Food Rescue
Final Report
January 2023-June 2024





Recycle Devon

COMMUNITY FUND

Devon Communities Together
helping communities help themselves

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1. Introduction

Food Rescue, funded by the National Lottery's "Reaching Communities" program, supports the development of Community Fridges across Devon. This initiative, managed by Devon Communities Together (DCT), aims to reduce food waste and foster community engagement by making surplus food freely available to the public. In 2022/2023, DCT was commissioned to deliver evaluation services for Food Rescue. They focused on developing a survey approach to gather insights from two Community Fridges operated by Food Rescue in Okehampton and Exeter. This methodology has since been extended to independent Community Fridges interested in gaining similar insights.

"Anything that helps reduce food waste is good. It also increases people's awareness of food waste and the importance of minimising this. It has increased my use of the library for other things. It has got me chatting to people in the library and elsewhere and increased my sense of community and belonging."

"Less waste is a huge bonus, people who have gluts in their gardens can make sure their efforts aren't wasted! The local shops cut their own waste down by donating reduced items at the end of the day which is great!"

Community Fridge Model:

Community Fridges and Larders are publicly accessible spaces (fridge, freezer, or ambient) that offer surplus food for free to local residents. "Surplus food" refers to items that are no longer intended for sale, but are still safe and good to eat. This includes food past its "Best Before" date, which affects quality rather than safety. Various factors, such as overstocking or damaged packaging, can render food unsellable, making it available for redistribution through these fridges.

The Community Fridge model operates on a self-service, honesty basis, allowing them to be relatively low-maintenance. Volunteers generally collect food from local businesses, which is then deposited at the fridge or larder. Additionally, some projects accept surplus food from households, such as excess produce from gardens or allotments.

"It's amazing: it reduces food waste in the community, help people save money, try new food, and it builds a sense of community as we all contribute to a community service."

"Very good thing to have, it helps my family in tough spots, to reduce our own waste and my children get excited to see/donate to the fridges!"



2. Survey Methodology

The evaluation of the community fridges was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, which included both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Quantitative data was collected through a short stakeholder(s) survey, which was designed in March 2023 as part of previous community larder/fridge evaluation activities. The aim of the survey was to reach people involved with the fridge projects – either as fridge users / volunteers and or contributors and to gather a combination of quantitative and qualitative data from all sites.

The quantitative data helps us profile who the stakeholders were; their gender, age, household size etc and the qualitative data (Most Significant Change and qualitative questions in the survey) tells us why they were involved with their local project and what they felt about the project. The team used an incentive to encourage people to take the survey. A random draw took place when the survey closed and one respondent at each fridge was given a voucher for £25 for a local independent food shop as a thank you for their time completing the survey.

Responses were also collected using face to face collecting, whereby the project team approached users at the two fridges. The online survey was promoted on social media and shared (by project partners) on the project's social channels and websites, as well as by the volunteers of each larder/fridge and via the local shops.

"It increases a sense of community, it gives people in food poverty a chance to supplement their diets, it reduces food waste, it gives a focus in the town, and it encourages conversation about food and nutrition."

"Absolutely a good thing. No need to think you / I am taking food away from people who really need (eg food bank). Quite the opposite everyone benefits, the planet benefits and

obviously it benefits the local community, and it points out how much food would have been wasted if the fridge wasn't there.”



3. Summary of Fridge Evaluation Project (January 2023-June 2024)

The evaluation firstly consisted of identifying the number of larder/fridge visitors/users at each site, to understand who is using the fridge and why. A stakeholder survey (see Appendix 1) with prize incentive for a local independent food shop was conducted for each fridge, which was designed as part of an evaluation methodology development by the Food Rescue team. The survey ran for 3 weeks for all fridges except St Thomas, which ran for 2 weeks due to the fridge relocation to the local Methodist Church as the library venue closed.

The aim during the survey period was for 30-50 surveys per location to be conducted at each location. Outputs from this activity are below:

2 x visits to Exeter fridge = , 25 surveys were collected in situ, 2 online, and 7 MSC stories collected.

2 x visits to Okehampton fridge = 21 surveys were collected in situ, 33 online, and 6 MSC stories collected.

2 x visits to St Thomas fridge = Observed 26 people using the fridge during visits, 21 surveys completed in situ, 11 online, 3 MSC stories collected.

2 x visits to South Brent fridge = Observed 30 people using the fridge during visits, 24 surveys completed in situ, 38 online, 5 MSC stories collected.

2 x visits to Bovey Tracey fridge = Observed 11 people using the fridge during visits, 45 Bovey Tracey (13 surveys completed in situ, 32 online), 3 MSC stories collected.

2 x visits to Crediton larder equating to 6 hours = 43 Crediton (25 surveys completed in situ, 18 online)

2 x visits to Bradninch food shed = Observed 27 people using the fridge during visits, 12 surveys completed in situ, 45 online, 2 MSC stories collected.

2 x visits to Ashburton fridge = Observed 36 people using the fridge during visits, 22 surveys completed in situ, 89 online, 2 MSC stories collected

2 x visits to Hemyock fridge = Observed 44 people using the fridge during visits, 34 surveys completed in situ, 51 online, 3 MSC stories collected

2 x visits to Holsworthy = Observed 24 people using the fridge during visits, 12 surveys completed in situ, 28 online, 1 MSC story collected

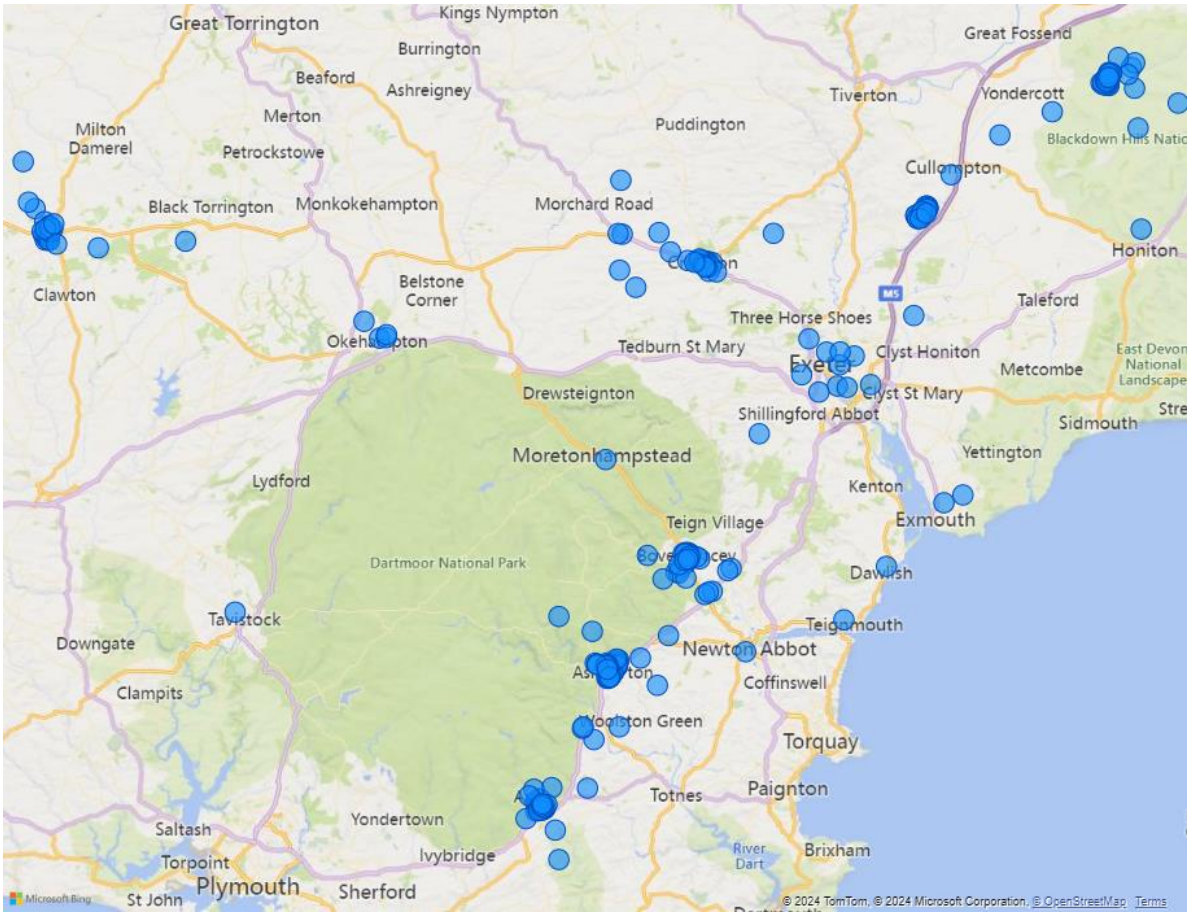
"...it is definitely a great thing to have in the community because it allows you to go down and help yourself to things that are only going to be wasted. It is a little weight off your shoulders knowing it's one less thing you'll have to buy when shopping to try and save a bit of money where you can."

"It encourages people to use up things that would otherwise be wasted. Helps low-income households of which I am one."

"...it is empowering people to gain access to food that they may not otherwise have. I believe there are several different populations of people who use the fridge... those who want to reduce food going to landfill, those who need additional food which they may not otherwise be able to afford. Also, most of the food is fresh and therefore people are encouraged to cook from first principles rather than maybe defaulting to a processed food option."



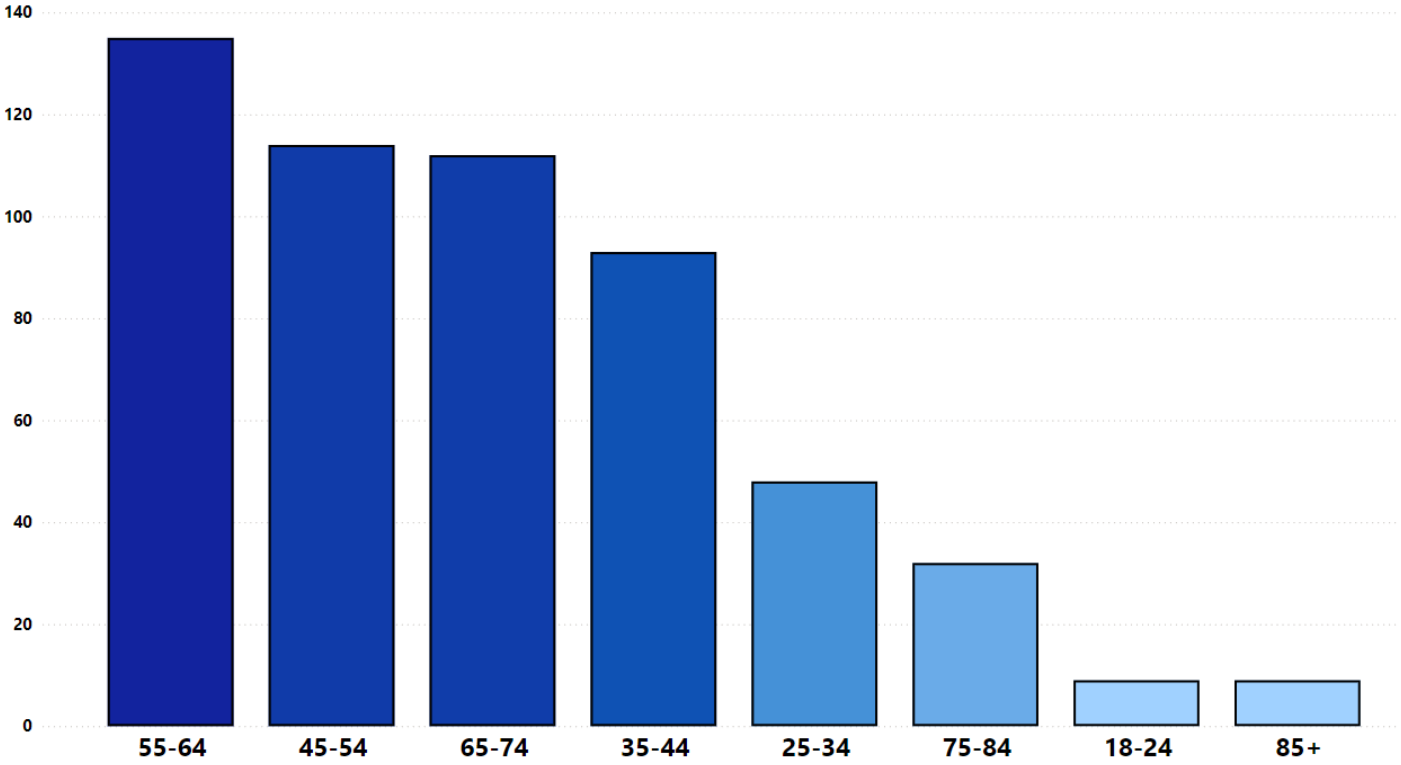
Map of Community Fridge Survey Respondents:



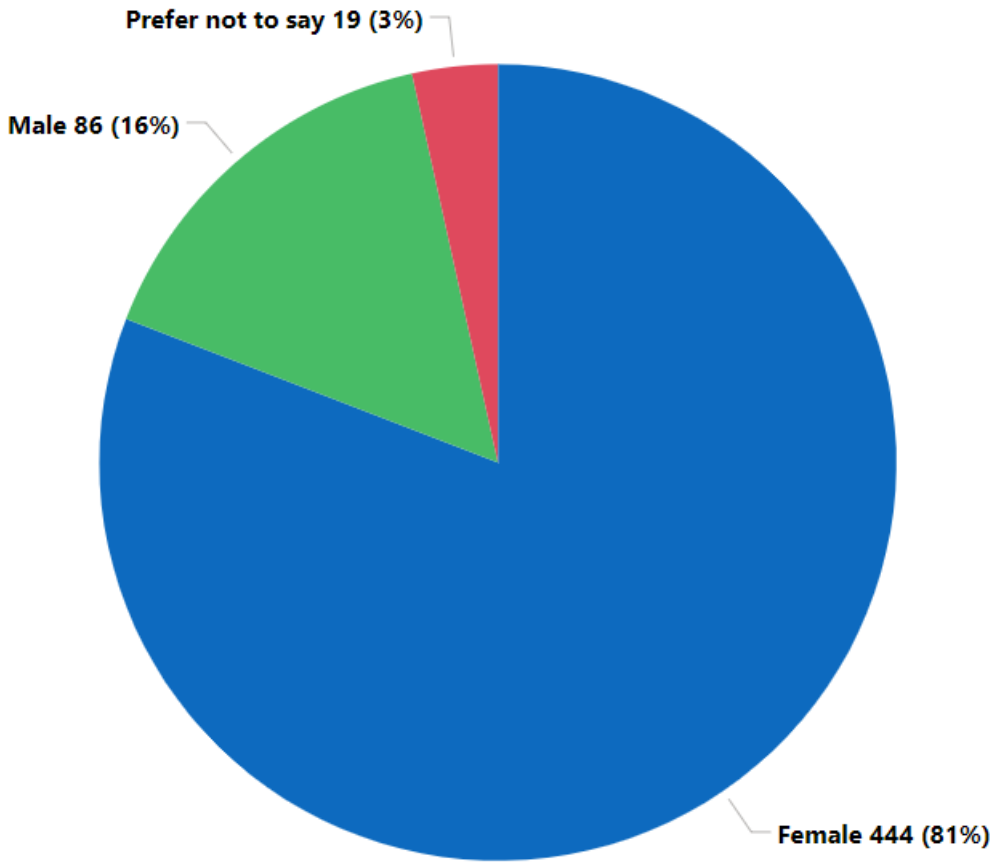
Across the 10 fridge evaluation surveys, 563 people engaging with the fridge responded to give their views and feedback.

Evaluation Results:

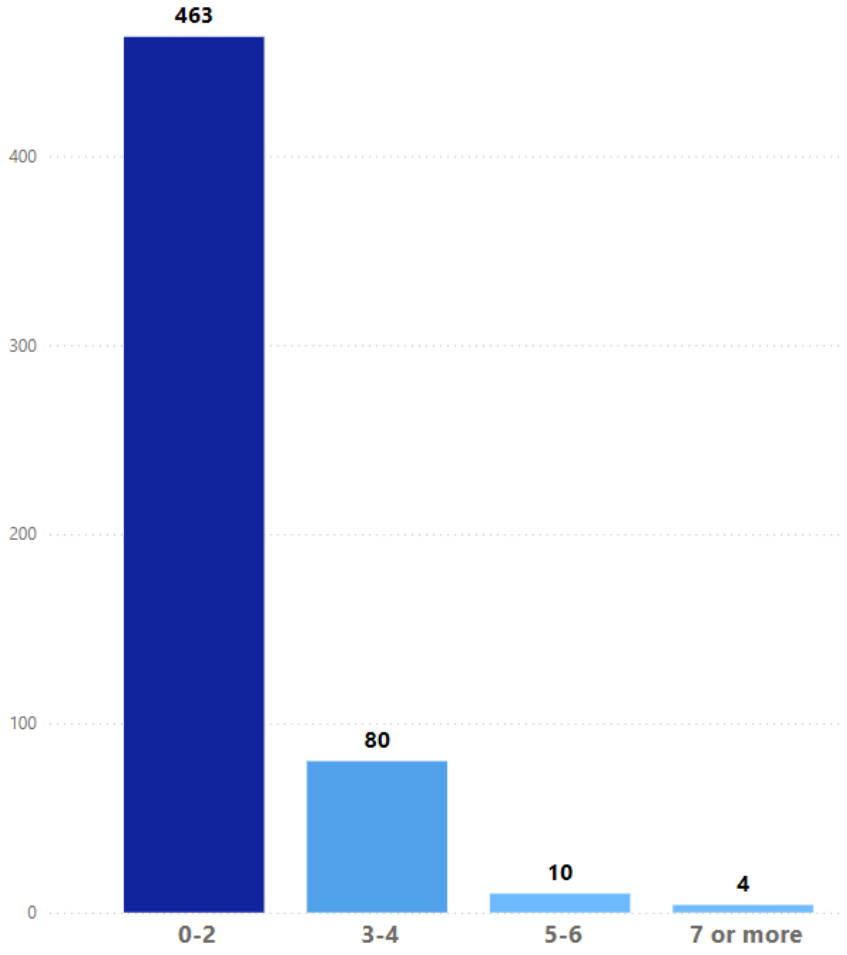
Age of Respondents



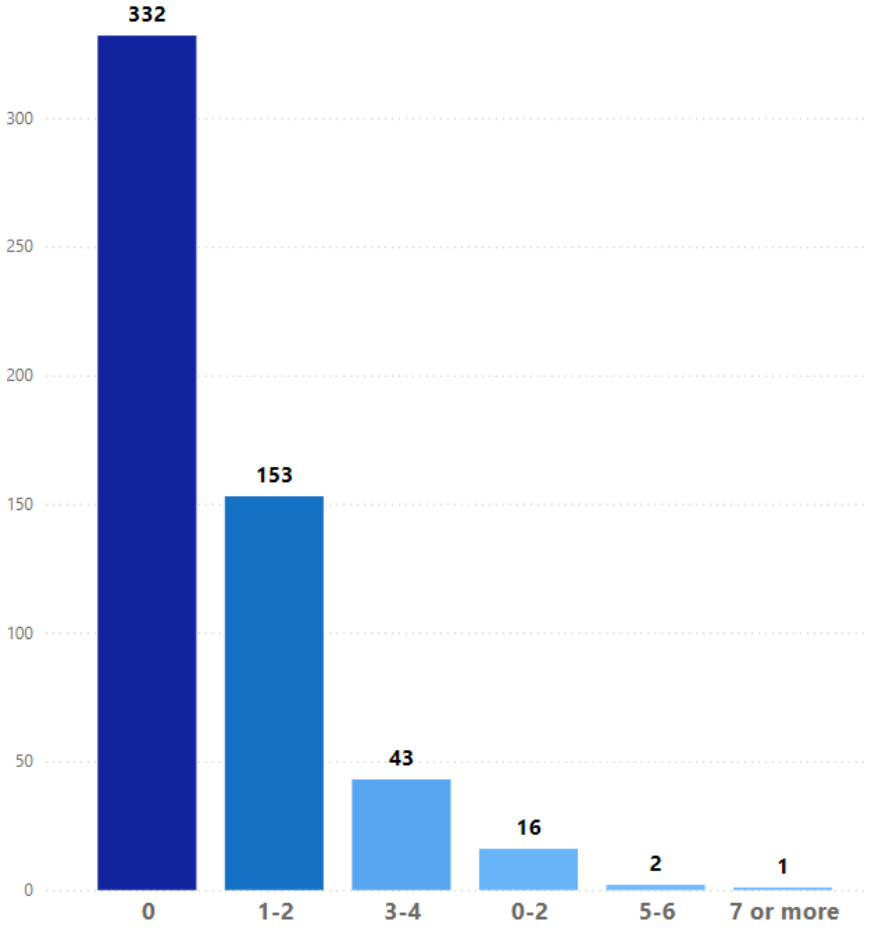
Gender of Respondents:



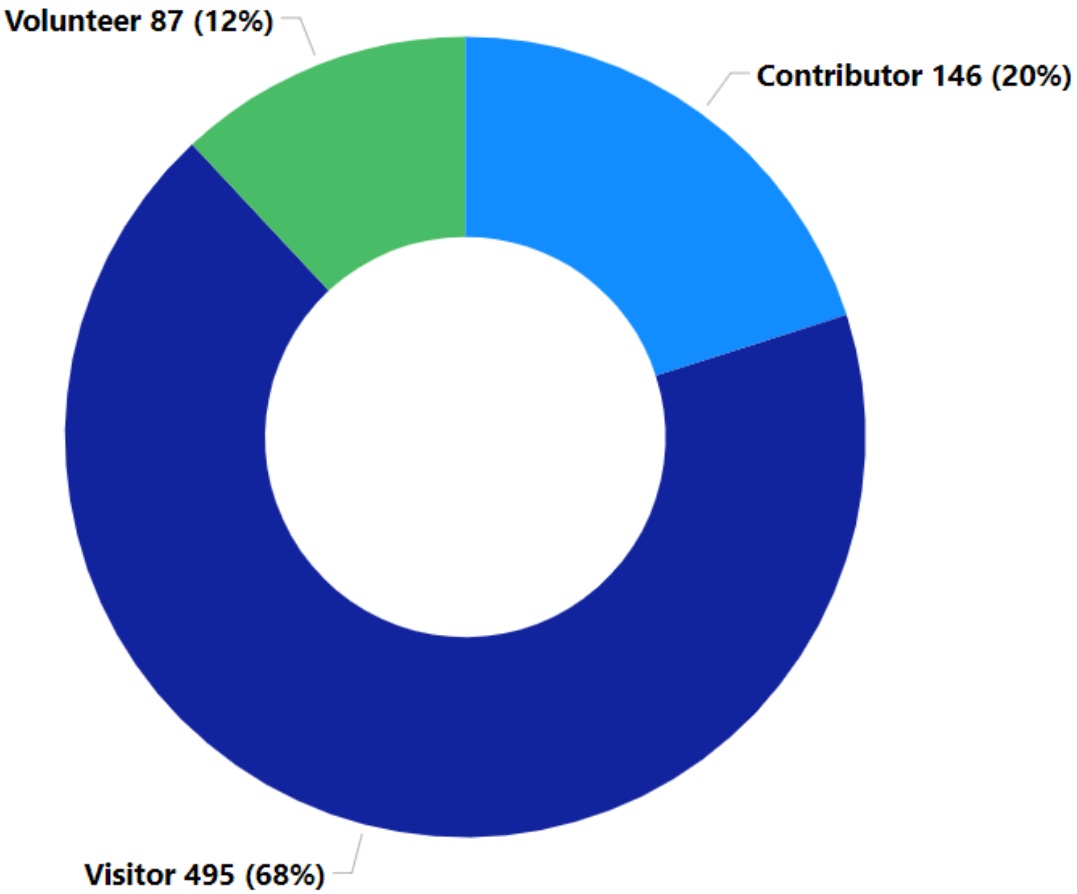
Household Size – Number of Adults in Household:



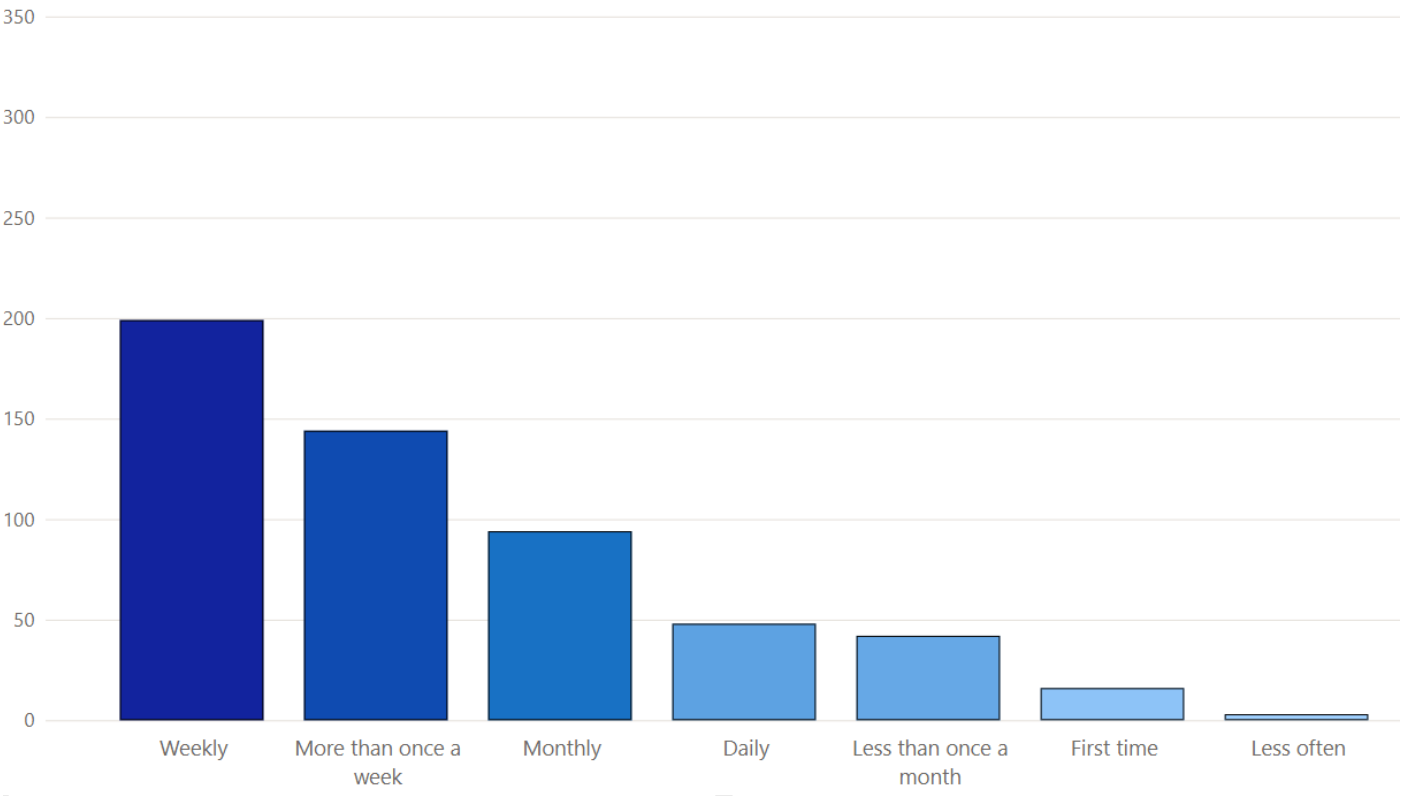
Household Size – Number of Children in Household:



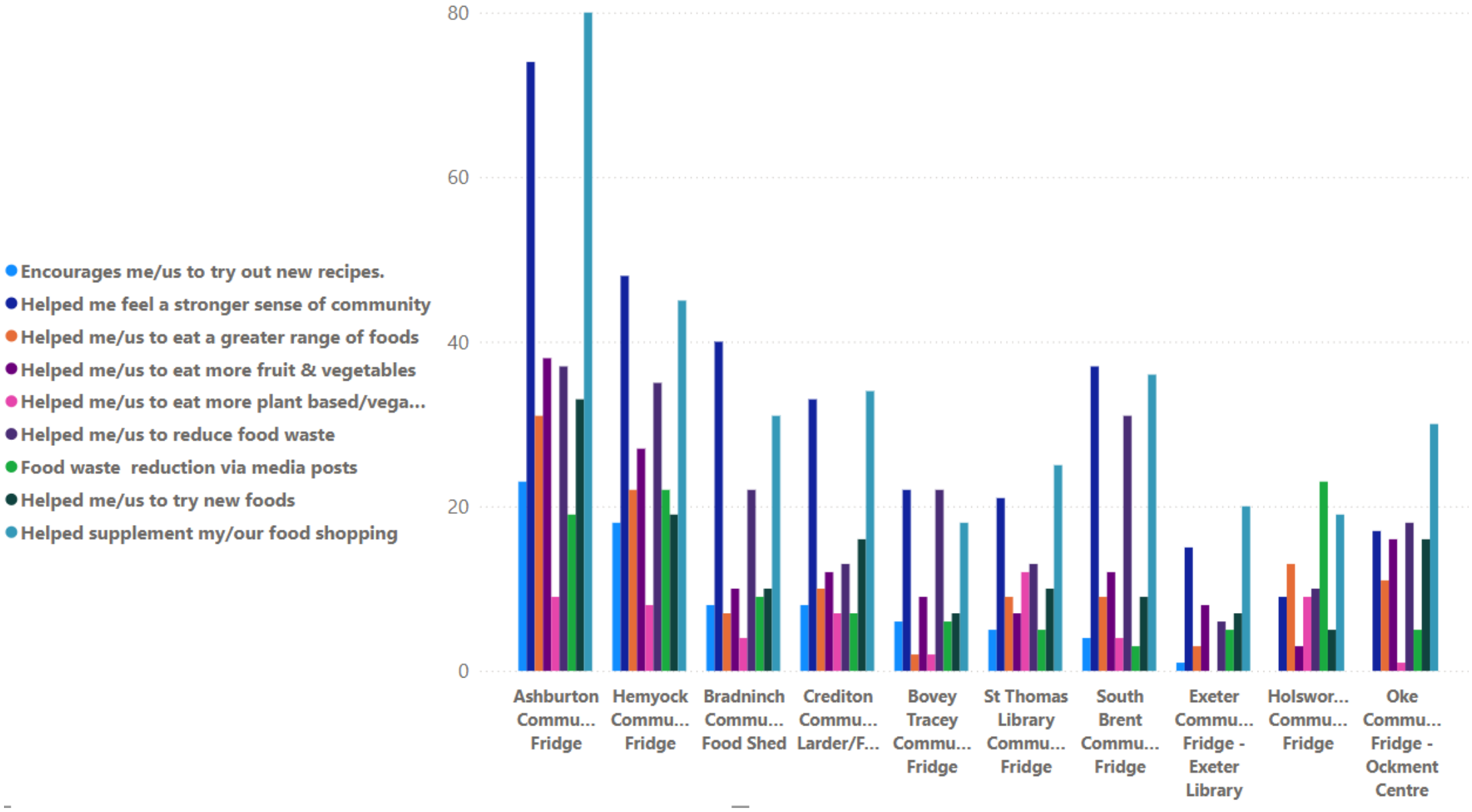
Type of Interaction:



Fridge Use Frequency:



Impact of Community Fridges:



5. Observations:

The evaluation has identified patterns and is working towards conclusions on the following aspects:

Demographics: The majority of fridge users were female (81%), and the majority age of respondents was between 55-64. A large majority of households had up to two adults, and no children, though there was good representation from families who have 1-2 children. Most of those who responded are visitors of the fridge, with some who are either volunteering or contributing. The findings also showed that some are interacting in multiple ways, such as both volunteering and visiting to use the fridge themselves.

Social Impact: The impact of community fridges findings show how the fridges are primarily helping to foster community connections, reduce stigma around food insecurity, and provide a reliable source of nutritious food for people living locally.

Environmental Impact: The findings show that respondents felt that the fridges impact positively on food waste reduction, efficient redistribution of surplus food, and reduced pressure on local waste management systems. The use of the fridge for the majority has had less impact regarding encouraging plant-based eating, or to try new recipes.

Financial Impact: Many respondents commented on how it supplemented their food shopping and has supported people experiencing financial difficulties.

"It's a fantastic way to help the community access free food at the same time as reducing food waste."

"...builds a better community. Helps those who wouldn't go out and stay at home."

6. Conclusion:

The ongoing evaluation highlights the importance of Community Fridges in promoting sustainability and social inclusion. The initiative is creating an opportunity for communities to address food waste and its impact on the environment in a manageable way, alongside creating social benefits through volunteering and when people go to visit. By providing a low-cost, volunteer-driven model for food redistribution, these fridges serve as a valuable resource for communities across Devon.

Volunteer groups who are managing the community fridges that were evaluated were positive about the evaluations facilitated by DCT, and many stated how useful the reports have been to the future planning and development of their sites. For example, one fridge manager stated:

'Thank you so much for sharing the evaluation report which is absolutely fascinating reading and will be so interesting for all those involved in the project.

It will certainly give us areas to discuss and focus on. Already we have listened to some of the feedback and have just started opening on Saturdays.

Thank you so much for including us in this evaluation work. It is much appreciated."

The evaluations of the community fridges ensures that the respective volunteer teams can review their projects, understand the impact they're having both environmentally, socially and economically for their community, and work on how to further develop an important community led resource in the future. The evaluation has highlighted the importance of community fridges both towards Devon's priorities surrounding sustainability and net-zero, and also in supporting local people; financially, creating connections, and reducing isolation.

Appendix 1 – Survey Questions

Community Fridge Survey

1. **Which food shed do you want to tell us about?**

-

2. **Which of the following options best describes you?** (Please tick all that apply)

- Fridge User
- Food Contributor
- Fridge Volunteer

3. **How frequently do you visit this food shed?**

- First Time
- Daily
- Weekly
- More than once a week
- Monthly
- Less often

4. **Has the food shed had an impact on your household? If so, how?** (Please tick all that apply)

- It has helped me/us to reduce food waste as I bring items to the fridge from home that I'm not/we aren't going to use
- It has helped me/us to reduce food waste as I/we have received food saving advice at the fridge / via the fridge Facebook page
- It has helped supplement my/our food shopping
- It has helped me feel a stronger sense of community
- It has helped me/us to try new foods
- It has helped me/us to eat a greater range of foods
- It has helped me/us to eat more fruit & vegetables
- It has helped me/us to eat more plant based/vegan food.
- It has helped encourage me/us to try out new recipes.
- Other (*space for comment*)

5. **How many adults are there in your household?** (18 and over)

6. **How many children are there in your household?** (17 and under)

7. **Do you think the food shed is a good thing to have locally? And why?**

8. **Do you think that the food shed is good for the environment? Why?**

9. **Write 3 words that describe your thoughts about the food shed.**

10. **Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with the food shed?**

11. **How old are you?** (optional)

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75-84
- 85+

12. **What is your gender identity?** (optional)

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

13. **What is your postcode?** (optional)