

ALCHEMIC KITCHEN FEEDBACK



THE ALCHEMIC KITCHEN COVID-19 RESPONSE

SOCIAL IMPACT REPORT

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Images: AI's Arc Team

INTRODUCTION

This report documents the social impact of the Alchemic Kitchen's response to the Covid-19 outbreak. The Alchemic Kitchen (TAK) is a social enterprise working to reduce food waste and improve food sovereignty in Liverpool, Sefton and Knowsley. They form part of Feedback Global's Regional Food Economy project which aims to foster circular food economies.

Between March- October 2020 Alchemic Kitchen delivered over 4000 meals through community groups. They stopped producing items for retail and wholesale, and produced soup using a mixture of surplus and purchased vegetables. Homebaked Anfield, a community owned bakery, supplied bread rolls. Meals were distributed through a network of 6 community organisations.

- Al's Arc
- Breckfield and North Everton Neighbourhood Council
- Hillside Community Centre
- Huyton Cooperative
- Swanside Community Centre
- Speke House



Helena, The Alchemic Kitchen

This report compiles the opinions and experiences of the following groups;

- Community organisations
- Project managers
- Funders
- Project team members.

SUMMARY

Community organisations and funders were impressed with Alchemic Kitchen's ability to respond to the increased demand for meal support within Liverpool and Knowsley. Funders

were happy for Alchemic Kitchen to reallocate funding to their Covid response. Community groups were relieved that Alchemic Kitchen were able to support them in their work.

Team members felt a sense of pride at being able to contribute during the crisis. They were pleased with their response and felt more connected to the national Feedback team.

Both Alchemic Kitchen and Feedback expressed the desire for the work being carried out to relate back to the circular food economy and result in a more just food system rather than continuing to provide meal support.

There is a strong theme of increased access to nutritious food throughout the responses. Both funders and community groups felt that Alchemic Kitchen were able to facilitate adoption of a healthy diet.

Concerns were raised over the ability of Alchemic Kitchen to create lasting impact in a complex political environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report recommends that Alchemic Kitchen builds social reporting and accounting into its ongoing work to ensure that they continue to respond to the needs of their community.

The next sections of the report run through the key areas that were reported through the interviews undertaken:

- Local challenges and regional differences
- Access to food and nutrition
- Sustainable network development
- Funder goals
- TAK long term goals
- TAK as part of Feedback
- TAK Response
- Difficulties

LOCAL CHALLENGES AND REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

The Alchemic Kitchen works and Liverpool, all areas with underserved populations because of planning, development, infrastructure and management of the areas.

There is a perception that there has been mismanagement from a local authority perspective – ‘it has been very mismanaged in terms of how the borough has been served. Things have been put in place but weren’t really priorities and they have a lot of control over voluntary sector.’

One funder outlined some of the issues in Kirkby stemming from the initial planning for example, ‘built as an overspill post war - no planning, no amenities, no supermarkets, doctors; childhood obesity is highest in Kirkby with least access to a car, but doesn’t have a supermarket. And another in reference to Knowsley, ‘Knowsley is the second most deprived area in Britain even before Covid’.

This impacts the local populations access to affordable, nutritious food, ‘[p]eople are forced into shopping at convenience stores, expensive and poor quality, or fast food, unhealthy and expensive.’

Chronic multigenerational unemployment is a key factor in the challenges at a local level. In Knowsley, one of the respondents highlighted that the distribution of higher paid jobs is disproportionately in favour of those outside of the borough, ‘highest paid jobs in Knowsley are all people who travel into the borough, not people who live there. One of the only assets in Knowsley is the Hall and Safari Park.’

Access to all services is a key issue, because of lack of infrastructure. Lack of access to food is part of a wider system of people being underserved. As one of the respondents stated, ‘we’re looking at 3rd and 4th generation non-working families, just the tip of the iceberg, [it] all feeds into each other.’



Berna, Hillside Community Centre

WORKING IN THE NEIGHBOURHOODS

People have different perceptions and expectations in relation to food. Need to be clear on whose values are being pushed through projects. One respondent said ‘you’re rightly shocked when you’re seeing people’s homes and what they’re living in, but you’re applying your values to their circumstances. A lot are content with what they have, you’re expecting them to want something different - they’ve not had something and lost it. I found that challenging.’

The supplies TAK are offering help to provide the environment that allows people to engage with food ‘people don’t have all the supplies – slow cooker as well has helped with increasing interest in food. Most families haven’t got a table, or it’s piled up with rubbish.’

A key area of collaboration for TAK and funders is the combined aim to help those neighbourhoods to flourish, aim is to make it a place people want to live.

A key challenge in achieving this is addressing local perception of own area, with one respondent describing that ‘the motivation is to want to get out, not to be happy with or like where you live.’

Another issue will be breaking down protectionism over cohorts of beneficiaries for services, especially in light of challenges to funding post Covid. One funder outlined that 'people were protective over their cohorts, their beneficiaries, didn't want to share resources and people who you got signed up for your project meant you got paid at the end of the quarter and somebody else wouldn't.'

TAK are uniquely placed in Merseyside to understand the differences in the boroughs, and the necessity for both flexibility and formality, and to offer that connection to the North West, which was echoed by one of the London based funders 'we would have been able to do this through another partner – but would have been London based, and we didn't want it to be just a London focused initiative.'

ACCESS TO FOOD AND NUTRITION

HUNGER VS ENGAGEMENT WITH FOOD

Hunger is a very real problem for people in the neighbourhoods TAK work in. One partner said 'It's not about the fun of eating and sharing food, it's about putting something in your mouth and not being hungry. So when I take the soup to them, they were a bit 'urrr', what's that, but then the next week, they were like hey, that was alright that! Because they've never tried anything like that before.'

One partner said 'For one family, before the box the family had only had toast Most people are very genuine Some have been embarrassed to ask'

Health benefits of the food is important for the partners, and for those receiving the food. One partner said 'I loved what was in the soup. I loved the way they explained it, and how they use all the bits and bobs and it's all so healthy. Couldn't say which is most important.'

Being able to relieve stress from TAK partners through support with meals, one partner said 'Not having to cook on that Friday. I work weekends as well, it was just wonderful.'

CONNECTING WITH PEOPLE

Multiple people mentioned the importance of connecting with people, through delivering food, through cooking activities, and through the partnerships with TAK. One partner said 'biggest thing is that we would normally be doing home visits, by doing drop off of food this means you get view of the families

One said 'I just want to continue that work we do community days where we cook, it'd be lovely for them to come and show what they do, and show people, this is how you do it and it's healthy and it's cheaper than getting a cottage pie from Asda!'

FOCUS ON THE VALUE OF FOOD

For staff the valuing of all food is important. 'The business previously made sure local produce was used, TAK – revalue things that would otherwise go to waste. Really thought about this for home and work e.g. with apples use cores for apple vinegar.'

SUSTAINABLE NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

Shared Values / Outcomes / Objectives with funders, suppliers and partners: there are shared objectives with funders around feeling less socially isolated, better mental health, feeling they're more in control of decisions, better off financially. With Livv Housing they use the Social Value Bank for outcomes and values to track in reporting. With supplier organisations it was noted that TAK and the supplier share values around food and

waste. There is mutual respect on what they are each trying to do for community and the environment. From a supplier perspective, financial support is also important – through placing orders.

Community / local organisation response: everyone has changed what they are doing to meet the needs locally. This was out of emergency need, but has also led to new opportunities and ways of engaging with people: Loads of opportunities have opened up that potentially wouldn't have if we'd just been doing what we normally do, waiting for referrals, waiting for clients to be sent our way, this time it's been going out and meeting people yourself.

FUNDER GOALS

From a funder perspective there are key themes for Knowsley:

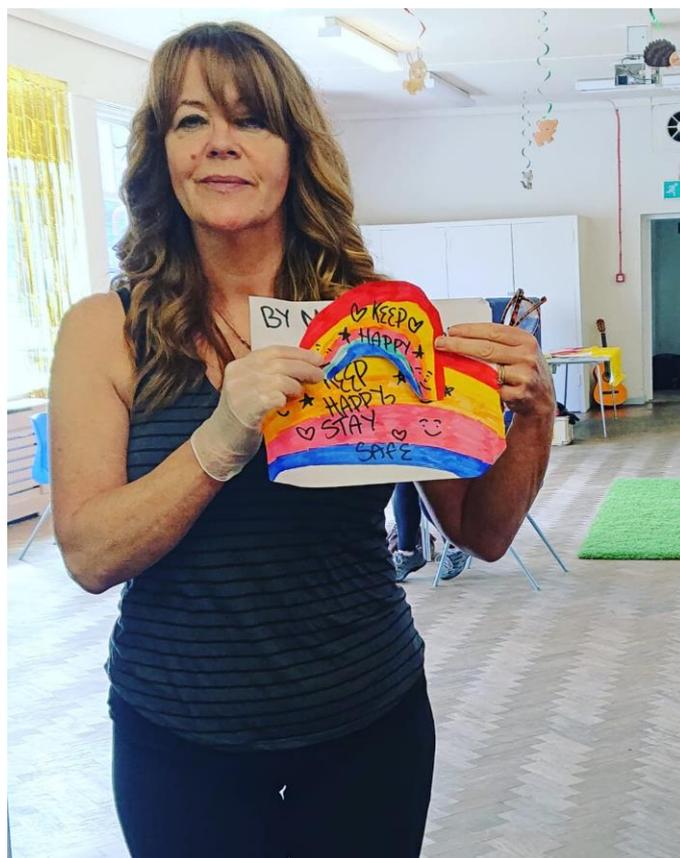
- education attainment for young people,
- mental health and wellbeing,
- digital inclusion,
- employment and skills and financial inclusion.

From Knowsley 2030 strategy the aim is to plan how will collectively address the issues in the borough.

For TAK, the engagement from one funder has been in relation to:

- children and young people, and
- wellbeing, both physical and mental wellbeing.

The funder stated that they 'look to work with organisations who already have a good track record in Knowsley and are aligned with our vision.' 'TAK are a really valid contributor to working with people without the pressure of outcomes, just bring people in and engage them and move them around as and when they are ready to where they want to be so its bespoke rather than off the shelf course. TAK have their own outcomes, the Jan, Swanside Community Centre as long as we can see the journey they've been on, the mon...



TAK LONG TERM GOALS

One area of focus for TAK (identified by staff) is about identifying the business models within the circular economy that could be self-sustaining that are low waste, that draw attention to waste streams and resolve them.

The vision is important to staff, and 'being involved in that vision from the beginning is really important.'

From a funder perspective, there is the opportunity for exploring synergies as brewery based orgs: 'We're exploring synergies between Toast and TAK as brewery based orgs.'

TAK's quick response has been important from a funder perspective: 'TAK was the main entity that was responding, and their ability to reach people that needed it. Taking surplus food for redistribution to people. Agreed to fund meals and meal prep for whatever capacity TAK were able to serve.'

Storytelling of positive action and to raise awareness: 'Part of the benefit was to have a story to tell and communicate about positive action, to raise awareness and to bring hope. – good case study to incentivise action Getting requests from other community groups as well – ended up working with 8 different groups through feedback.'

TAK AS A PART OF FEEDBACK

Different working practices, and different working geography: As the main parent organisation is based in London, there have been some challenges earlier on in terms of integrating a remote staff member into the wider team, as this was not something Feedback had done much until this point (reported from parent organisation).

TAK practical experience informs Feedback work as policy specialists: 'Particularly during Covid Lucy and team has been a touch point between impact of Covid on communities during the crisis and the work that they've been doing enabled Feedback to go to wider group of policy makers in terms of emergency response, and then what needs to change longer term emerging out of Covid.' The work that TAK does brings credibility to the overall work of Feedback.

Another example is through the products practically showcasing use of food that would otherwise go to waste: 'At Christmas told the story of creating first product range from food that would otherwise have gone to waste, did a drive that people could order from products or donate to Feedback. It's not really about the money but more about the story and one that people are appreciative of.'

TAK is public facing though still doing events and is a connection to general public: 'TAK is one of the only parts of Feedback that still does public events. This is one of the only places where we have a direct interface between ordinary non-environmentalist type people and the issues that we are trying to address, so in that sense it is a really useful sense check especially for comms, about how you talk about these issues in a way that people understand but also in a way that people want to engage with.'

TAK RESPONSE

Many of the stakeholders remarked on how quickly TAK were able to respond to community needs. One funder noted 'The fantastic thing about TAK is they've been able to turn on head what their offer is - agility has been incredible. They've not been disabled by Covid, they've responded to it, programmes, policies, risk assessments, they've written it down, and got on with it while lots of others were still scratching their heads. Incredibly efficient. No concerns. Amazing ideas and creativity, professional as well. Combination of very good at doing stuff and also managing, gathering evidence, doing what needs to be done for funding'. This work has led to Knowsley Kitchen, an initiative that was a direct response to the crisis but has a relevant place in a post-Covid society too.

In regard to how TAK worked with partner organisations one organisation said 'Been a pleasure working with them. Kept in the loop on orders. Good communication. Been on time. All logistics has been great. No negative feedback. People are always pleasant. Everyone has been respectful.'

TEAM SENTIMENT



The TAK team members were happy and relieved to be able to have an impact on their community but felt frustrated by the change in direction 'I was brought on to develop recipes for surplus produce, stopping that has been frustrating but it has been offset by the positives'. One team member said 'Fantastic project and very happy to be working on it. Small but formidable'. There was a feeling that the response work has improved the visibility of Alchemic Kitchen within Feedback. TAK team members stated how they appreciated the flexibility and support of Feedback in facilitating the relief work.

SAFETY AND PRECAUTIONS

Stakeholders noted how they trusted TAK as they knew that the organisation had taken the necessary precautions required to reduce the spread of Covid.

KNOWSLEY KITCHEN

Natalie, Speke House, Launch Pad

Both funders, parent organisation and recipients highlighted the benefits achieved through Knowsley Kitchen. Benefits include:

- Identification of isolated households
- Reason for point of contact with vulnerable citizens
- Fresh food provision

There are concerns from the parent organisation that Knowsley Kitchen does not become a 'charitable food delivery service'. Instead 'this needs to be about creating a new way of procuring food locally or linking people to the food system'.

DIFFICULTIES

One funder highlighted the attitudes towards food and nutrition held by community groups in Knowsley. She commented "Got FareShare stuff delivered and put out the crates. People from the neighbourhood came down, took a bag of what they needed. The following day there was one enormous crate piled high with kale. They'd taken cabbage and stuff they recognised, the manager said to my colleague, we laughed and said kales not very popular. She looked at her straight and said 'they're desperate, but they're not that effing desperate!'. But I know if Lucy's gang had been there and turned it into pesto and stirred it through a load of pasta, it would have gone like that. Because that bit of knowledge isn't there, the whole lot went in the bin". This was echoed by

TAK team members who suggested that, at times, community groups could be difficult to communicate with. One team member said 'It can be difficult working with volunteer organisations, local relationships and politics. There are a lot of very personal relationships that prop up community organisations – if all volunteers, or with differing motives – certainly a challenge'.

From the parent organisation there was concern that the project had 'many strings to its bow' and that it was a lot to manage.

CONCLUSIONS

The project carried out by Alchemic Kitchen has been part of a critical societal need to engage citizens with nutritious food in a way that is accessible, informative and when possible fun. Partner organisations appreciated TAK's ability to respond to their needs quickly and efficiently. Despite the changes to existing project plans funders were happy for TAK to change activities and provide meal support.

Going forward it is important that TAK build on the network of organisations they have created and continue to respond to the needs of the community whilst maintaining their core objectives surrounding equitable and environmentally responsible food systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Alchemic Kitchen should incorporate data collection techniques into their ongoing practice to ensure that they continue to respond to the needs of their communities.
- There was a good understanding of the work carried out by Alchemic Kitchen amongst team members and funders. However, community organisations had different understandings of Alchemic Kitchen's role. This could be improved through the development of Knowsley Kitchen.