



Feeding our families in a cost-of-living crisis: parents' experiences and ideas for change

A participatory case study in Hounslow

March 2024



Centre for Food Policy

Shaping an effective food system

School of Health & Psychological Sciences

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Report scope



This report presents findings from a multi-phase participatory research project.



Parents with low incomes were recruited from the London Borough of Hounslow.



The project explored how financial, social and material resources support or undermine opportunities for parents to feed their families healthy food.



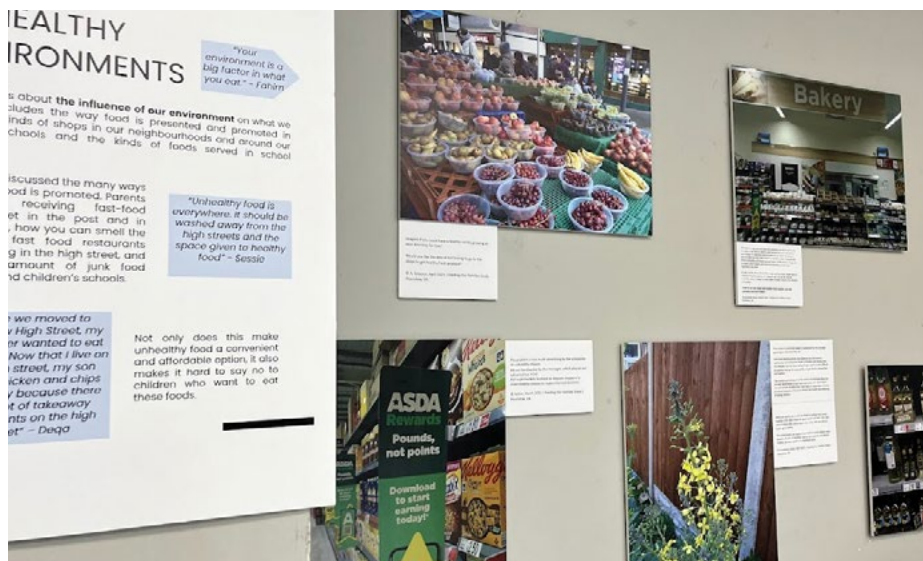
Parents captured their experiences of feeding their families on a low income and during a cost-of-living crisis through photography.



Research activities took place between March and December 2023.



Parents then came together with local decisionmakers to co-create policy ideas based on the experiences/ findings identified in phase one.



Executive summary

Background

Individuals living on low incomes are disproportionately affected by obesity and overweight in the UK.

The drivers of dietary inequalities are complex but must be better understood so that policies and interventions can effectively address the challenges that low-income communities are facing. Previous work from the Centre for Food Policy identified three key aspects of an individual's everyday realities that shape their food experiences: financial, social and material factors (Isaacs, Halligan, Neve & Hawkes, 2020; Isaacs, Gallagher-Squires & Hawkes, 2022). This study used participatory photography and co-design methods to examine how these factors support or undermine opportunities to how these factors support or undermine opportunities to consume a healthy diet

Study aims

- Involve parents living with low incomes to research how their financial, social and material resources create or undermine opportunities to feed their families healthily.
- Bring together the expertise of multiple stakeholders, including those with experience of living with low incomes and decision-makers, to identify opportunities for more effective and equitable food policies to prevent obesity.

- Generate evidence about the use of participatory methodologies to capture the lived experience of feeding a family on a low income and co-creating policy solutions with multiple stakeholders.

Methods

This study engaged ten parents of nursery- and school-aged children living with low incomes (<£22,000). All parents lived in Hounslow, West London.

Phase one

Employed participatory photography (Wang & Burris, 1997; Turner et al., 2023) and took place across seven x 2.5-hour workshops between March and June 2023. During the workshops, parents took part in photography and research skills-building activities. Between workshops one to four, they used digital cameras to capture the financial, material and social factors which shape how they feed their families.

Phase two

Brought together the parent group with policy stakeholders and decision-makers to co-design policy recommendations informed by the findings from phase one. This took place in a policy co-design workshop in November 2023.

Here, the parents and the decision-makers identified opportunities for change both locally and nationally based on the study findings, through a 'World café' activity (Löhr, Weinhardt & Sieber, 2020). This participatory method involves groups collectively developing ideas through several rounds of small group discussion. The outcome of this process was a list of prioritised policy recommendations which both the parents and the decision-makers agreed on. The policy workshop was designed in conjunction with the parent group through a series of three online planning meetings.

Hounslow was selected as the case study area because it has child and adult obesity rates above the national average (Public Health England, 2021).

Obesity rates in the Borough also follow a social gradient with obesity prevalence in the more deprived wards more than double those in the least deprived wards (Public Health England, 2021). The population is also highly ethnically diverse (Office for National Statistics, 2012).

Findings

The following key themes were identified, named and defined by the parents:

‘Cash rules everything around me’ described the impact of financial constraints on daily life; from determining what is affordable and where food can be obtained, to mental health and wellbeing.

‘Time constraints’ described the dilemma of working more hours to increase income but having less time to prepare meals compared with choosing to work fewer hours to have more time for family and food work but limited funds to provide healthy food. Parents also described experiencing repeated cycles of poverty and poor health through the theme **‘What the health? Health matters’**

‘Unhealthy environments’ described the ubiquitous accessibility and promotion of unhealthy food in supermarkets, communities and school canteens, while **‘Location monopoly: postcode lottery’** described how some areas of Hounslow were particularly problematic in terms of vast numbers of unhealthy food outlets.

‘Let me grow’ described the role of community-owned spaces in growing fruit and vegetables for low-income communities, protecting against volatility in food prices, providing spaces to

teach growing skills to children (to encourage them to eat healthily) and establishing strong community networks.

‘Estate of mind: equality and transparency’ described parents’ feelings of a lack of transparency about where food comes from, why prices are increasing, how to access support services and how food policies are developed. The group felt that the voices of people like them needed to be better represented in government.

From these themes, parents and decision-makers identified the following policy recommendations (see pgs 34/35 for more information):



1. Set up a Hounslow Food Partnership.



2. Continue to increase the number of fresh fruit and vegetable markets in underserved neighbourhoods in Hounslow.



3. Enable local residents to use disused spaces for community-led social supermarkets and shops.



4. Widen the scope of existing projects (such as Grow for the Future) transforming disused council-owned spaces for growing produce.



5. Increase opportunities for children to be exposed to fruit and vegetables in school.



6. Explore opportunities for Hounslow to supplement Healthy Start.



7. Maximise opportunities to promote Healthy Start.



8. Change food labelling to make unhealthy foods less appealing to children.



9. Set up more networks/mechanisms for food sharing within the community.



10. Create a central repository of food information for the Borough.



Phase One

Participatory photography

Methods: Phase one

1. Recruitment

A study poster which outlined key information about the study and contained a link to an online survey was shared with community organisations in Hounslow and placed in public spaces such as supermarkets, libraries and notice boards. Researchers screened responses and parents were recruited based on the following inclusion criteria:

- Aged 18 or over
- Resident within the Borough of Hounslow
- Primary caregiver of at least one child in school or nursery
- Self-identify as being worried about money
- Living on a low income (<£22,000)

Parents were provided with a £30 shopping voucher for each workshop they attended to thank them for their participation (equivalent to London Living Wage of £11.95/hr for a 2.5-hour workshop).

2. Participant characteristics

The following demographic information was collected via an online survey during recruitment. Ten parents were recruited, and all took part in at least five workshops.



Four parents had a household income of below £22,000 and **six** had a household income of below £15,000.



Five parents were not in employment and **five were employed**. Of the five in-work, four worked part-time and one worked full-time in roles such as support staff in schools and supermarket workers.



Most of the group lived in homes rented from the local council, **three rented privately** and **two owned their home** with a mortgage.



Three parents were in single-parent households and **seven** in two-parent households.



Methods: Phase one

3. Data collection and analysis

'Photovoice' is a participatory research method developed by Wang & Burris (1997) which engages people in photography to capture, explore and represent their own lived experiences. It has been used to gain an in-depth understanding of lived experiences of food environments but has tended not to explore the wider drivers of inequality (Turner et al., 2023). We worked with the organisation 'PhotoVoice' to design and deliver the phase one workshops.

Parents were given digital cameras and photographic training. Workshops one to four took place in person on consecutive Saturdays and involved group discussions around a set topic (Table 1). After each workshop, parents were invited to take photos representing their experience of that topic. In workshop five, parents selected three to five of their photographs to share publicly and wrote accompanying captions.

Participatory thematic analysis involved analysis and identification of key themes led by the parents with support from experienced qualitative researchers. Parents individually viewed all photographs and noted key themes on post-it notes. Parents then shared their ideas before grouping common topics. Finally, parents collectively agreed on the theme names and definitions for each theme and grouped the photos within these categories. These discussions were audio recorded and used by the research team to develop this report.

Table 1: Breakdown of the research process for phase one

Activity	Outline of workshop content
Workshop one: Introduction to study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents introduced to project, researchers and rest of group Camera handout Skills-building activities
Workshop two: Physical factors/the food environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Photo sharing and group discussion Photo walk around Isleworth Group mind-mapping on impact of physical factors on food experiences
Workshop three: Financial factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Photo sharing Group mind-mapping on impact of financial factors on food experiences
Workshop four: Ideal food future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Photo sharing Problem tree analysis Visioning our ideal food future
Workshop five: Captioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents each selected final 3-5 photos to take forward Parents wrote captions to accompany their photos
One-to-one photo-elicitation interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interview with OK or CGS Parents discussed up to 10 of their photos in depth
Workshop six: Participatory analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents reviewed all their photos and captions Group developed initial ideas for themes
Workshop seven: Participatory analysis cont.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group finalised ideas for themes Sorted final photos and captions into the themes

Main themes

Cash rules everything around me

Described the impact of financial constraints on daily life; from determining what is affordable and where food can be obtained, to mental health and wellbeing.

Time constraints

Described the time required to provide healthy food and how low wage work created demands on time.

What the health? Health matters

Healthy food is vitally important for ensuring children live long and happy lives and should be guaranteed through a 'right to food'.

Unhealthy environments

What we eat is shaped by our environments and currently directs us toward unhealthy food.

Location monopoly: postcode lottery

Hounslow is undergoing a number of changes which means access to healthy food shops and spaces to grow food and exercise is under threat.

Let me grow

Community-led spaces to grow, share skills, celebrate diverse food cultures and build strong social networks is important for sustaining our communities.

Estate of mind: equality and transparency

Greater transparency and participation in where food comes from and how food policies are developed is needed, particularly in low-income communities.

1. Cash rules everything around me

This theme related to the multiple impacts of financial constraints, from where and what foods are bought, to mental health and well-being.

The group noted that they were already squeezed following COVID-19 and Brexit, with some having lost substantial income, savings and even jobs (*Ms C: “Salaries and benefits aren’t going up, but every bill is”*). The additional pressure of the cost-of-living crisis forced some families into food insecurity.

The group questioned why healthy foods were expensive, yet unhealthy foods were very cheap and easy to access. The group wanted greater transparency about pricing decisions and measures to protect them against sharp price increases in future. The group also emphasised the impact of financial constraints on mental health. Parents described worrying constantly and having to reduce their participation in the activities that normally support their well-being by **“avoiding eating out with others because you can’t afford it”** and becoming **“sad and isolated”** because of this (A. Sekason).



Enough is enough

Brexit has caused many issues such as the price of food and food products increasing. Shortage of food was also the prime problem due to customs on trading with other EU countries.

Families were badly affected income-wise, they in turn had to take up multiple jobs for survival. This affected family life, relationships were affected in terms of less time for family, arguments in families, bad parenting etc. Also because of the multi-jobs and no time, families started compromising on unhealthy food which affected their health and lasting illnesses,

medications, etc. Depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and many more problems are on the rise in these families.

Due to the shortages of food and food products, families were left with no choice but to survive with what was made available in the market, with increased price and fewer quantities for the same or high prices.

The Government should regulate and monitor the hike in prices, so that families do not suffer in having the required meals which are the basic rights of every human being.

© Sessie Leitao, April 2023



Healthy Start voucher

The Government states that kids and adults should be eating 5 a day, but how is that possible with the rise of the cost of living?

This is a Healthy Start voucher. They don't give it to just anyone, just families on the lowest incomes which is wrong as whether you work or not, everything has gone up.

I get the voucher, but I still have to tell my children to spread out a portion of fruit over two days because of the cost of living, you can't afford to buy it everyday.

I get £17 a month with Healthy Start, what does that get me?

© Serena Harris, April 2023

Can you afford a variety of food to get your daily nutrients?
The increase in cost of living has left some families without some basic necessities.

© A. Sekason, April 2023





Us parents have had a hard time navigating different ways of dressing up food to make it exciting and getting younger cubs to eat food provided for them.

Some days they like food and some days they don't. So there is a lot of waste on food spent, served and re-worked.

© Chantelle Mugalu, March 2023

Packed lunch is the life

For my autistic child this is his life and he cannot do without these. More affordability to purchase expensive and other food alternatives.

© Ms C, April 2023





I can only afford to drink my food so my family can eat theirs.

© Chantelle Mugalu, March 2023



The cost of living feels like counting every penny, struggling to make ends meet. Families come in a vast difference of shapes and sizes. It's a struggle, and it's a rocky journey. Every penny counts.

© A. Sekason, April 2023



2. Time constraints

The challenge of time constraints was raised in multiple contexts.

Parents relied on several strategies to keep costs low: learning the time of day or week when foods were reduced in supermarkets; joining community food pantries; using calculators to budget; memorising prices across shops and visiting different shops to buy the best value ingredients. Since the cost-of-living crisis, these strategies took even more time as prices changed unpredictably, so parents had to find more and more ways to save money as in Fahim's photo below.

Those in work described having to make sacrifices between working more hours to be able to provide but having less time to cook fresh, nutritious meals, or reducing work hours to have more time for food work and childcare, but then being unable to afford healthy food.

It's a dog's life.

The problem is we have to make constant choices of where our money/spending will go. I have to balance the books.

Let's have more affordability on our essential items for food and health.

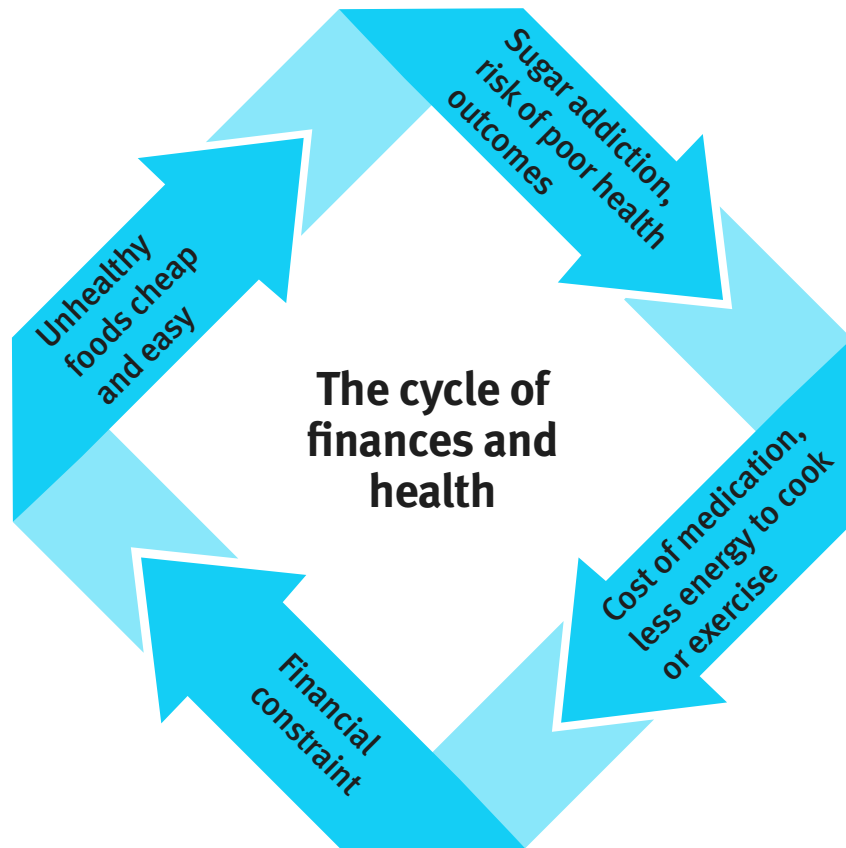
© Fahim, March 2023



3. What the health? Health matters

Parents emphasised the importance of having access to healthy food that will support the long-term health and well-being of their families.

In particular, that children have a right to healthy food. Parents felt this was important to ensure they lived a long and healthy life. Many of the photos visualising this theme highlight concerns about how decisions made now will impact health outcomes in the future.



The concept of ‘cycles’ was frequently raised in these conversations. In particular, financial constraints contributed to “vicious cycles” that made it even harder to feed families healthy food or support health and well-being.





Well balanced, varied and colourful diet is a **human right** and should not be a luxury.

Does junk food supply our bodies with all the nutritious elements?

© Djedjiga, March 2023

Daily ingredients shenanigans

Ingredients used daily. More healthy food/ingredient options.

© Ms C, March 2023





The problem is we take too much medication.
For example my father takes 12 tablets per day from the pharmacy.
So don't fall into the trap of all these, stay healthy, make healthy food choices.

© Fahim, March 2023

I am worried about my children adopting this new lifestyle which is trending now. We submit to this impulsion to buy junk food as adults, what we can say when it comes to our children? The consequences would be worse.

Looking back 50 years ago, what food did our parents rely on; fish and chips, burgers and pizza? They lived healthier and longer. They did not suffer from blood pressure, diabetes and depression.

© Djedjiga, March 2023





Wealth equals health

Without either you cannot afford to live a balanced nutritious, mentally well body. It is statistically proven that food consumed in early life contributes to your mental & physical health in your teens and into adulthood. It is also noted that the foods we consume play a major part in how our immune and digestive systems work, and therefore FOOD is our most valuable commodity.

© Chantelle Mugalu, March 2023

'Brotherhood'

Our children's lives matters.

Feed them healthy foods so they can live long.

© Deqa, March 2023



4. Unhealthy environments

This theme encompassed concerns about the influence of food environments; the way food is presented and promoted in shops, which shops are located in neighbourhoods and around children’s schools, and the foods served in school canteens.

Unhealthy foods are promoted in a number of ways. Parents recalled receiving fast-food vouchers in the post and in newspapers, smelling fast- food restaurants when walking down the high street, and seeing increasing numbers of unhealthy food outlets around children’s schools. As Sessie described in one workshop *“unhealthy food is everywhere; it should be washed away from the high streets and the space given to healthy food.”*

Unhealthy food is a convenient and affordable option which is desirable to children and hard for parents to say no to. Deqa described how she noticed the impact of unhealthy food environments when she moved neighbourhoods in Hounslow: *“before we moved to [where we live now], my sons never wanted to eat junk food. Now that I live [here], my son wants chicken and chips every day because there are a lot of takeaway restaurants [here].”*

The school canteen only has a few choices as their mains which each parent books online. The government says that children are only allowed so many grams per portion which is unfair as each child has different appetites. The good thing is there is unlimited salad offered to children, but to be honest what child loved salad.

The government should allow a bit more on their menu- look at the picture, that’s all that’s offered to key stage one.

When key stage 2* comes in, it is all fresh.

*Key stage 1 = reception to year 2; Key stage 2 = years 3-6

© Serena Harris, April 2023





The bakery is organised and clean but sometimes you don't want to buy this type of stuff. But it is hard to resist because you see it and smell it. Even though it's expensive and you know you can make it at home, if you're hungry you can't wait to buy it. It would be better if they put this kind of unhealthy stuff where you can't see it. I'd like to have a shop with no sweet stuff in the bakery, just meat and vegetables and the main ingredients you need.

If I take my kids, they ask for all the crisps and fizzy drinks. Rather than us enjoying shopping together, I'm having to say "no, no, no", but the unhealthy food is cheaper, so that makes it harder to say no. The situation is not good.

I want to see food shops with healthier food available, and with unhealthy food more hidden.

© Hammida Hassan, March 2023



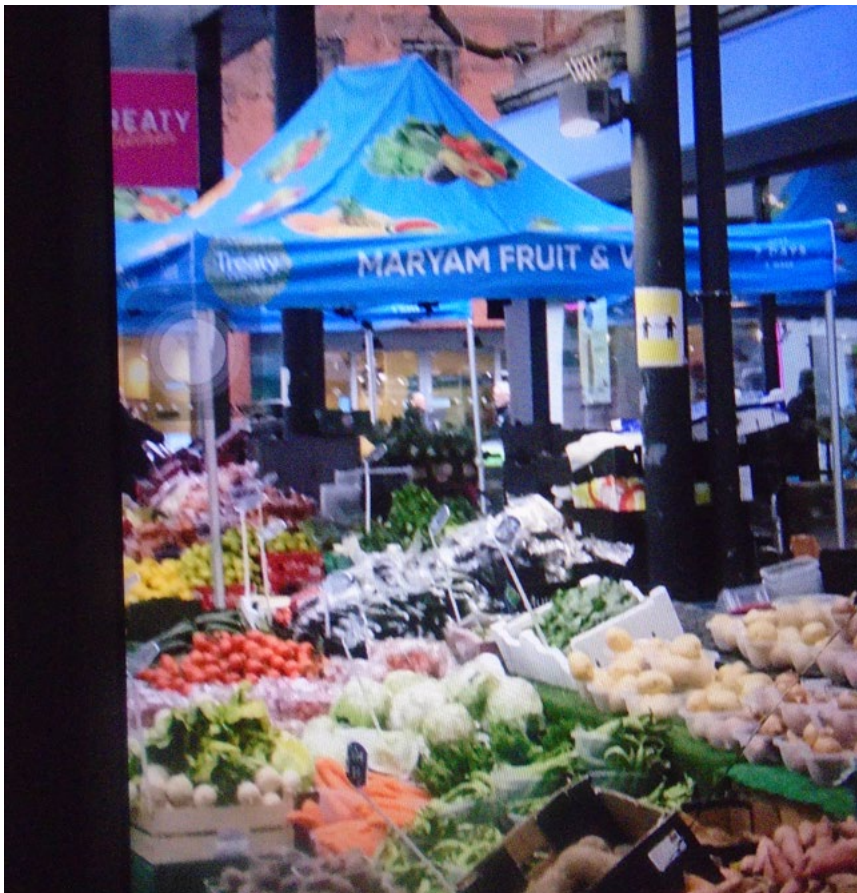
The schools or canteen organisers think that it is ok to serve frozen foods or junk foods as meals. Also, the Free Meals budget limits the children's allowances to £2.20 per day, the children remain hungry due to less food or frozen food not cooked properly, sometimes very cold. This worries and pressurises me as a parent to cook some extra meals when the children come home.

Our aim is that schools should have more budgets for healthy food to be served for children and training should be given to the canteen ladies for serving in a pleasant way and making meals a cheerful one. Also, educating the children on eating a balanced diet is very important and we can start this from the schools where learning is practised and put into action.

The policymakers can budget more funds for schools to cultivate their own herbs and veggies or even fruits and flowers. This will not only nurture them but build up their confidence and motor skills. Harvesting fruits and vegetables is both educational and rewarding.

© Sessie Leitao, April 2023





People like buying fruits from the market places, it's cheaper than bigger stores and healthier than eating junk food.

This is happening in our daily lives and in our society.

The supermarkets are too expensive, so it's very convenient to have market places in Hounslow that are cheaper.

© Deqa, March 2023



The problem is too much advertising by the companies on unhealthy choices.

We are bombarded by the messages, which plays on our subconscious mind.

Ask supermarkets to direct or educate shoppers to healthy choices or make informed decisions.

© Fahim, March 2023





Imagine if you could have a healthy variety growing at your doorstep for free.

Would you like the idea of not having to go to the shops to get healthy fresh produce?

© A. Sekason, April 2023

Living the olive life

Having variety and choice readily available. Decisions, decisions.

© Ms C, April 2023





Easy access to junk food makes it convenient for the younger generations wherever they are.

Junk food advertisements and publicity are everywhere, convincing and tricking the minds of families and young ones. For example, my son loves eating burgers and it is very difficult to convince him as the accessibility of junk food is around him everywhere.

The marketing techniques or the aroma of junk food draws the younger generations to eat more and more of it. Junk food is less priced than healthy food. Junk food is a slow killer, it being in a lot of weapons of harm to destroy the health and wellbeing of young children.

What we need to do is educate them in schools that eating healthy is the right choice for good health and this is the right way to shape their future and in turn, they will carry this to future generations.

The government can support food stalls to serve healthy food around schools, in hospitals, bus & train stations and leisure centres, but at a student or subsidised price.

© Sessie Leitao, April 2023



5. Location monopoly: postcode lottery

Where you live in Hounslow shapes what food is available to you, as summarised by Fahim “*our choices are limited to what we have in front of us in our locality and neighbourhoods.*” Areas like Chiswick offer a healthier environment than areas like Hanwell or Hounslow High Street.

In some communities, outlets are predominantly fast-food restaurants such as fried chicken shops, while in others there are vegetable markets and bakeries. Parents described seeing a change in their local food environment, with more large stores being built and the smaller stores, which can be more convenient and friendly, closing.

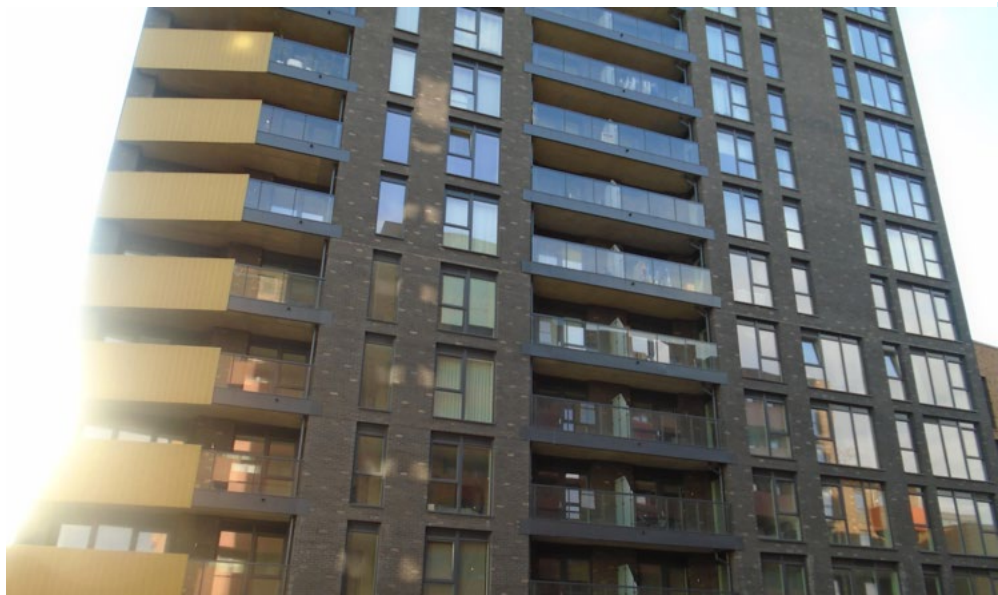
There are many new housing developments in Hounslow, but parents observed this does not bring new parks, gyms or spaces that support healthy living and activities for children. Rather, in places like Hounslow High Street, there are more unhealthy than healthy food outlets.

‘Closed down shop’

Once upon a time, this shop was the only refuge for elderly, busy new mum and teenagers to buy their essentials or something missing on a shopping list: eggs, milk, some fruit and vegetables. But now when Covid hits this shop turned into an empty, enchanted and scary place. Benefits of opening local shops are: Make food accessible and affordable in a neighbourhood, reduce carbon foot print, elderly can have a chance to be more active and move their legs for a short distance, improve mental health of people living in the neighbourhood as they meet and greet, talk and share their worries.

© Djedjiga, March 2023





Hounslow Housing is building more housings and restaurants, which means there are no places for the kids to play, like parks and gyms for adults. The restaurants only sell junk food instead of healthy foods.

This is affecting our daily health, people have diabetes, cholesterol, blood pressure.

People's health matters.

© Deqa, April 2023

This is a picture from a high view, where all you can see is buildings surrounding all over the land.

There is no room, nowhere at all for allotments to be able to grow veg.

No room to plant trees to grow things such as apples.

© Serena Harris, April, 2023



6. Let me grow

Participants emphasised the value of community-owned spaces to grow food and connect with where food comes from.

Sustainability was an important subtheme; being able to grow food in environmentally friendly ways but also being able to “sustain the local community around you” in the context of wars, droughts and supply chain

issues, which lead to unpredictable food shortages and price increases. These issues impact low-income communities the hardest.

Access to green space was important but the sense of community ownership of these spaces and building social networks around these spaces are more important to ensure their sustainability long-term.

Imagine a community working together.

A whole community working together to nurture and to look after plants on their doorsteps. Being mutually courteous and careful that they're actually picking what they actually want to consume. Being able to think/say “I want an apple, let's go pick it from the tree outside.”

Avenues of fruitful and colourful trees.

© A. Sekason, April 2023





Plot of unused land in Heston

I've lived in this area all my life. This always has been an empty plot of land. There's not enough space in my flat to grow food and there's no shops close by.

Why not use it as a space for shops or allotments to grow food?

© Zeinab Aboukar, April 2023

'Give people more space to grow'

It would be good to use spaces like this for people who don't have a garden to grow vegetables. It's also good for kids, who can learn about different vegetables rather than struggling at home with the TV and laptop which isn't healthy.

I imagine myself coming to a place like this once a week. I want to be able to grow and eat the food I used to eat before- organic- like in my country. It would be easy to grow cassava and cream fruit, but to buy it here it's expensive and I cannot find it anywhere.

© Hammida Hassan, April 2023





This is the ingredient that I use everyday in my house. Sometimes you can get basic ingredients like this, but now it is more expensive. Ingredients like this make the food smell and taste good, but now you can't always get them.

In the UK, we don't grow our own food enough. If people had more help to grow food in gardens people would have more access to ingredients like this, it would be easier and more cheap. They would also be fresher if we grow them here.

In my country I helped my grandma grow food, and still now I remember helping my family grow food when I was young. I would like to do that with my kids so I can spend more time with them and so my kids know about my culture.

In Africa, we used to grow food and be more connected with food. Growing food as a family as a way to spend time together. Now I can only tell my kids about my culture through words, but I'd like to be able to show them the food.

© Hammida Hassan, March 2023



7. Estate of mind: equality and transparency

This theme described parents' concerns about the lack of transparency related to where food comes from, what it contains and how decisions about food policies are made.

Parents did not feel that their voice are heard when food policy decisions are made and people like them, who grew up on housing estates, are not well represented in consultation and decision-making processes.

Some expressed frustration that while policies existed, they were not always implemented well (e.g., fast food zoning around schools). Parents expressed a desire to learn more about the challenges policymakers face and find solutions together.

Parents were concerned that large companies were profiteering from the cost-of-living crisis by increasing prices beyond what is needed to cover the increased costs of production. There are fewer photos that directly link with this theme, but it was something that tied into many of the other themes.

Stop commercialising food, health and education.

© Djedjiga, April 2023



Key Messages

Families living with low incomes were having to make difficult choices on extremely limited food budgets during **the cost-of-living crisis with family finances already squeezed from COVID-19** and the associated economic impacts.

The **cyclical relationship** between poverty and unhealthy diets felt inescapable. Parents described how multiple overlapping aspects of living in poverty made healthy diets inaccessible, while at the same time the health impacts of unhealthy diets reinforced aspects of poverty.

Feeding a family healthy food has now become more challenging in almost every respect.

The **pervasiveness of unhealthy foods** made it difficult to say 'no' repeatedly to children's food requests, especially for parents navigating tight budgets.

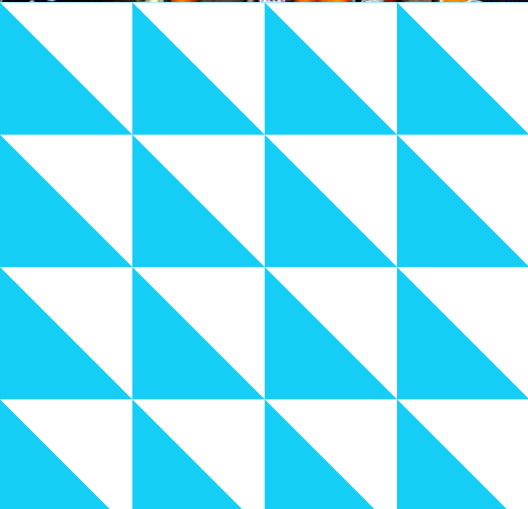
Worsening financial insecurity had a negative impact on family well-being and mental health as well as on diets.

There are **geographic inequalities** in the healthfulness of food environments across the London Borough of Hounslow.



Phase Two

Co-designing policy solutions



Co-designing policy solutions

Eight of the parents from phase one continued to phase two. The parent group worked with the researchers to design the policy workshop across three online planning meetings. These meetings involved setting the agenda for the workshop and deciding on the activities. The parents also contributed to a pre-workshop briefing for the policy attendees. The parents developed ground rules for the workshop (described as café etiquette in keeping with the café theme) which were included in the briefing.

A significant degree of planning went into designing these elements of the workshop because making the process and ‘feel’ of the workshop a collaborative and equalizing space was deemed as important as the content of the session.

Additionally, parents took part in a public speaking training session which was identified as an important element of preparation by the parent group and our expert advisory board.

The timeline on the right outlines the design of phase two.

Outline of the design for phase two

2023

September

First planning meeting: some training on policy; parents and researchers brainstormed initial ideas for the workshop

October

Capacity building workshop: 2.5-hour public speaking training with an external facilitator

October

Second and third planning meetings: parents developed and finalised ideas for the workshop

November

Policy co-design workshop



Co-designing policy solutions

Policy co-design workshop

It was attended by five parents and seven decision-makers from Hounslow Council including two councillors representing food and environment policy areas, members of the public health and planning teams, and professionals working on local growing projects. The workshop lasted about two hours.

The workshop was facilitated by the researchers. The workshop comprised: 1) an opener activity, 2) brief presentations from three parents about their experiences of feeding their families and 3) the co-creation of policy recommendations through a 'World café' activity (Löhr et. al., 2020), which was the main part of the workshop.

The 'World café' is a participatory method in which participants take part in several rounds of small-group discussions around a specific topic to collaboratively generate ideas.

The three workshop topics were chosen by parents and included:

- a) food environments, location monopoly and growing,**
- b) school food and Healthy Start,**
- c) involving citizens in food policymaking.**

Each table focused on one of these three topics and had 10-15 minutes to discuss their ideas for change in relation to the topic. The activity focused on answering the question: "What are the opportunities for change based on the study findings?" Each table comprised one or two parents and two or three policy actors.

After each round, the participants moved to a different table and discussed another topic with different participants. This approach enabled each participant to contribute to the discussion on each of the three priority areas.

In the fourth round, participants returned to their original table to reflect on all the ideas and discuss whether they were 'S.M.A.R.T.' (Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound).

Each group then refined their policy recommendations and shared their final recommendations with the rest of the group. A total of 17 recommendations were put forward. Following the workshop, the participants were all asked to select up to five recommendations that they thought would be the most effective. The researchers then collated the recommendations that the participants had given the highest priority. The outcome of this process was a list of eleven co-created policy recommendations seen as priorities amongst the workshop attendees. The recommendations are outlined on the following pages.



Final policy recommendations

1 Establish a community-led Hounslow food partnership: a collaboration between the Council, the community and others working in food

- Partnership must be well-resourced with dedicated, long-term funding, and have a dedicated person responsible ('food tsar').
- Include a lived experience food reference group so affected communities are meaningfully included in decision-making.

2 Increase opportunities for children to be exposed to fruit and vegetables more in school from the canteen to the classroom

- Incorporate activities such as growing produce at school and sensory food education workshops, learning from organisations who specialise in this such as Grow Your Own Playground and TasteEd.

3 Explore opportunities for Hounslow to supplement Healthy Start

- Could be modelled on initiatives such as Alexandra Rose vouchers.

4 Maximise opportunities to promote Healthy Start

- For example, through schools, midwives, the NHS website and Citizen's Advice services.

5 Enable local residents to use disused spaces for community-led social supermarkets and shops selling essentials such as food

6 Change food labelling to make unhealthy foods less appealing to children and their negative health impacts clearer

The following recommendations relate to initiatives already underway, but the parents proposed further recommendations regarding their implementation, to ensure these actions address the needs of their community:

7 Continue expansion of the number of fresh fruit and vegetable markets in underserved areas of Hounslow to increase provision of affordable produce

- Must have quality control mechanisms to ensure adequate standards and quality for consumers.

Final policy recommendations

8 Ensure that planned projects transforming disused land for growing (Grow for the Future) include diverse citizen voices from the start so that spaces are community-led

- This will enhance the social value of these spaces as places to build community networks, resilience and reciprocity and to practice and celebrate different cultural food heritages.

9 Ensure the process by which residents apply to use growing sites owned by the Council are accessible and inclusive

10 Create a central repository of food information for the Borough

- Key organisations are already listed on the Hounslow website, but this could be expanded to include information on apps and businesses/allotments which distribute surplus produce, food banks and larders.

11 Make sure existing networks/mechanisms for food sharing within the community are working for people

- For example, ensure opening hours for food support are suitable for working parents; ensure online information is accessible for people.

The following policy ideas were also discussed and identified as important by the participants:

- Create more spaces for children to socialise with peers away from fast food takeaways.
- Support and incentivise healthier restaurants and food sellers to enter the market.
- Bring school food procurement in-house at the Council.
- Tackle junk food advertising.
- Give residents starter kits for food-growing projects (materials, equipment).

Case studies

Food partnerships

Local food partnerships aim to bring together people from across the food system in a local area, including the public, private and third sector. This joined-up approach can help promote change toward more healthy, equitable and sustainable food. There is a growing network of local food partnerships across the UK, from Greenwich to Glasgow. This network is supported by Sustainable Food Places, who offer funding, toolkits and sharing of best practice. Having dedicated paid roles to coordinate partnerships and active involvement of both local authorities and communities is essential for their success.

Restricting unhealthy food advertising

While the recommendation to change food labelling may be outside of local government remit, a growing number of local authorities have recently shown that it is possible to restrict other sources of unhealthy advertising. Local authorities including Haringey, Merton and Tower Hamlets have restricted the advertising of junk food on council-owned estates and assets.

Alexandra Rose Vouchers

Alexandra Rose Vouchers provide a model of how to support healthy food consumption and incentivise healthier food markets at the same time. They consisted of £4 vouchers for each child every week, or £6 if the child is under one year old, for families on low-incomes. Vouchers can be redeemed for fruit and vegetables at local markets, simultaneously helping to support market traders selling healthy, low-cost food. They are currently available across the country in areas such as Hackney, Lambeth and Liverpool.

Transforming derelict spaces to promote food growing in Manchester

Residents in Gorton, Manchester were granted free use of a previously derelict site and transformed it into an award-winning community growing project.

Sharing our findings

- The parents' photos were presented during an exhibition launch event at the Bridgelink Community Centre in Hounslow on 2 September 2023 and remained there until November 2023.
- The exhibition launch event was attended by over 40 people including local residents, civil servants, councillors and a local MP.
- The photos were then exhibited in the Waterman's Arts Centre between November 2023 and February 2024, in Beavers Library between February and April 2024 and Hounslow House from April to July 2024.



Responses to findings

- Local residents expressed that the findings resonated with their own experiences.
- Members of Hounslow Council and local-level government noted that nutrition and dietary inequalities are priority areas.
- Hounslow Council is currently exploring participatory models of policy development to ensure that policies to improve healthy weight in the Borough are equitable and reflect the contexts of people's lives.
- Hounslow Council is currently developing a food policy and has cited this study as a key driving force in this policy being developed at this time.



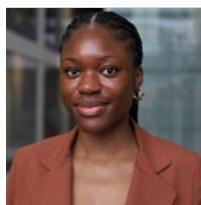
Academic Authors



Charlotte Gallagher Squires

Charlotte Gallagher Squires is a researcher whose work uses creative and participatory methods to amplify marginalised voices in policy making. She led the Feeding Our Families project as part of her work at the Centre

for Food Policy. She is a trained participatory photography facilitator and has used a range of qualitative, visual and ethnographic research techniques to investigate health inequalities and identify policy solutions. Her research examines peoples' experiences as a route to understand the broader structures and systems we live within and how these can be reshaped for a more socially just society.



Olubunmi Kolawole

Olubunmi Kolawole is a researcher at the Centre for Food Policy where she works on projects as part of an NIHR-funded Policy Research Unit, most recently on the Feeding Our Families project. Her work focuses on

exploring the wider structural determinants which impact the consumption of healthy diets and produce dietary inequalities. Her work has involved using qualitative and participatory approaches to explore lived experiences and bring communities and decision-makers together to develop more equitable and effective policy solutions.



Dr Anna Isaacs

Dr Anna Isaacs is a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Food Policy. She is currently working on a series of projects for the NIHR-funded Obesity Policy Research Unit, exploring how food policies can better support

positive nutritional outcomes, particularly in areas of deprivation. More broadly, Anna is interested in exploring how social, political, economic, and environmental factors shape experiences of health and wellbeing in different contexts, how these factors lead to health inequalities, and what policy can do to address this. She has expertise in a range of in-depth qualitative and participatory methods, and experience working with diverse communities in areas of deprivation. Anna is trained in public health and anthropological research methods.



Professor Christina Vogel

Christina is the Director of the Centre for Food Policy, Professor of Food Policy and registered nutritionist. Her research aims to inform the implementation and evaluation of food-related policies and interventions to improve population

health, reduce inequalities and protect our planet. Her work adopts a systems approach and investigates the wider determinants of diet. Community participation and public voices are also integral to her research activities and development of policy recommendations. Christina leads several major NIHR research grants including product placement trials with a national supermarket chain, evaluations of the UK Government's Food (Promotions and Placement) legislation and the Healthy Start scheme, and systems investigation of the UK convenience store sector. Christina has given evidence to the House of Lord's Select Committee on Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment, and she is lead author of Chapter 2 of the WHO European Region's 2022 report on obesity. Her work has received national and international press coverage, and she is Deputy Editor of the scientific journal *Public Health Nutrition*.

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With thanks to the parents for their collaboration on this project between March and December 2023:

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- Some parents have chosen pseudonyms.
- Parents did not want to include photographs of themselves to protect their confidentiality.

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Useful resources

Sustainable Food Places. (2023). Good policy for good food: A toolbox of local authority policy levers. Available at: https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/processors/good_policy_for_good_food.php

Helpful toolbox outlining 29 policy levers to promote healthy and sustainable food at the local level. It includes case studies of where these policies have been successfully implemented.

Sustainable Food Places. (2017). Sustainable Food Cities: Manchester. Available at: https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/Portals/4/Documents/SFC_Manchester_Application_FINAL_PDF.pdf

Page 51 details a case study of transforming derelict spaces to promote food growing in Manchester.

Disclaimer

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PhotoVoice, is a non-profit organisation working worldwide using ethical photography for social change. They specialise in participatory photography projects which emphasise principles of community engagement and co- design.



The Bridgelink Centre is a community centre on the Ivybridge Estate in Isleworth, Hounslow. The Centre hosts a range of services to support the needs of the 3000+ residents who live on the estate.