

Watergate Primary Care Network Veg Box Pilot

In April 2023, Green Genius Funding was secured from the Volunteer Cornwall Climate Resilience Team, via their partnership with the Cornwall Council Public Health team, on behalf of the Watergate Primary Care Network. This comprises Narrowcliff Surgery, Newquay Health Centre and Petroc Group Practice. The funding enabled us to buy 3 annual subscriptions to Newquay Orchard's Grown Scheme. This provided a small seasonal vegetable box, every week for a year.

To get the most from the scheme, we split the annual subscription down into 4 x 3-month opportunities, enabling us to offer it to 12 patients in total.

Patients were selected from those referred to the Social Prescribers and Health Coaches across the PCN. Inclusion criteria consisted of a diagnosis of Type 2 Diabetes or Pre-Diabetes, low income, able to collect in person each week and most importantly, a willingness to give it a go and make changes to their diet.

Patients were enrolled on the scheme and given the choice of collection point; Newquay Orchard, Sprout Wholefood Shop in Newquay or Fentenfenna Farm near Indian Queens. As well as collecting the box, they received a weekly email updating them about things happening at The Orchard as well as containing a recipe using the vegetables given that week. Recipes included:

Dahl – using onions and squash

Herby Roasted Veg – using courgette, shallot, beetroot and carrots

Tomato Salad – using fresh tomatoes and basil

Beetroot Pasta – beetroot, basil

We recorded weight and HbA1c at the start and end of the project alongside capturing participants' thoughts and feelings around engaging.

Interim results – We do not as yet (May 2024) have full data for all participants who completed the scheme. However, for the 6 who have had a second HbA1c all have shown a decrease in HbA1c ranging from 1-37mmol/mol change. BMI data also shows a decrease with an average weight-loss of 12.2kg * this is the total for the whole engagement period with Health Coaches which included the time on the Veg Box scheme.

As well as metrics, we also asked participants to give feedback about the scheme. It was overwhelmingly positive and included comments such as:

Client A shared a photo of one of the dishes they had made and said 'It's been great, as it has made me try different things'.

Client B said, 'It's amazing how picking up a bag of veggies gets you thinking differently about what to eat'.

Social interaction – A key feature of the scheme was that participants had to go to collect their veg boxes each week in person. This led to social interaction with staff at the pickup points on a regular basis. One client reported 'I've loved getting different recipes alongside the veg. I've eaten vegetables more regularly than ever before. It's not just great bags, but the staff are great and it's been a social thing for me too'.

Future Developments – additional funding has been secured to continue the scheme this year. In collaboration with Newquay Orchard, we are amending the recipes to simplify the preparation of ingredients as well as reduce the number ingredients required. One comment that was fed back mentioned how what we thought were store cupboard basics, were out of reach of some people e.g herbs and spices. Some were provided when in season, but we are looking to add a small supply of these where appropriate. We are also adding pictorial instructions to help address some of the low levels of literacy in our population.

Another pilot piece is looking at providing cooking lesson, where people will be shown how to prepare vegetables and then try it for themselves as part of preparing a simple vegetarian meal. Participants in these classes, will then be given all the ingredients to take and try the dish at home.

Through all pilots, we are trying to open the discussion around local food production; it's benefits not only nutritionally but for society, the economy, and the environment; all of these aspects leading to overall positive health creation.

This pilot project has now helped catalyse a county wide network developing food as a lynchpin of health, called WellFed, co-ordinated by the Volunteer Cornwall Climate Resilience Team and [Sustainable Food Cornwall](#).

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