

## **Final Report: Usage of the “Community Cupboard” in Barton Neighbourhood Centre**

### **Executive summary**

The ‘Barton Community Cupboard’, housed in the Barton Neighbourhood Centre, exists to combat food poverty and reduce food waste. The Student Consultancy was tasked with analysing the impact of interventions made to the cupboard. Research was conducted over one week on food delivery days (Monday, Tuesday, and Friday). Data regarding both the cupboard users and the demand for food were collected.

83 users were observed in total. The majority of users are female, regulars, and arrive around food delivery times. Fruits, vegetables, and bread items are the most popular. Abuse of the service has been minimised by Eatwell staff regulating cupboard food distribution in the morning.

The most prevalent issues identified from the previous set-up have been addressed. One remaining problem is that users can have a lack of trust over the quality of food on offer. We conclude that the community cupboard is being successfully used, and that a sign to reassure users that the food is still fresh and edible would further improve the service.

### **Methodology**

We understood that a key aspect of our task was to gather data without impacting the nature of the results produced. The fear was that interviewing cupboard users may cause them to be dishonest about how they were using the cupboard. In order to provide an objective set of results, the observant positioned themselves on a table just on the near right hand-side wall as you enter the community center. Most cupboard users therefore only noticed the observer as they turned around to leave having already collected their food. Along with careful observation, approximations were made about the cupboard users age, sex and amount of food taken. While there are undeniably some generalisations that are made throughout the results, we feel that their collective weight provides an accurate picture of the cupboard’s overall effectiveness. When you combine this data with some of the qualitative analysis, in conversations overheard between cupboard users and Eatwells staff, and indeed between the users themselves, the methodology used portrays a consistent picture over the three days the food cupboard was observed.

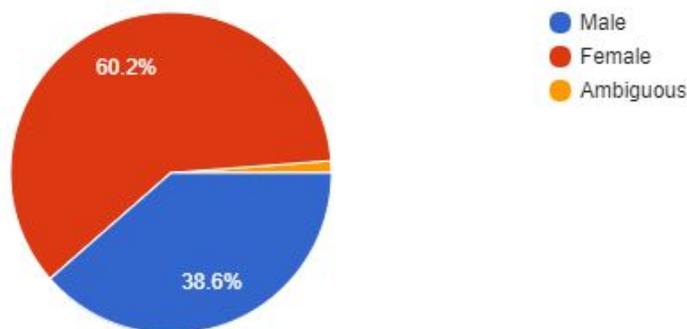
## Quantitative data

A total of 83 users were observed over the three days. The data regarding both the community cupboard users and their food choices are summarised below.

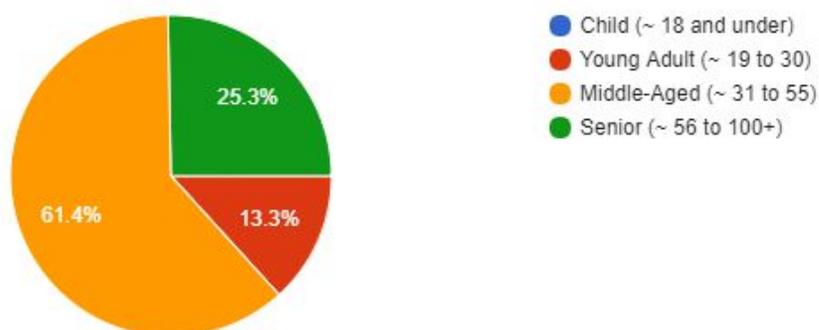
### Community Cupboard Users

*Users are predominantly female, middle-aged, and come alone. The majority of users interact with another person during their visit to the cupboard.*

- Graph 1: Users by gender. 60.2% of users are female.



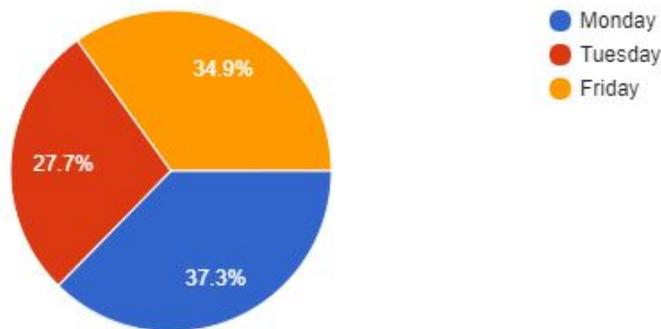
- Graph 2: Users by age-range. 61.4% of users are in the 'middle-aged' (31 - 55) category.



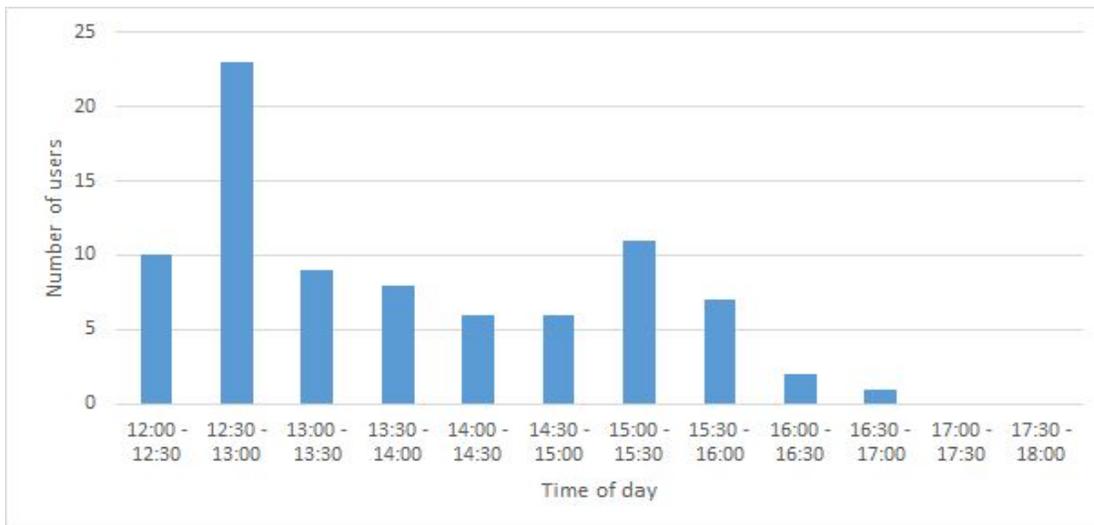
- 84.3% of users came alone. Those who were accompanied came with a maximum of two children, with a partner, with a parent, or with another community cupboard user.
- 44.6% of users did not interact with anyone during their visit to the community centre. 32.5% interacted with the Eatwells Cafe Staff, with the minority interacting with other workers at the community centre or visiting the doctor's surgery.

Footfall is roughly equal on the three delivery days. Footfall is highest 12:30 - 13:00, corresponding to food delivery times. 78.3% of users did not spend longer than 15mins in the community centre.

- Graph 3: Footfall distribution over the Monday, Tuesday, and Friday. Demand is constant throughout the week.



- Graph 4: Footfall distribution: time of day. Includes observations from Monday, Tuesday and Friday. 12:30 - 13:00 was the most popular time slot.

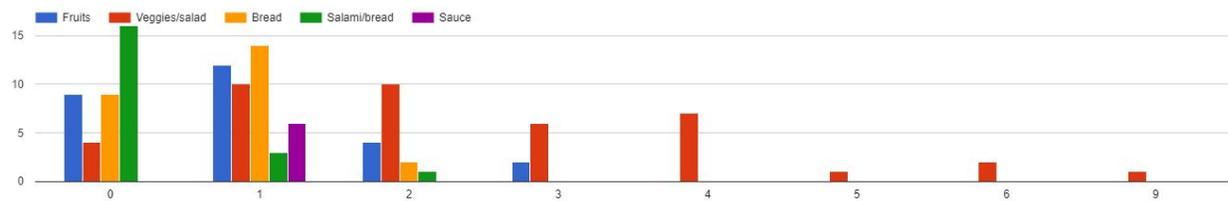


## Demand for food

*Only two people were observed taking more one bag; the vast majority took one bag or less. Vegetables are the most popular food item.*

- Graph 5: number of items taken by food category.

How many of which types of food were taken



- I. Most people took at least one vegetable item, and those who took higher numbers of items were more likely to have taken vegetables.
- II. Salami/meat products were least likely to be taken.
- III. The majority took at least one bread, vegetable, and/or fruit product.

## Observations and Qualitative Data

In addition to the quantitative data, qualitative data was also collected in order to build a fuller picture of the Community Cupboard usage. Throughout the three days over which observations were made, two general user groups were identified. The first group consisted of regular users, who tended to arrive at the same time as the food delivery (between 12:30PM and 1PM) and likely visited the Cupboard on a repeated basis. The regulars each brought their own bag, which was then filled by Eatwells Cafe staff. They spent time interacting with both Eatwells staff as well as other regulars. The second group consisted of occasional users, who usually stopped by the Cupboard on their way to other activities at the Neighbourhood Centre. These users usually arrived at different times throughout the afternoon, picked out the food themselves and had more questions about the policies and procedures of the Cupboard. However, occasional users were observed to interact less within the Neighbourhood Centre.

The main issue brought up in the previous TSC report was abuse of the service. As a point of difference from the year previous, the Cupboard food is now regulated when it first arrives (generally affecting the regulars). The surplus food leftover from the initial surge is left on the table, unregulated. This change appears to have largely mitigated the issue, as there were only two instances singled out as potential cases of food abuse throughout the week. One observed instance was a single female rapidly filling up an entirely backpack with food, another was a single female filling two bags with vegetables. Although most of the regulars were observed to add additional food items to their bags after the unregulated food is placed on the table, none exceeded the one bag limit. In general, the relations between the Eatwells staff and the Cupboard users appeared to be friendly and agreeable. Not only did the staff fill up the regulars' bags, they were also present throughout the afternoon to talk to other users and provide recipe guidance. Towards the end of the day, an increasing number of users begin questioning the quality of food in the Cupboard. While some users remain confused about the policies and procedures of the Cupboard, there appears to be a greater overall degree of awareness of its purpose.

## **Comparison to Prior Studies**

The 2016 TSC team observed 68 users over three days from 10AM - 5PM. These were similar conditions to this year's data collection environment. The following findings were consistent from Year One (2016) to Year Two (2017):

- Users of the Community Cupboard are predominantly female
- Users are mostly middle-aged (31-55 years old)
- Footfall is heaviest around the time of the deliveries. Heavy footfall around the time of the food deliveries suggests that most users are regular users. Footfall also picks up around 3PM, when mothers come with their child(ren) after picking them up from school
- Some users pack their own bags, while some of the users (especially the regulars) have bags packed by the Eatwells Cafe staff for them
- Some users question the freshness of the food or ask questions about how to prepare certain food items that were available
- The most demanded foods were fruits, vegetables, and bread items

This year's results differed in two key ways from the 2016 study. First, last year's TSC team found that salami and meats were highly demanded. This year's TSC team found that these food items were the least likely to be demanded by users. Second, last year's TSC team notes a high incidence of abuse of the Community Cupboard. Abuse is classified as users taking more than one bag of food. This year's TSC team found only two possible instances of abuse and did not observe any other misuse of the Community Cupboard. Further, the observed possible instances of abuse did not involve users taking significantly more than one bag of food.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

On the whole, the most prevalent issues from the previous set-up of the food cupboard seem to have been addressed. However, there does still seem to remain a problem regarding trust in the quality of the produce that is on offer. In particular that which is still available at the end of the day. As a result, we recommend measures are taken in order to make sure that food does not go to waste.

The ideal solution would perhaps to provide a use-by-date for all the produce. However, we understand that this would be very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve given the knowledge the staff members at Eatwells have of the food given to them as well as the time they can give to it. Therefore we instead suggest that clearer signage be put in place, in order to reassure users of the community cupboard that all the food on offer is still in its prime and edible. This recommendation is based on the success of the recipe cards. The recipe cards seem to be a trusted source of information and give people the confidence to select any food item that is available to them. We believe that the effect of a clearer and more effective sign regarding the quality of the produce will have a similar effect. The new sign will imbue users of the community cupboard with the confidence to take home, and crucially use, healthy produce even if it is slightly bruised etc.

In the main, however, we recommend that vast changes are not put into place. There seems to be a high level of understanding on the part of the users of the community cupboard as well as a strong sense of control and respect established by the Eatwells Cafe staff. Though there have been instances of abuses these have both been slight infractions and they were exceptionally infrequent. Certainly they do not seem to be on the scale of the abuse that was previously occurring such as individuals taking vast quantities of food and reselling it. Furthermore, in order to totally eliminate this abuse would require full time attention of the Eatwells staff and seems like an inefficient use of their time given the minor nature of the infractions. Therefore, we believe that, though not ideal, steps should not be taken in order to definitively stamp out any potential abuse unless it is observed that there is a significant spike in the frequency and severity of it.