



## FoodCycle Report for The Clare Foundation, October 2023

Last year, The Clare Foundation played a key role in the development of our first Project in Buckinghamshire: FoodCycle Aylesbury. The Trustees also contributed £5,000 to the Project's running costs in the first year. This report details what our volunteers at Aylesbury have been able to achieve since your donation.

### Who we are

As I am sure you will recall, we provide free three-course community meals for vulnerable people (our 'guests') across England and Wales every week, using surplus food. Typically, guests are living on very low income, homeless or having housing problems, living with long-term physical or mental health conditions, asylum seekers and refugees, and many live alone.

### FoodCycle in Buckinghamshire

In June 2022 we launched our first Bucks Project in Aylesbury, following a development process which involved many local stakeholders including the Clare Foundation and Bucks Council. It takes place every Tuesday evening at the Vineyard, HP19 8DN.



Volunteer at FoodCycle Aylesbury

Since your grant in September 2022, our volunteers have run 67 meal sessions, serving over 2,000 three-course meals and handed out a further 759 meals as takeaways at the end of a session for guests to enjoy at home. Nearly 1,000kgs of surplus food was saved to make these meals.

Over the last year, FoodCycle Aylesbury has reached 130 people.

### Our Impact

To understand the impact our Projects have on the people who use them, we run an annual guest survey. This survey takes place in November each year. Here is how our guests at Aylesbury told us FoodCycle helped them:

- **Eating better** – 89% tried new foods at FoodCycle, 67% said they ate more fruit and vegetables, 38% said they cooked more healthily at home and everyone said they went home well fed after their meal.
- **Able to save money** – 88% said FoodCycle gave them an extra meal in the week they wouldn't otherwise have had and they could save money for other important costs, like bills
- **Less lonely** – 78% had made friends at FoodCycle, 89% said they felt more confident with other people and 78% said FoodCycle helped them to feel less lonely
- **Feeling more part of their community** - 78% had met people from different backgrounds at FoodCycle and everyone said they felt more part of their community

Here are some comments from guests at FoodCycle Aylesbury:

*"It's a nice friendly place to come. The staff are nice and helpful and friendly. Nice tasty healthy meals."*

*"This FoodCycle evening is fantastic. It's warm, friendly and the food is really good. There is always a variety of food and it's always very tasty. It's the best meal of the week. Wonderful staff."*

*"Staff friendlier than some pubs I have been to! Nice cafe atmosphere. A good opportunity to try something different."*

## Case Study – Nick, Aylesbury



### **What brought you to FoodCycle? How did you initially find out about FoodCycle?**

*I found out about FoodCycle through a food bank, they were handing out leaflets there about it.*

### **What were your first impressions of a FoodCycle meal?**

*To begin with, I didn't go straight away because I was living quite a way away from the Project. I then had to move because of the long history of being unemployed and issues with alcohol and things like that. So I managed to go to my first meal in October last year. And I thought, well I should try it, see what I think.*

*I was very, very impressed. I haven't missed one meal since! I've made new friends, met new people, eaten great food...it's fantastic!*

*And the staff and volunteers there are absolutely lovely. You walk in and it's "Hello, Nick. How are you? Is everything alright?!" Obviously, we've got new volunteers every week as well and it's great to meet so many new faces. I've been going regularly and we all sit together and have a chat with the volunteers and other diners and it's just a nice place to be. It is really nice to get out and you know that once a week you'll meet different people as well as the regular group. It's just lovely. Really, really lovely.*

*Probably about five or six weeks ago, two new ladies turned up and they had never been before and they sat with me during the meal and they had the same impression as me they absolutely loved it and keep coming back!*

*You get people from different backgrounds: older people younger and families too. It's lovely to see how families and their kids are welcomed and that the kids can also enjoy a healthy warm meal. It's what FoodCycle is all about. Getting together, socialising over a lovely meal and meeting new people.*

### **What are your favourite FoodCycle meals?**

*It's so hard to choose because it varies so much each week and it's always good! You don't find out until you get there, you never know what you're going to have but it's always something new and different that I would have never made myself. It's just really nice to try new foods and all of it is really healthy and varied.*

*When I first found out about it someone had said "oh you don't want to go there, it's all vegetarian food" and I was like, well, I'm not going to knock it until I've tried it, and I was really shocked and amazed at all the meals you create with just vegetables and fruit.*

*You know it's different. It makes a change once a week to know that you are going to get at least one of your five a day, if not more! Some weeks we have way more than five a day and it's nice because there are also foods I've never tried before. Put it this way, I've never been disappointed.*

### **How is the current cost of living crisis affecting you and does FoodCycle help?**

*This time 12 months ago, I was up and down because I became unemployed and because of alcohol issues. It's nice to now be able to go somewhere once a week, forget all my worries for a couple hours and eat great food. Things have turned around a lot for me now and it's just nice every week now knowing it's something to look forward to. I look forward to it every Tuesday!*

## Award winning support



We were delighted to receive the Community Group Contribution Award at the Proud of Bucks Awards for 2022 for FoodCycle Aylesbury. This is of course thanks to the hard work of our volunteers in Aylesbury but also the support we have had from local stakeholders such as yourselves, Bucks Council and the Heart of Bucks Community Fund.

### Your Place at the Table

In January, I shared a report called Your Place at the Table with the Foundation. The report was commissioned by us and compiled by leading social eating expert Dr Marsha Smith. It highlighted how, whilst Projects like FoodCycle are providing a vital service during the cost-of-living crisis to tackle food poverty, community dining in itself has enormous benefits. Here are the key findings:

- 1 in 2 of us believe eating together benefits our mental health
- Eating in groups is about more than food - shared mealtimes are social activities that deliver health and environmental benefits
- Eating together broadens our horizons as we sample new and interesting foods, and we learn more about the food we eat and different cultures
- The majority of survey respondents said they didn't know of a community dining event taking place near to them, but if they did, they would attend

*"Eating together is one of the best activities people can undertake to make new connections and cement existing friendships. Humans have evolved eating together as a way of creating social bonds."* – Dr Marsha Smith, *Your Place at the Table*, 2023

### The importance of your support

The support of the Clare Foundation as an advocate and funder as we set up and delivered our first Project in Buckinghamshire. As I hope the report shows, FoodCycle Aylesbury is now a well embedded service, providing healthy community meals tackling loneliness and poverty, for the local community.

**Thank you for your generous and continued support**