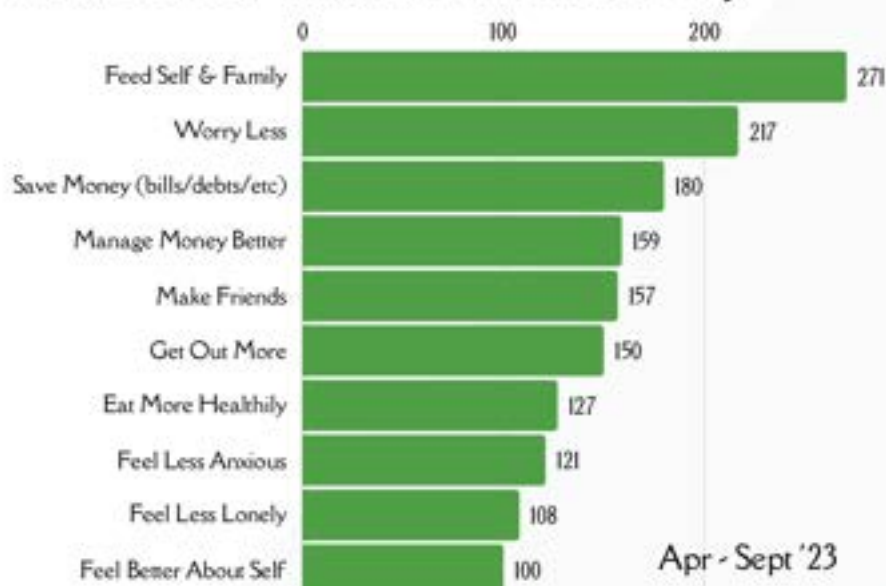
273 postcards were completed by members during a two-week period; this positive response rate suggests the approach would be a useful method of gathering members feedback in the future.

### What Pantry Members said - Fixed Responses

The postcard survey responses offer a valuable insight into the wider socio-economic and health benefits that community pantries are having on their membership. Analysis of the fixed statements from 273 postcards, Figure 3, illustrates the spread of responses across 12 fixed questions. These clearly show that the community pantries are having a significant impact on a number of important public health outcomes, which reach far beyond people accessing affordable food.

**Figure 4: Analysis of FDCP Members' Postcards Survey**

## What do FDCP members (customers) say



## Headlines from the Survey Fixed Responses

Health outcomes, both physical and mental, can be seen in the following responses: 217 people (80%) said they worry less about shopping for food, and 121 said they were less anxious in general, demonstrating a positive impact on mental wellbeing; 127 people said that shopping at the pantry means that they are able to eat more healthily, which particularly impacts their physical health. 150 members said the pantry helped them get out more, and 157 said they had made friends through using the pantry. Other responses reinforce the important social and community role of the pantries, with 108 members reporting they felt less lonely, suggesting community pantries have a part to play in reducing loneliness and social isolation.

A significant proportion of respondents (66%; n=180) reported that being able to access affordable food had helped them save money for other bills and/or to reduce debts, with high numbers also indicating that the pantry had helped them with financial advice and money management. The wellbeing and socio-economic benefits reported by members amplify the impact of the FDCP pilot on individuals and families using a community pantry; Anonymised raw data from the Members' Survey provided in Appendix 10.

## What Pantry Member said - Free Responses

*"It is a grate (great) place to volunteer (volunteer) you feel part of a family"*

*"Warm and friendly have helped my family"*

*"Lifesavers!"*

*"This pantry has helped my self-esteem and to feed my family I am grateful (grateful)"*

*"I'm very thankful to for being welcomed to a kind non-judgmental place"*

*"You can talk to them about your problems."*

Over 60% of survey respondents included personal statements on their postcard, this small selection of comments illustrates that the support members get from their community pantry goes beyond the provision of affordable food. It is evident that the warm, welcoming, friendly and non-judgmental ethos created by the community pantries is highly valued by the members. The positive ethos is of great significance for members who are vulnerable, attending for the first time, offering a safe space for people going through challenging and potentially chaotic life experiences.

## Overview of Case Stories: a small sample

### **Case Story 1 (Verbal Account given during interview)**

Young male, low income, health issues, isolated with limited social support. Presented at the FDCP and pantry staff supported him with health advice, encouraged him to visit pantry regularly and spent time chatting with him; he started volunteering at the pantry, filling shelves, unload collections, tidying up, etc. Has continued to volunteer for a few years, has made some friends and increased in confidence; he continues to volunteer and also has secured voluntary work at two other organisations in the town.

### **Case Story 2 (full in Appendix 6)**

Female sent in a thank you card which included the following statement:

"Since the pantry opened, I have been able to pay off my gas bill and I'm actually in credit now, ready for winter, I've also saved money for school uniform thanks to the money I've saved - many thanks"

### **Case Story 3 (Letter in full in Appendix 6)**

Female, moved to area because of safeguarding issue; high anxiety about going anywhere new and claiming benefits. Sent in letter thanking staff for kindness, mentions, going to pantry has given her more courage and enhanced her life.

### **Case Story 4 (Collected during interview)**

A few weeks after joining the pantry an older female disclosed to staff that, prior to becoming a member she often spent several days without speaking to anyone, she lived a few doors away from the pantry. Now she volunteers and comes to the pantry most days and helps with the café. She also knits baby clothes and other garments for the community pantry. She has made friends with the staff and other pantry users.

These case stories demonstrate the following themes:

- High level of appreciation and gratitude amongst the people using the pantries
- Self-reported improvements in mental health, self-esteem, and confidence
- Reduced loneliness and social isolation
- Gateway into volunteering opportunities - giving back.
- members and has said she feels much better in herself and less lonely.

The case stories provide real-life examples of the personal impact community pantries are having on individuals and families living in Derbyshire, and, whilst this is a small sample of case stories, it is nevertheless reasonable to conclude that their experiences will be common to members throughout the pilot. The stories reiterate many findings from the postcard survey, adding to the meaningful evidence of the effective support offered by community pantries to people in difficult circumstances. As one pantry organiser commented during an interview visit, "they come in crying ... and go out smiling!"

## Summary - Headlines - Next Steps

The combination of quantitative and qualitative material made available by the members survey and qualitative cases stories builds a rich narrative about the benefits and value of the FDCP pilot. The material provides powerful evidence of how people using community pantries are being supported with challenging economic and personal circumstances associated with food insecurity.

The findings demonstrate a strong correlation between feedback from community pantry members, as gathered through the postcard survey and case story samples, and the views and perceptions of organisers and staff, as expressed during the interview phase of the evaluation. This correlation strengthens the validity of the findings, which are a valuable addition to the evidence-base for community pantries.

There are also similarities in the postcards free responses and case story examples, with members mentioning the ethos of the community pantry as an important aspect of the support they received. Others referred to improvements in mental health issues, anxiety, loneliness etc., and again this reiteration of similar benefits and outcomes in different sources of data collection adds weight to the conclusion that community pantries do much more than provide access to affordable food.

The material collected from the community pantry members is both credible and emotive, offering insight into how a community pantry can have significant wider impact on the health and wellbeing of people affected by food insecurity. There is a clear indication that the FDCP pilot has addressed the SLA key outcomes in relation to mental wellbeing, self-esteem and resilience.

The positive response to the membership survey activities suggests that this could be a useful way of capturing members feedback consistently across the FDCP network at sensible intervals, certainly on an annual basis, and possibly bi-annually. The fixed statements could be changed to meet the evolving needs of FDCP network as it grows and develops. For example, the statement about 'feeding self and family' may be unnecessary and could be replaced with an alternative. If the survey is repeated it is suggested that the process for collating and analysing survey information be reviewed, exploring how the use of technology could speed up data collection and analysis, reducing time commitment for the Feeding Derbyshire team.

Membership feedback creates a compelling argument for continued investment in community pantries, particularly in the continuing economic climate where food insecurity proliferates. Section 7 will consider how social value measures can be used to measure the value of this rich qualitative evidence, contribute to the growing evidence-base on community food programmes, and support the rationale for investment

## Section 7: Social Value Impact 'Valuing the Invaluable' (SVE, 2024)

The FDCP membership survey and interviews with organisers illustrate that access to a community pantry has produced a range of outcomes for the members, beyond the obvious of providing affordable food. Outcomes include wider financial, social and health and wellbeing, and whilst it is reasonably straightforward to ascertain financial benefits, evaluating the impact on mental wellbeing, social inclusion and other health outcomes can be more complex. These are often referred to as softer outcomes and have been considered notoriously challenging to measure, particularly when traditional indicators often focus on purely monetary outcomes. However, there are ways of attributing monetary value to social outcomes and impact, and there is growing interest in this field of social value (SV) and social return on investment (SROI).

As Campbell (2024) points out it is necessary, "to evaluate success not just by financial metrics but also by the positive changes generated within communities". Consequently, it has become increasingly important to find alternative means of measuring and valuing social outcomes, with terms like Social Return on Investment (SROI) and Social Value (SV) becoming commonly used in recent years (Social Value UK, 2023, <https://socialvalueuk.org/what-is-social-value/>).

The concept of social value is not new, as early as the 18th century economists and academics explored the relationship between economic success and wider societal wellbeing, referring to 'moral sentiments' (Smith, A., circa. 1780, cited by Campbell, 2024). In modern times, the principles of social value are rooted in robust community development and engagement <https://socialvalueuk.org/principles-of-social-value/>. Some of these principles have been embedded statute by the Public Services (Social Value) Act (2012), since 2013 public sector organisations are required to consider the social value and impact of services they procure and deliver. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/3/enacted>). As a consequence, various tools and processes have been developed and tested, to enable social researchers, and professionals from public health, and the community and voluntary sector, to measure the holistic impact of programmes on individuals.

The emergence and increased use of social value tools has made it possible to measure the considerable impact that FDCP pilot has had on the lives and wider wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. For this evaluation, a toolkit developed by The Social Value Engine (Social Value Engine 2023) was used as it particularly reflects the ethos of the FDCP pilot, by, "providing a framework for measuring and communicating the impact of initiatives in terms that reflect the actual experiences and values of communities".

### What we did

- The members' postcard survey (Appendix 5) used relevant fields from the social value engine (SVE).
- Used (as far as practicable) identical language from the SVE to produce the Membership survey fixed statements, this meant that responses could be directly attributed to this field to be able to demonstrate impact.
- Survey results set out in Figure 4. (shown in Section 6) and the costs of FDCP pilot were entered into the SVE to produce an overall measure of Social Value and Social Return on Investment expressed in £s for every £ spent or invested.

The following social value fields were selected as suitable for measuring the value of data/information gathered from community pantry members, with the potential to show impact on a range of outcomes:

- Value of reduced social isolation
- Cost of loneliness
- Impact of not having any close friends on wellbeing
- Impact of severe loneliness on wellbeing
- Regular attendance at voluntary or local organisation
- Average reduction to grocery bills
- Reduced levels of anxiety and stress
- Overall improvements in mental health
- Value of being supported by food project (community pantries)
- Value of food bank signposting to relevant services

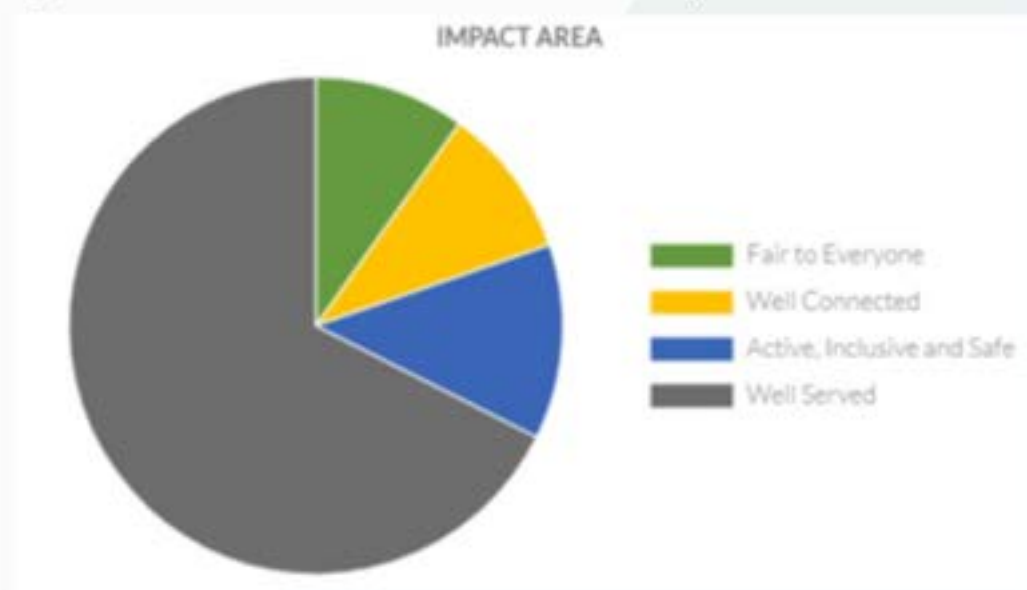
### What we found

Responses collected from members, discussed in Section 6, were fed into the Social Value Engine and were collated under four impact areas, shown in the table below, along with the financial calculations for each impact area based on the responses fed into the tool. Figures 4 and 5 display the results:

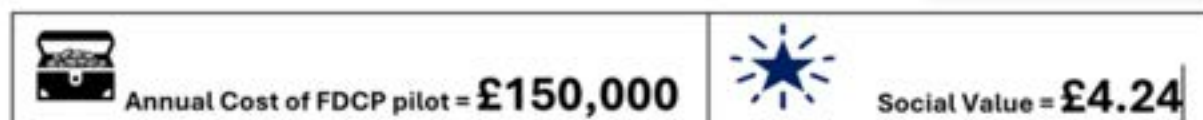
**Figure 5: Social Value (SV) and Social Return on Investment (SROI) calculation in £'s for each Impact Area**

Impact Area	Value (£)
Fair to Everyone	65,075.52
Well Connected	64,900.96
Active, Inclusive, Safe	83,288.50
Well Served	445,154.96
<b>Total</b>	<b>658,419.94</b>

**Figure 6: Distribution of Social Value across each Impact Area**



The value of these was then measured against the project investment (input/direct costs) of £150,000, using these figures the Social Value Engine calculated that the social return on investment (SROI) for the FDCP pilot is shown in Figure 7.

**Figure 7: Social Value of FDCP pilot calculated by the Social Value Engine in £'s**

### Summary - Headlines - Next Steps

The social value (SV) quantifies the social return on investment (SROI) achieved by the FDCP pilot as £4.24 for every £1 invested, which is substantial. When the results are interpreted against the SLA, they show that the pilot has had a measurable effect across the outcomes set out, including, financial issues, mental wellbeing, and personal resilience. This demonstrates the initial investment decision was sound, and it is reasonable to assume that the next phase of investment will build on the success of the pilot and enable the development of a FDCPs network which can use this evidence of impact.

Using the Social Value toolkit to assess the social value of the FDCP pilot was not without challenge; care is needed not to 'over-egg the pudding' by overclaiming outcomes because if the financial return comes out too high the claim may seem implausible, and this undermines the integrity of the tool, and of social value measurement in general. In this instance, range of outcomes included in the calculation and the high number of responses from the members survey initially produced very high SROI, which was considered unrealistic. By adjusting the weighting in the tool several times, a credible social value of £4.24 for every £1 of investment was calculated. Details of the calculation are available in Appendix 7. and further information about the toolkit and process can be found at <https://socialvalueengine.com/>

This aspect of the evaluation shows that, going forward, the SVE tool has potential to measure the social and wellbeing outcomes in a tangible way. Learning from the process is key as it demonstrates that, to maintain the credibility of the SV/SROI calculations, impact statements need to be selected from the toolkit carefully. It has shown the benefit of selecting a small number of measures, and if the exercise is repeated there will be a need to refine and/or reduce those used on this occasion. Statements also need to be selected and incorporated into the monitoring framework and processes in the early stages of development to ensure consistent language to allow the outcomes being measured to be directly linked to values.

With increasing interest in SROI and Social Value as a way of demonstrating the wider social and health impact of projects, this first attempt suggest it would be worthwhile to utilise and practice with the SVE in the FDCPs context. Incorporating the use of the tool into routine monitoring and any repeat of the Members' Survey will upskill the FD team and exploit the potential of the SVE. There is clearly further work warranted and needed in this emerging area of impact evaluation, and it has much to offer in terms of quantifying social impact of FDCPs in the future.

## Section 8: Summary of Findings and Conclusions

Across the eight FDCP pilot projects the evaluation found evidence for the following:

### Overall Experience

**FDCPs are not one size fits all**, they come in a variety of shapes and sizes, and it is fair to conclude that this holds true to the initial principle of the pilot to explore bespoke and tailored models reflective of the different communities making up Derbyshire.

The length of time needed to launch a pantry is often greater than anticipated and desired, but to create a robust service it is important for the foundations to be solid. This means taking time to identify suitable premises and engage with the local community to secure support that is reliable. The evaluation found that where this happened projects were launched successfully and have been sustained so far.

**Local community politics and relationships** have the capacity to help or hinder the development of a FDCP; 2 of the pilots were delayed by support being withdrawn by local statutory organisations and others were derailed by a breakdown in local relationships. This suggests that investment in community development and relationship building could be an important building block of the FDCP roll-out.

**A strong local team** has the best chance of successfully setting up and sustaining a FDCP; whilst a leader or key individual can be instrumental in kick starting the process, too much reliance on one person is unsustainable in the medium to long term. Team relationships also impact on timescales for setting up a project and longevity; staff morale and team cohesion are maintained best when interpersonal issues are addressed promptly.

**Usage and uptake was much greater than predicted**, most likely a result of the widespread impact of the economic crisis. It is reasonable to conclude that this will continue to impact on communities for the time being, therefore, demand will not reduce significantly in the foreseeable future.

**FDCP pilots reported high levels of satisfaction** with support given during and after set-up; financial support is a key factor, but the pantry organisers valued the co-ordination of the network and individual support provided by FD/RAD as equally important. Resource Pack and Communication Strategy will need on-going review to evolve as the FDCP Network grows.

**The FDCP Network** has fostered strong relationship between pilot pantries and the FD team and between the community pantry organisers; attendance at meetings is consistent. Pantries also make good use of the WhatsApp group to support each other, exchanging information and ideas, sharing surpluses of supplies and generally providing peer support.

### Membership

**Membership demographics are diverse**; there is no such thing as a 'typical pantry member', the common denominator is a change or worsening of financial circumstances. Many pantries have seen a significant increase in working people and pensioners becoming members. Not all members are claiming benefits which presents a challenge for using referral and/or benefit-based membership schemes. Further work is needed on refining membership criteria to support FDCPs with this issue.

**Personal circumstances of members can be complex;** several pilots referred to the extreme situations some of their members deal with, requiring more than food support and needs input from additional support services, including, local housing, CAB, Welfare Rights and others.

**All FDCP pilots aim to provide or facilitate access to wraparound or additional support services, but provision is not consistent.** In some pilots support is provided in-situ during the pantry opening hours, whilst in others the services are signposted. However, because additional support is not delivered through a consistent model this can affect equity of access. There are also risks identified because of potential changes to funding for services like Citizen's Advice (CAB).

**Over subscription of FDCP membership is common,** meaning that some pantries have limited or delayed entry of new members, and some closed membership for periods of time; partly because of higher than expected demand and also people remaining registered but not using the pantry for several months. FDCPs need to find a consistent way of managing membership.

**Members are overwhelmingly satisfied with the service offered by the FDCPs.** Feedback gathered by the customer survey showed that both fixed responses and individual comments highlighted how much members value and appreciate their community pantry, giving multiple reasons. This qualitative data needs to be examined in more depth and there is merit in repeating Membership surveys annually, if resources allow.

## Benefits for Members: Outcomes and Impact

**Financial benefits are significant,** a high proportion of FDCP members cited that having access to affordable food and making savings to offset other household bills and debt are major benefits of their pantry membership.

**Being a member of a community pantry has a positive impact on health and wellbeing,** FDCP members report that being part of their pantry, in particular mental health, and reduced social isolation; the Members Postcard Survey provides strong evidence of positive outcomes.

**Wider Social Value** "valuing the invaluable" (<https://socialvalueengine.com/>) the combination of membership feedback with social value has been a standout feature of the evaluation findings. Inputting feedback from members who are directly benefiting from the FDCP pilot into the SV tool has produced credible evidence of outcomes and impact which go beyond financial gain.

**The FDCP pilot achieved or exceeded** all but one of the objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs) set out in the service level agreement. It has supported the setting up of eight community pantries but was not able to establish one in each district or borough area during the pilot phase. Rurality and limited existing infrastructure and/or provision have been barriers to setting up a FDCP in every locality; addressing this has been the focus of the on-going rollout of the project during Year 3 (2023-24) and as Year 4 (2024/25) commences progress has been made in some areas.

**Transition of people from emergency food to pantry membership,** was often easier than anticipated when planning the FDCP pilot; where a pilot project also operates a food bank this changeover has resulted in decreased reliance on emergency food.

**Emergency Food/Food bank use appears to have reduced** in FDCP locations; there is reliable evidence of this from the FDCPs pilots where emergency food forms part of their overall offer and this finding echoes the national picture report by Feeding Britain (2024b). However, to be able to demonstrate this outcome with confidence, local data need to be collected to provide robust evidence of this shift, not just from FDCPs but from wider FD community food partners.

## Food Supply, Funding and Sustainability

**A universal challenge is affordable and reliable supplies to stock community pantries** with a reliable choice of quality supplies and in sufficient quantity. This challenge is complex and multi-factorial and solutions will need to reflect this. In the long term the challenge of affordable food requires national policy level solutions to address the systemic food supply issues which create food insecurity and food poverty.

**Local solutions to supply issues need to be tested** by working collaboratively across the FDCP Network, short to medium term. Whilst this evaluation has been underway, the FD team have been working with the pilot pantries and other partners to develop ideas and plans are in place supply of a range of basic goods from a central store.

**The FDCP pilots rely heavily on unpaid staff and volunteers;** a few of the pilots have paid staff supplemented by volunteers, whilst others are entirely volunteer run. The community capital evidenced by strong volunteer engagement is encouraging, but organisers identified risks related to the number and age profile of volunteers, which have implications for project stability and sustainability.

**FDCPs are often supporting people during stressful life circumstances** and staff may not always be equipped to deal with complex emotional impact of some of the situations they are dealing with. Staff would benefit from appropriate training and development to support them in their role.

**Funding uncertainty is a significant challenge** for the staff and volunteers; the rising cost of food and energy during the last 18 months has exacerbated this perennial problem and many projects have depleted their reserves to subsidise increased expenditure. FDCP organisers are keen to explore collective approaches to funding and some indicated they would like support to become registered charities.

**Sustainability and reliance on grant funding;** The short to medium term future of FDCPs has been boosted by the award from DCC Public Health to RAD for a further 3 years. This gives security for the will give security short term and enable the FD team to work with FDCPs on sustainability plans. Expectations need to be realistic in relation to economic recovery and other external variables which may influence the timescale for sustainability and the ambition to reduce reliance on grant funding. Strengthening the Evidence-base

**Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation is crucial for the next phase of FDCP;** gathering good quality, reliable and trackable data will support effective monitoring of Feeding Derbyshire contract; specific issues have been highlighted throughout the report. It is fair to conclude that a strong monitoring process will help to build a robust evidence base for FDCPs as a whole, and also for individual pantries and partners to access and use in funding proposals which will contribute to the sustainability strategy.

## Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this evaluation was to reflect on the pilot phase, highlighting key achievements against the SLA performance, as well as identifying meaningful learning for the future. The process generated a wealth of information which has been scrutinised within the evaluation framework, however, as is often the case with research, it has raised more questions and shone a light on areas for development and further investigation. Many of these will not be a surprise to the FD team or the pantries themselves, because learning and improvement has been at the core of the FDCP pilot. The findings capture progress so far, but also present an opportunity for further evaluation, perhaps by an independent researcher or team if resources permit. There is significant material available for

ongoing examination and it may be worthwhile exploring academic affiliations at a local or national level to consolidate this initial evaluation phase.

For now, what is clear is that the continued roll-out of community pantries will enable projects to provide a lifeline for local people through some of their most difficult hardships, and the final section sets out recommendations for the next phase of Derbyshire's Community Pantries programme.



## Section 9: Main Recommendations

### 1 Targeted roll out of FDCP model across Derbyshire

- Maintain FDCP bespoke tailored approach, which has worked well during pilot phase.
- Target under-represented areas using public health evidence base (In Progress).
- Explore approaches to addressing rurality and isolation of some communities, for example, pop-up provision.
- Develop a template for reviewing community assets and resources to support the set-up of new FDCPs to assess feasibility and manage risk.
- Revise Support/Resource Pack to provide stronger guidance and advice on issues identified by FDCP pilots, for example, criteria for and management of membership schemes.
- Work with FDCPs on specific operational issues which they have identified as barriers to sustainability, for example, high cost of waste disposal.

### 2 Develop solutions to stabilise food supply challenges

- Pilot and review short term solutions to purchasing and distributing a selection of basic/ambient goods from a central storage point, working collaboratively across the FDCP Network. (In progress from February 2024).
- Based on learning from above, explore local opportunities for wholesale supply of a wider range of goods, including perishables.
- Contribute to national discussion/debate to find longer term solutions to food supply issues, which are exacerbating food insecurity and food poverty.
- Consider how the FDCP network and wider Feeding Derbyshire partnership can be utilised to improve the supply of goods for community pantries, including potential for working directly with food producers.

### 3 Consolidate the FDCP Network

- Deliver annual programme of meetings and events for community pantries; engage organisers in identifying items for discussions, training and development (Cross reference to 4).
- Maintain FDCP Network WhatsApp group.
- Produce a Communication strategy for the FDCP Network to support pantries with their promotional activities; use key data to publicise achievements (Cross Reference to 6).

### 4 Support FDCPs to build capability and capacity of staff

- Carry out further needs analysis to confirm priorities for training and development, particular emphasis should be on mental wellbeing for staff.
- Use the training needs analysis to inform FDCP network events (Cross Reference to 3).
- Develop a mentoring system for new pantries, to maximise the experience and learning from existing community pantries.
- Capitalise on strong network relationships and explore opportunities for collaboration.

### 5 Develop a Sustainability Plan

- Secure mainstream funding for short to medium stability. (achieved by DCC new contract).
- Build on emerging relationships with local businesses, donors etc.
- Facilitate FDCPs to explore charitable status where appropriate and work with infrastructure organisations to provide necessary support with the process.

## 6 Review monitoring system to strengthen FDCP evidence base

- Ensure monitoring information is robust and meaningful for use by all stakeholders, including, individual pantries, DCC Public Health and RAD/FD team, this will enhance the evidence-base to inform investment decisions.
- Review and redesign data collection and management system, including reporting format/storage and retrieval processes.
- Build qualitative evidence-base by gathering members/customer feedback regularly, for example by repeating postcard survey, and requiring each FDCP to submit 2 case stories per year to build qualitative evidence-base.
- Incorporate Social Value indicators into routine monitoring and reporting.
- Develop specific data collection to formally assess correlation between FDCPs and any changes to food bank use.
- Use key data to promote FDCP network as part of Communication Strategy (Cross Reference to 3).



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6.	Distribution of Social Value across each Impact Area
7.	Social Value of FDCP pilot calculated by the Social Value Engine in £s

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