

***mobilise***

Peter Bedford Housing Association

# Plot to Plate Evaluation

A Report by Mobilise Public Ltd

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Gardening and spending time outside have long been recognised as beneficial to wellbeing and advocated as part of mental health programmes. Recent studies such as Mind's *Feel better outside, Feel better inside* (2013) and Sustain's *Benefits of gardening and food growing for health and wellbeing* (2014) have shown clear scientific evidence to back up this common-sense idea, as well as demonstrating that growing fruit, salads and vegetables can lead to a healthier diet.

Improving diet for better health and reducing obesity is a priority for both local and national health strategies. Although obesity affects all groups in the population, it is more common among people with learning difficulties, and excess weight is linked with poor mental health; the Government's *Call to action on obesity* (2011) emphasised that particular attention should be given to tackling obesity among people with mental health needs. Several organisations including Mind (*Food and Mood*, 2009) and Sustain (*Changing diets, changing minds*, 2006) have highlighted the effect diet can have on mental health.

Obtaining food from local suppliers has become a consideration for many organisations looking to reduce their impact on the environment. Local food reduces packaging and emissions from transport, supports local farmers and the economy, and can be fresher and more nutritious. The ability to trace food on the plate back to its source may also make it more interesting and appealing, and is a way to encourage people to try different foods for a healthier and more varied diet.

## 1.2 Context

Peter Bedford Housing Association (PBHA) is an Industrial and Provident Society with charitable status which works with socially excluded adults in North East London. The association provides housing for tenants who face social exclusion due to problems including poor mental health, homelessness, learning difficulties and substance abuse. In addition to supported housing, PBHA provides activities and training for tenants to improve their wellbeing, confidence and employability, with the aim of helping service users achieve independence.

PBHA is based in the London Boroughs of Hackney and Islington. Islington has especially high levels of inequality, and Finsbury Park ward in Islington is amongst the top 20% most deprived wards in England. 40% of areas in Hackney are among the 10% most deprived in England, with only five local authorities in England having a bigger proportion of deprived areas. Healthy life expectancy is 4 to 5 years below the national average, there is a higher than average hospital admission rate for mental health disorders, and the proportion of statutory homeless households is more than 4 times the average for England.

However, the area is also home to many programmes designed to address social problems, including a wide range of initiatives to improve health and wellbeing through healthy eating and community gardening. These include Shoreditch Spa, The Food Chain, Hackney Young People Outdoors, Wenlock Barn Growing Kitchen, Growing Spaces, City and Hackney Mind Gardening Club and St. Mary's Secret Garden. Edible Islington is an initiative from Islington Council to foster over 100 food growing projects. There is therefore an existing network of similar projects that PBHA has been able to make links with and benefit from.

## **1.3 Plot to Plate**

Plot to Plate, funded by the Big Lottery Fund Local Food scheme, was developed with the overall aim of improving tenants' physical and mental health through promoting healthier diets and lifestyles. Plot to Plate also aimed to use more local food as part of PBHA's commitment to social and environmental responsibility, and to improve tenants' skills and employability through learning about cooking and growing food.

The initiative makes use of the subsidised meals offered by PBHA and builds on their existing health and gardening projects, including a previous gardening project, Roots and Boots, and a pilot scheme at the Clissold site. Plot to Plate extended this scheme through:

- Running weekly cookery clubs at both Isledon and Clissold kitchen cafés to teach healthy eating and cooking skills to service users;
- Organising food demonstrations and workshops;
- Developing three growing spaces for service users to use, in addition to a growing hub (which supplies seedlings to the other growing spaces) at Clissold Community Garden. These four plots supply the cookery clubs and cafés with salads, vegetables and fruit;
- Establishing relationships with new suppliers of local food;
- Establishing links with partners and beneficiaries such as The Food Chain and St. Mary's Secret Garden.

## **1.4 Methodology**

This report evaluates the success of the Plot to Plate project at meeting its three stated outcomes. Section 2 surveys similar projects and research carried out in this area, creating a framework with which to evaluate the success of the project.

Sections 3, 4 and 5 examine each of the project's three desired outcomes in turn, looking at PBHA's own records and quarterly reports as well as focus groups held by Mobilise to discover whether the quantitative targets and qualitative outcomes have been achieved. Section 6 summarises and analyse these findings, and section 7 examines the future and legacy of Plot to Plate.

Two focus groups were delivered for this evaluation; the first brought together kitchen staff, volunteers and café users; the second talked to gardeners, gardening volunteers and residents.

## 2 Background Research

There are a huge range of projects led by community groups and housing associations with the aim of improving access to healthy food for people with low incomes. Despite their diversity, many of these projects have identified similar barriers to a healthy diet (*Healthy Living Tastes Better*, Community Food and Health Scotland, 2011; *Food Access & Social Housing*, Sustain, 2005). These can be grouped under four headings:

**Availability** – few sources of quality, nutritious food in the local neighbourhood, leading to “food deserts”

**Affordability** – healthy food, particularly fruit and vegetables, and the cost of getting to shops that sell it, can be too expensive for people on low incomes

**Awareness and skills** – some people may not be fully aware of the need to eat healthily, although it is important not to overstate this factor. Sustain stress that “poor diet is rarely due to ignorance”. However, many people may find it difficult to access information about food, or lack confidence and skills in cooking and shopping.

**Culture, needs and preferences** – diet is often a matter of ingrained habit, which may be hard to change. Many people also have specific dietary needs (e.g. for cultural reasons) which can add to difficulties in establishing a healthy diet.

Projects are most effective when they address all of these barriers, rather than just one or two – as being more aware of healthy food may not change behaviour if such food is not accessible, while healthy food that is available may not be eaten if there is a lack of understanding of its benefits or how to prepare it. The following examples illustrate this:

**Blue Triangle Housing Association** in Glasgow provides housing support services to homeless people or those affected by homelessness. Its project at Viewpark in North Lanarkshire provides supported accommodation for young people and works with them to prepare for living independently. As part of this the project offers cooking sessions which encourage young people to cook more healthy dishes and more meals from scratch.

In 2009, the project was allocated funding to develop garden plots to grow its own vegetables and fruit for use in the cooking sessions. The project used a local gardening company to design, build and offer advice on planting. Staff have responsibility for maintaining the garden, but residents are encouraged to help. The young people are encouraged to use the garden’s produce in their meals, with help from staff if necessary. The produce is also used for the cooking sessions, as planned, and for the communal meals served on Sunday.

This project has been a success at providing cheaper and more accessible fruit and vegetables for residents to use, whether in their own cooking or as part of a class. The residents who choose to take part in the gardening activities also learn new skills and gain a sense of achievement. (*Healthy Living Tastes Better*, 2011)

**Croydon Food Links**, funded by Croydon Primary Care Trust, aims to promote more healthy eating habits among older people in the borough by running cookery classes, and has developed a recipe collection to increase residents’ confidence at cooking for themselves. However, the organisation observed that residents often had difficulty putting these new skills into practice due to being unable to access affordable fruit and vegetables. Therefore, Croydon Food Links has also developed a fruit

and vegetable delivery scheme for older people with restricted mobility (*Food Access and Social Housing*, 2005).

Plot to Plate is not only about improving diet, but about growing food and increasing the use of local food. This is itself a way to improve diet; in their 2008 paper *Fruit and vegetable intake among urban community gardeners*, Alaimo et al reported that adults who participated in community gardening in urban Michigan consumed 40% more fruits and vegetables per day than those who did not, while UK studies have also found higher than average levels of fruit and vegetable consumption among new food growers (*The benefits of gardening and food growing for health and wellbeing*, Sustain, April 2014).

As well as the effect on diet, growing food in community gardens has also been found to have many other benefits:

- Improved physical health through opportunities for physical activity in the garden
- Improved mental health
- Improved community cohesion and social ties
- Improved community security (through greater use of public areas)
- Opportunities for education and training, leading to improved job prospects
- Improved environment and ecosystem, producing long-term health benefits

Sustain's 2014 report surveys a range of research to show clear scientific evidence that being involved in community food growing projects can contribute to improved social interactions and be beneficial for a range of mental and other health problems. Many of the benefits described above may be difficult to measure. However, the report cites many studies that show quantifiable benefits, such as reduced hospital admissions and fewer episodes of stress.

**Spectrum Housing** on the Isle of Wight hosted the Growing Spaces project with funding from the Big Lottery Fund Local Food scheme. The project installed 530 raised beds and 200 water butts in residents' gardens, made links with local allotment groups who shared their growing knowledge and donated seeds, and gave new gardeners advice on how to use their produce with tips on cooking, preserving and storing.

Feedback from participants was extremely positive. Over 90% of participants found they had learnt more about growing vegetables and 88% claimed to have saved money on buying vegetables. Participants also commented that the project had helped them enjoy and take pride in where they live and had brought residents together, creating a better atmosphere. (*Edible Estates*, National Housing Federation, May 2014)

**Capital Growth Network** surveyed community growing spaces across London, asking them whether their projects had provided increased employment opportunities. 237 people from the 342 spaces that responded had taken up formal training and 140 had gone on to employment. (*Monitoring Report 2013*, Capital Growth Network, May 2014)

### 3 Was Outcome 1 Achieved?

#### Outcome 1

***“The proportion of locally grown food served in our cafés will have increased from five percent to 50 percent by the end of the project and will be accessible as subsidised meals to 350 vulnerable and socially excluded adults each year (450 by the end of the project). This outcome will help to change the food culture at PBHA and the diets of our service users.”***

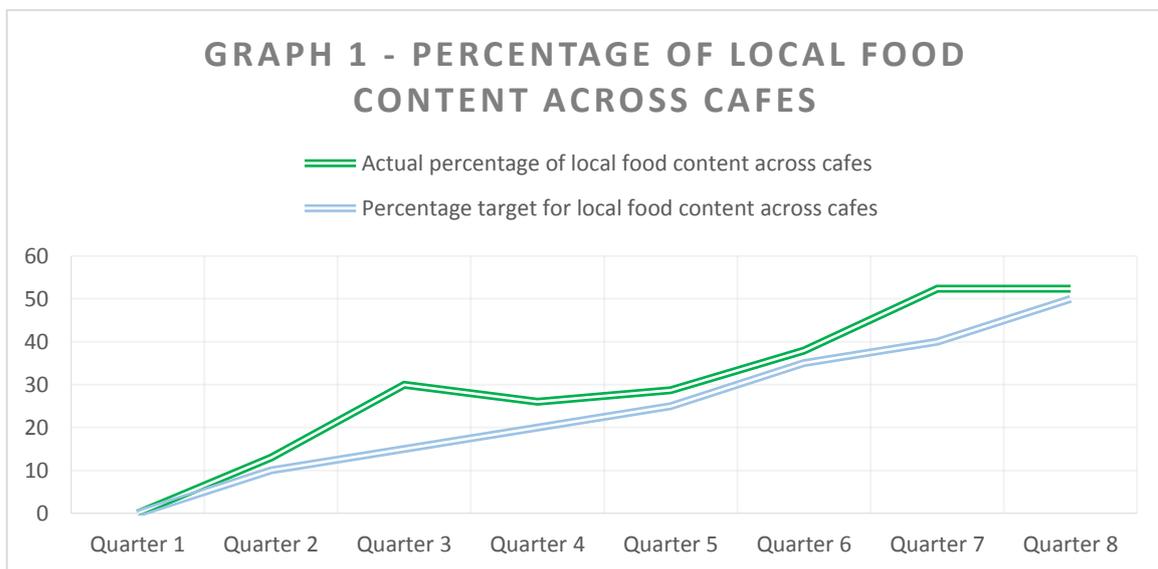
#### Locally Grown Food

##### 3.1 Proportion of locally grown food

Graph 1 below shows both the target percentage for local food served in PBHA cafés (detailed in the Plot to Plate’s Procurement Policy), along with the actual percentage of local food achieved by Plot to Plate.

To establish the percentage of local food, PBHA staff took the overall expenditure on food, worked out how much of this was spent on local food, and calculated the percentage from this. The PBHA definition of ‘local’ is food sourced from up to 60 miles away. The value of Plot to Plate grown produce (which was invoiced, but not charged for) was determined by comparison with supermarket prices.

As shown in Graph 1, Plot to Plate has consistently kept to and exceeded its targets for percentage of local food in cafés. At the end of the two-year period, the target of 50% local food has been achieved.



The graph does not show the actual percentage figures for quarters 7 and 8. These were actually 28.17% for quarter 7 and 76.61% for quarter 8. However, these figures are best seen as an average of 52.39% (figured in Graph 1) because of delayed invoicing, and the way income and expenditure fell across the quarters.

## **3.2 Mainstreaming local food into cafés**

The percentage of local food featured in Graph 1 above really shows how much local food has been mainstreamed into the PBHA cafés. This mainstreaming is demonstrated further through Peter Bedford Housing Association's and Plot to Plate's Food Procurement Policy, which sets out rules around the types of suppliers Plot to Plate can obtain produce from; this policy states that Plot to Plate should give preference to local, sustainable and ethical food suppliers. Furthermore, it discusses the need to provide guidance and relevant product information to staff members to allow them to select sustainable products and services.

Local Food was served through two main cafés at Legard Works (N5 1DE) and Stamford Works (N16 8JH) also known as Legard and Grapevine Cafés respectively. There are two smaller kitchen cafes attached to the supported housing communities at Clissold Road (N16 9EX) and Isledon Road (N7 7JP). These cafés are also adjacent to 3 of 4 food growing sites, including the Clissold Community garden growing hub.

## **3.3 Local suppliers**

At the beginning of the project, PBHA established that a key indicator to show whether Outcome 1 had been achieved was *'the number of suppliers researched and contacted who can supply locally grown food'* (Plot to Plate – Monitoring & Evaluation Framework).

Plot to Plate is now working successfully with five different local suppliers. These are Church Farm, a community farm in Hertfordshire; Stepney City Farm; the Dalston Farm Shop (for small supplies); Highbury Butchers; and in the final quarter, Seasons & Blossoms, a new local business selling organic fruit and vegetables from Kent or allotments around Islington and Finsbury.

## **3.4 Challenges of using locally sourced food**

Focus group 1 were very positive about the project overall, but gave an interesting insight into the challenges of providing locally sourced food in the cafés. One issue they faced was to do with the seasonal nature of local food, particularly the struggle to obtain produce in the winter months and keep to the 60 mile limitation on local food:

*"One of our big challenges actually was during winter. I had a lot of difficulty to get seasonal, especially local, fresh vegetables to cook during the winter."*

*"In the winter, most of the people who could actually give us fish and fruit and vegetables are slightly outside of the 60 miles. If we could have some change on that radius - we managed, but it was really challenging in winter."*

However, focus group 1 also highlighted how the staff had worked to overcome this issue:

*"We were able to preserve a lot of the blackberries and berries. We froze trays of those so we were able to use these during the winter. We had blackberries, raspberries, apples."*

Focus group 1 also mentioned how service users sometimes complained about limitations on the food choice available, because certain local food is only available at specific times of year. The following quote demonstrates this issue, but also shows how staff have worked to change expectations and educate further on the nature of sourcing local food:

*"As a society today we are so used to having and getting everything we want as far as ingredients, vegetables, why can't we have strawberries in December? So I think that area,*

*where we are really focusing on seasonal produce and where it's coming from, and what is available to us at times of the year - that has been a bit of a challenge. We need to be focusing on reducing the carbon footprint by getting seasonal food. Again, with awareness, with education, people are beginning to get a much better awareness and you get less complaints. Sometimes you do mix and match, but it's about getting this balance. In the summer, as you can see there, on that wall, the abundance we have from our garden is just amazing."*

### 3.5 Challenges in the future due to seasonal food

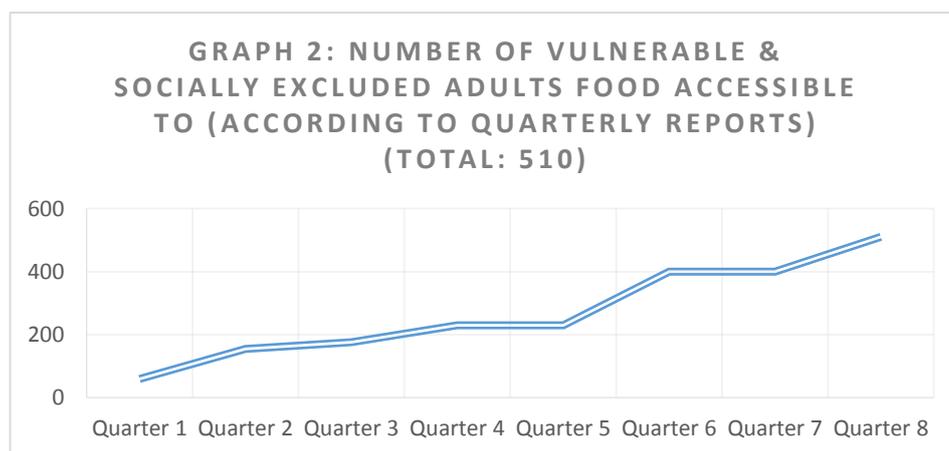
The Plot to Plate project is funded for 2 years by the Big Lottery Fund's Local Food Scheme. Focus group 1 highlighted their concerns for the future, particularly in regards to keeping local food available across the cafés:

*"At the moment it's only possible because we are moving towards summer, so there is more coming from the garden. But when winter arrives, it's going to be another challenge. Because the garden will give less, and without the funding it's difficult."*

## Accessible meals for service users

### 3.6 Number of vulnerable & socially excluded adults accessing meals

A key part of outcome 1 is that locally sourced food *"will be accessible as subsidised meals to 350 vulnerable and socially excluded adults each year (450 by the end of the project)"*. Graph 2, below, shows PBHA's estimation of the number of vulnerable and socially excluded adults that had access to and benefitted from subsidised local food meals during the project. As the graph below shows, they estimate that the reach has been 510 vulnerable and socially excluded adults during the project, against a target of 450.

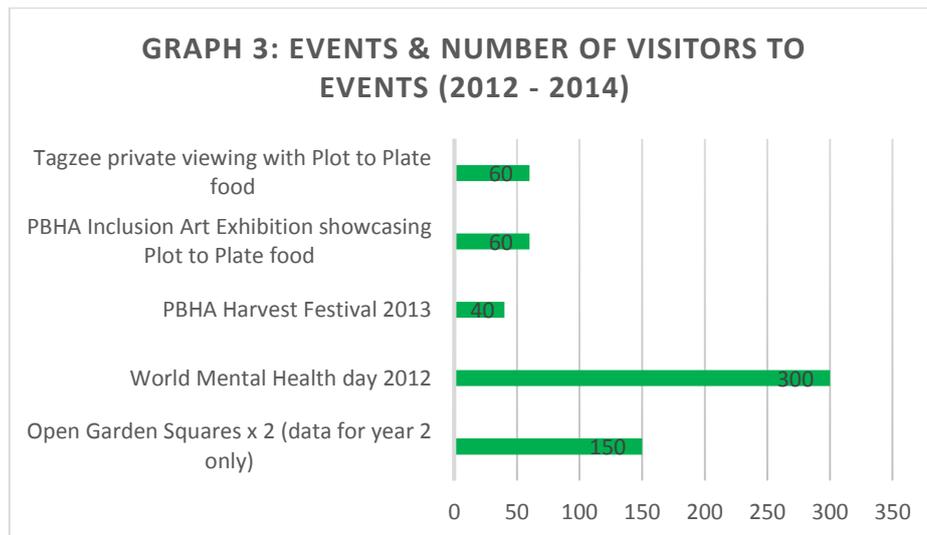


This reach is a conservative estimate as it does not take into account the number of vulnerable adults reached through one off events, discussed below.

### 3.7 Events

Events are a key way of raising awareness of the Plot to Plate project and involving more vulnerable and socially excluded people. Graph 3, below, shows the estimated attendance at events held to

promote Plot to Plate. It shows that the most attended individual event was World Mental Health Day in 2012, where Plot to Plate held a ‘Time for Tea’ event and sold healthy cakes made with locally grown produce; this event was estimated to have reached 300 people. Open Garden Square Days were held in both years, which showcased growing spaces and Plot to Plate food. Although numbers are only available for one year, one of these events was attended by 150 people, so it can be estimated that another 100 plus people attended the other event. Finally, there were three smaller events: the PBHA Harvest Day Festival, which showcased and sold locally grown produce, and the PBHA Inclusion Art Exhibition, which showcased Plot to Plate food. Finally, Plot to Plate provided food at the private viewing event for Tagzee, a local Islington artist, which was attended by 60 people.



### 3.8 Publicity

Publicity is another way to involve and reach out to vulnerable and socially excluded adults. Throughout the project, Plot to Plate has been promoted through participant and tenant newsletters, flyers and posters. The menus used in the cafés have featured Plot to Plate branding since quarter 2, and a new logo for Plot to Plate was developed in quarter 6. In the final quarter, Plot to Plate developed a recipe booklet which will be used to engage tenants alongside tasters and workshops.

### 3.9 Weekly local food days

One of the stated outcomes indicators in the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework was: ‘*at least one local food day each week in each café where local food is served*’. This indicator was achieved through the Weekly Local Food Days taking place from November 2012 in each of the main cafés, along with the growing and cooking healthy food clubs based at Clissold Community café and Isledon Road.

## Changing food culture and participants’ diets

### 3.10 Healthy changes in the menu

The first step Plot to Plate needed to take to encourage vulnerable and socially excluded adults to eat healthier was to make healthy changes to the menus in PBHA’s cafés.

Included below are two examples of the Grapevine Café Menu, one from 2011 (before Plot to Plate) and one from 2014. The chips, kebab and burgers are gone, and have been replaced with jacket potatoes with a nutritious filling, while the fruit sponge and custard dessert has been replaced with a

fresh fruit salad. These two menus illustrate the steps Plot to Plate have taken to bring in a healthier menu.

Grapevine Café Menu (2011)	Grapevine Café Menu (2014)
<b>Starter:</b> Pea soup	<b>Starter:</b> None
<b>Main:</b> Chicken Kebab ‘tikka style’ or beef burgers or quorn burgers with chips & coleslaw.	<b>Main:</b> Jacket potatoes filled with braised spiced lamb and sweet potato or ratatouille, both served with cauliflower polonaise
<b>Desert:</b> fruit sponge & custard	<b>Desert:</b> Fresh fruit salad

The cafés also reduced their portion sizes in line with Department of Health regulations; this was not always popular with service users, so staff worked to explain the changes and educate tenants on healthy portion sizes.

### 3.11 **Passionate and educated staff**

PBHA staff working on Plot to Plate developed their skills through attending training events, including healthy cooking and nutrition training from Shoreditch Spa, a workshop on running community cafés, a baking course from Hackney Training and Enterprise Agency, a course in mushroom growing from Urban Harvest, and a course in Preparing To Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector.

The passion of the PBHA staff and their dedication to making Plot to Plate a success was apparent from Focus Group 1:

*“When the salad comes from the garden, all covered in dirt and that, it’s not something that anyone here likes cleaning. We don’t like to do it, but at end of the day, we understand the reasons behind it ... Then we make it possible and the passion comes, the determination comes, the willingness comes and we make things possible.”*

*“The people who have been leading on the project, they actually are so passionate and enthusiastic about it actually becomes an extension of our everyday life.”*

The comments made by Focus Group 1 demonstrated that staff were keen to talk to and educate service users, were interested and knowledgeable about healthy eating, planting and environmental issues, keen to try and learn new things and encourage service users, and that they understood and supported the aims of Plot to Plate.

## **Was Outcome 1 achieved?**

Plot to Plate successfully reached and exceeded its target of 50% local food across PBHA cafés, with food accessible to an estimated 510 vulnerable and socially excluded adults. Across the two years the amount of local food averaged at 34%, reaching 52% by the end of the project.

There are many signs of a change in food culture at PBHA: the adoption of the Plot to Plate Food Procurement Policy (which focuses on locally sourced food); the links made with local food providers; the willingness of staff to immerse themselves in promoting healthy eating and the

benefits of locally sourced food; the events held over the past two years; and the changes made in café menus (discussed further in the next section). This wouldn't have been possible if it wasn't for dedicated and educated staff, who worked to achieve this target despite the challenges and restrictions of locally sourced and seasonal food.

## 4 Was Outcome 2 achieved?

### Outcome 2

***“350 vulnerable and socially excluded adults will be more aware of the links between food and a healthy life style by the end of the project, 50 of whom will have undertaken formal and informal learning and achieved credits or qualifications. This outcome will help to change the life-styles of service users, promoting better health and improve their skills and employment prospects.”***

### Links between food and healthy lifestyle

#### 4.1 Making healthy food appealing

Focus group 1 discussed a number of ways in which Plot to Plate made service users aware of the benefits of healthy eating and locally sourced food; these included training, information leaflets, and changes to menus, but also through staff members talking to service users about the produce, education and engaging them on the subject:

*“As trainers and educators ourselves, we discuss with people what they are eating, what’s been grown in the garden this week; what Precious [one of the growers] has brought in and how we are going to use it. We have leaflets, we have certain months, where we promote specific foods that have been grown in the garden that are good for certain types of ailments. Sophie and I will sit down ... with participants while they are eating their food, we discuss with them what they are eating.”*

Plot to Plate also introduced indoor herbs and miniature tomatoes to the cafés, so that participants not involved with the garden could still make links between growing produce and the food they were eating. This idea of the ‘story of the food’ appeared to really help in the promotion of healthy lifestyles by staff members as service users took an interest in where the vegetables had come from. There was a sense from the focus groups that service users were more likely to try healthy food offered through Plot to Plate because they liked that the food was grown in the garden, was local and had a story:

*“Even if you are just sitting at your desk, someone will come up about Plot to Plate and you will have a discussion. Or you’ll come downstairs and someone will ask ‘what’s on the menu tomorrow? And where do the vegetables come from?’ So it is part of your everyday.”*

#### 4.2 Making healthy eating easy and affordable

The focus group showed that staff members were attempting to remove barriers to healthy eating by telling participants about simple, quick and healthy ways of cooking food:

*“Those who have not yet adapted to healthier eating are being encouraged and told about the benefits of healthy eating, and also of ways to cook vegetables that are easier, less time consuming.”*

*“Quite often I’ve given people recipes. If they want a recipe for something that has been shown on the menu, they can have the recipe.”*

Clissold community café experimented with offering a breakfast and found that participants learnt the importance of eating breakfast, noticing that they had more energy and that they were less

tempted by dessert at lunch! Meanwhile, the café offers an option for service users to take away the food served at lunchtime and have it for dinner. This makes healthy eating easy and more affordable:

*“Let’s face it, people who usually like a ready meal don’t like cooking, they don’t like spending the time on vegetables, but ... when they come to eat at lunchtime they can buy takeaways because the prices are really reasonable, so it actually works out to be cheaper than a chicken and chips meal. So they are encouraged to have a takeaway and go home - that’s another way for them to slightly change, to adapt to the new eating culture.”*

During the fourth quarter of the second year a seconded housing worker worked with a small group of tenants to encourage them to engage with the project, exploring how to shop for healthy produce and accompanying them shopping. Focus group 1 highlighted that staff were directing service users to places where healthy food was more affordably available:

*“That’s one of my things, our tenants can’t all be going to farmers markets.”*

*“I think it can be done. A lot of the supermarkets now ... you can go in and get a bag of carrots for a pound that have been grown in Kent. If you use, not the farmers markets, but Ridley Road market, where the produce is a lot cheaper because they are marketing to a different group. ”*

Staff are also encouraging service users to be thrifty with their food by showing them different ways to cook and utilise all parts of their food:

*“For example, the other day I saw the stalk of the broccoli, and people throw it away normally. With Plot to Plate, we adapt it in a different way, different ways of cooking ... I found a way to also use that and I said ‘you all ate that without knowing’ and they were surprised.”*

Some Plot to Plate volunteers became “food champions”, promoting the project’s aims to their peers. In the final month of the project a Plot to Plate recipe book was produced, containing healthy and seasonal recipes, which will be used to engage tenants alongside tasters and workshops. All these methods show how staff have embraced the aims of Plot to Plate and tried different ways to engage with service users on the topic of healthy eating.

#### **4.3 Individual stories of healthy eating**

In both focus groups, attendees described the impact of the project on the diets of service users, or how their own diet and approach to food has changed. The following quotes illustrate the change seen in service users by members of staff:

*“Confidence in trying different foods. Definitely. I mean, I can only talk for my tenants, living on their own, they would just get a ready meal. I am not saying they are now constantly cooking fresh food ... because that’s not the case. But now they have had their eyes opened to lots of different fresh vegetables, which they try now, whereas if they were on their own, at home, they wouldn’t. They are a lot more adventurous.”*

*“We have one specific service user that comes in here, who never touched vegetables. And now that particular person will not have a pudding and she will have the vegetables, because she likes to know the fact that the vegetables are grown in the garden. She is also interested about growing little things in her garden as well because she’s been introduced to something*

*different. She has also changed her diet, where it's a lot more fresh food, so she's sort of acknowledging fresh food, and having that awareness of fresh food, so it's changed her perception of eating different things and its given her the opportunity to have a healthier diet without actually realising what she's actually doing."*

*"It wasn't quite as clear cut as [service user]'s gone away and now he's cooking quinoa, because he's not, but he is a lot more aware of organic food. And he does buy fruit and vegetables."*

*"I think people's diets have changed. At least they are getting a good meal once a week. The other times, I am not sure what [service user] eats, I don't think it's particularly good. At least once a week he is getting something and that's made a difference."*

#### **4.4 Service users themselves described changes made in their diet or lifestyle by the project:**

*"I used to be very fussy on fruit and veg, but I seem to have turned a corner, and eat more vegetables and more fruit than ever. I seem to enjoy what I eat, so I enjoy apples, oranges and bananas, and strawberries. I've tried melon, some melon I will eat. The same with juicy fruits, like pineapple. And I am starting to eat more vegetables than ever before, and less fizzy drinks. I've cut right back on those and I am also drinking water more."*

*"I don't have a garden, I have window boxes. I learnt through Plot to Plate that I can grow certain things, like strawberries for example, and other herbs, so that saves me money, which is very important because I am on a tight budget."*

*"[Staff member] has been helping me, telling me about nutrition and things like that. [Staff members] cook very healthy foods, and that's encouraged me, when I get home. You go out and get fruit and vegetables whatever, even though it's not the same as [staff members]. I do make an effort to try and cook more vegetables at home and you know, more healthy stuff at home."*

#### **4.5 Challenges to changing attitudes to healthy eating**

Focus group 1 was asked whether there had been any resistance to the changes in menus and the adoption of a more healthy approach by PBHA because of Plot to Plate. It was explained that, occasionally, some service users had questioned the changes made in the café because of Plot to Plate. However, to tackle this, the project staff explained the 'story of the food' and why the changes had been made. They found that through this approach, they could get users interested in the project and the food and become more accepting of the changes:

*"There are times where we will only have a vegetarian dish and we have had comments and complaints about it. But then you start talking to people, and having a discussion with them, and saying 'well actually, meat isn't necessary every day and this is what we've got from the garden. We've harvested this and this is what we will be using.' It's like anything else, people don't like change. People are very resistant. It's how it's introduced."*

## **4.6 Wider impact**

Both focus groups thought the project worked well to change the eating habits of the people directly engaged with it. However, they also suggested that it was hard to determine the project's impact on the diets of vulnerable or socially excluded people more widely:

*“Not everyone’s eating healthy. But everyone who’s got involved in Plot to Plate probably didn’t know a lot about healthy food and they were educated as the course went on. There are some tenants who haven’t done any gardening, don’t eat in the café very often. There are people out there who still want to have their McDonalds every night. But I think those involved in Plot to Plate embraced it. All we can do in the café is cut down on sugar, so when they do come to eat, they are eating healthy food.”*

To attempt to determine whether PBHA has met its target of 350 vulnerable and socially excluded adults have been made more aware of the links between food and a healthy lifestyle, we can look at various sources of evidence.

Two separate surveys were conducted, a year apart, in the first and second years of the project. Although these are not directly linked, they do give an impression of tenants’ and participants’ engagement with the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

### **Survey 1 – Plot to Plate Interim Qualitative Assessment 2012**

This survey was conducted in 2012. A total of 21 guided interviews with a range of participants, tenants (who use the cafés) and sessional staff, and 4 completed questionnaires were received from full time staff respondents. 11 (46%) respondents said they had noticed changes to the menus at the Grapevine, either as a result of Plot to Plate or more generally. 7 (29%) indicated that they thought the food had improved in recent months, while only 3 (12%) felt that the food had got worse. 11 (46%) respondents hadn't noticed any change in the menus or food served in the cafés. Unfortunately, this survey did not ask whether those who had noticed the changes in the menu had been made more aware of the link between healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle.

In 2013, the Tenants’ Forum noted that the food served in PBHA cafés was much healthier and also of a higher quality.

### **Survey 2 – Peter Bedford Housing Association Tenant Survey 2013**

Later in 2013 a wider survey of PBHA tenants was carried out. A question was asked about the Plot to Plate project. This question asked *“With the Plot to Plate: healthy eating and locally sourced food initiative, have you noticed any change in the food in the PBHA cafés in the last year?”* Fifty tenants completed this question. Their answers are featured in Chart 1 overleaf:

**Chart 1: With the "Plot 2 Plate: healthy eating and locally sourced food" initiative, have you noticed any change in the food in the PBHA cafes in the last year? (50 tenants answered)**



This survey shows that 26 respondents (52%) of the 50 that completed the question had not eaten in the cafés. Of the 24 respondents (48%) who expressed their opinion on the changes in the café food, 14 (28%) felt it had become more healthy, 9 (18%) felt it had stayed the same and 1 (2%) felt it was now less healthy. These results suggest that Plot to Plate might need to work further on getting tenants into the cafés and trying the food, along with educating those that do eat in the cafés further on the new menu and why changes have been made.

Unfortunately, there is also little evidence to show changes in tenants’ diet and lifestyle. A survey was carried out concerning diet and lifestyle with 62 service users at the beginning of the project, but this does not seem to have been followed up.

## Formal & Informal Learning

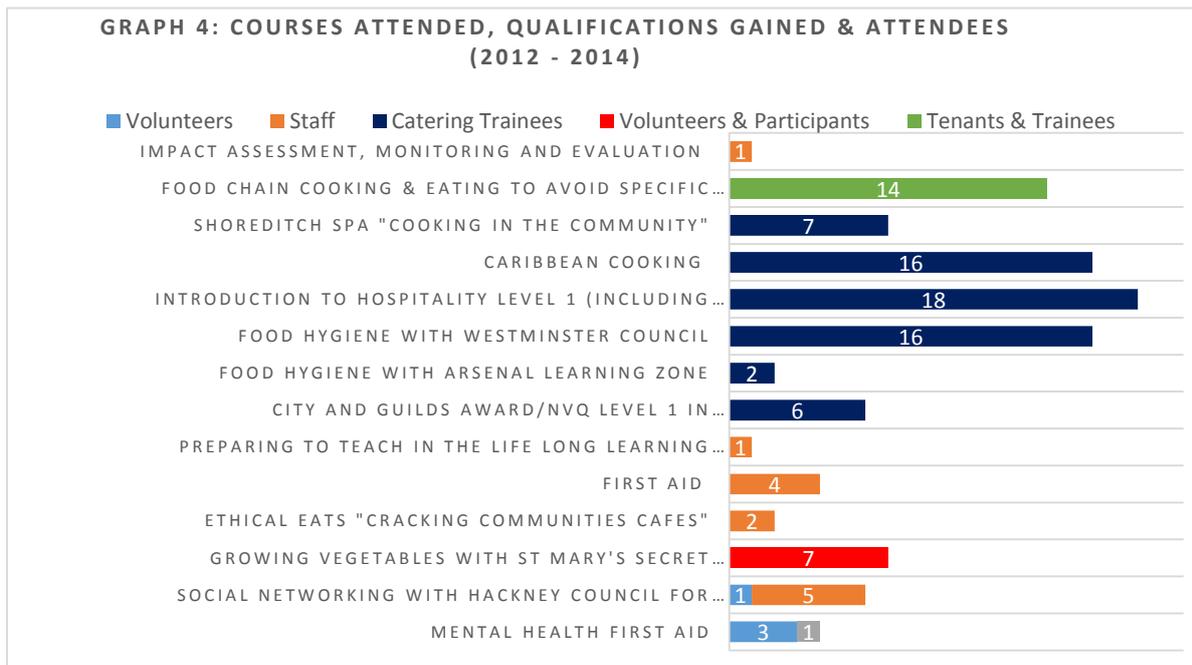
### 4.7 Courses & skills

Part of objective 2 states “...50 of whom will have undertaken formal and informal learning and achieved credits or qualifications. This outcome will help to change the life-styles of service users, promoting better health and improve their skills and employment prospects”. Graph 4, overleaf, shows that there were 103 attendances at training courses; 90 course attendances by vulnerable adults and 13 by staff\*. According to quarterly report 8, 46 achieved a qualification over the lifetime of the project. Although data was not collected on credits, it is estimated by Peter Bedford Housing Association that 20 participants achieved credits towards a qualification.



We cannot gauge exactly how many participants were involved through attendance figures, as some participants may have attended several different courses. However, we can see that since 46 participants achieved a qualification, around 20 achieved credits towards a qualification, and there were 90 attendances by vulnerable people to different courses, it is very likely that at least 50 participants undertook some formal or informal learning through Plot to Plate.

\* In quarterly report 8, it states ‘in total 102 vulnerable adults took part in cooking or growing healthy food related courses’. However, using the service data provided by PBHA in the document named ‘Plot to Plate Evaluation Data’ it shows 103 attendances to different courses and training. 13 of these are by staff rather than vulnerable adults, and 90 of these were classed as either volunteers, catering trainees, volunteers and participants or tenants and trainees. Furthermore, they are described as attendances, as some service users may have attended more than one course.

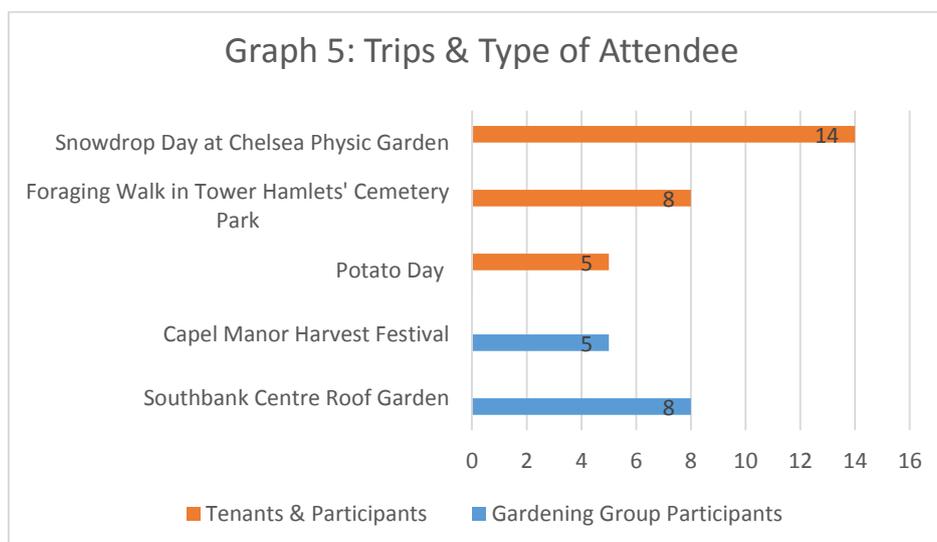


When it comes to involvement in the programme, according to quarterly report 8, in total 58 individuals have been involved in the Plot to Plate growing programmes and 84 in the cooking of local food. Furthermore, they have recruited 12 gardening volunteers and 10 catering volunteers.

Over the summer of 2013, Plot to Plate volunteers took over the running of the Legard café, learning about waste reduction, healthier cooking methods and adapting recipes to use sustainable and local food.

#### 4.8 Trips

Trips and educational days out help develop Plot to Plate participants' understanding of the relationship between food and a healthy lifestyle, along with raising their awareness of sustainability and green issues. Graph 5 below shows the different trips those involved in Plot to Plate have been on, how many went along and the type of attendee.



## **4.9 Employment**

There are a number of examples of service users who have progressed to further training and employment partly as a result of the project. For example, one of the service users who has learning difficulties completed a course in growing vegetables at St. Mary's Secret Garden and was offered a job as a gardener in the final quarter of the project. Other service users progressed to training or employment in catering, partly as a result of involvement in the project.

## **Engaging Wider Community in Healthy Eating**

### **4.10 Local organisations involved with Plot to Plate**

A key signifier of the scope and impact of the project more widely in encouraging healthy eating is the involvement of and benefit to other local organisations. As well as using local food suppliers, Plot to Plate has been reaching out to various different (mostly not-for-profit) organisations in the local area. These included:

- **Hackney Training Enterprise Agency** is a local social enterprise which provides affordable courses and workshops to the local community. Plot to Plate has established close links with the organisation and they are using the Peter Bedford Housing Association kitchen premises to offer healthy baking sessions to local people, including one staff member and two Plot to Plate participants.
- **St Mary's Secret Garden** is a horticultural project in Hackney, London. It has benefited from a relationship between the projects and service users, including Plot to Plate volunteers, attended a course in growing vegetables at St Mary's in June and July 2012.
- **Shoreditch Spa** works with young people in Hackney to support them in living healthier lives. Plot to Plate has worked with them through commissioning professional advice around menu planning and nutrition.
- **Hackney Council for Voluntary Services** used Plot to Plate catering for their 2012 AGM.
- **Food Chain** is a charity which delivers meals and groceries, and offers cooking and nutrition classes and communal eating to people living with HIV in London and their dependents. The Food Chain involved more people in its programmes through its partnership with Peter Bedford Housing Association. The first session was designed for participants with diabetes and showed how the use of seasonal food can help in managing the condition; this proved so popular that two further sessions took place.
- **Ethical Eats:** two PBHA staff attended a training workshop on "Creating Community Cafés", where as well as receiving training they were able to meet groups engaged in similar projects and exchange ideas.

### **4.11 A community project**

In focus group 1, attendees were asked to describe and build up a picture of the Plot to Plate Project. What they described was a project that engaged with the community. Whether this was people planting, cooking, growing or picking; local organisations providing produce; or just service users eating in the café, Plot to Plate appeared to bring the community together, not only around the activity of food, but also with an awareness of the journey of food. Plot to Plate was not just about the team in the kitchen providing lunches but about the PBHA community getting involved in different ways to make this project a success:

*“The community feel as well. It’s the continuity of planting the seed, picking it, cooking together and eating together is quite a powerful tool really, for all the residents.”*

Focus group 2 brought out the role Plot to Plate played in the wider community as part of a network of similar projects in Hackney:

*“The project is not in isolation; it’s part of a network of projects going on in Hackney. There’s lots of other projects; it’s part of a much wider thing that’s going on in Hackney and beyond about thinking about healthy eating and growing your own, involving people in gardening projects. There are a lot of things going on, and the fact that Peter Bedford has done it, it’s almost like it contributes to that network of things that are going on.”*

The project worked hard to be inclusive to as many participants as possible. Raised beds and wider paths were built at the Clissold growing site to improve access for less able participants, and Plot to Plate produced a guide to growing potatoes in bags for participants with limited space. The focus groups also identified ways that Plot to Plate tailored itself to local community and individual needs:

*“We use a halal butcher; we have lots of people of all different ethnicities, cultures and religions. We wanted to make sure that the meat we buy from him would be good for everybody.”*

*“One of the real strengths of this project, what I really appreciated from the support point of view, is that some weeks [service user]’s not able to work, he’s not going to participate in the gardening and the cooking on a Wednesday. And that was fine, it was completely accepted. It wasn’t so rigid, people in the organisation know each other and it wasn’t so rigid to be, ‘where were you last week’? There was a lot of understanding around mental health issues.”*

This acceptance of community differences makes it more likely that service users from different backgrounds and demographics will engage in the project, and adopt a healthier approach in their lives.

## **Was Outcome 2 achieved?**

For individuals who engaged with the project, the evidence shows that Plot to Plate has altered eating habits and perceptions of healthy food and has encouraged some to try food they were not willing to try before. Instead of just presenting information on healthy eating, Plot to Plate has engaged with people by offering practical involvement in growing and cooking food and by telling the ‘story of the food’, which makes healthy food appear more appealing and attractive.

The target regarding training and learning has been achieved and the educational opportunities offered through Plot to Plate have been well attended, with 46 participants receiving formal recognition for their learning over the 2 years of the project.

Plot to Plate has tailored itself to community preferences and local needs, and worked effectively with the local community, engaging with local organisations and becoming part of a wider network in Hackney and beyond that encourages people to change their eating habits for the better.

However, although our focus groups showed a real impact on the diets of some individual people because of Plot to Plate, we need to be realistic about its impact on a wider scale. It is difficult to establish the success of Plot to Plate in terms of the target of 350 vulnerable and socially excluded adults being more aware of the links between healthy eating and lifestyles, as this has not been

directly investigated. Although PBHA residents are eating healthier meals in the café, it is less clear whether this has had an effect on their awareness of healthy eating or led them to make any further lifestyle changes, particularly when they cook for themselves.

## 5 Was Outcome 3 achieved?

### Outcome 3

***“Three growing spaces, including a growing hub, will be created and developed by the end of the project to supply fresh locally grown food to our cookery groups, cafés and retailers. This outcome will change three garden spaces turning them into spaces for growing food, one of which will be a new growing hub. Service users will be changed by acquiring new skills in growing food and improved physical and mental health. The project will build on our growing and cooking food pilot and the Roots & Boots project.”***

#### 5.1 Growing spaces

Plot to Plate surpassed the goal of developing three growing spaces, with four developed during the two years of the project. Sites were developed at Legard Works (N5 1DE), Forest Road Community Garden (E8 3BH), Isledon Road Community Garden (N7 7JP) and Clissold Community Garden (N16 9EX). Two other sites were planned, but had access and other difficulties.

The target of creating a growing hub was also achieved; Clissold Community Growing Hub was established in the first quarter and has been maintained continually throughout the course of project to provide seedlings for the other growing sites.

The focus groups, particularly the members of the Clissold Gardening Group in focus group 2, gave us a further insight into the growing spaces. The following quotes illustrate how much work has been done on the growing spaces and the positive impact they’ve had on the area:

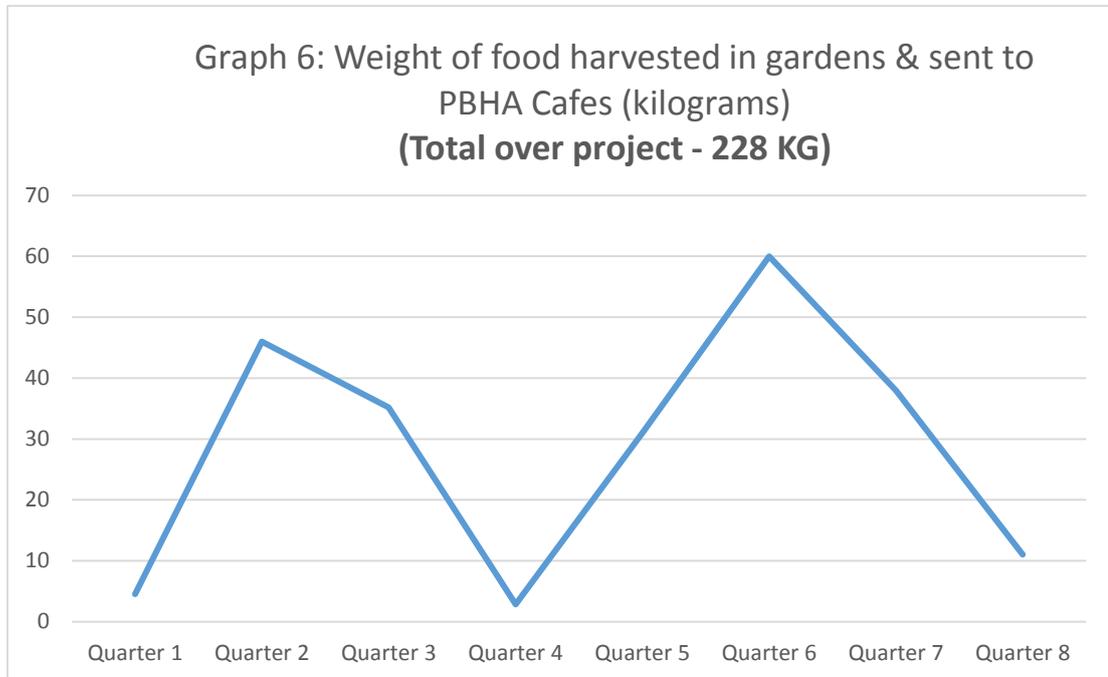
*“Part of the project really has been to grow food for the kitchens, but also to beautify and diversify the gardens... you’ve got the food area here, you’ve got the orchard here, you’ve got the wildlife area... It’s not just a farm, a massive field of monoculture. It’s about finding something that’s actually accessible to the residents, and also that we can grow food from. To think about the residents, about what they want - some of them want to bring their dogs out, some want to go on the swings, some want to sit on the bench and enjoy the sunshine... some want to come and do the gardens.”*

*“Someone can come down and sit in front of the shed, or they can go down to the wildlife area, to the swings or whatever. There’s different, distinct areas of it, you know, that in itself is useful. People just hide themselves away quietly, and different people can use the garden at different times; there are different areas.”*

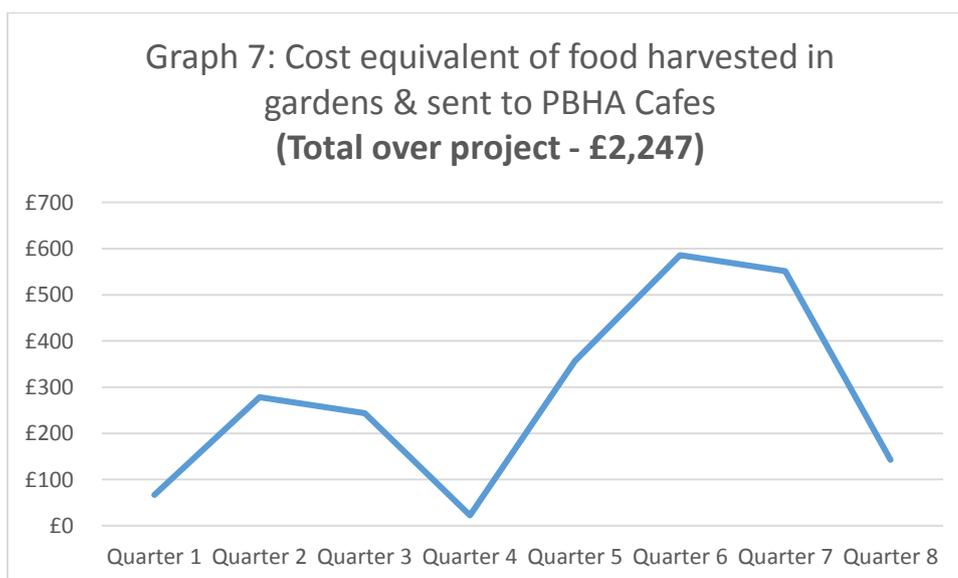
Through Plot to Plate, the gardens have been developed from under-used land into spaces with multiple uses that provide enjoyment to visitors as well as being a source of food for the cafés.

## 5.2 Supplying locally grown food

Graph 6, below, shows the weight of food harvested in the gardens and supplied to the PBHA cafés over the eight quarters. The dip in produce in quarter four and eight was due to the time of year (winter / coming into spring). The total amount of food produced in the gardens over the project was 228 kilograms.



Graph 7, below, shows the monetary value of the food harvested in the gardens and supplied to the PBHA cafés. These values were worked out by comparing the price of equivalent produce in supermarkets. As graph 6 above, this fluctuates with the seasons.



Both these graphs show that the gardens are successfully producing food that is being served in the cafés, benefiting vulnerable and socially excluded tenants, and helping achieve both Outcome 1 (local food targets in cafés) and Outcome 3 (supplying fresh local food to cafés).

This success in the growing spaces becoming suppliers for the cafés was discussed in Focus Group 2, where the amount of food produced was seen as one of the major successes of the project:

*“We actually manage and produce a sizable amount of produce to give to the kitchen. You wouldn’t believe it was possible!”*

*“The development of the garden is hugely more productive. It looks quite different, it still has an aesthetic appeal. On the kitchen side, [there’s] much more variety - say the salad leaves. [It’s] really exciting actually because you don’t know what the taste is going to be. Previously we would buy in sandwich leaves which were completely tasteless, [now] often there are different colours on the plate that you notice. Lots and lots of different ingredients... Instead of having meat and potatoes and a green thing, you might have several vegetarian things and some beetroot, so you can see on the plate that’s using what’s produced that week and inventively putting food together.”*

## **New skills and improved health**

### **5.3 ‘Soft Skills’ & Learning Through Doing**

Part of Outcome 3 includes: ‘service users will be changed by acquiring new skills in growing food and improved physical and mental health’. This was partly explored when examining Outcome 2, when we looked at attendances to training, courses and gaining qualifications. However, it is also important to discuss the ‘softer’ skills gained through volunteering, gardening, cooking and generally being involved with the project.

During quarter 3, Plot to Plate and Peter Bedford Housing Association worked in collaboration with a number of partners for World Mental Health Day. Plot to Plate ran the ‘tea lounge’. The report from this quarter details Plot to Plate trainees’ involvement and the skills they gained. These included sourcing local produce, cooking, publicity, customer service and team work, but also increased confidence, self-esteem and the ability to socialise, all of which are important skills for enhancing mental health. These softer skills were also developed through the other Plot to Plate events, volunteer activities and general involvement in the project. The following quotes from Focus Group 2 illustrate the learning that takes place outside formal training sessions:

*“I think that there’s been a lot of learning, because gardening is a practical art, you can’t read it in a book and go ‘I’m going to do that now’. You have to see it and do it. I think there has been a tremendous amount of learning... everything from the seed packet to harvesting it and eating it. [At] all those stages, there’s a lot of learning just by being there and seeing it, taking action when it’s needed.”*

*“Whatever’s going on in their lives is tricky, and just to come and be part of a group involved in something has been important for people, and that’s where they learn. I haven’t experienced anybody coming along and becoming a gardener, but I have experienced them making this their home, and really enjoying being here and being outside and being part of the project. That’s been their learning really.”*

It is important to recognise the benefits of these practical and soft skills, especially for people who are mentally ill, socially excluded or vulnerable. In January 2013, Plot to Plate was awarded the runner-up place for a City of London/City Bridge Trust Growing Localities Award in the Gardening

and Growing Food category. The award, which included £500, recognises projects that “use nature to enhance and improve local communities and in particular the lives of vulnerable or socially excluded people”.

## **5.4 Health benefits**

We can apply a common sense approach that those involved in the garden activities will also have benefitted from the physical activity this entails. One Plot to Plate participant detailed in the focus group how he had become involved in the project after his doctor recommended some form of physical activity. 14 participants went on an outing to Chelsea Physic Garden where they were educated on the medicinal value of plants. Ecotherapy, as stated in Mind’s evidence report for the Ecominds programme, *Feel Better Outside, Feel Better Inside*, is a “cost effective way to increase both physical and mental wellbeing which is accessible and inclusive”.

### **Building on Growing & Cooking pilot and Roots & Boots project**

Roots and Boots was a gardening project undertaken by PBHA working together with Groundwork and funded by Ecominds, an initiative from the mental health charity Mind to improve mental health through outdoor and gardening projects. The project worked to renovate nine run-down community gardens, transforming them into attractive spaces and increasing their use. It was praised for bringing tenants together, improving their social skills and confidence and instilling an interest in cooking and gardening. Some of the gardens developed by the Roots and Boots project were then able to be cultivated and become growing spaces for Plot to Plate.

In the year prior to Plot to Plate, a growing and cooking food project was piloted at the Clissold community garden site. 12 service users were supported by a horticulturalist to grow their own food and prepare healthy lunches at a weekly lunch club. This project was very successful and received positive feedback from participants, inspiring the larger Plot to Plate project. A poly-tunnel was installed at the site to allow the space to become a growing hub, supplying seedlings to other growing spaces as well as growing salad leaves, vegetables and fruit.

### **Was Outcome 3 achieved?**

Generally, Plot to Plate’s stated Outcome 3 was very much accomplished. Four gardens are successfully producing food to be used in the cafés, building on the achievements of the Roots & Boots project and the pilot programme. Volunteers and service users have been involved and have acquired new skills, both formal and informal, through hands-on learning, training, courses and trips.

Although there is no measurable evidence of improvement to participants’ health, a common-sense approach backed up by the evidence discussed in section 3 suggests that these growing spaces will have had a positive effect on both physical and mental health of service users.

## 6 Analysis

The aims of Plot to Plate can be summarised as an improvement in the mental and physical health of users and a transformation of PBHA's food culture which extends into the wider community. Although neither of these aims can be directly measured, we can note the strengths and weaknesses of the project and assess against the indicators measured as to whether they are likely to have been achieved.

Menus in PBHA's cafés include much more food grown locally, often by the Plot to Plate project itself, or from sustainable local sources. The proportion of locally grown food served is now more than ten times larger than it was at the beginning of the project and this is something that PBHA can be very proud of. Moreover, the food served has become much healthier, and this has been observed by both the tenants' forum and the majority of café users (as shown in the 2013 survey). These changes have been mainstreamed so healthy, locally sourced meals are now standard in PBHA cafés, and are accessible to hundreds of service users. PBHA has also served local food to many more people through successful events, which worked to publicise the project at the same time.

The project has developed four growing spaces, against a target of three, which have supplied fresh food to PBHA cafés and cooking clubs. Both staff and service users commented on how this has helped to make the healthy meals and new foods more interesting and appealing to tenants because the ingredients have a story and were grown by their peers. Being involved in the gardening has given participants an opportunity to learn by doing and gain skills, and even tenants who did not take part in the growing were able to benefit from the enhanced environment resulting from the development of the outdoor spaces.

Staff have shown enthusiasm and commitment to the project and worked hard to engage service users, especially those who might not have appreciated the changes at first (e.g. smaller portion sizes or more vegetarian meals). They have developed their own skills through training opportunities and shown creativity and resourcefulness in getting the most from the growing spaces and produce, from growing a truly remarkable variety of crops to inventively incorporating the themes of Plot to Plate into events such as Christmas, Valentine's Day or Pride. We got a strong sense that Plot to Plate had impacted the whole PBHA organisation in a myriad of ways and that organisational culture has changed.

Individual participants described the changes to their lifestyle made by the project, such as greater willingness to try different foods, increased understanding of a healthy diet, or enjoyment of the outdoor spaces improved by Plot to Plate. Many participants also attended the wide variety of courses and trips provided as part of Plot to Plate and developed life-enhancing skills, both formally recognised and otherwise. The final evaluation report for the Local Food Programme 2014 states that Local Food projects are "contributing to personal development and empowerment, including nurturing self-esteem, changing existing life-style patterns and developing skills".

Plot to Plate made links with many organisations over the course of the project in order to benefit from training and expertise. These relationships have proved very fruitful and will be a major asset when considering the future of the project.

However, although some individuals have embraced healthy eating as a result of the project, it is hard to assess the effect Plot to Plate has had on the diet and lifestyle of PBHA tenants overall and whether awareness of the link between food and health has increased significantly. Unfortunately,

no surveys of tenants were carried out to establish this. Some comments from the focus groups suggested that, while participants benefited from the cooking clubs and healthier meals at PBHA cafés, in most cases this had not yet had an effect on their cooking and eating habits of individuals.

Similarly, it is not clear what impact the project has had on the wider community. It was hoped that participants would engage their peers on the subject of growing and cooking healthy food and take the message into the community, but there is little evidence that this has taken place.

The nature of locally grown food means that there are seasonal variations in availability, in particular that it becomes much harder to source local food in the winter. Plot to Plate worked hard to overcome this by preserving produce as much as possible, and indeed this provided another learning opportunity for tenants. However, it was noted that the 60-mile limit on local food was a challenge in wintertime and many local food suppliers that would have been suitable for the winter fell just outside this limit.

In summary, the project met and exceeded most of its targets; PBHA tenants now benefit from four growing spaces and healthy, affordable, locally sourced meals, and this will undoubtedly have a positive effect on both physical and mental health. In terms of the attitude of staff and the meals provided, there has also been an impressive change in the food culture at PBHA. However, there is still scope for further changes in terms of tenants adopting healthy changes to their diet at home and spreading this message to their peers.

It is perhaps understandable that the impact on lifestyle and the wider community has been limited; PBHA tenants and participants are faced with many challenges in their lives and it may be difficult to make healthy eating a priority:

*“It’s not like someone has decided out of nowhere that they are against eating vegetables and a certain way of eating or cooking. It’s perceived as expensive, and difficult, and quite frankly there are a lot of other things they are worried about at the time. There has been a list of pressing concerns - organic vegetables aren’t at the top.”*

We can examine the Plot to Plate project using the framework outlined in section 2 and consider each of the barriers to healthy eating in turn: accessibility, affordability, awareness and skills and habits and preferences. Healthy food became more accessible and affordable to tenants through healthier affordable meals in the café, as well as through encouragement and support for growing produce at home and practical advice on shopping; and participants’ awareness and skills were improved through the many trips and courses offered by the project, Plot to Plate publicity, and the Plot to Plate recipe book. To address the remaining barrier - habits and preferences - project staff and volunteers have discussed the project with tenants, explained the changes they may find difficult and adapted the project to individual health and cultural needs. Changing people’s habits around food may be the barrier that is hardest for a project such as this to remove. However, the appeal of the Plot to Plate approach of demonstrating the story of the food has clearly resonated with some tenants and encouraged them to change their eating habits for the better.

## 7 The future of Plot to Plate

### Focus Groups

Participants in focus groups described what they would like to see in future, including pickling and jam-making classes, bee-keeping and chickens:

*“For me personally it would be to have more plots. So the participants and tenants would be able to go to the gardens, and buy their products, rather than to go and buy them elsewhere, so more involvement on growing. Because it seems to be the first limitation to our payments.”*

*“I think to develop the foods produced in the garden, develop the garden here. And develop other gardens.”*

*“I’d find a way to make it more of a social thing, so that people can grow and it can become part of people’s lives. Participating in the process.”*

All these quotes show a desire to see the Plot to Plate project continue, and be enhanced and expanded further.

### The legacy of Plot to Plate

This section looks at ways that the achievements of Plot to Plate can be built on, despite the two-year funding period for the project coming to an end.

It is important to note that the project did not solely rely on the grant from the Big Lottery Fund. Some of the attendances at training courses were funded from other sources, as was the pilot project. Moreover, PBHA’s catering service will of course continue, and the mainstreaming of healthy and local food into the menus, along with the Healthy and Sustainable Food Policy, means that the improvement in meals that was a major achievement of the project looks set to continue.

However, the loss of funding means that PBHA will need to be realistic about which of the project’s objectives can continue to be met. The higher cost of local food suggests that PBHA will not be able to maintain the 50 percent local food content of its meals, although relaxing the 60 mile limit could help. As the overall aim of the project was to improve participants’ health, PBHA should prioritise maintaining the improvements in meal quality and nutrition made by Plot to Plate, accepting that it may not be possible to achieve the project’s local food targets at the same time without funding.

The hands-on gardening skills that Plot to Plate participants developed will allow them to continue their involvement, and experience from the pilot project shows that users do continue to tend plots after the official completion of the project. Similarly, participants who have come to enjoy learning about cooking as a result of the project seem likely to continue to do so:

*“People coming into the kitchen, working with people who are enjoying what they are doing, who want to share their knowledge and their experience - then training and education takes place as a matter of course anyway.”*

A PBHA project worker has been trained in seed saving techniques; by saving seeds from season to season and swapping them with other organisations, expenditure on seeds could be reduced or eliminated in future.

Many of the formal qualifications obtained as a result of the project related to catering. However, the success of one service user, who completed a course in gardening and subsequently found work with a local growing project, shows potential for another progression route. *Roots to Work*, a City & Guilds publication from 2011, highlights the potential for community food growing projects to develop employability, while skills shortages affecting the horticulture industry were identified by the Institute of Horticulture in their 2014 report *Horticulture Matters*. There is potential for PBHA to build on Plot to Plate by developing progression pathways to further training and employment in both catering and hospitality and horticulture. This could include developing existing links with colleges and other learning agencies.

As described above, Plot to Plate's impact on participants' eating habits was predominantly through meals eaten in PBHA cafés. Focus group participants also commented that the main growing hub was based in Hackney, which discouraged Islington tenants from taking part. PBHA could consider how to extend the reach of the project to tenants' homes, perhaps by providing fresh produce in communal areas which would either be offered for free or for a small contribution. This produce could be provided by the growing spaces; although the current level of food production has not been enough to support this proposal so far, achieving this would be ideal. It was also suggested that tenants and chefs at PBHA could form a group to bulk-buy produce, thus bringing down the cost. This could be supplemented by cooking demonstrations, tasters and workshops at kitchen cafes attached to supported housing.

During the project, some own grown produce such as herbal tea, pickles and jams has been sold at events, and there is potential to develop this aspect of the project. PBHA is working to develop its social enterprises including its Creative Industries strand, its catering service to local groups and businesses, and *Outpost*, its newly refurbished shop and community hub, opened by the Mayor of Islington in 2013. By incorporating elements of the Plot to Plate project into these enterprises, the project's local and healthy food message can be taken into the wider community. *Outpost* could act as another venue for workshops and tasters and selling produce, while local food has already featured as part of the menus for PBHA's external catering service, and could strengthen PBHA's offer to customers.