

Forecast Social Return on Investment (SROI) of supporting the Community Meals Service in Leicestershire

Summary Report

The aim of this report is to use the principles of Social Return on Investment (SROI) to forecast the value of Leicestershire County Council's contract with the Community Meals Service in Leicestershire. Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a principle based framework that helps measure the value created by a project or service by considering a range of outcomes for all stakeholders affected by the project.

The Community Meals Service provides hot meals to elderly residents in Leicestershire 365 days a year. Within the new contract the Community Meals Service offers enhancements such as making a drink and encouraging people to eat as part of the service. The meals are of high nutritional value and a varied menu is offered, promoting choice and flexibility. The meals are subsidised by Leicestershire County Council (LCC). This report forecasts the value created by both the meals at home service and lunch clubs over a 12 month period, between April 2010 and April 2011.

The number of older people suffering from malnutrition is set to increase and there is an urgent need to address how older people are supported into older age now before the problem gets worse. There are multiple causes of malnutrition that might prevent people from getting to food, such as mobility problems, mental health, difficulty in eating and disease. Research has found many frail, vulnerable and older persons ultimately have to move into residential care and nursing homes because they become ill as a direct result of malnutrition and dehydration - which inevitably is likely to cost the UK taxpayer more than if they were able to stay in their own home.

1,416 older people received meals in their home between April 2010 and April 2011. Older people who received meals at home were initially engaged and asked what difference the service made to them:

“I get to **choose** what I want and it always varies. They are very **friendly**, they ask if I'm alright. The men take the tops off the puddings. I know they would **help if something was wrong**” (female, age 90)

“The girls [drivers] are very good, **it breaks the day up**. I'd go potty if I didn't see anyone. I fractured my pelvis 12 months ago so I can't go out.” (female, age 86)

“We've come to a stage in our lives when it would be dangerous for us to cook for ourselves. We're too old now. It's nice to see a friendly face too” (male, age 95)

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“I lost my daughter to cancer and I have two sons who live in Market Harborough, but no one comes to see me except a carer at weekends”
(female, age 86)

Overall the themes that emerged from talking to service users were around **practical help so they could remain to be independent** and **make their own choices**. The **social contact** with a regular driver was also important, particularly for those who did not regularly see family.

Family members were also consulted on the difference the service made to them:

“They have rang me when mum’s fallen. Any problems they ring me or my brother - they have all our numbers. They have rang me a couple of times when she’s been ill and I’ve gone round. I’ve got **no worries**” (Daughter)

“The **burden is taken away**, I used to spend weekends just doing all their food for the week. It’s a big relief. It takes the pressure off. ” (Granddaughter)

The responses from the interviews with family members highlight the importance of involving family members in evaluating services. Those felt that where a service is having a positive benefit to the service user, this also has a significant impact on family members in terms of both their **freedom** and **peace of mind**.

LCC also commission 52 lunch clubs. Most of these are currently at capacity suggesting that close to approximately 1,450 places are filled. Lunch club attendees were engaged through of number of small focus groups. Stakeholders were asked what difference the service made to them:

“The company, a meal is ready for you, it’s a nice place. You feel well cared for” (female, age 85)

“It brings you out for an hour. I **enjoy talking to people** that I don’t [normally] see” (female, age 90)

The lunch club attendees often talked about the village they lived in, highlighting the importance of that connection, both in terms of knowing what was happening in the community and keeping in touch with old friends and neighbours. They often talked about the fun they had at the club which contributed to their positive wellbeing.

Each lunch club relies on a minimum of 4 volunteers to help run the clubs, equating to 208 volunteers. Volunteers were interviewed about the value of volunteering.

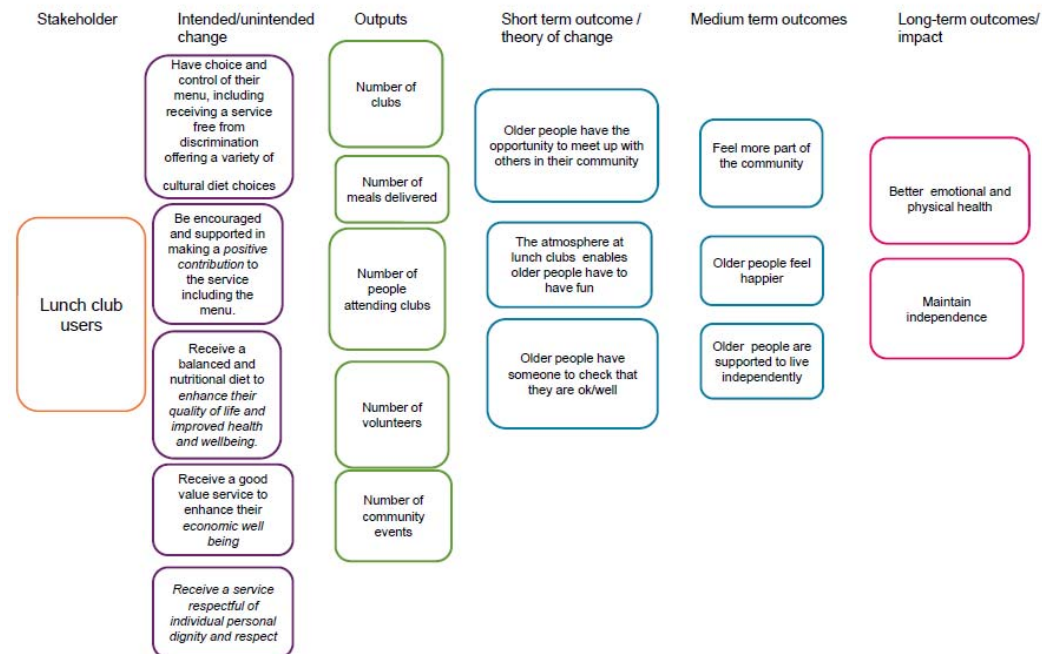
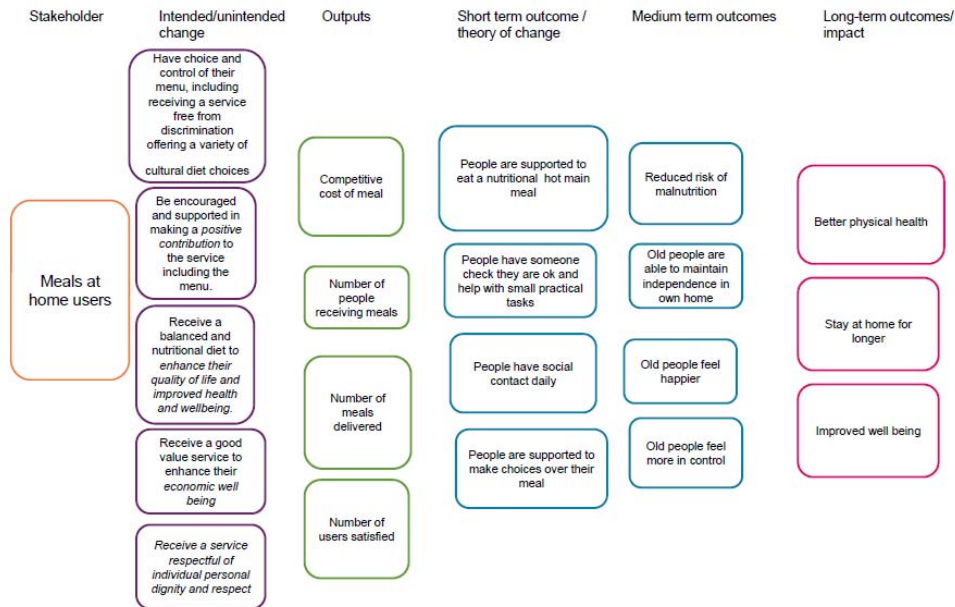
"A chance to put something back into the community and help a vulnerable group in society" (Volunteer)

Most volunteers decided to get involved because they wanted to do something different and give something back.

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Theory of change

The engagement with stakeholders can be used to develop a theory of change for all stakeholder groups to map out the short, medium and long term outcomes of the service.



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The following outcomes were identified as relevant to measure and value:

| Stakeholders | Outcome |
|---|---|
| Community Meals (Meals on Wheels) users | Reduction in those at risk of malnutrition/dehydration |
| | Support to live independently |
| | Friendly social contact on a daily basis |
| | Feel more in control |
| | Receive a meal from Icare |
| Family | More freedom |
| | Peace of mind |
| Lunch club attendees | Feel part of community |
| | Have fun |
| | Receive a meal from Icare |
| Volunteers | Satisfaction in helping others |
| LCC | Reduction in intensive support costs |
| NHS | Reduction in those at risk of malnutrition/dehydration or potential hospital admissions |

Data was explored and analysed from a range of sources to calculate the actual change in outcomes. A variety of sources were used to estimate baseline and impact. These included:

- Stakeholder interviews
- Social Care database (2010/2011)
- Social Capital Survey (2007) (*For profiling*) (See Appendix D)
- Quarterly survey with those receiving meals at home (2011) (See Appendix D)

To assess the potential value of outcomes all of the indicators need to be monetised, or expressed in financial terms.

This forecast SROI estimates that for every £1 invested in supporting community meals service £2.05 is returned in social value. 34% of the value is achieved through outcomes associated with family members, 21% for lunch club users and 41% for those receiving meals at home.

The outcomes that created the most value were:

1. Receiving a meal for service users
2. Peace of mind for the family
3. Feeling part of the community for lunch club attendees

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4. Daily contact for those who usually see friends or family less than once a month
5. Reduced risk of malnutrition for those who are supported to eat their meal

The SROI highlights the importance of understanding who else is affected by a service, such as family members, particularly when there is an increase in those who are no longer eligible for a service. The SROI process also identified the potential to increase value by focusing on and understanding the outcomes affected by the quality of social contact, and keeping people linked to their community. These outcomes may potentially yield the most value. New ways of collecting this information may be necessary to understand this value and its contribution to wellbeing in the future. The benefits of supporting the community meals service to other services such as the NHS should also be noted to inform future commissioning plans and joint working. The SROI also highlights the value of supporting volunteers which may not usually be recognised.

The sensitivity analysis highlights the issues that while targeting the service more towards those who do not have family contact results in more value created for the service users, the overall value may not change significantly because fewer family members may be helped to care for their relatives. Contact with family members and carers is therefore important to assess when additional support is required.

The SROI ratio achieved through this evaluation suggests that supporting an enhanced community meals service does result in significant benefits that would not be realised through alternative provisions, such as once a week frozen meal services.

Recommendations

- Include family members/carers in monitoring satisfaction and understanding value
- Ensure there is a clear systems to monitor any complaints / negative outcomes
- Focus on what older people say is important to them (e.g. social contact, practical help with little things) to maximise wellbeing.
- Understand and acknowledge the impacts of lunch clubs on community cohesion.
- **Consider introducing a Malnutrition assessment tool to evidence impact of healthy meals**
- **Consider collecting and analysing local NHS data on numbers of patients being admitted with malnutrition**