

The Benefits of Community Food Initiatives for Children & Young People

[Healthy Food for All \(HFfA\)](#) is an all-island charity addressing food poverty by promoting access, availability and affordability of healthy food for low-income groups. Food poverty is defined as the “inability to access a nutritionally adequate diet and the related impacts on health, culture and social participation” ([Friel & Conlon, 2004](#)).

A core part of [Healthy Food for All’s work](#) is to support the development of Community Food Initiatives (CFIs). CFIs, such as cookery & nutrition classes and community gardens, are projects that improve the availability, affordability and accessibility of healthy food for low



income groups. Check out our [video series here](#) and hear many of the participants comment on the positive effect CFIs are having on the children and young people in their communities. For example, Charlie from Dunmanway FRC talks about how, when the carrots are ripe, his grandchildren love to “pick ‘em, wash ‘em and eat ‘em”!

Community Food Initiatives (CFIs) benefit children and young people in many ways and reach targets under all five of the national outcomes as outlined in [Better Outcomes, Brighter Future’s](#). They not only increase access and availability of healthy food in low-income areas, for example by growing produce in community gardens, but also improve physical activity. The CFIs that we support report many cases of children and young benefiting from being connected with their environment through gardening and also by learning about healthy cooking and nutrition. Some projects have raised beds for local pre-schools and playgroups. Other projects link in with local schools on growing produce to use in school cookery classes. In other projects parents attend events and classes with their children thus helping family cohesion. Parents report an increased interest in healthy eating among their children because they have grown, picked and cooked it themselves. Teachers and community development workers report the gardening and cooking classes being an excellent space for children to learn new skills, share their issues and also to engage parents in healthy activities. This also has a knock-on effect on the health and well-being of the

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entire family and can influence the wider community. CFIs can have a transformative effect on the health and social engagement of families, children and young people and can build confidence by offering people a chance to learn and share their skills.



Crucially CFIs can be a catalyst for young people enrolling in further education, e.g. horticulture and cookery qualifications. As such they strongly relate to the fourth Better Outcomes Brighter Futures national outcome of **Economic security &**

opportunity by helping protect people from poverty and social exclusion; enhancing opportunities for living in child/youth-friendly sustainable communities and by offering opportunities for ongoing education and training and pathways to economic participation and independent living.

Norah Gibbons (Chair, Tusla Child & Family Agency) was a key speaker at Healthy Food for All's recent National Conference. She highlighted the short and long term impacts of a lack of access to adequate nutrition for children and young people. She stated that the Family Resource Centres, the Children & Young People's Services Committees and the School Completion Programme provide key contact points for supporting access to food and nutrition for children and young people. Practical programmes delivered by these services include the Community Mothers Programme, healthy eating programmes and breakfast clubs. Tusla has a particular role in the support of parents. "The government recognises that parents are the foundation for good child outcomes and further to that they are key mediators in developing and supporting desirable health-related behaviours among children and young people". It recognises that parents need support at each stage of the child's development. See the full report and presentation [here](#).

Healthy Food for All has been supporting Community Food Initiatives for eight years and has evidenced the many benefits of these powerful projects for children and young people. We

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advocate on behalf of their mainstreaming in every low-income community and we see the CYPSC's and FRC's as key structures to promote and support the development of CFIs at a national level. In HFfA we are keen to share our wealth of evidence and learning on CFIs and are actively promoting the projects and advocating for their continued support and development through our [policy submissions](#). We will also be hosting a national networking and training event in November and will invite the CYPSC and FRC networks once organised.

The cumulative impact of austerity measures has led to an increase in the numbers of people experiencing food poverty from 450,000 in 2010 to 600,000 in 2013 ([Social Inclusion Monitor](#), 2015). Certain household types are more vulnerable to food poverty with almost one-third (30%) of lone-parent households food poor in 2013, an increase from 23% in 2010 ([ESRI](#), 2015). Unemployed households are the most likely to be food poor.

- On average, low-income households would have to spend ¼ of their budget to achieve a healthy basket of food (safefood June 2015).
- The cost of feeding a teenager is €49, double the cost of feeding a pre-schooler (€24) and €12-€13 per week more expensive than for a primary school child (€37) (safefood June 2015).

This of course has a huge impact on the long-term health outcomes for children and young people. Low-income households consume less nutritionally balanced diets and suffer from higher rates of diet-related chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, obesity and certain cancers at a younger age. These factors also have long-term implications for demands on the health system with **safefood** estimating the cost to the state of obesity alone at €1.13 billion ([safefood](#), 2012).

Findings from our [Demonstration Programme evaluation](#) found that CFIs make a difference to food poverty at local level (pg. 17). Year one of our current [CFI Programme evaluation](#) showed that CFIs engaged with more than **12,000 individuals** in activities related to healthy eating, growing food and cooking skills. For more information please visit our website: <http://healthyfoodforall.com> or contact Georgina Buffini at gbuffini@healthyfoodforall.com.