

Evaluation of the People's Kitchen

June 2014

Adele Irving, supported by Paul Biddle and Oliver Moss

Department of Social Sciences and Languages, Northumbria University

Contents

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	4
Evaluation Findings	4
Conclusions and Recommendations	6
Introduction	7
Project Overview	7
Methodology	7
Evaluation Findings	9
About the People's Kitchen	9
Overview of the Organisation	9
Recent Key Developments in the Organisation	10
Friends of the People's Kitchen	12
The Demographic Profile of Friends	12
The Needs of Friends	13
Housing	13
Employment and Benefits	13
Health and Wellbeing	14
Most Significant Needs	14
Discussion of Questionnaire Results	14
Accessing the People's Kitchen	15
The Delivery of 'Core' Services	18
Food Aid	19
Friendship	19
Information	20
The 'Your Future' Programme	20
Background to the Programme	20
Partner Agency Involvement	22
The Engagement of Friends in the Programme	22
The Impacts of Engagement with the People's Kitchen	26
The Value of Food Aid	27
The Value of Friendship	28
The Value of 'Your Future' Services	28
The Future Delivery of People's Kitchen Services	28
The Future Development of 'Core' Services	29
The Future Development of 'Your Future' Services	29
Conclusions and Recommendations	33

Evaluation of the People's Kitchen: Executive Summary

Introduction

In January 2014, the Department of Social Sciences and Languages, at Northumbria University, was commissioned by the People's Kitchen to:

- Produce a detailed quantitative and qualitative assessment of the needs of service users,¹ their experiences of engagement with the organisation, the outcomes and impacts arising from this engagement and any areas of unmet need;
- Evaluate the delivery model and impacts of the 'Your Future' Programme; and
- Identify areas for further consideration.

The aim of the evaluation was to produce targeted information, in order to help inform funding applications. It was also hoped, however, that the information may inform the strategic and operational development of the organisation and guide discussions with partner agencies with a view to developing more co-ordinated service provision.

The evaluation process involved: an analysis of 60 questionnaires administered to friends, 9 interviews with self-selecting friends; five interviews with volunteers; three interviews with trustees; and six interviews with partner agencies.

Evaluation Findings

The People's Kitchen is a pro-active, local charity which provides food, friendship, clothing, information and washing facilities to homeless and vulnerable people in Newcastle. The quality and efficiency of service delivery, the organisation's 'open door' policy, opening times and city centre location, and the dedication of its volunteer 'staffing' base, are key strengths of the organisation.

Recent developments of note include: the refurbishment of its primary premises and establishment of an off-site clothing warehouse; a review of back-office administrative processes; the adoption of a more pro-active approach to supporting rough sleepers; and, greater partnership working – with the launch of the 'Your Future' programme in August 2012 standing as a flagship initiative in this regard. Partner agencies welcome the greater integration of the organisation within the city's wider service offer for vulnerable people.

Of 60 self-selecting friends who completed the questionnaire, the majority were male and of working age. Most are from the North East originally and currently reside in the Newcastle area. Friends are predominantly 'White British'. Over a third have a criminal record, one in five were in local authority care as children and one in eight are ex-servicemen. Nearly two-thirds of friends have their own tenancy. Just one in five friends would describe themselves as homeless and 30% had experienced rough sleeping between January and March 2014. Just 7% of friends are in employment. Most reported unemployment to be one of the the most significant issues affecting their lives at present. Friends are typically accessing benefits, but problems with sanctions and delays to the processing of claims are becoming more common. Nearly half suffer from a combination of poor physical and mental health, emotional ill-being and/or substance misuse. More than half do not have friends or family who can provide them with housing, financial or emotional support.

¹ Service users at the People's Kitchen are known as 'friends'.

Trustees and partner agencies suggested that a higher proportion of people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and Eastern European communities and young people may be accessing support than the questionnaire results indicate.

Comparison with the findings of a similar survey undertaken in early 2012 suggests that: a greater number of women are accessing the service over time, a greater number of friends now have stable accommodation and the prevalence of 'complex needs' remains unchanged.

Friends typically started accessing support due to: general financial hardship/low-income, problems with benefits and homelessness. Just over half have been doing so for more than two years. While many friends started accessing the People's Kitchen as a matter of necessity, many now access the support due to its social benefits. Few reported that their needs go unmet when support from the People's Kitchen is not available. Most friends access the Kitchen two to three times per week, although frequency of attendance can vary significantly (often linked to benefit payments). Data suggests that friends are accessing support more frequently than they did in 2012 and that all sessions are well attended. Food, friendship (including the opportunity to take part in events) and clothing support continue to be the most valuable services provided.

The 'Your Future' programme, launched in August 2012, aims to facilitate the engagement of friends with a range of professional services across the city (via an outreach model), in order to address their more complex needs. Partner agencies are highly supportive of the programme; seeing it as an important opportunity to access people who are not engaging with other services and to provide greater continuity of care to those who are. However, there remains some tension within the People's Kitchen about the extent to which the programme reflects the ethos of the organisation. Four agencies currently deliver outreach services, in the areas of housing, health, employment and legal advice. Two of these have the capacity to refer friends to a wide range of services across the city. Other organisations have expressed an interest in contributing to the initiative but are struggling to do so due to resource constraints.

Friends demonstrated low levels of awareness of the 'Your Future' initiative, but are aware of some professional services undertaking outreach at the Kitchen. Key barriers to accessing 'Your Future' services are lack of information and concerns over confidentiality. Many friends are also engaged with other services in the city. Those who have engaged generally reported 'very positive', 'positive' or 'satisfactory' experiences of engagement.

Almost all friends reported that the People's kitchen has had a 'very positive' or 'positive' impact on their lives, due to its satisfaction of basic needs and the provision of a foundation through which they can begin to address the underlying causes of their problems. More specifically, support from the People's Kitchen can be considered to have impacted favourably on financial inclusion, tenancy sustainment, health, wellbeing, education and training, personal skills development, the development of positive social networks and desistance from offending.

Friends identified a number of recommendations regarding the future delivery of 'core's services. These include: more events, longer opening hours, more listeners, a quiet area for friends to relax, additional private 'listening' rooms, a structured induction process and an opportunity for user-led engagement in the management and delivery of services. All stakeholder groups raised concerns over the behaviour of friends under the influence of drugs and alcohol, issues of personal safety and 'boundaries' between professional and volunteer staff and friends. Regarding 'Your Future, potential service gaps include: women's services, recovery support services, young people's services and the provision of specialist financial management/debt advice.

The People's Kitchen does not have monitoring systems (regarding levels of demand for support, the needs of friends or the outcomes of engagement with friends) or information sharing protocols in place with partner agencies. These would be beneficial to the organisation, although the nature of the organisation's infrastructure and 'staffing' base will make these limitations difficult to overcome.

Partner agencies are committed to continuing to engage with the 'Your Future' programme, with some hoping to increase the frequency of their engagement, broaden their service offer, create more structured programmes of engagement and undertake more intensive work with friends (on both an individual and group basis).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The People's kitchen plays a valuable and unique role in the city's efforts to meet the needs of homeless and vulnerable people. The nature of its service offer, open door policy and opening hours complement other services in the city, while the quality of service provision and the organisation's ability to attract and work with people who often struggle to engage with mainstream services are significant achievements. The People's Kitchen not only supports friends to meet their basic needs (a vital role in itself); it also provides them with a sense of stability in their lives and a foundation from which they can begin to address their more complex needs. The support provided by both volunteers and professional agencies is impacting on a wide range of needs and policy/service sectors.

At the same time, however, the strengths of the organisation are also its weaknesses. The People's Kitchen has come to support an increasing number of friends over time. The extent to which this is sustainable is a matter of concern. Demand for support, combined with the ever-expanding needs of friends, also raises questions about the role of the People's Kitchen in supporting service users to address these needs and how this should be achieved, in light of the organisation's ethos, working practices and 'volunteer' staffing base. As such, the organisation can be considered to be at a juncture in terms of its strategic development, with a number of important challenges and opportunities to consider, in respect of capacity and maximising its knowledge, skills, resources and relationships with partners in support of friends.

At the more operational level, the evaluation has indicated a number of practical recommendations which may be beneficial to the development of the organisation. It is recommended that the organisation considers:

- Establishing a monitoring process, particularly in respect of service demand and needs. This could take the form of an annual survey or a signing-in process.
- Developing an induction process for new friends.
- Continuing to develop the 'listening' service.
- Ensuring that volunteers have an understanding of the needs of friends, the availability of services in Newcastle to support them and their criteria for support.
- Identifying a team of volunteers to further develop the 'Your Futures' project.
- Developing an awareness-raising campaign to raise the profile of the 'Your Future' programme, targeted at both friends and volunteers.
- Producing a clear plan to maximise the input of existing partner agencies in the 'Your Future' programme.
- Addressing potential service gaps in the 'Your Future' programme, including women's services, recovery support, young people's services and specialist debt management support.
- Creating opportunities for friends to engage in organisational decision-making.

Evaluation of the People's Kitchen: Full Report

Introduction

1.1 Project Overview

In January 2014, the Department of Social Sciences at Northumbria University was commissioned by the People's Kitchen to:

- Produce a detailed quantitative and qualitative assessment of the needs of service users,² their experiences of engagement with the organisation, the outcomes and impacts arising from this engagement and any areas of unmet need;
- Evaluate the delivery model and impacts of the 'Your Future' Programme; and
- Identify areas for further consideration.

The aim of the evaluation was to produce targeted information, in order to help inform funding applications. It was also hoped, however, that the information may inform the strategic and operational development of the organisation and guide discussions with partner agencies with a view to developing more co-ordinated service provision.

1.2 Methodology

The evaluation was undertaken using a 'mixed-methods' approach that combined the use of qualitative and quantitative. This comprised the following five elements.

'Friends' were asked to complete a **paper-based questionnaire**, supported by the evaluation team where necessary. The questionnaire consisted of a mix of multiple-choice and open-ended questions, relating to demographic information, needs, experiences of engagement with the organisation and recommendations for the further development of services. The questionnaire was administered during six sessions at the Alison Centre, one outreach session and one social event. Sixty questionnaires were completed in total, by self-selecting friends. All were completed during March 2014. Not all questions were answered in all cases. Baseline figures are given, therefore, for each of the findings. This activity was supplemented by **nine semi-structured interviews** with **friends**, in order to gain a richer understanding of their backgrounds and experiences of engagement with the organisation.

Semi-structured interviews with **five volunteers** were completed. The interviews explored the volunteers' perspectives of the nature and value of the People's Kitchen's service offer, barriers to engagement with the organisation and recommendations for its strategic and operational development (particularly in the context of supporting friends). The volunteers interviewed perform a range of roles within the organisation and consisted of a mix of new and long-standing volunteers.

In-depth, **semi-structured interviews** were undertaken with **six partner organisations**. The interviews explored their engagement with the People's Kitchen (typically through the 'Your Future' programme), the support needs of friends, the value of the services provided, the current and potential role of the People's Kitchen in light of changed (and changing) government policy and potential areas for development.

² Service users at the People's Kitchen are known as 'friends'.

The evaluation team also conducted **three interviews** with **Trustees**, which involved discussion of all of the key issues being explored through the research, as well as relevant background and contextual information.

Following completion of the fieldwork, the questionnaires were input into 'SurveyMonkey' (an online survey tool used to create, collate and analyse survey data) and analysed. The findings were compared with those gathered by the organisation through a similar exercise undertaken in 2012. The interviews were transcribed internally and analysed using a thematic coding system. The data collected was triangulated and written up into the final report. The following report details:

- The social and demographic profile and service needs of friends;
- The benefits of engagement with People's Kitchen services;
- A critical assessment of the extent to which the organisation's current service offer (particularly the 'Your Futures' programme) meets the needs of friends and areas of unmet need; and
- Key recommendations for the future development of the organisation.

The Evaluation Findings

2. About the People's Kitchen

2.1 Overview of the Organisation

The People's Kitchen, based in Newcastle, was established in 1985. The organisation provides support to homeless and vulnerable people, in the form on food, friendship, clothing, information and washing facilities. The ethos of the organisation was described by interviewees as:

'connections with people and bringing humanity to an existence that's often a very demoralising and degrading one' (Trustee)

'building a community of friends and a network so that people always have somewhere to go' (Partner agency)

'giving them somewhere where they're not an invisible figure.' (Trustee)

The organisation runs eight sessions per week, six days a week, 52 weeks per year. It operates from its city centre premises – the Alison Centre – and via a mobile catering unit. The organisation's central location was seen as particularly advantageous to engagement by partner agencies. One such agency, for example, said: *'We regularly see people at the Kitchen who don't come to the Centre simply [due to] location. It doesn't seem an awful long way to us but for somebody who has all these problems, nine times of out ten their method of transport is by foot, it can be a barrier.'*

Unlike other organisations in the city, the People's Kitchen does not have any criteria for support, other than that friends are over the age of 18. One trustee stated, *'It's open house, we don't ask any questions as long as they look over 18. There's no barriers from our point of view.'* The Kitchen also primarily operates 'out of hours', providing services in the evenings and weekends. As such, the organisation is seen both internally and externally as complementing other provision in the city.

The organisation is managed by a Board of Trustees, which plans the strategy, funding and operating guidelines for client services. Service delivery is overseen by an appointed Kitchen Council and sizeable volunteer pool (approx. 150 in total), organised into over 20 different teams. The absence of any paid staff is a source of great pride within the organisation and both partner agencies and friends alike were impressed by the dedication and commitment of the volunteers to deliver such a professionally-run service. Comments of this nature included:

'It's absolutely remarkable to have a service that's completely managed by volunteers, that works with a group of people to whom public attitudes are ambivalent and probably prejudicial...the way that [they] all work towards one end..and no matter what the weather is, whatever time of day or the year, volunteers get here and deliver' (Trustee)

'This is a service that is run solely by volunteers and actually, I think they go over and above what really would be expected' (Partner agency)

'That they manage to run something like that, on [that] scale, the quality they have, with only volunteers is remarkable. To harness that level of dedication and support that the volunteers have is incredible.' (Partner agency)

'It's friendly and nice to know that the volunteers aren't getting paid and they are just doing it to help'. (Friend)

The People's Kitchen does not receive funding from statutory agencies. Instead, it relies on donations from commercial sponsors, charitable grants and fund-raising. The scale of donations is testament to its good reputation in the local area. When asked about its public image, interviewees commented:

'I think it has a really positive image. You quite often see stories in the newspapers, their website is pretty strong, it focuses on its core remit, it's understandable, it's quite clear what it's trying to achieve' (Volunteer)

'I'm sure if you lined up a load of charity boxes in the supermarket this one would receive a high volume of donations compared to others' (Volunteer)

'I think it's very well-respected and that's demonstrated by the number of churches and schools that support it'. (Trustee)

2.2 Recent Key Developments within the Organisation

While the People's Kitchen originated as an organisation that supported homeless people, its client base has diversified over time. When asked about the nature and needs of friends, a typical comment was *'They're not necessarily homeless. I quite quickly realised that perhaps a minority of our friends are, strictly speaking, sleeping rough on the street. They quite often are struggling [financially] or are lonely' (Trustee)*. Indeed, the majority of friends would be more appropriately classed as 'vulnerable', with a potential range of needs, relating to housing, financial exclusion, poor physical and mental health, emotional wellbeing, poverty and limited social capital. Partner agencies welcome recent acknowledgment by the People's Kitchen of its varied client base, following historic, conflicting perceptions about the size of the city's rough sleeping population. One partner agency explained, *'There's been a noticeable difference in terms of acknowledgement and acceptance around what the role of the People's Kitchen is...and that 80% of people are going there because of low-income and isolation. There might be other issues with that client group but it's not the acute, roofless client group which is certainly positive to hear, because our whole approach has been about ensuring we don't miss people out.'*

It is unclear how many friends access the Kitchen due to the absence of monitoring procedures. Estimates of attendance at sessions delivered at the Alison Centre ranged from 80 to 130 friends, depending on the time of year and weather, for example. Trustees suggested that up to 200 different people may be accessing the Kitchen on a regular basis. Clear from discussions with trustees and volunteers, however, is a widespread sense that demand for support has increased over time. One trustee commented, *'Well, certainly the numbers attending have gone up. When I started [in 2011], it was something like 80 meals a night. It's now gone up to 120-130 a night. All the teams are finding that. So certainly the number of people attending for meals have rocketed.'* Increases in demand are likely to be linked, in part, to the broader economic climate, unemployment levels and changes to the welfare system. Indeed, several friends interviewed have been affected by the introduction of the under-occupation rule in social housing, which is placing them under greater financial pressure. Trustees and volunteers also reported increases in the number of friends affected by changes to conditionality for work-related benefits, resulting in the sanctioning of their benefits, and delays to the processing of new claims.³ Trustees reported:

³ Similar findings were reported by the North East Homeless Think Tank's (2014) report on the impacts of welfare reform on single homelessness in the region.

'There's more incidents in people saying 'oh there's been a delay in getting my benefits, or it's been taken off me, or it's been stopped for a while until they reconsider it'...I never heard that before until recently'

'I think the biggest thing that's causing the problem now is they're getting sanctioned for anything. The fact you can't read or write and you've made four mistakes on a form doesn't matter'

'The bedroom tax has had a huge impact...a lot of people are saying that they're struggling to manage, they're falling into arrears or they're at threat of losing their accommodation.'

There is concern about the subsequent effects of welfare reform on demand for support in the future. 50% of friends (28 of 56) expressed concern about the impacts of welfare reform on their housing and financial circumstances.

Another significant change within the organisation is the refurbishment of the Alison Centre - which included re-decoration and the development of a meeting room for trustees and volunteers and a consultation (or 'listening') room for friends – and the setting-up of an off-site clothing warehouse. The improved aesthetics of the centre have reportedly made attending the Kitchen a more pleasant experience, and to have made a positive difference to the organisation and the efficiency with which services are delivered, as well as the quality of support offered. Supplementing this, the organisation is in the process of reviewing its back-office administrative frameworks and processes, relating to compliance with charity regulations, IT systems, recruitment and training, food safety and street outreach. It is also reviewing the skill-sets of its volunteers in order to ensure that they are being maximised to best effect. Both trustees and volunteers commented that the increased 'professionalisation' of the People's Kitchen over time gives them more confidence in the way in which it operates and the future development of the organisation.

A greater understanding among trustees, volunteers and partner agencies of the nature and needs of friends and the barriers they face to addressing those needs – facilitated, in part, by a greater level of engagement of the organisation in research – has resulted in greater dialogue with external agencies. In particular, the Kitchen has developed a good working relationship with the local authority, which has supported volunteers to improve their knowledge of homelessness in particular and the range of services available to help homeless people. One partner agency described this process as having '*tested the theories of some volunteers that no one helps their clients*'. As a result, the People's Kitchen has become more pro-active in respect of responding to rough sleeping.

Linked to this, interviewees reported a broader culture change within the Kitchen, whereby the organisation as a whole has been keen to develop partnership working arrangements with a range of agencies across the city. They stressed existing high levels of co-ordination among services working with vulnerable people across the city and welcomed the interest of the People's Kitchen in becoming integrated with the city's wider service offer. Commenting on the importance of this, partner agencies stated:

'The city in general...we all need to sing to the same song book and if you've got somebody working on their own and isn't giving the same advice out, it does nothing but confuse clients...the networking and everybody pushing for the same thing is the best way forward for the clients'

'The only way of breaking the cycle of poverty is by a team approach of people working together to help people out of it and I think that People's Kitchen understands that more and more...and the fact that they've got people like Ted who come to the Active Homeless Inclusion Forum is really, really good. People respect them and respect their opinion.'

The most progressive development in this respect has been the establishment of the 'Your Future' programme, which represents an effort to provide friends accessing the Kitchen with a holistic package of support to address their more complex needs. As one volunteer put it, *'As an organisation, things have changed a lot and are very different from when Alison first set it up. We live in a very different economic climate and a very different world. The numbers of people who are coming to somewhere like the kitchen have risen and you can't then just give food and then not do anything else. So, we're trying very much to work in partnership with other agencies, so that we can help move people forward'*. A detailed discussion of the 'Your Future' programme can be found in Section Six. The People's Kitchen has also appointed a Chaplain, who runs a monthly worship service and supports a team of 'listeners' to listen to the experiences of friends, offer them information and emotional support and signpost them to other services in the city.

Several stakeholders attributed the development of the 'Your Future' programme largely to the work of Ted Dickinson and were keen for this to be stressed in this report. Typical comments were:

'For me, the biggest change with People's Kitchen came when Ted came...he's got a very clear vision about what the People's Kitchen is, where the value is, how it can work with partners and that is definitely something that's improved in the last couple of years. He deserves a lot of recognition'

'What Ted has done is to make sure that those connections have been made with other partners in the city so that the People's Kitchen aren't providing a stand-alone service.'

3. Friends of the People's Kitchen

The People's Kitchen does not have a systematic approach to the identification and monitoring of the needs of friends and their engagements with the organisation. Trustees commented, *'We aren't very good at identifying or having mechanisms to identify needs'*. Trustees and volunteers reported an informal, *ad hoc* approach to asking friends about their needs. One trustee explained, *'We tend not to ask questions, because we never get an answer. You don't know [their needs] unless they talk. Some will ask some of the regulars and the regulars will come over and say can you help this guy, but if they sit on their own they wouldn't know'*. Another said, *'I think our approach has been fairly passive. I think if you talk to some volunteers, some will know some individuals very well indeed, but that's the nature of the kitchen. There isn't a process of engagement, it's very informal. I can think of people, I know their names, I've got to know. Lots of others I haven't'*. However, an understanding of the nature and needs of friends is critical if the organisation is to effectively support them to 'move on' from charitable support.

3.1 The Demographic Profile of Friends

Sixty friends completed (partially or in full) a questionnaire about their needs and experiences of engagement with the People's Kitchen. Of those, the **majority** were **male**. Specifically, 79% were male (39 of 55) and 21% were female (16 of 55).

The majority were **adults of working age**. 2% were aged 18-24 (1 of 55), 18% were aged 25-35 (10 of 55), 31% were aged 35-44 (17 of 55), 33% were aged 45-54 (18 of 55), 7% were aged 55 to 64 (4 of 55) and 9% were aged 65 and over (5 of 55).

87% are **from the North East originally** (47 of 54). 6% are from the Scotland (3 of 54), one is from the North West, Yorkshire and Humber and London respectively and one is from outside the UK. 69% currently **live in Newcastle** (41 of 59), 20% live in Gateshead (12 of 59) and 2% (one friend) live in North Tyneside. 8% live in North Tyneside (5 of 59).

93% (39 of 41) of those who live in Newcastle stated in which areas they currently live.

- 23% (9 of 39) live in Byker.
- 15% (6 of 39) live in Benwell/Scotswood and Elswick respectively.
- 10% (4 of 39) live in Walker (4 of 39).
- 8% (3 of 39) live in Fenton/Kenton and Gosforth/Fawdon, respectively.
- 3% live in Heaton (1 of 39).
- 15% live in 'other areas' of Newcastle (6 of 39).

90% of friends are '**White British**' (54 of 60). 3% are 'White Irish; and 'Mixed Other', respectively (2 of 60). 2% are 'Asian British' and 'Other', respectively (1 of 60).

38% (22 of 58) have a **criminal record**. 53% do not have a criminal record (31 of 58) and 9% (5 of 58) preferred not to say. 18% (10 of 57) of friends were in **local authority care** as children. 12% (7 of 58) are ex-service personnel.

3.2 The Needs of Friends

Housing

Almost two thirds of those accessing support who responded to the questionnaire did not report to have a housing need. **62%** (37 of 60) described their **housing situation** as **stable** and **60%** (35 of 58) described this as **long-term**. These friends typically have their own tenancy. 37% of friends (22 of 60) have a social housing tenancy, 20% (12 of 60) have a private tenancy and 5% (3 of 60) have a housing association tenancy.

The remaining **38%** of friends (23 of 60) described their **housing situation** as **unstable** and **40%** (24 of 60) described it as **temporary**. 13% (8 of 60) are living in homeless accommodation, 8% (5 of 60) are staying with friends, 7% (4 of 60) are staying with family and 5% (3 of 60) are rough sleeping.

Three friends did not elaborate on their housing situation.

22% (13 of 60) of friends described themselves as **homeless** and **29%** (17 of 58) had **experienced rough sleeping** in the 3 months prior to completion of the questionnaire. A number of friends reported a long history of homelessness, with homelessness episodes lasting up to eight years in some cases. While some had slept on the street for one or two nights, a minority reported rough sleeping for the entirety of the three month period.

Employment and Benefits

Just **7%** (4 of 58) of friends who completed the questionnaire are in **employment**. All four work part-time. Of the remaining friends, **59%** (34 of 58) are **looking for work**, 26% (15 of 58) are not looking for work and 8% (5 of 58) stated 'other' but did not specify their employment status.

The **majority** of friends (85% or 49 of 58) are **in receipt of benefits**. However, **12%** (7 of 58) **are not** in receipt of benefits and **3%** (2 of 58) are in receipt of benefits but are **frequently sanctioned**. As mentioned previously, problems with benefits have become more commonplace following the implementation of new work-related benefit conditionality.

Health and Wellbeing

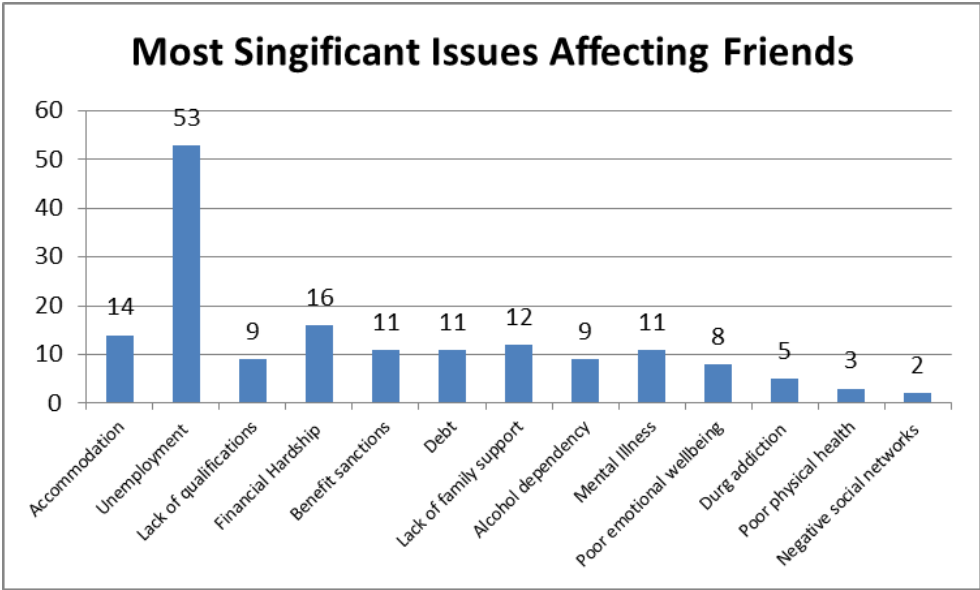
Regarding the health and wellbeing of friends, **21** (35%) have **physical health problems**, **13** (22%) have **mental health problems** (particularly depression and suicidal thoughts, in some cases), **12** (20%) have problems of **alcohol dependency**, **7** (12%) have problems of **drug addiction** and **5** (8%) have a **learning disability**.

13 (22%) friends reported to suffer from problems of **isolation and loneliness**. Furthermore, **55%** of friends (29 of 53) reported that they do not have family or friends who could offer them support with **accommodation** in times of difficulty. **53%** (27 of 51) reported that they do not have family or friends who could offer them **financial support** in times of difficulty and **46%** (24 of 52) reported that they do not have family or friends who could offer them **emotional support** in times of difficulty.

The **majority** of friends (88% or 53 of 60) are registered with a **GP**. Just 12% (7 of 60) are not registered with a GP. Nearly **3 in 5** (35 of 60) are registered with a **dentist**. However, 42% (25 of 60) are not registered with a dentist.

Most Significant Needs

Friends were asked to identify the three most significant issues affecting their lives at present. Responses are shown in the chart below.



The results indicate that unemployment is the main issue affecting the lives of friends at present, although friends potentially have a wide range of needs.

3.3 Discussion of Questionnaire Results

The findings of the questionnaires should be considered indicative of the characteristics of friends, but in light of the absence of a robust understanding of the number of people accessing services (and hence, a known response rate for the questionnaire), it is unclear to what extent the findings can be considered representative. The qualitative interviews with trustees and partner organisations suggested that a higher proportion of people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and Eastern European communities access the Kitchen than the questionnaire results indicate. Several partner agencies, for example, cited English not being the first language of friends as a barrier to their effective engagement with support. The interviews undertaken also suggested that the organisation is more widely accessed by young people than the questionnaire results indicate.

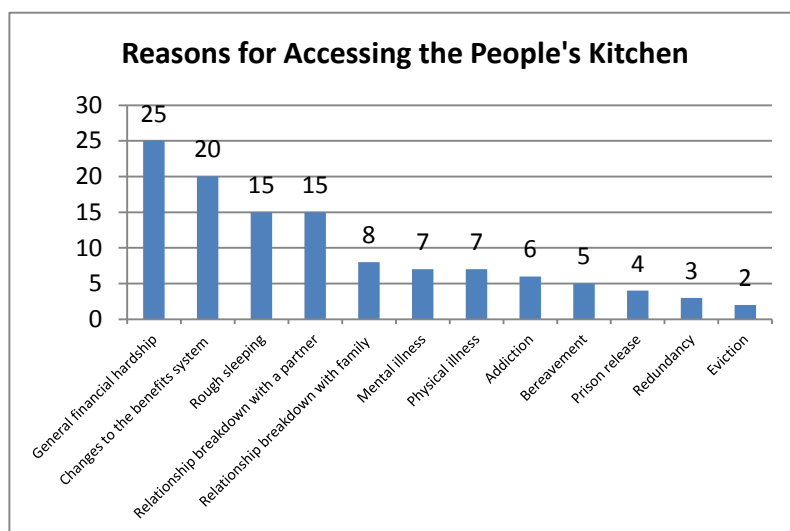
A similar exercise was carried out in early 2012 and completed by 109 service users. Comparison of the results suggests that:

- The number of women accessing the service has increased slightly;
- A higher proportion of friends accessing the service are at the higher end of 'working age' age bracket (45 – 60 years);
- A smaller proportion of friends accessing support are homeless / rough sleepers;⁴
- Securing employment continues to be a challenge for friends.
- The prevalence of physical and mental health needs, problem substance misuse and levels of engagement with mainstream healthcare appears to be relatively unchanged.

4. Accessing the People's Kitchen

The most common trigger factors for accessing the People's Kitchen are shown in the chart below.

⁴ National rough sleeping counts for October and November 2013 suggest a 5% increase from the 2012 figure, which was in turn a 6% increase on the 2011 figure. There was a fall in the number of rough sleepers found in the North East. Between 2012 and 2013, there was a fall from 62 to 19 (DCLG, 2014). North East homelessness agencies have put resources into finding and helping rough sleepers over the last year. The drop is likely to result from better intelligence about who is on the street and how to help them move into accommodation, as well as the provision of more information that are at risk of rough sleeping.



As suggested by trustees, volunteers and partner agencies, the data indicates that **three 'trigger' factors** typically prompt engagement with the organisation: general financial hardship/low-income, problems with benefits and homelessness. When asked about the reasons for accessing the Kitchen, the qualitative comments of friends included:

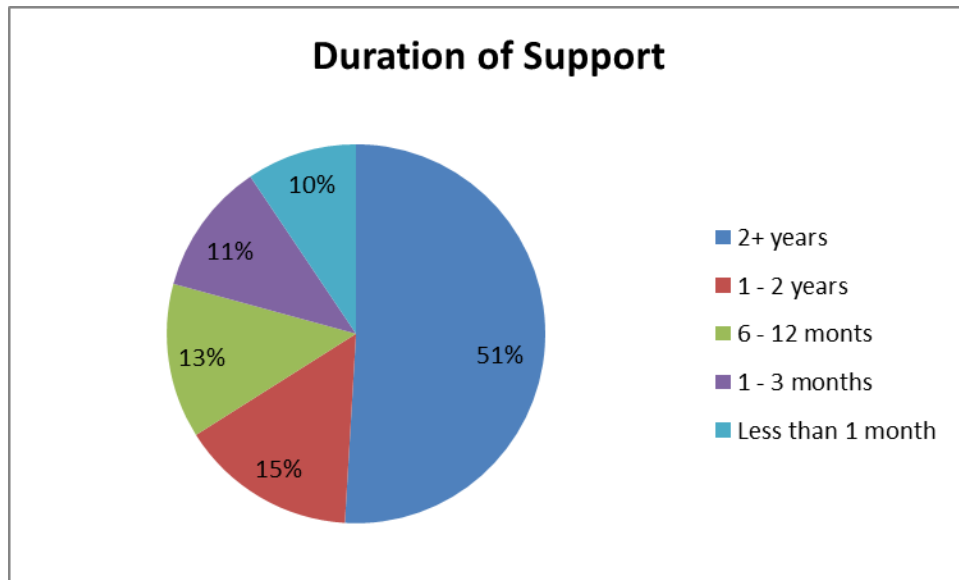
'I have got a place to stay but money is a bit tight so I come here to get some help. I need something to eat'

'I'm not homeless but by the time I pay my bills and stuff, I've not got anything left and I've just finished a four month sanction for a missed appointment'

'I find it very hard to survive. Have no carpets, no curtain, have a cold flat, meter costs a lot.'

Over three-quarters of friends (**77%** or 46 of 60) found out about the People's Kitchen through **word of mouth**. 12% (7 of 60) found out about the service through leaflets and posters, 8% (5 of 60) were signposted to the service via another organisation and 3% (2 of 60) found out about the service via a web-search.

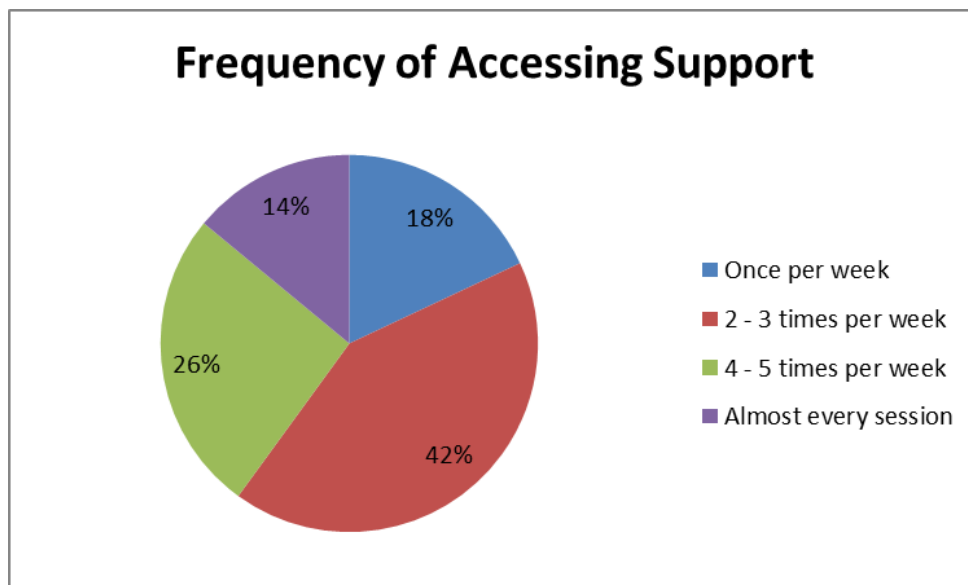
Just over half of those accessing support have been doing so for more than two years, as indicated by the chart below.



The qualitative data indicated that while many friends start accessing the Kitchen as a matter of necessity, some now primarily access the service due to its social benefits.

When support from the People's Kitchen is not available, their needs are typically met by accessing others services, receiving help from family or friends or 'working something out'. Many friends have no plans to disengage with the Kitchen in the near future.

The frequency with which friends access support is illustrated by the chart below.



Friends were most likely to report accessing the Kitchen 2-3 times per week. However, some reported that the number of sessions which they attend can vary significantly and is typically dependent on their benefits situation. A comparison of these figures with those produced in 2012 suggests that friends are attending the People's Kitchen more frequently than they used to. This substantiates earlier discussion about increased demand for support over time.

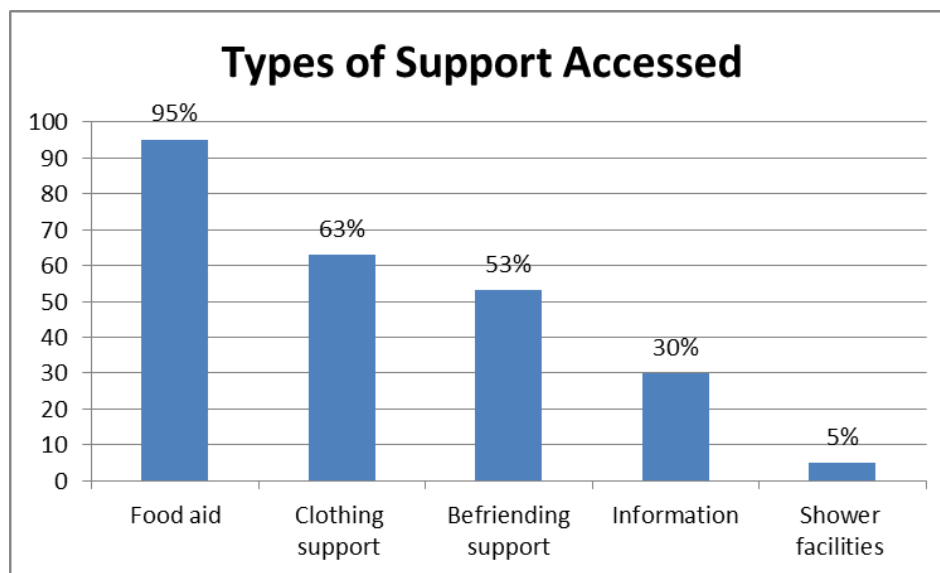
The table below indicates the number of friends who reported to ‘typically attend’ the various sessions delivered by the Kitchen.

Session	Type of Session	Number of Friends
Monday 9.00pm – 10.00pm	Outreach	27
Tuesday 6.30pm – 8.45pm	Alison Centre	40
Wednesday 6.30pm – 8.45pm	Alison Centre	42
Thursday 1.00pm – 4.30pm	Alison Centre	36
Thursday 8.00pm – 9.00pm	Outreach	29
Friday 6.30pm – 8.45pm	Alison Centre	32
Sunday 9.00am – 10.00am	Outreach	26
Sunday 10.15am – 11.00am	Outreach	15

The figures reveal that all sessions delivered by the People's Kitchen are well attended and valued by friends.

5. The Delivery of ‘Core’ Services

The quantitative data indicates that the primary services accessed at the People's Kitchen are its ‘core’ services.



The chart indicates that almost all friends access food aid and a majority access clothing and befriending support. Just 5% (3 of 60) of friends reported making use of the shower facilities. This could be attributable to the fact that most people accessing the organisation have some form of accommodation and those who are rough sleeping may be accessing other services providing this facility in the city (e.g. Rom Eager). Nonetheless, during discussions, friends appear to regard this as an important part of the organisation’s service offer.

The findings will be of no surprise to trustees and volunteers. As one trustee explained, *'I kind of feel that our dominant achievement is subsidising welfare benefits in a way. Lots of the guys who come here don't come here because they've got specific personal issues that they need professional help with. The majority of people come here because of the food, there's some social contact, it's a place to*

go. *Very basic stuff.*' Some interviewees elaborated on the Kitchen's food, friendship and information offer.

5.1 Food Aid

Unique to many other services, interviewees emphasised that the People's Kitchen does not simply provide food aid; it provides hot, cooked meals. As one friend stated: *'The other places provide a cup of tea and biscuits but they don't provide meals. They are a drop in place rather than a kitchen'*. This type of provision is of particular benefit to rough sleepers who do not have access to cooking facilities, those on low-incomes at risk of/suffering from fuel poverty and those whose needs prevent them from having the capacity or motivation to cook meals for themselves. Reinforcing this, one trustee explained: *'Food Banks are great, they do a good job, but it's not for our guys who haven't got the wherewithal shall we say, or depression or some sort of mental illness, that they can't be bothered making their own hot food.'*

Friends and partner agencies spoke positively about the organisation of the food services at the Kitchen and the quality of the food provided. Friends said, for example, *'the quality of the food is excellent'* and *'I've been to other services in the city and this is the best one...it's really well run.'* While trustees and volunteers were similarly proud of how well the sessions are managed and the quality of the food provided on the whole, several raised some concerns about the healthiness of the food provided. They would like to see the Kitchen provide friends with more fruit and vegetables, but recognised the difficulties associated with securing high quantities of fresh food on a daily basis.

5.2 Friendship

During interview, many friends cited the social aspect of the Kitchen as one of their main reasons for attendance. During observation of the sessions, peer groups were clearly observable (particularly among the older service users) and many friends now attend the sessions together. Indeed, 21 friends reported as frequently attending the sessions with others. Commenting on this further, one trustee said, *'There are groups of people that I see who come together as a sub-social group, tables where the same guys tend to go and meet together, eat together, chat together, so it's a complex weave of different kinds of individuals and different groups.'*

Friends also reported good relationships with volunteers. They spoke of their friendliness, empathy and non-judgemental attitudes. Feedback included:

'Very friendly, take care of me, I never get put down by the staff, they are always there to talk to'

'The volunteers are very good. They all treat you nice. They always make a point of saying hello'

'I would recommend the People's Kitchen to anyone as the staff are all nice and they make you welcome every time you come into the centre and on the outreach van.'

Reflecting this, one volunteer described this exchange as, *'Coming in here, having a cup of coffee, a cup of tea, it's like going home and sitting talking to your parents almost.'*

The organisation's events offer is central to the formation and nurturing of friendships and is something which has significantly expanded in recent years following the appointment of an 'events co-ordinator'. There were good levels of awareness among friends about the programme on offer. Of those who completed the questionnaire:

- 60% (36 of 60) are aware of rambling activities
- 53% (32 of 60) are aware of street/festive parties
- 50% (30 of 60) are aware of card-making activities
- 47% (28 of 60) are aware of karaoke parties.

The events are reportedly well attended and friends spoke positively about their enjoyment of them, particularly as for some, their financial circumstances would normally prevent them from being able to participate in activities and they have limited opportunities to socialise. The feedback of friends and volunteers included:

I had never stood up on a karaoke before coming to this place...it went quite well!!'

'We've started going on these walks. That's quite interesting'

'They helps us get to know each other'

'The Karaoke is packed out, the card making, they love it. They really enjoy it.'

5.3 Information

Part of the role of volunteers is to listen to friends who would like to talk about their needs and to provide them with information about organisations that may be able to help them. Trustees and volunteers were clear about the limitations of their role in this respect. One, for example, said: *'We don't give advice as we are only a volunteer organisation, we aren't professionals, we give out information and sometimes that information can give them a bit more help'*. In response to this, the Kitchen has recruited a team of 'listeners', led by the Chaplain. The role of the listeners is to provide friends with a dedicated opportunity to talk and to signpost them to professional services. Listeners have a specific mandate not to be involved in the work of the other teams; although this has caused tension with some volunteer teams, following a perception that the listeners were not *'pulling their weight'*, as one volunteer put it. Most of those interviewed, however, were keen to defend the role of the listeners, considering it more important that listeners maximise the time available to support friends. Despite some tensions and problems of recruitment and retention, the Listening Team is reported to be working more effectively. Listeners are becoming more confident at pro-actively approaching friends, they have a good level of knowledge of professional services in the city and friends are beginning to trust and engage with them.

While friends did not discuss the role of the Chaplain as distinct from the other volunteers and listeners, there was a clear sense from the interviews that the opportunity for spiritual guidance and support is important to friends. The Chaplain explained, *'It's because I'm visible that a number of the friends will come and say can you give me a prayer or can you give me a blessing? Often they will ask me to pray for them or with them or give them a blessing and they'll say 'I've got a load of stuff going on, can I talk about it, would you pray for me. Sometimes, they might be upset about something and I'll just talk with them. It's about being with them. But it's spiritual care, more than just being a friend'*.

6. The 'Your Future' Programme

6.1. Background to the Programme

The 'Your Future' programme was launched in August 2012. The programme aims to facilitate the engagement of friends with a range of professional services across the city, in order to address any needs which they have, beyond food, friendship and personal care. The model is based on professional agencies undertaking outreach within the People's Kitchen.

All trustees, volunteers and partner agencies interviews have a good understanding of the aims of the programme, stating for example:

'The name of it, 'Your Future', is one of the aims. It is trying to give that client group the thought that there is a future there for them...A lot of people on the streets lose hope, they have knock-backs and I think Your Future is trying to get them on the first steps of the ladder again where they can progress their housing situation, maybe training after that and have things to aim for' (Trustee)

'[It's about] trying to encourage professional agencies and services to come in here to make it as easy as possible for friends to have access to somebody who might be able to help them with underlying problems which we're not equipped to deal with' (Trustee)

'They're good at feeding people, good at making people feel good about themselves, good at building relationships between people. And now they're looking at where the gaps are and that's what Your Future is about. Making sure they they're providing a one-stop shop really for people coming in there to make sure they're getting the best service that they need.' (Partner agency)

Partner agencies are highly supportive of the programme aims and delivery model and are keen to participate; seeing it as an opportunity to access people who are not engaging with other services, those for whom the chaotic nature of their lives makes it difficult for them to access mainstream provision and those who simply prefer the nature of the Kitchen's service offer to other organisations. Comments to this effect included:

'For any organisation that's working one-on-one with the homeless, vulnerable adults or at risk of being so, there's a certain duty to offer people the best advice they can and signpost people to what's out there'

'It is important to make commissioned services a lot more accountable in terms of supporting the people who are accessing the People's Kitchen, so we know who they are, so we make sure that no one is left out'

'It's best that there's partnership working and that agencies that are used to dealing with it, deal with the part that they know. I think it's just getting the best of both worlds'

'People's Kitchen is essential in terms of intelligence gathering. It could be a way of being able to meet people's needs who ordinarily wouldn't have engaged through other types of referral routes. There's a genuine role, I think, for the People's Kitchen'

'We've got a gentlemen who's hard to reach, hard to engage with and has been for a couple of years, but he talks to the staff now because they're going into the People's Kitchen. That's the only place he'll go.'

While the 'Your Futurs' programme is seen by some trustees and volunteers as a progressive development and one which challenges historic concerns that services which provide food aid enable people to sustain a negative lifestyle, the programme has been subject to resistance by others; seen by

some as representing a shift away from the organisation's ethos. While resistance may have lessened over time, it nonetheless remains, as evidenced by the following volunteer quote: *'When they are in here, they have their own role and we don't interfere with that. We allow them to do their job in here, providing they come in and respect the team leader and if they want to do something which is over listening to what the clients have to say, they have to go to team leader about it.'*

6.2 Partner Agency Involvement

Four organisations are currently delivering outreach services during sessions at the Alison Centre: the Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion (ACE) team, Crisis Skylight, the Joseph Cowan Health Centre and a legal firm. The ACE team visits the Kitchen on a weekly basis to support rough sleepers to address their housing needs. The Joseph Cowan Health Centre visits the Kitchen on a weekly basis to support friends to address their health needs. Crisis Skylight visits the Kitchen on a fortnightly basis to support friends to access education, training and employment (ETE) opportunities. A solicitor visits the Kitchen on a monthly basis to provide friends with legal advice.

Other organisations have trialled outreach support in the Kitchen in the past (i.e. dental, welfare rights and counselling services), but have since withdrawn due to capacity issues and limited demand for support in some cases. Other organisations have been approached about undertaking outreach in the future, but problems of capacity are proving an issue. This is particularly true of services that are not on flexible commissioning contracts. Commenting on the tensions associated with this, one partner agency explained:

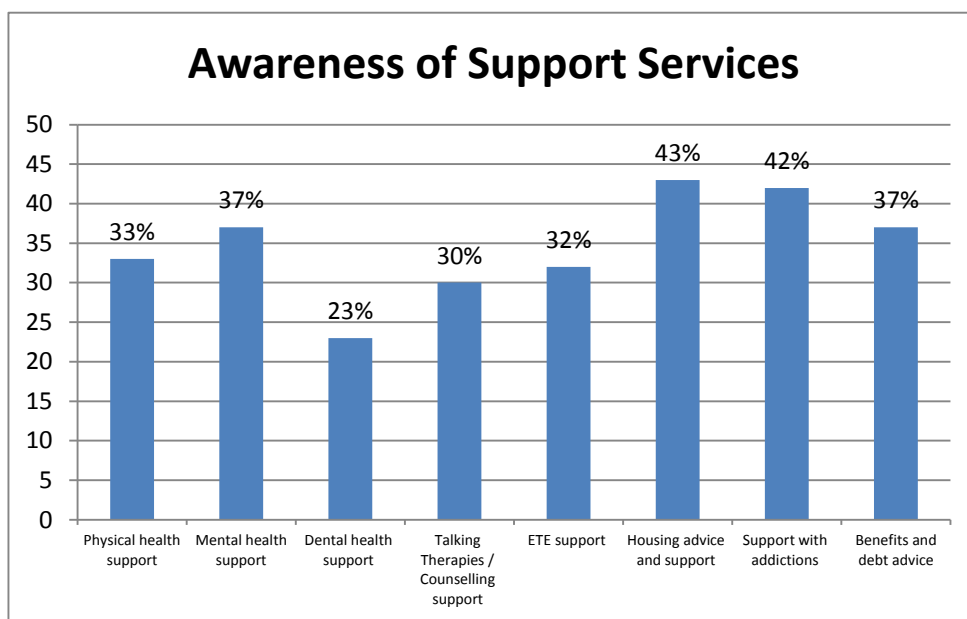
'It is possibly a little bit naïve to expect services that are funded for specific purposes, who are losing funding, to do extra over and above whatever they're contracted to do. But certainly for services like Joseph Cowan and the ACE project, it is a reasonable expectation on the basis that they are there to deal with a particular client group and that particular client group doesn't follow prescriptive routes into services. It's harder to expect CAB to...if they are unable to do it for free, then fair enough.'

Despite not all services approached being able to commit to the 'Your Future' programme, those that are engaging are fully integrated into the wider service offer in Newcastle. As such, they have the knowledge and ability to refer friends to any service required in support of their needs.

The People's Kitchen was praised by partner agencies for its consultative approach to the development of the programme. Partner agencies reported that participation in the programme has enabled them to engage with new service users and offer greater continuity of care to those already engaged.

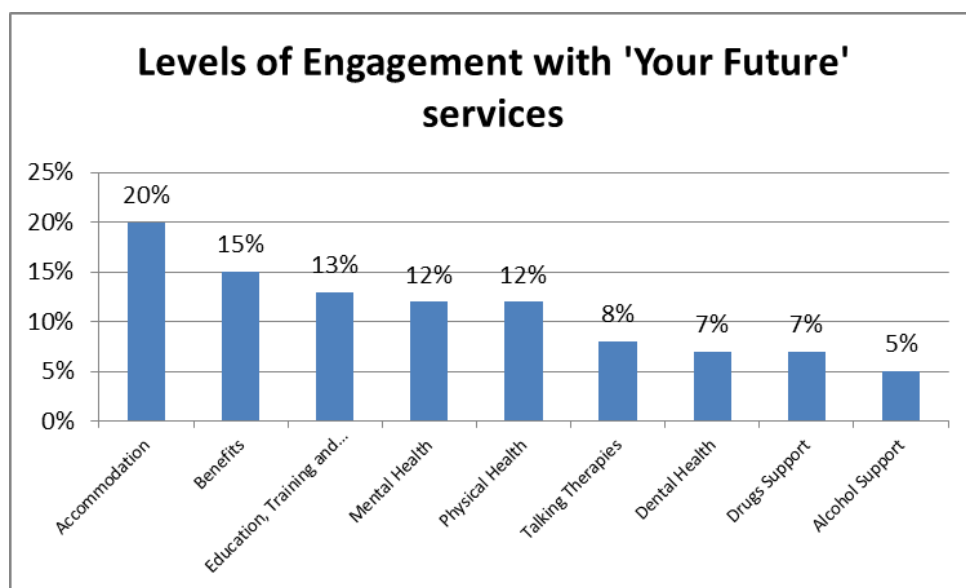
6.3 The Engagement of Friends in the Programme

The quantitative and qualitative data collected with friends indicated low levels of awareness of the 'Your Future' programme. Few recognised the initiative by name, although most were aware of some professional services coming into the Kitchen. The questionnaire results suggest the following levels of awareness of the availability of different types of services.



The chart indicates moderate levels of awareness of all support services, with the greatest awareness being in relation to support with housing, addictions, mental health and benefits advice.

Levels of engagement with 'Your Future' services are shown in the chart below.



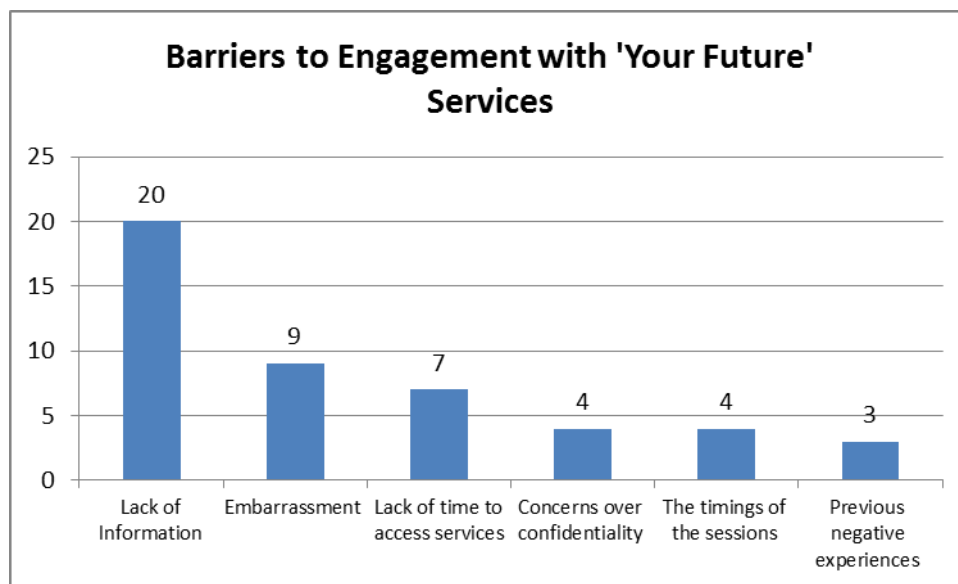
The chart indicates highest levels of engagement with accommodation, benefits, health and employment support services. On the whole, however, it suggests low levels of engagement. This contradicts the data provided by partner agencies for a report produced by the People's Kitchen in September 2013. During September 2012 to September 2013, agencies provided the following figures:

- Counselling - 48 friends supported;
- Housing - 147 friends supported;
- Health - 30 friends supported per session, equating to over 1000 contacts over 12 months;

- Legal – 19 friends supported;
- Homelessness – 39 friends supported (over a 6 month period).

It also contradicts discussions with partner agencies, where good levels of engagement during most sessions were reported.

Friends identified a number of barriers to accessing 'Your Future' as outlined in the chart below.



During interview, trustees, volunteers and partner agencies agreed that despite some promotional work, the programme needs to be publicised in a more systematic way. Not all friends who access the Kitchen can read and the chaotic nature of the sessions means signs and leaflets can be easily missed. English not being the first language of some friends, problems of substance misuse, learning difficulties and mental health problems can also make it difficult for friends to engage with the programme. In a number of cases, volunteers and listeners were reported to have played a key role in encouraging friends to access support. However, there is a sense that they are not always aware of when partner agencies are attending the sessions and the types of services they deliver.

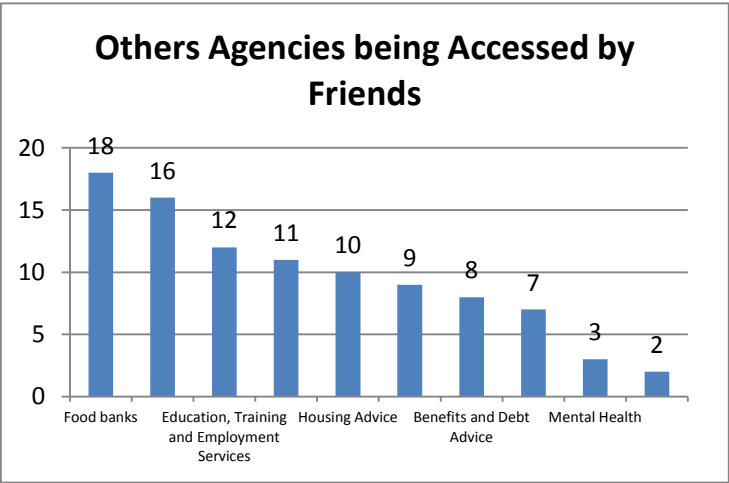
A further challenge to awareness raising and engagement is that partner agencies cannot always attend planned sessions. Partner agencies reported:

'It's been hit and miss sometimes because of our commitments. If I've got a staff member off sick, I can't staff it properly. So there have been times when we've not been very good at getting down there. But we do very much try our best to get down there'

'To be honest we've not been as clear about when we're going to show up and leave. That's something we could have done better and that we will do better. And also, I think I don't know if the team always know when we're coming.'

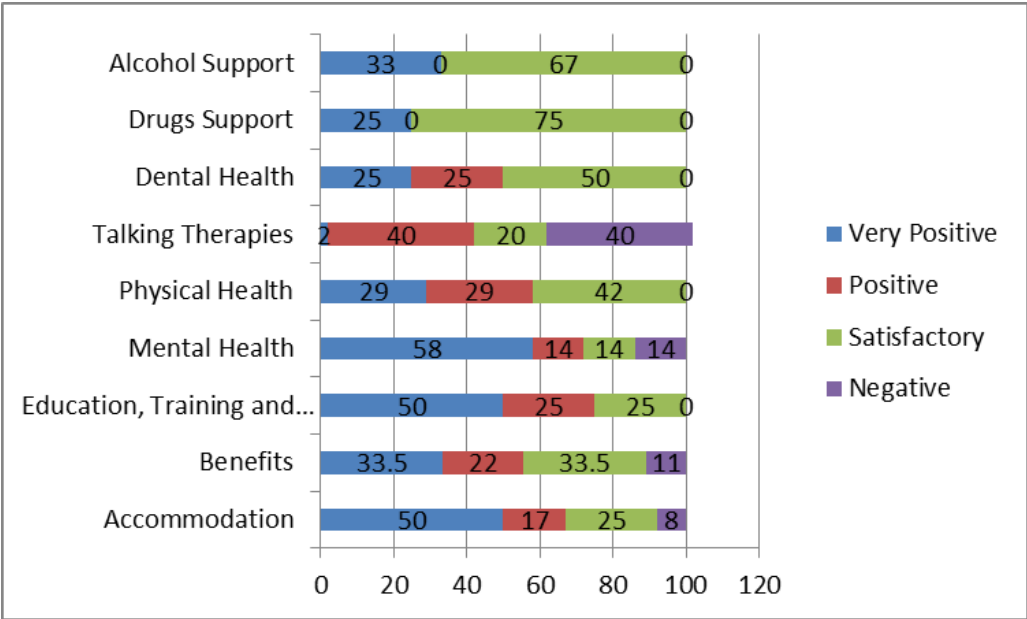
Commenting on the importance of this, one trustee said, *'I think the Futures thing is dependent on the outside agencies fulfilling their role to be there...because if [friends] pluck up the courage to talk to somebody about an issue and there's nobody there, that's a problem.'*

Almost one fifth of friends (11 of 60) reported that they had not accessed ‘Your Future’ services because they do not require support. This could be because they do not require support or because they are already engaged with other services in the city, as evidenced by the chart below.



Those who had accessed support were asked to rate their experiences of engagement. The results are indicated in the chart below.

Experiences of Engagement with ‘Your Future’ Services



Friends generally reported either 'very positive', 'positive' or 'satisfactory' experiences of engagement.

Partner agencies attributed 'satisfactory' or 'negative' experiences to client expectations, despite the complexity of their needs. One partner agency explained, *'What I think sometimes isn't met is the client expectation of what you can do. Sometimes I think...they think you can be a miracle worker and do everything for them and...you should be able to solve it there and then....we can't. So, their basic needs we do help and we can get them the help that they do need, but its just not immediate.'* Partners also pointed out that friends can quickly become disillusioned with support services when needs can't be addressed immediately. Partners also pointed out that sometimes, the nature of support offered through 'Your Future', can be limited to the provision of advice. More intensive support would require friends accessing services outside of the Kitchen as mainstream service users, or from another organisation. Finally, the informal approach to the provision of professional support can make it more difficult to effectively engage with and support friends. As one partner agency explained, *'I wonder sometimes if it's a really good time to talk to people, because people are having lunch and then we're going around talking about what we do. The staff have to be extremely proactive...they have to really impose themselves on people...it's a difficult way in but when it does work, it works well'.* Another said, *'At first, it's a daunting thing to go in there and sit down with people who are just eating and have to have that confidence to go up to them. I can see why some agencies might prefer to sit behind a table and wait for people to come over. It may work better now they've got that room.'*

All partner agencies engaging with friends record their discussions and typically input them on their respective organisations' information systems. As yet, however, there are no formal mechanisms in place for professional agencies to share information about the needs of individual friends and the outcomes of engagement, with Kitchen trustees and volunteers.

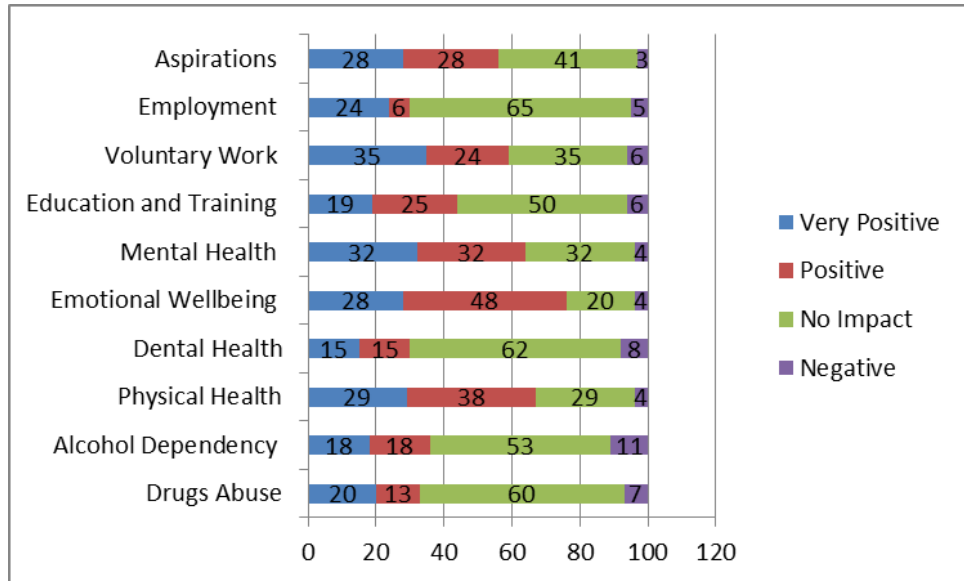
7. The Impacts of Engagement with the People's Kitchen

Of 57 friends, **47%** (27 of 57) reported that the People's kitchen had had a **very positive** impact on their life and **49%** (28 of 57) reported that the People's Kitchen had had a **positive** impact on their life. 3% (2 of 57) friends were unsure about this.

Not surprisingly, friends identified the three most **important services** provided by the organisation as: **food** (identified on 58 occasions), **clothes** (identified on 36 occasions) and **befriending** (identified on 30 occasions). Other important services identified were: benefits advice (5), mental health support (5), education, training and employment support (4), voluntary work (3) and housing advice (2).

Friends were asked to rate the impact of engagement with the People's Kitchen in relation to a range of needs. The results of this are outlined in the table below.

Impacts of Engagement with 'Your Future' Services



7.1 The Value of Food Aid

The provision of food aid fulfils the most fundamental need of many friends accessing the People's Kitchen. The fulfilment of this need was widely regarded by interviewees as laying the foundation for friends to engage with other types of support to begin to address their more complex needs. One volunteer explained: *'I think the most important thing is the food because if you don't eat, you are starving and you can't do anything else. I think the other [services] are important, but as an addition to the food.'* It was also considered important in respect of the prevention of poor physical and mental health. Following periods of rough sleeping, several friends commented that they had gained weight since accessing support and felt healthier. Others discussed a sense of relief associated with managing problems of food poverty (linked to low-income and homelessness) and the positive impacts on self-esteem of not having to 'beg' for food (or money for food) and no longer having to find waste food around the city. There was also a clear sense that the provision of food aid has impacted positively on friends' financial situations, with associated impacts on tenancy sustainment and desistance from offending. When asked about their experiences of accessing food at the Kitchen, the comments of friends included:

'A few months ago, I was down to 9 stone or so. I was depressed as I'd broke up with my girlfriend so this made a difference. It was one less thing to worry about'

'It's something less to worry about. I don't have to worry about cooking for myself or...when you feel good about yourself, it helps you to do other things on. I'm looking and feeling healthier'

'When you are unemployed, and on rock bottom financially, money is an issue and that extra few sausage rolls, bread, beans came make all the difference'

'When I first came, I was glad I didn't have to go in the bins anymore'

'It provides hot meals which saves you a lot of money'

'Without the People's Kitchen, crime would probably go up as people would start nicking'

'At least I'm not starving. Without this, I could be out doing stuff and end up back in jail'

'Without the service, I would just have to grin and bear it and I would have to tighten my belt.'

7.2 The Value of Friendship

Problems of loneliness and isolation are commonplace among friends. As one partner agency pointed out, *'There is a lot of people that haven't got a lot and for some people that'll probably be the only contact that they've got with somebody else all day.'* When asked about the value of befriending support, combatting problems of isolation was a key feature of responses. Building friendships gives friends a positive sense of identity and sense of purpose. Similarly, friends talked about the impacts of the events programme on their emotional wellbeing, physical health, the development of friendships and skills development. Some of the feedback included:

'At the end of the day, its somewhere to go rather than sitting in by myself'

'Since coming off the drugs, I've lost all my friends and acquaintances. It's nice to be able to talk to someone. I don't want to associate with my old acquaintances and get back on the stuff'

'If I'm bored, I'll think, I'll go to the kitchen and see some friends'

'It's somewhere to come to in the evening and have a chat and have a laugh'

'It makes your life more interesting...your week goes by a lot better. It just flies by when I come down here'

'It used to be food but now I come along to see my friends and see how they are getting along, to see if they have got off the drugs as well, then I'll go back home'

'Some of the friends have actually said that without the People's Kitchen they'd be dead. When they are desperate, just having somebody who will listen to them, take an interest in them. They really need somewhere like People's Kitchen'

'If the kitchen wasn't here, or other charities, I would have killed myself.'

7.3 The Value of 'Your Future' Services

Few friends articulated the impacts of engagement with 'Your Future' services, although there was much discussion of this with partner agencies. Broadly speaking, they suggested that the biggest achievement of the programme to date is that it has supported some friends to overcome their fear of engagement with services and given them the basic information needed to begin to address their needs. One partner agency stated:

'It helps for those people who are quite scared or wouldn't do anything about it. At least coming to see someone like myself in the drop in session means they get a little bit of a pointer in as to where they are, what they need to do and just even if they don't do anything else what might happen. And sometimes, that's enough to make them go and see somebody.'

Through 'Your Future' services, friends have been assisted with a range of issues, including: depression, anger and anxiety management, sleeping problems, drug and alcohol dependency, assertiveness, bereavement, relaxation techniques, rough sleeping, homelessness, blood pressure, weight, mental health, sexual health, welfare benefits, family matters, fraud, debt, rent arrears and evictions and immigration. Recollections of the outcomes of specific interventions include:

'The lady with the benefits appeal...she was successful so obviously all her benefits were reinstated and she received a back-dated award which meant she could pay back all the people she'd borrowed off'

'I've had people come back who've managed to negotiate with their landlord or people that have come back and they've got into temporary accommodation'

'A homeless guy came to see me, he'd been living street homeless for six weeks or so after being kicked out by a partner...so advice was given in relation to severing the tenancy versus negotiating with the council because severing the tenancy would sever the tenancy for both and put his ex-partner in a predicament and he knew that his children were living at the flat. So I put in a call [to the local authority] and they made an appointment for him...he came back and said I've managed to get somewhere to live, which was great'

'An immediate outcome, a women coming to us worried to the hilt because she could be pregnant, we can give her a pregnancy test'

'We had a case the other day...this gentlemen had gone through the homelessness system, had gained a tenancy, had gained employment. However, he'd been on the sick and fell behind in payments and he walked through our door and came back to us...we worked with the bailiffs who were coming to his house, we worked with a debt advisor and we worked with CAB and after to-ing and fro-ing, we managed to get him on a payment plan. He's a different man. He's going back to work.'

Trustees and volunteers also highlighted that the work of the organisation may have a positive impact on community safety, reporting: *'From the community point of view, if these guys are here, they are not in trouble or not causing trouble out on the street and hopefully they go away in a better frame of mind and less likely to cause a disturbance in the town'*(Trustee).

8. The Future Delivery of People's Kitchen Services

8.1 The Future Delivery of 'Core' Services

Friends made a number of recommendations regarding the delivery of core services, which they felt would improve experiences of engagement. The three most popular recommendations were: for the Kitchen to have longer opening hours so that friends can spend more time there (36 requests), for the Kitchen to organise more social events (31 requests) and for the Kitchen to have more volunteers and listeners for friends to talk to (21 requests).

During the interviews, several reported that they would welcome a 'quiet area' at the Alison Centre where they could relax and read. They commented that the Kitchen can often be a busy and noisy environment and they do not like to relax in the television area in the foyer as they do not know who is 'hanging around' the entrance. One trustee acknowledged this, but also noted the challenges associated with this: *'The atmosphere is intimidating for some people...there are people who shout*

their head off and it upsets them...I know people who've said I'm not coming back I can't stand it...but given our premises and lack of room, it's a difficult one.' Several friends requested that they would like more private spaces where they could talk to listeners and professional services in confidence when they are 'feeling down' or have a problem.

All stakeholder groups interviewed reported that while the management of behaviour has improved at the People's Kitchen, concerns nonetheless remain about the behaviour of those under the influence of drugs and alcohol. Several trustees and volunteers conceded that managing the sessions can be challenging; particularly when there is a high volume of people in attendance. One trustee reported feeling 'vulnerable' when interacting with friends under the influence of drugs, describing drug use as a 'culture' that they are not familiar with.

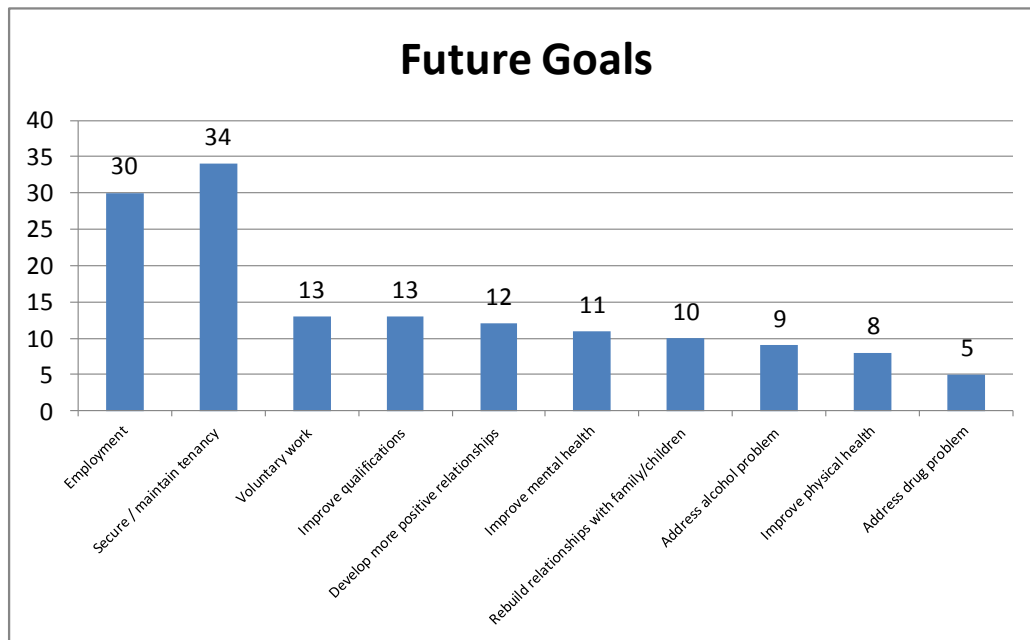
The concerns of some partner agencies in this respect are exacerbated by the absence of monitoring systems and information sharing protocols at the People's Kitchen and the absence of 'professional boundaries' with friends. One agency explained, *'My one worry within the People's Kitchen is security. The People's Kitchen do have a slightly different look about how they react or interact with some of the clients. There's a lot of boundaries here [at partner agency] and clients know they can't overstep those boundaries. The clients that we deal with, they're not silly. Some...are very devious. Some...are manipulative. I'm able to get offending history. I work with social services, I work with MAPPA units. When someone comes into the centre, I know exactly what they're capable of. My worries are some of the staff at the kitchen don't.'* Several agencies suggested that the lack of boundaries may be reinforced by the informal nature of support at the Kitchen and the referencing of service users as 'friends'. They pointed out that friends are generally willing to share basic personal information in order to access other services in the city and are often happy to comply with rules around client expectations. Indeed, several friends reported valuing the informal nature of the support offered at the People's Kitchen, but nonetheless said they would welcome a more formal induction process and more structured approach to some aspects of service provision.

Several friends also suggested that they would welcome the opportunity to become more involved in the management and delivery of services, partly linked to a sense of wanting to 'give something back'. Some trustees and volunteers agreed that a limitation of the Kitchen is the lack of service-user involvement. Indeed, this is a key element of Newcastle City Council's 'Active Inclusion' strategy and a key feature of services across the city. Service-user 'reps' or forums could be beneficial to the organisation in terms of capturing an on-going understanding of the needs of friends and their thoughts on how to develop the service offer. This would also be likely to be of benefit to friends, given the links to skills development and impacts on employability and wellbeing.

6.2 The Future Development of 'Your Future' Services

Through the questionnaire, friends were asked about their key goals for the future. As the chart below indicates, issues relating to employment, housing, education training and employment (ETE), and building positive social networks are central to the future goals of friends. The on-going delivery of the 'Your Future' programme could play a central role in supporting friends to achieve these goals.

Furthermore, 16 friends reported 'opportunities for increased engagement with professional services' to be one of their top three recommendations for service development.



Both the quantitative and qualitative data collected suggested a number of service gaps in the programme. These include: women's services, recovery support services and young people's services.

Although women tend to be a minority group within the friends population, they nevertheless constitute a distinct group, with a distinct set of vulnerabilities and needs. During informal discussions, one female friend disclosed her engagement in sex work, suggesting the possible need for a specialist service of this nature to undertake outreach within the Kitchen. Another female friend pointed out that the service is dominated by men and that more female-orientated groups and social events would be welcomed. They said, *'A girls group...the girls can talk to each other confidentially. Maybe that will build up relationships between them. There aren't many women on the streets, so...'*

The questionnaire findings confirm that the more chaotic, homeless friends accessing the Kitchen typically have problems with drugs and alcohol. While needs around drugs and alcohol can be addressed through some of the professional support services undertaking outreach in the Kitchen, a wealth of studies (including local studies) evidence the value of peer support to 'staying in recovery' (see for example, Rowe et al, 2014; Harding et al, 2012). As such, the engagement of recovery support groups in the programme could be useful.

Young people are also a distinct group of friends within the Kitchen. Evidence suggests that many young people in the region have complex needs (linked to drugs and alcohol, for example), are dealing with chaotic childhood experiences, lack qualifications, struggle to secure employment, are disadvantaged by the benefits system and have low aspirations and hopes for the future (see, for example, YHNE, 2013; YHNE, 2014). They are also a difficult group to engage in mainstream services. The engagement of a young people's group with the Kitchen, therefore, should be considered.

Engagement with additional peer support services, more generally, would overcome the limitations of the organisation in respect of the knowledge of volunteers of complex needs and the ability of professional services for vulnerable people to engage with 'Your Future'.

Partner agencies reported to be committed to supporting the 'Your Future' programme in the future and have a number of ideas about how to develop their service offer. For example, the health provider is keen to make mental health support, smoking cessation classes, self-help groups (i.e. anger management sessions) and sexual health support more prominent features of their future service offer. The ETE provider would like to deliver more frequent outreach at the Kitchen (perhaps on a weekly basis) and to work with friends more intensively through the delivery of (individual or group) education sessions, for example. They suggested that 'Your Future' sessions of this nature could perhaps operate in the large meeting room upstairs at the Alison Centre.

Several agencies also reported that they would like the 'Your Future' sessions to be more structured. This would include a clear programme of outreach activity and greater awareness among volunteers and friends of when the sessions are taking place. They suggested that a formal approach to the delivery of services can sometimes be beneficial to service users as it encourages them to 'invest' more in the process. Partner agencies explained:

'I'd like it to be a bit more structured, a bit tighter and say these are the times that we're here, we are in this office and this is what we're providing so that people would see it as something a bit more positive, rather than just someone coming in and sitting beside them and having a chat. Because they might not take it seriously'

'I think it would get a better result. The clients would feel that they were getting something put in place for them. If people knew there was a time and they knew they could get an appointment and go there...bit more private for the client. Give a time makes it easier cos they know at that time, I'll see him.'

At a more basic level, partner agencies said they would welcome the opportunity for a greater understanding of the contributions of all those participating in the Your Future programme and their delivery models, in order to maximise the co-ordination of provision.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of the evaluation indicate that the People's kitchen plays a valuable and unique role in the city's efforts to meet the needs of homeless and vulnerable people. The nature of its service offer, open door policy and opening hours complement other services in the city, while the quality of its provision and ability to attract and work with people who struggle to engage with other services are significant achievements. The People's Kitchen not only supports friends to meet their basic needs (a vital role in itself); it also provides them with a sense of stability in their lives and provides a foundation from which they can begin to address their more complex needs. Several volunteers compared the People's Kitchen to *'having a home to always come back to.'* The support provided by the People's Kitchen, including the 'Your Future' programme, is impacting positively on a wide range of service user needs, as well as policy and practice areas.

At the same time, however, the strengths of the organisation are also its potential weaknesses. The People's Kitchen has come to support an increasing number of friends over time. An increase in demand is likely to continue in light of the nature of the local labour market and changes to the welfare system. There is widespread concern among the trustees and volunteers interviewed about the extent to which the People's Kitchen can continue to respond to demand, given the size of its central premises, a stable population of friends and the voluntary nature of service delivery. Demand for support, combined with the ever-expanding needs of friends, also raises questions about the role of the People's Kitchen in supporting them to address complex needs and how this should be achieved. In the context of increased demand, supporting friends to 'move on' in their lives may be an essential, as well as responsible, way of working.

The 'Your Future' programme is a flagship development and one which largely reflects the needs of friends and aligns with the city's 'co-ordinated' approach to the active inclusion of vulnerable people in the city. The People's Kitchen has made a significant degree of progress in respect of its development and implementation in the 18 months since its launch and there is a great sense of momentum and commitment from partner agencies to continue to support this. However, how the 'Your Future' programme should develop and the implications of the deeper embedding of the programme in terms of the Kitchen's ethos, working practices and levels of volunteer support will require greater discussion.

The organisation appears to be at a key juncture in terms of its development and has a number of strategic challenges and opportunities to consider, in respect of capacity and maximising its knowledge, skills, resources and relationships with partners to best effect.

In addition to this, however, the evaluation has yielded a number of practical recommendations which may benefit the operational development of the organisation. These include:

- To consider the development of a monitoring process, particularly in respect of service demand – This may be as simple as asking friends to sign-in to each session or undertaking an annual review exercise.
- To consider the development of an induction process for new friends – This will ensure that friends are aware of all of the information that they may require in order to address their needs. It will also provide the Kitchen with an opportunity to gain additional insights into the needs of friends.
- To establish a team of volunteers to develop the 'Your Future' programme - The development of the programme is likely to be a long term and complex process. To further integrate the programme into the organisation's service offer will require, not least, an awareness-raising/publicity campaign, regular liaison with partner agencies and the identification of and engagement with further partner agencies. The development of a team to progress this will enable the programme to be established

and embedded more quickly and to make it more sustainable. The organisation may also wish to consider establishing a 'Your Future' working group, comprised of partner agencies, where the development and impacts of the programme are regularly reviewed.

- To undertake an awareness-raising campaign to raise the profile of the 'Your Future' programme within the Kitchen - This should be targeted at volunteers, as well as friends. Volunteers have a potentially important role to play in signposting friends to professional services.
- To address potential service gaps in the 'Your Future' programme - It is important that the programme reflects the needs of friends. Potential gaps include women's services, recovery support, young people's services and debt management support.
- To develop a clear plan to maximise the input of existing partner agencies in the 'Your Future' programme – Issues to discuss include service offer, the timings of sessions and approaches to engagement with friends.
- To establish a service-user forum or appointing service-user representatives as part of the Kitchen Council - Service-user input could be another means of facilitating an ongoing understanding of the needs of friends and ensuring that the development of the organisation reflects this. It could also have a positive impact on the People's Kitchens relationships with friends and both empower and build the capacity of friends.
- To ensure that volunteers have an understanding of the needs of friends, the availability of services in Newcastle to support them and criteria for support – This will maximise the likelihood that friends receive all of the information they require in order to begin to address their needs.
- To continue to develop the listening service – This includes greater awareness-raising of the importance of this role among the wider volunteer teams.