

YMCA Young Artisan Heritage Food Project

End of Project Report

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Introduction

Delivering an introduction to cultural heritage foods, this project worked with 35 young people (16-25), living in YMCA housing in Nottingham, Mansfield, Workshop and Goole. The School of Artisan Food (SAF), based on Welbeck Estate in Nottinghamshire, led a programme of nine workshop sessions which focused on understanding of cultural significance foodstuffs, their roots, history, and its importance in the modern world. Participants, as well as learning basic cooking skills, benefitted by preparing and eating a wide range of global foods. This high-quality experience within the professional surroundings of SAF, enabled young people to learn about where food is grown and produced, butchery and cutting techniques, and other transferrable cooking skills. Each week all food made was taken back to YMCA housing so that other residents could enjoy the dishes prepared.

The project was delivered in six blocks of 9-weekly sessions, which were attended by residents from different housing, as well as bringing different groups of residents together. Weekly sessions included traditional English cuisine, Italian influenced cuisine, Indian & SE Asian cuisine and North African & Middle Eastern cuisine. Participants also benefitted from a tour of the Welbeck Estate, visiting the farm shop, farmyard and taking part in a food foraging session around the grounds. Participants who completed each block were invited to a celebration event, where they took part in evaluation, shared experiences and received gift tokens for food, alongside the SAF cookbook, created specifically for this project.

Evaluation of the project was conducted by Nottingham Trent University and sought to collect evidence on the following outcomes, which make up the structure of this report:

- The heritage of food being better explained and identified.
- Young people's skills development and learning.
- Benefits to wellbeing and the local economy.
- YMCA's organisational understanding of how working with food can be better embedded within their work with young homeless people.

This final report draws upon multiple data sources in order to capture and represent these outcomes. Evaluation methods took the form of a pre- and post- project questionnaire for young people, interviews with young people following each block, interviews with YMCA and SAF staff at the mid-way and end-point. NTU as evaluation partner organised a student placement as part of block 3, so that each of the cooking workshops could be documented. In addition, YMCA provided regular data on young residents in the form of outcome stars and the case studies of six young people were recorded as part of this project.

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Outcome 1: The heritage of food is better explained and identified

With the survey participants were asked how interested they were in food. This answer increased from the start to end survey – 56% somewhat interested at the start to 55% extremely interested at the end of the project. At the beginning 4% of participants said they were ‘not interested at all’, with none stating this at the end.

Favourite food stated at the beginning included traditional English meals such as roast dinner, fish and chips and unhealthy foods such as take-aways, fast foods and fry ups. At the end of the project participants reported more diverse, world food such as Moroccan, Curries, North African Lamb Tagine and complex puddings such as Tiramisu.

At the end of the project, 70% of participants stated that they had learnt ‘a lot’ about the heritage of different foods, with 70% of participants rating their knowledge of modern cuisine as ‘average’.



Figure 1: Participant learning about the heritage of different foods

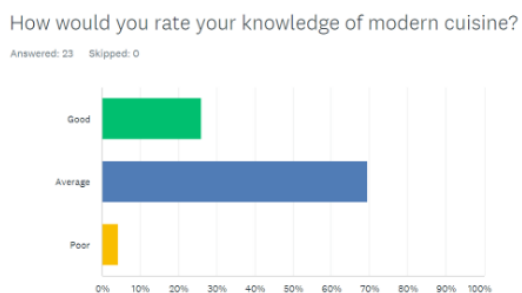


Figure 2: Participant rating of knowledge of modern cuisine

For some residents, the course connected them back to their own heritage, a connection that had been severed due to challenging life circumstances. One participant had told Sarah Rogers, Project Manager, that he could now cook the Caribbean food of his childhood and share this with friends and residents at the YMCA.

Student placement report by Aina Gil Thomas

In order to supplement the participant data on improved understanding of food heritage, NTU organised a funded student placement, undertaken by Aina Gil Thomas, year 2 student studying Politics and International Relations. She was able to provide a session-by-session account of the learning experiences of the participants:

Session 1: Toby the chef, introduced us to English and Scottish dishes. On the first day at Welbeck Estate, we made a loaf of bread, coronation chicken and Scottish broth. With the bread, we made coronation chicken sandwiches. The residents seemed to enjoy this day. They were entertained and kept busy chopping, cooking and baking all the ingredients. Toby explained and showed each ingredient and even told us what it is good for. Participants were happy to take all the food they made back home.



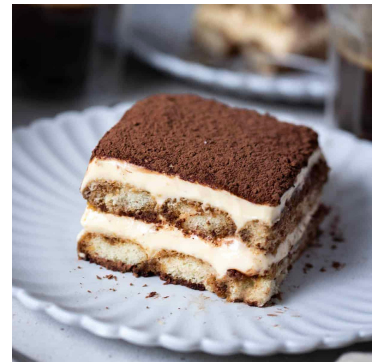
Session 2: We learnt how to make dough balls for pizza. They were supposed to rest for 24hrs, so the residents took 2 dough balls back home. For lunch, we took dough balls that had already been made by Toby the day before and went outside to a table full of toppings that we chopped and prepared to put on top of the pizza and put it in a stone-baked oven. The group was much louder than last week as some of the younger residents are getting to know each other. Some of them were more interested than others but Toby tried to keep them engaged. They enjoyed eating the food that they just made for lunch. Several of them met the owner of Welbeck state during lunch and were really happy about it.



Session 3: We made Naan bread, and curry and there was the option to make half chicken curry and half vegetable curry or just chicken curry. Most opted to make the chicken curry as they didn't like vegetables. On this day Toby showed us how they make bread in an industrial oven like they do in the bakeries. On top of that, we made some basmati rice to go with the curry. Some of the residents seemed not to be as engaged as on the day of the pizza but cooked the food and were pleased to take some back with them. They also enjoyed shaping the naan and making the curry to their taste.

Session 4: We made lamb and sweet potato tagine, quinoa and hummus as well as harissa which we added to baked cauliflower. The lamb and sweet potato tagine took the longest time to cook but everyone could add the spices that were available and if they wanted more they could make it to their taste. Most participants were not used to eating lamb. The residents at this point seemed to get used to coming to the School of Artisan Food as they already knew what to expect. They did not enjoy the food that was provided this day at the SAF, orzo pasta with chicken and spices and some salad, so they did not have much lunch, but waiting for the taxis home I saw them eat their lamb and sweet potato tagine which they seemed to enjoy.

Session 5: We made chocolate chip cookies, chocolate mousse and Tiramisu. The residents were quite interested in knowing what Tiramisu was, as most of them had never tried it before and they like coffee. Toby explained the story of the origins of Tiramisu and they found it interesting, they asked some questions, and we learnt that this recipe is not as old as we think it is. The only two residents that came this week seemed more interested in learning and interacting during the stories of the recipes. When making the food Toby explained and came around showing the ingredients as those are different spices, which most of the residents haven't seen before. He also explained a bit of background history about the spice trade. Toby gave us a cookbook of all the recipes that we made during the sessions so far.



Outcome 2: Young people's skills development and learning

In the participant survey, when asked to rate their cooking skills pre- and post- project, there was also an increase with 26% good, 56% average, 17% poor at the start (figure 3) and 57% good, 43% average, none poor after (figure 4):

How would you rate your cooking skills?

Answered: 23 Skipped: 0

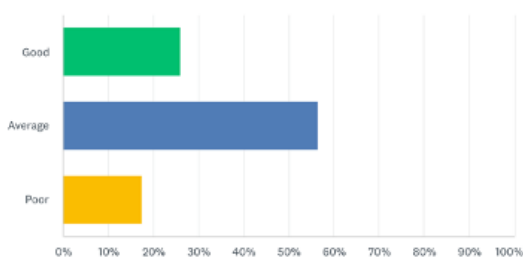


Figure 3: Participant cooking skills at the start of the project

How would you rate your cooking skills?

Answered: 23 Skipped: 0



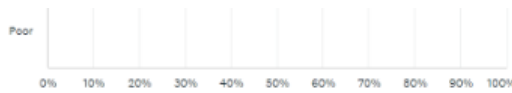


Figure 4: Participant cooking skills at the end of the project

When asked how often participants cook a meal from scratch, the most common answers on the survey at the start were ‘less than once a month’ (39%) and ‘a few times a week’ (30%). This frequency had increased by the end of the project - ‘a few times a week’ (52%) with 8% ‘every day’ and 18% ‘once a week’ – showing a growth in participants confidence in cooking meals from fresh ingredients. This was also accompanied by more confidence in growing their own food, which 65% of participants had no experience in at the start of the project and 48% saying ‘feel confident’ in growing own food, with 30% saying ‘maybe’:

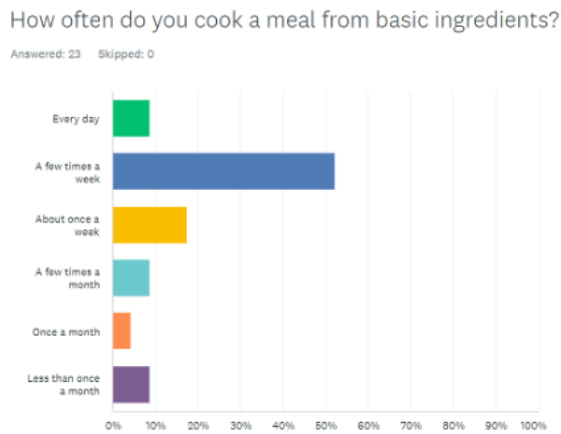


Figure 5: Participant cooking a meal from basic ingredients at end of project

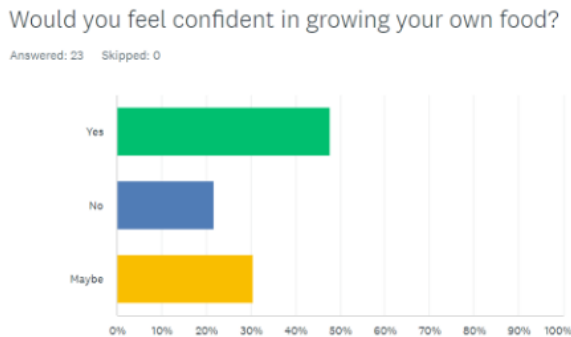


Figure 6: Participant confidence in growing own food by end of project

The participant’s skills development and learning was also evidenced through staff observations. Staff Member from YMCA Mansfield reported an increase in participants independence in their cooking and wider range of foods being prepared:

So, they definitely got a sense of independence. A lot of them didn't realise how easy cooking was or how easy cooking could be. They always thought, if you're easy cooking, then it's gotta be something crap, like a chip sandwich! But the project has taught them basic skills. Things like how to cook Rice that a lot of the young people didn't know. And they can now put that into practice within the hostel, they were cooking rice the other day, and they made a stir fry that they would never have probably made without.

Toby Doy, lead Chef from the School of Artisan Food noted that participants were learning how to make “delicious nutritious food that isn't costing them the Earth ... it's like a wonderful skill for them to get and I think it's also a massive confidence builder for the for the guys that come on the course”. He noted participants increased interest in food and the development of a range of kitchen and cooking skills such as basic knife skills and dough handling, learning how to make stocks and brown meats; familiarisation with cooking terminology, eg ‘sweating’ vegetables; and a willingness to try new foods.

Sarah noted that the course had also taught the young people budgeting skills, in that they now know how to cook a meal from scratch and are doing so. She added that one small group of young people who had been on the course together were getting together to cook once a week in their hostel and this was improving their social and communication skills. The young people live in hostels which house large numbers of people and may not normally meet and interact in small informal groups in this way.

Toby’s key role in facilitating the young people’s learning was identified by Sarah and she noted the importance of the relationships he had built with participants, with many of them looking up to him as a role model. It was clear from talking to Toby that he understood the challenges that participants had experienced in their lives and was very able to work with them in a flexible and empathetic way that won their trust.

Outcome 3: Benefits to wellbeing and the local economy

In terms of future employment within the food and hospitality industry, the project has encouraged more young people to become interested in getting a job that involves food or drink with 39% saying ‘maybe’ at the start and 35% saying ‘yes’ afterwards.

Going to the Welbeck Estate and the School of Artisan Food was also another new experience for participants with 87% having never heard of the school or been there before. However, at the end of the project, 95% of participants rated the sessions at the Welbeck Estate as very good.

Are you interested are you in getting a job that involves food or drink?

Answered: 23 Skipped: 0

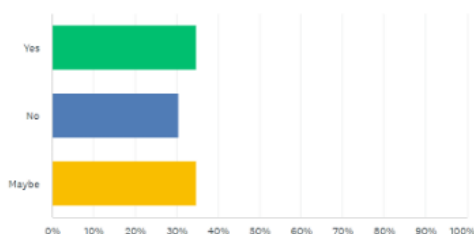


Figure 7: Participant interest in getting a job that involves food or drink

How would you rate the sessions at the School of Artisan Food on the Welbeck Estate?

Answered: 23 Skipped: 0

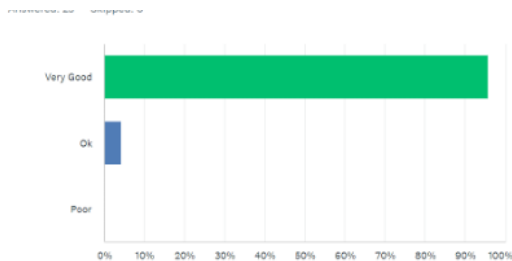


Figure 8: Participant rating of the sessions at the School of Artisan Food

Staff member from YMCA Goole reported that one of their Residents had secured a job in a local kitchen following the project:

Obviously, I see the residents quite a lot, and they're always talking about when they are going to make the food again. So, their confidence around cooking has much improved and one of our residents has actually gone into work. He started with pot washing but obviously going into the kitchen gave him confidence to start that.

The project was also an opportunity for staff from SAF to signpost young people to further education courses in cooking, food hygiene and hospitality. The Staff Member from Mansfield YMCA reported that:

One of our young people who went regularly to the project, she discussed what she could do next with Toby. She's done a level 2 in either baking or cookery, but Toby let her know that there is funding for somebody to go and do a diploma at Welbeck and there's also student housing in Welbeck as well. So, it's learning about those opportunities.

In interviews with the Project Manager, Sarah from the YMCA and Toby from SAF both talked about residents' improved self-esteem, self-confidence and improved behaviours, attitudes and aspirations. Sarah talked about the young people no longer feeling 'excluded' after being on the course. And for some this extended to them taking an interest in the degree that is run at Welbeck. The location of the course was part of this. Sarah said that the course had given participants the chance "to experience the glory of the Welbeck Estate" adding that being in such beautiful surroundings week after week had made participants feel a greater sense of self-worth. Toby added to this saying "There's sort of an almost monastic sort of feel to the place [Welbeck] it's sort of, there's something very calming about the environment" Having a structured activity to look forward to each week also had had a positive impact on participants' mental health with Sarah saying, "They've got something to do Something to look forward to". She also noted that some of the young people had few social relationships prior to the course which had built "their friendships and networks".

In relation to improved participant wellbeing, the pre-existing YMCA mechanism of the outcomes stars were used to monitor young people at regular intervals during the project. An outcomes star chart was completed for each participant at the beginning of the project and three months later at the end. One of these elements, one point on the star is emotional and mental health, which is a desired outcome of this project. The evaluation engaged with this existing tool and also draw on data in relation to motivation, social networks, meaningful use of time and self-care and living skills, such as cooking. The rating scales include 1-2 stuck, 3-4 accepting help, 5-6 believing, 7-8 learning, 9-10 self-reliance. The process with the outcomes star is to support young people through the stages of need toward self-actualisation, as shown in the exemplar below:



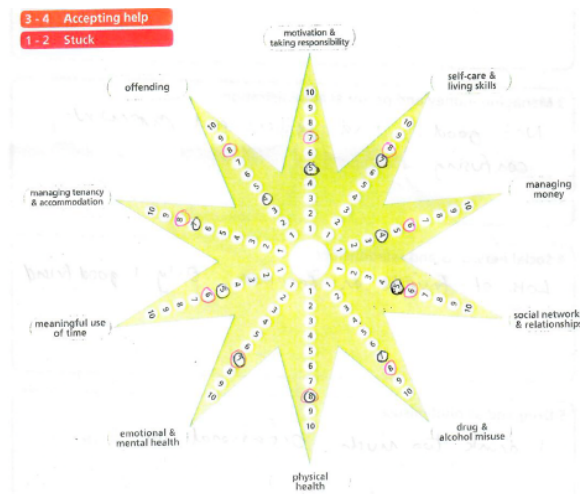


Figure 9: One Participant's Outcomes Star

Mapping the data across the project for all participants, the following patterns in relation to emotional and mental health, motivation, social networks, meaningful use of time and self-care and living skills can be gleaned. Participants self-reported improvements to all elements from the beginning to the end of the project. Whilst it should be noted that there were external factors taken into consideration with this data, the biggest increase was in 'meaningful use of time'. This signifies the positive use of participants time through this project, which aligns with participant feedback concerning the enjoyment and anticipation of the session at SAF.

Outcome	Rating Pre (most common)	Rating Post (most common)
Emotional and mental health	5-6	7-8
Motivation	7-8	9-10
Social networks	7-8	9-10
Meaningful use of time	5-6	9-10
Self-care and living skills	7-8	9-10

Figure 10: Most common Outcomes Star responses

In addition, staff feedback the following concerning participant's wellbeing:

One of our residents was having issues with his confidence and self esteem, which was one of the reasons he actually attended the project. I could see that he was taking a decline in his mental health and so forth. But he really liked how the sessions were interactive, and being with new people and then since the project, he's been more engaged. It's brought him a network of friends.

Staff from YMCA Mansfield reported improved motivation from those taking part in the project, with young people 'looking forward' to the weekly sessions:

It gave them a sense of purpose, even though it was only one day a week, it gave them a reason to get out of bed in the morning and it gave them a bit of motivation. Obviously getting lunch there and being able to take home everything they make, meant that they could eat for the next two days.

Outcome 4: YMCA's organisational understanding of how working with food can be better embedded within their work with young homeless people

It seems clear that who runs the course and where it takes place are key ingredients to its success. As noted elsewhere, Toby's ability to relate to the young people, and to understand how to work with them were key to them feeling comfortable at Welbeck. He noted for example, that for the young people, getting up in time to attend the course was a challenge, and this often resulted in them arriving not having had breakfast, and so he started to give participants some pastries before the sessions commenced, and said "they need to be comfortable before they can learn".

It may not be possible to run future course at Welbeck, but it would seem essential that courses are facilitated by someone with the same skillset that Toby brought to this course; not only professional cooking experience of many years, but empathy and desire to work with this client group.

Both Sarah and Toby noted that for the young people getting up in time to be at Welbeck for a 10 am start was difficult. This led to some participants missing sessions. Any future food course, whether at Welbeck or elsewhere might consider this and have later starting times.

Sarah noted that having the funding to pay for transport for the young people to Welbeck was key. The cost of accessing and travelling to training can be a barrier for these young people, and so future courses may also need to include travel costs or be closer to where the young people live.

Other material and non-material factors incentivised participation according to Sarah, including the fact that young people are fed at Welbeck, get to take home the food that they make and get certificate at the end of the project.

Sarah discussed the possibility of the YMCA employing an activity co-ordinator, one of whose roles may be to promote engagement with training opportunities such as this. Whilst this course had high engagement compared to some others, it would have been good to see more young people take up the opportunity.

There were also recommendations from Housing Staff concerning keeping the project going within YMCA facilities:

- Focus on a 'low budget' menu, in order to show residents that cooking for themselves doesn't have to be expensive. Support this thread with accompanied shopping trips to source materials.
- Organise themed cooking night for residents, such as Indian and Italian nights, and ensure that there is enough food cooked for all residents to enjoy. Ensure that there is support to help residents with planning and cooking these dishes.
- Involved hostel residents in menu planning for the week. A support session could involve researching and printing off recipes, followed by budgeting and shopping.

· The Sunday Dinner could be the focal point for residents, not only in terms of cooking together and for each other, but also for bringing people together. This was currently being undertaken in one location, but due to one staff member providing food. The costs should be regularly accounted for within YMCA funding as an activity.

Participant case studies

Mark has lived in Nottingham all his life. He wanted to attend the project to learn a bit more about cooking because it could lead to other things. He already does volunteering, but this was another way to get his foot in the door for some paid work and step his life in a different direction. He reported that:

I'm definitely going to start cooking more because it's always sort of been 'meal for one' and stuff in plastic containers that you just put in a microwave, but I'm certainly going out looking for fresh spices and stuff like that. From the first day we came here, I had a limited amount of knowledge on spices and vegetables but those things can really bring different meals to life... We've got kitchens on our landing. Microwaves and fridges in our rooms. But the cookers in the kitchen on the landing and nobody is ever in there. So, I'm definitely going to be utilising that a bit more.

He fed back positively on the range of practical cookery skills that he'd learnt as well as the experience of the foraging day:

My favourite part was the foraging, because the first time we went foraging, we went out on the bikes and it was a nice day. We stopped a lot and looked around the estate. But there was so much stuff just growing naturally that you can use. You know you've got to be really careful with somethings, but I downloaded this great app, that one of the staff from School of Artisan Food showed me. You take a picture of something and then everything I snapped, it came up with the name of it, and the Latin name of it and even showed you what stuff you could make with it. So, that was my favorite day, the foraging and really enjoying getting out and about.

In relation to the evaluation of the project outcomes, Mark reported wellbeing benefits in terms of the use of his time, excitement for the next session and uplift in mood:

After each session I'd be buzzing. As soon as we'd get back, I'd sent a text to Rachel (Support worker) and say that I can't wait for next week. It's just lifted my mood a little bit, especially the night before, when I'll be really looking forward to it. Normally I'd be up

playing on the PlayStation but the night before everything went off at 10:00 o'clock and I was in bed asleep, so I could be up in the morning and ready for it.



This was also reported by **Wayne** who came to the project because of his interest in cooking from his early family life. Coming from a big family, who ran an allotment, cooking and roast dinners were a big tradition. In terms of his improvements to wellbeing during the project, he stated that:

I've been struggling with my mental health for the last few years and doing this for the last nine weeks, has helped with my well-being and another little things that mean I've been able to come out of my shell a bit more. So it's helped me in a way that way I am just being sociable and not isolating myself. It's just been one of them steps... Doing this is showing me that I have got the confidence to do things and I have got the confidence to live better.

As well as the social aspect, Wayne also reported feeling more motivated after the project. Following the project he was looking for opportunities to volunteer on the estate:

We got a tour around the estate and you got to see all the running of the estate. Met the farmers and everyday we got to see a different bit. I'm even thinking about if there is a way that I could volunteer there, even for a day or two. That farm shop was great. There's just so many different things and it's about knowing where the food has come from as well. I mean, the milk was a bit dearer, but at least you know it's going to the local farmer.

Caprice was already working in the food and hospitality industry, working two-days per week at Macdonalds. Having done GCSE food technology at school, she commented on how different the sessions with the School of Artisan Food were:

This is a completely different type of food. They said after this, that we'd get the chance to go to college and do more food courses from it I'm a very hands-on person. I'd rather be more practical than it all being written down. We had dishes that we've heard about, but you'd never cooked yourself, and so to cook something with everyone that you never had before, and you never cooked yourself, was a completely different experience.

Key cooking skills that Caprice developed included using a slow cooker for the first time, learning different ways to cook rice and simple tasks such as how to cook basics in water. She learnt about the variety of spices and seeds that can be added to uplift a simple meal and that cooking with multiple ingredients doesn't need to be costly:

I've learnt that not everything has to be expensive, like summer foods, you can just add lemon to vegetables and you've made something really nice. Obviously if you've got meat, that's your main part of the dish, but everything else doesn't have to be expensive.

Caprice also commented positively on the opportunity to 'get out and do something different for a change'. She appreciated the chance to spend time with young people in similar circumstances and be able to relate to them, as well as meeting people from different towns:

I think it's really good and it should be put on again. It's nice to have people who are normally stuck inside with nothing to do, being out for a couple of hours. Even if it just means you meet twice a month, it's nice for us all to get out and cook a meal together with people who understand my situation. It's nice to have some people from a different town who are in the same circumstances.



Toni had always been interested in cooking, but rarely found time to do it. She learnt a lot from the different cultures and food heritages, which was a new experience for her:

Everything has been brand new because I've never looking into the different cultures in foods. It's always been your basic English kind of foods. So, this has increased my knowledge of that. Now I can cook Indian and Chinese and put the ingredients in the recipes that they've been using. The School of Artisan Food has been absolutely fantastic in picking things that you'd never even thought that could go in different dishes.

With lamb tagine, being a firm favourite of hers, and many other participants, she appreciated that everything she got to cook, she took home. Each week she was provided with food boxes and bags and everything she took away was enjoyed by everyone she dished it out to.

Toni also appreciated the cook book that was given to her towards the end of the project. Being able to take that home and choose different recipes from each of the weeks, she saw that she would be cooking more in future:

Now I just want cook more. Because it's not always boring. You can make things fun, you can cut your vegetables into funny shapes if you really want it, and you can make it as fun as you want it to make. There's no point making it as bland and boring and quickly as possible. I just want to cook all the time now.

Adam reflected positively on his skills development, particularly in relation to learning around food hygiene and food production. He recounted his conversation with Toby concerning the growing of coffee beans and the natural habitats required to facilitate that. Adam also commented that his diet had improved since undertaking the project:

My diet has got a lot better. I'm cooking a lot more different stuff. So, something like a Shepherd's Pie, I would never have thought about putting that together. But now I know that you put into it, and it's surprising how much stuff you put in, you have a totally different taste to what you used to. And then just my cooking skills got better.

Adam, as well as the other participants were highly complementary about the informal education style of Toby and the staff as SAF. Young people felt comfortable to 'have a go' at basic cookery skills, within the professional environment and felt excited by what they were learning about food heritage. Adam reports that:

They're really good, really engaging. If you had any sort of queries they were very open to help you. Compared to what I found at college, where the tutors are more busy with the whole classes, this was more of a 1-2-1 thing. The whole group was really nice and you didn't feel silly about asking a question. I have anxiety and depression and so it's been nice to have someone that is open that you can talk to. Pretty much from the first day, we just sort of clicked.

For young people such as **Christian**, this project was their first opportunity to learn cooking skills. Christian attended the sessions as he wanted to gain more confidence in the kitchen, declaring that he 'barely knew how to turn the oven on'. He reported that the project had taken him out of his comfort zone and pushed him to try to cook, and eat for the first time, different foods, such as the Moroccan dished. Connecting with heritage English food took him back to his childhood, as he recounts through this quote:

The best thing that I cooked was Apple Crumble. It was my favourite and it might seem simple to you, but it brought my childhood memories back. Ummmm, apple crumble with custard. I loved that as a kid, absolutely loved it!

Christian was highly complementary about the 'hands-on' experience that he felt that he gained during the sessions. He listed things such as butchering a chicken, learning how to hold the knife to chop vegetables and baking different meats at different temperatures. He described his confidence in kitchen as going from 3-4 to 8-9. Christian also positively described his learning from the foraging session:

Well, I've learnt that it has to be the right time of year for it, but when we went Toby was showing us these little leaves that we used in the cooking. They were growing like basil and lentils and stuff like that. I remember we had some lavender and we'd crushed it up, and then it smelled proper strong.

This project was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund. For further information about the project, contact Sarah Rogers, Operations Manager – Service Delivery (City), YMCA Robin Hood Group - sarah.rogers@ymcarhg.org.