

A woman with short blonde hair, wearing a bright yellow t-shirt and patterned blue trousers, is bent over watering a raised garden bed. She is using a green hose with a yellow nozzle. The garden bed is filled with various plants, including pink and purple flowers. In the background, other people are visible working in the garden under a blue sky with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

# COMMUNITY FRIDGE

*Network*

IMPACT REPORT

JANUARY - DECEMBER 2022



Registered charity no. 1158700



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# Introduction

**W**elcome to the 2022 annual report for the Community Fridge Network [CFN].

When we developed our first community fridge in Swadlincote at the end of 2016; we were curious as to whether this concept (which existed in other countries) would work in the UK. Now, six years and 450 fridges later, what started as an idea has flourished into a national movement of welcoming spaces where people can access and share surplus food, learn new skills, connect with others, and work together towards a more sustainable future.

In 2022, the CFN experienced remarkable growth, overcoming challenges and forming valuable partnerships along the way. We expanded from 270 to over 450 community fridges, redistributed an estimated 7,000 tonnes of surplus food, and positively impacted the lives of countless people.

Our primary objectives for 2022 revolved around two key areas: expanding our reach and deepening our impact:

- **Growing the movement:** With the dedicated support of Co-op, our main partner in this journey, we assisted hundreds of groups across the UK in creating and launching their own community fridges.
- **Depth:** With combined support from Co-op, The Rothschild Foundation and Strabucks we've helped them to enhance their operations and transform into full-fledged community food hubs.

With these collaborations in place, our network's reach has extended further than ever. Throughout the year, we witnessed inspiring stories of community resilience and the power of human connection.

Take Mick at the Elmbridge Eco Hub, where the fridge has become an integral part of their community. In the past seven months they have shared 5.6 tonnes to 2,600 people across Elmbridge and transformed an unused bowling green into an award winning community garden with the help of over 300 local volunteers.

Despite facing a continued increase in demand due to the cost of living crisis, the CFN adapted and thrived, with community fridge coordinators and volunteers working tirelessly to support their communities.

This report delves into the incredible accomplishments of the past year, covering our growth, impact, challenges, partnerships, and future plans. As you read on, you'll discover more about our ever-expanding network, the communities they serve, and the change we're making together.

If you would like to join, support or learn more about the Community Fridge Network, we would love to [hear from you](#).

*Liam, Kate & Carly*

**The Community Fridge Network Team**



# Our impact in 2022



# Background of the Community Fridge Network

The Community Fridge Network was born out of a simple yet powerful idea: to bring people together to share surplus food and reduce waste. It began as a grassroots initiative in 2016, with the opening of the first community fridge in Swadlincote, Derbyshire. The success of this pilot project and the enthusiasm from so many people demonstrated the potential for a nationwide movement, paving the way for the CFN's establishment.

Since its inception, the CFN has grown rapidly. From just one fridge in 2016, the network has expanded to over 450 community fridges across the UK. This growth has been fueled by dedicated volunteers, supportive partners and an increasing awareness of the need for sustainable food practices and community connections.

The CFN has been fortunate to collaborate with numerous partners and supporters, including Co-op, The Rothschild Foundation, and Starbucks. These partnerships have provided crucial funding, resources, and expertise, enabling the network to reach more communities and broaden its impact.



# 450+

## So how does it work?

Hubbub's role is to support the whole network of fridges, helping anyone who wants to learn about setting one up, as well as groups who are successfully running a fridge in their community. We do this through developing guidance, training and supporting best practice, and sharing knowledge and experiences between community fridges. Local organisations, coordinators and volunteers play a critical role in running the day-to-day operations of individual fridges with Hubbub supporting the movement.

Some benefits of joining the Community Fridge Network are:

### Education

Access free resources, guidance information, tools and templates.

### Member events

Regular workshops, events and roundtables.

### News

Regular updates and the latest news delivered right to groups inbox.

### Networking

A community just for community fridge groups to support friendships.

### Coaching

Advice and support from the community fridge team at Hubbub.

Be the first to hear about upcoming funding opportunities

[www.hubbub.org.uk/the-community-fridge](http://www.hubbub.org.uk/the-community-fridge)



## Our ethos

Community fridges are open to all and operate on an honesty, mutual benefit basis.

As an environmental charity, cutting food waste is one of Hubbub's core objectives. We don't see the provision of surplus food as a long-term solution to food poverty. However, we recognise that for many, the community fridge and access to free food is a crucial support in difficult circumstances. We, along with organisations across the food and charity sector, continue to call on the Government to ensure that people have enough income to cover their living expenses adequately and access healthy food with dignity.

“Our fridge helped connect and bridge the gap between different groups of people that may not have otherwise had a relationship at all.”

*Walworth Living Room*



# Food Hubs Initiative

At Hubbub, we're passionate about creating a brighter future for our communities and the environment. That's why we're thrilled to share our vision for the expansion of 'community food hubs' across the UK. Our goal is to improve access to healthy food, strengthen local food economies, and support communities with valuable skills and connections.

In 2021, we took the first step in making this vision a reality by funding four community fridge groups to develop additional community food activities. Each group focused on one of four key themes:



## Food skills

The workshops teach people how to cook healthy, low-cost meals using surplus food, empowering them with valuable skills while reducing food waste.



## Food growing

These activities encourage people to grow their own food, improve access to healthy food and provide connections to nature.



## Community connection

By providing welcoming spaces for community meals and informal gatherings, the food hubs help build social connections and combat loneliness.



## Affordable food

Supporting collaborative purchasing and/or local food retail. This could include food co-operatives, food box schemes, fruit and vegetable stalls or a community café.

We provided not only financial support but also advice, expertise, and encouragement to help these groups successfully move beyond food redistribution and deliver impactful activities that can be sustained over time.

We learnt a huge amount from these first groups and were excited to witness them demonstrate significant positive impact locally. Groups reported the activities bringing people together, creating better engagement with local residents and a stronger sense of community pride and ownership.

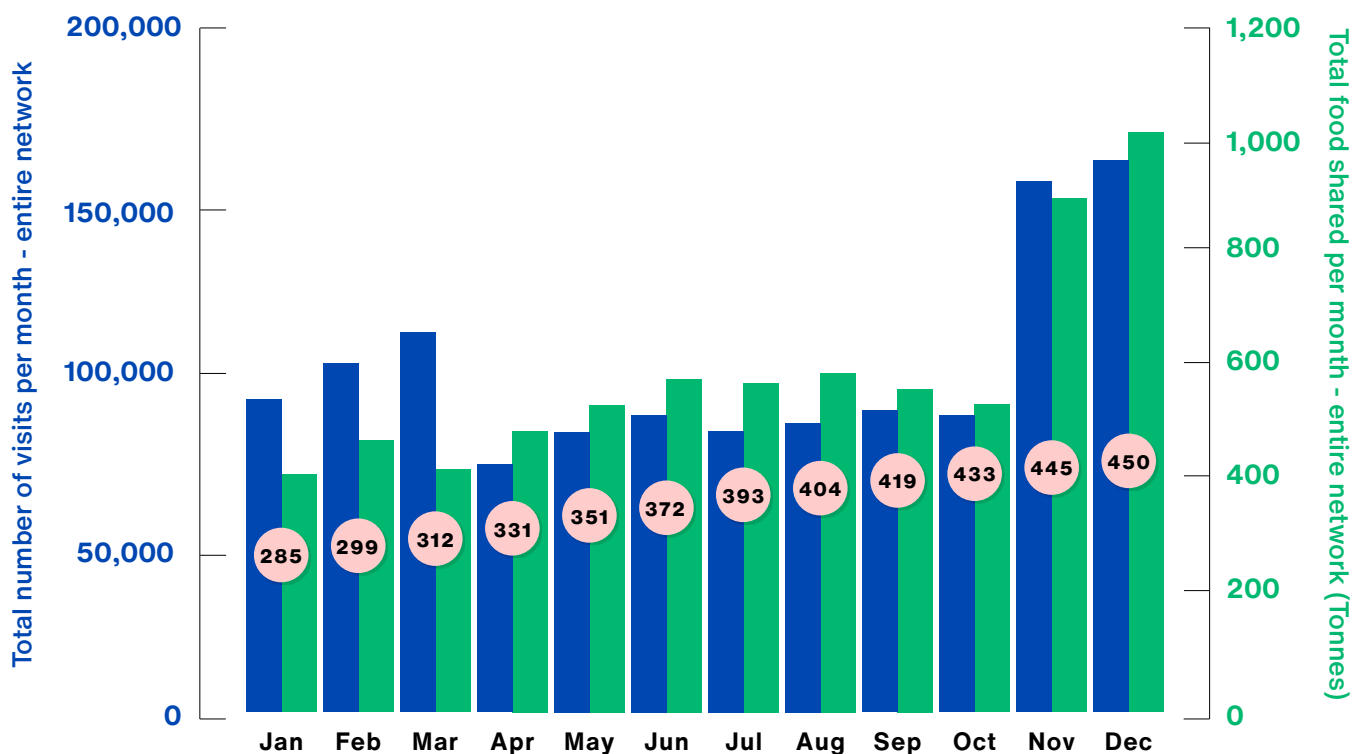
The success of this pilot project has attracted the attention and support of major partners, including Co-op, The Rothschild Foundation, and Starbucks. Thanks to their generous contributions, we've been able to support an additional 50 groups to develop their own food hub activities.

Together, we're building a vibrant network of food hubs that not only tackle food waste but also cultivates stronger, more resilient communities. We're excited to see how these hubs will continue to grow and thrive, and will continue to share their progress.





# Open fridges, visits and food shared each month



- Total number of visits per month - entire network
- Total food shared per month - entire network (Tonnes)
- Number of open community fridges (at month end)

### A note on our data:

Hubbub sends a survey to all community fridges each quarter to understand activities happening on site, as well as to capture how much food is being shared, the estimated numbers of visitors and any challenges that co-ordinators and/ or volunteers are experiencing.

Community fridges that are not funded by any of our partners report their data on a voluntary basis, while our funded fridges have an agreement in place to report food and visitor data. We calculate the estimated impact of the network once a year, based on the survey data we receive.

The impact in this report has been calculated from data shared by over 121 fridges across the year. We calculate 'average food shared based on the total tonnage reported, and multiply that by the number of fridges we know to be open by that month. This helps us report estimated monthly and annual distribution of food.

We use 420g as a typical meal size to estimate the number of meals' worth of food shared. The same methodology is applied to the visitors - taking an average based on reported figures and multiplying by the number of fridges open in that period.



# Media coverage

Since 2017, the Community Fridge Network has seen **1,329 pieces of coverage**, with opportunities to see/hear of **over 1.1 billion**.

In 2022, there were **275 pieces of coverage**, with opportunities to see/hear of **over 249 million**.

Some of key the topics covered include:



## Regional funding

The push in January 2022 to encourage community groups in specific regions to apply for funding generated **47 pieces** with opportunities to see/hear of over **20.8 million**, including interviews with Liam Sweeney on ITV Border, BBC Radio Cumbria, BBC Radio Coventry and Warwickshire and BBC Radio Ulster as well as 32 regional print and online pieces.

## New fridge launches

Throughout 2022 new community fridge launches were covered regularly in regional and local papers, both in print and online, as well as by local radio stations.

## Practical advice

There have also been a number of pieces with advice on how to set up a community fridge and how to find one if people are in need of support during the cost of living crisis. This includes pieces in print in consumer weeklies and monthlies: That's Life Monthly, Take A Break, Country Living; in online titles: The Rooftop, Skint Dad, Moneymagpie.com, The Big Issue, Save The Student, MSN UK, The Simple Things, Londonist and Yahoo! UK & Ireland.



“Our community are now aware of the food waste from supermarkets and also how many people are in need of food - the issue is no longer invisible.”

*Porty Community Fridge*

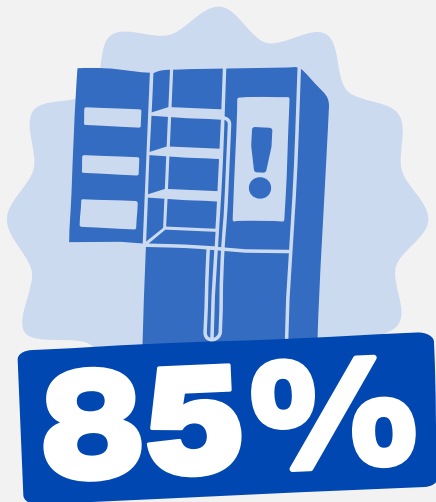
# Cost of Living impact

This year we've seen an increase in the number of groups seeking support and advice in relation to the effects of the cost of living crisis, for example fuel costs and visitor increases. Our desk-based research into the third sector suggested that groups would experience threefold problems: an increase in need for their services, an increase in cost of operations and a decrease in available volunteers.

Whilst the ethos of the network is not to be a solution to food insecurity, we wanted to design better support and guidance for the groups and to find out how the cost of living crisis was affecting the network on the ground.

In November we sent a survey to all groups in the Community Fridge Network, asking a combination of questions based on a wider UK survey by Sustain and more specific qualitative questions about what help groups would be most welcome.

Over 100 groups responded from across the UK, with similar challenges identified across different locations.

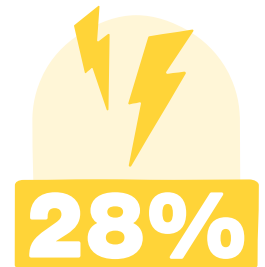


**feel the running of their fridge is being impacted by the cost of living crisis**

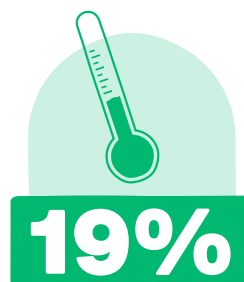
## What costs have increased due to the cost of living crisis?



Fuel prices (for food collection)



Cost of electricity



Cost of heating



Volunteer expenses



Rent



Other

Overwhelmingly, groups reported that they wanted help with funding and were worried about financing their projects. This was reflected both in the quantitative responses and in the free text responses.

With this in mind we have started developing a support strategy for groups which will involve:

- Sharing funding opportunities
- Support via workshops
- Skills sharing on bid writing
- Group knowledge sharing on fundraising

Designing these support interventions will be an iterative process and we have scheduled regular check-ins with groups to review and feedback on what groups find most helpful.



**94%**  
 have reported an increase in the number of visitors to their fridge

## What support will make the most impact on your group?



**38%**  
 Financial support in the form of grant funding



**17%**  
 Support with lobbying local authorities and government



**13%**  
 Support in raising awareness of fridge to public/organisations



**10%**  
 Identifying good practice in cost/energy saving



**7%**  
 Support with recruiting and retaining volunteers



**5%**  
 Online forums /knowledge sharing



**5%**  
 In-person local networking



**3%**  
 Training



**2%**  
 Other

# Looking ahead: 2023 and beyond

In 2022, the CFN experienced significant growth, reaching more communities and making a tangible impact on food waste reduction, social connections, and skill development. The success of the food hubs pilot demonstrated the potential for further expansion, driving the network's plans for the future.

Looking ahead to 2023 and beyond, the CFN aims to continue expanding its reach, with a goal of supporting the development of new community fridges in regions of the UK which have not yet been reached and continuing to seek opportunities to grow the food hubs movement across the UK.

We also look forward to strengthening our existing partnership with Co-op, focusing on ways to further invest in our network of fridges and amplifying their impact across each community. Together with Co-op we'll be looking to support the network through:



## Connection

Creating more opportunities for groups to build connections with one another, with more opportunities to share knowledge and inspire one another.



## Innovation

Supporting groups to test and trial new innovations that further develop their fridge offerings.



## Education

Improving our onboarding journey, making it simpler for individuals to learn about and action setting up their own community fridge.



I genuinely believe we have an incredibly difficult year ahead, especially throughout the Christmas period. All that we can do is our best and work through one day at a time.

- Survey response



# How can you get involved?

We invite you to join us in our mission to reduce food waste, foster community connections, and improve well-being for all. Whether you're interested in volunteering, visiting a fridge or partnering with us, your support is vital to the continued success and growth of the Community Fridge Network.

Here are the ways you can get involved:



**Visit**

**Find and visit your local fridge**



**Share**

**Learn about reducing waste through sharing**



**Volunteer**

**Volunteer at your local fridge**



**Set up**

**Set up a fridge in your area**

**Find out more**

[www.hubhub.org.uk/the-community-fridge](http://www.hubhub.org.uk/the-community-fridge)



# Thanking our partners

Throughout this report, we have shared stories and testimonials from those who have experienced the positive impact of the CFN first-hand. These testimonials serve as a reminder of the power of community, and the importance of the work we do together.

Since beginning our partnership with Co-op in 2021, the Community Fridge Network has created more places where communities can share food, connect with each other and learn new skills. Support from their network of stores and Member Pioneers continues to enable groups to establish themselves, recruit volunteers and help to reduce food waste across the UK. This commitment has contributed to the ongoing success and overall impact of the CFN.

Lastly, we offer our sincere thanks to the network of dedicated volunteers and co-ordinators across the UK who set up and run community fridges, as well as the key partners and supporters below who have all made a huge contribution to the growth of the network.



**STARBUCKS®**



**LIEBHERR**

southern coop



COMMUNITY  
FRIDGE  
*Network*

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