

Voices of Hope
KingsGate Church

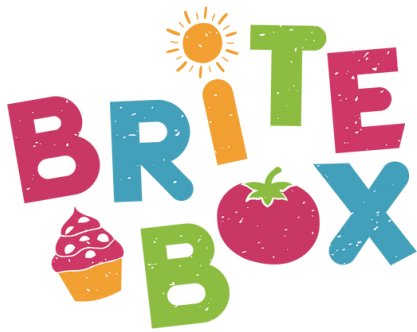
KINGSTON UNIVERSITY

EVALUATION REPORT SEPT 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:



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Brite Box is a recipe box initiative for children and families, in which pre-weighed complete ingredients sufficient for cooking a meal for a family of five are supplied weekly, accompanied by easy-to-follow, low-cost, nutritious recipes. Primarily aimed at low-income families, it is administered by schools in Kingston (which covers schools and families located in Kingston, Richmond and Elmbridge boroughs), and Southwark.

A comprehensive analysis of the initiative involving questionnaires and optional interviews (parents/carers), and interviews with other stakeholders identified overwhelming positive perceptions of the initiative. A total of 82 questionnaires were completed by parents/carers as well as 46 interviews with a range of stakeholders.

Children and family members gained a range of knowledge and skills, were introduced to new foods and flavours and enjoyed the excitement of Brite Box. Volunteers felt welcomed and valued, and gained personal satisfaction from their involvement in an initiative they viewed as worthwhile and transparent in terms of objectives. Additional skills such as numeracy and literacy were highlighted by some recipients, as was the potential value of Brite Box in enhancing acceptance of new foods by children with limited diets and/or sensory difficulties. These are aspects which deserve further in-depth research.

The evaluation highlights the importance of Brite Box as a scheme which helps alleviate poverty and food insecurity, takes pressure off parents but whose worth goes far beyond food, enabling families to spend time together creating meals and learning and enhancing life skills, values also espoused by funders of the initiative.



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INTRODUCTION

This report is based on a comprehensive evaluation of the Brite Box scheme. It was carried out by a research team from Kingston and London Metropolitan Universities with support from the organisers of the scheme. The purpose of the evaluation was to stocktake what is working well and what could be improved, to inform future developments of the recipe box initiative, now active in Kingston (on behalf of schools and families in Kingston, Elmbridge & Richmond boroughs), and Southwark. Brite Box is a weekly recipe box scheme provided to children recommended for participation by their schools. Each box contains pre-weighed ingredients and a step-by-step recipe designed to be suitable for children and intended for use by families cooking together. While most children recommended for Brite Box are from low-income families, many of whom are entitled to free-school-meals, schools have wide latitude in relation to their reasons for recommending Brite Box, including poor nutritional intake and limited food acceptance (e.g. due to sensory difficulties). Participation in the scheme is usually for one academic year; boxes are provided through the schools and each box contains enough for one weekly meal for a family of five. In addition, recipes are intended to cost <£5 to replicate so that children and families build up a repertoire of low-cost nutritious meals which they are able to cook together over the course of a year. In addition to helping with food costs, Brite Box aims to encourage children and families to cook and eat together, taking pressure off parents for one day a week.

The evaluation was designed to include perspectives of recipients, as well as organisers and funders of the scheme, volunteers and supporters, including school staff involved in its delivery. Data were collected using questionnaires and interviews of recipients, and interviews with all other groups. In addition to specific information about Brite Box itself, questions relating to the wider context within which Brite Box is operational were included, including views of why it is needed, reasons for food poverty in the UK and what should be done to address it. Questionnaires and interview questions used were co-created with the Brite box organisers. Finally, all recipes were nutritionally analysed (data is not included in this report).



METHODOLOGY

Ethics approval for the evaluation was granted by Kingston University Faculty Ethics Committee.

Data collection

1. Parents/carers:

Data from parents & carers were collected using questionnaires administered online & optional interviews. Questionnaire invitations were distributed in Brite Box parcels over several weeks using a flier with a QR code to

the questionnaire. Invitations to participate in optional online or telephone interviews were included in the questionnaires; those parents or carers who left their contact details were interviewed at a suitable time (otherwise completion of the questionnaire was anonymous).

2. Organisers/volunteers/ suppliers/school staff/referring agents/funders:

A list of those willing to be interviewed and their contact details was supplied by the Brite Box organisers. Interviews were organised and carried out by the research team online or by telephone.

Data tools

All data tools were co-developed with the Brite Box organisers to ensure they were fit-for-purpose. Questionnaires for parents/carers included limited demographics data such as age, gender, ethnicity and disability status. In relation to Brite Box, participants rated their levels of agreement with a series of statements about it but also about other use of food support (past and current) using a five-point Likert rating scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Additional data were collected using open text boxes allowing respondents to elaborate on their responses. A total of 82 parents/carers completed questionnaires (76 from Kingston and 6 from Southwark).

Data analysis

Questionnaires were coded and data were entered manually into an Excel spreadsheet. Statistical analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS version 27. Differences in levels of agreement with statements by demographic characteristics were assessed using Kruskal Wallis tests with posthoc Dunn's and Bonferroni correction. Differences in responses between venues were tested using chi square tests at $p < 0.05$. For similar statements, levels of similarity were tested using Cronbach's analysis (negative statements were reverse coded for this purpose).

Interviews

Interview guides were used to ensure consistency and interviews were audio-recorded with permission for accuracy. Additional contemporaneous notes were taken. Audio recordings were transcribed and basic thematic analysis was carried out to identify key themes. Where quotes are used to demonstrate themes, pseudonyms are used to maintain anonymity. Parents/carers who were interviewed received a small token of acknowledgement of their time in the form of an Amazon voucher for £10. A total of 46 interviews were carried out as follows: 15 interviews with parents and carers were carried out (12 Kingston, 3 Southwark); 5 with supporters/partners; 2 with funders; 14 with volunteers; 6 with organisers/patrons and 4 with schools/youth groups.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The majority of Brite Box recipients at both venues were women and aged 30-39 years. Half of respondents in Southwark were Black; by contrast, over 70% of Kingston recipients were white (data shown in Table I). Approximately 15% in both locations considered themselves to have a disability. There were no significant differences in age ($p=0.91$), gender ($p=0.46$), ethnicity ($p=0.65$) or disability ($p=0.97$) between locations.

Approximately a third of respondents in both locations had two children, however, approximately 13-14% in both groups had four children (data shown in Table II). There was no significant difference in numbers of children by location. Approximately half had received Brite Box for >6 months. The scheme is intended to be used for 1 academic year:

PARTICIPATION & CONSIDERATIONS

'How long should people be in it? A year to see change, to be empowered to make lasting change as a family unit, needs a year. It takes 12 weeks to change a habit, 3 cycles to embed it. But that has resource implications, we could reach more people if it was shorter' [Rachel, organiser]

'In practice children may be allocated to it for shorter periods of time (e.g. within youth groups a decision was made to allocate young people to Brite Box for 6 weeks in total so that more children would be enabled to take part). In other cases, new funding meant that some families were offered it from Jan/Feb rather than at the start of the academic year, impacting upon the length of time they received it.

"In the first year of lockdowns [Brite Box] was the top activity, we offered it in 6-week stints so we could offer it to more families (25 per term), so more than 200 children benefitted' [Moir, youth group organiser]

In Southwark, a universal approach was used so that whole classes, rather than individuals within classes, were allocated to Brite Box. This in turn is likely to influence the extent to which behaviours are changed and that any changes are sustained in the long term; something which should be researched in more detail in future.





SECTION 2

**9 YEAR OLD - 'I CAN'T
WAIT TO BRING BACK MY
BRITE BOX TO COOK IT BY
MYSELF'**

PARTICIPATION & CONSIDERATIONS

We also observed that while low income was the main reason for referring children to Brite Box, different allocation methods were used, and schools were allowed wide latitude in terms of allocating children to the scheme. This was intentional, since schools were considered best able to identify those who would benefit. In addition, the possibility of intersectionality between risk factors was identified in some children, as was the potential benefit to schools of Brite Box as a positive mechanism to talk to families with complex needs and/or problems.

'Schools decide who would mostly benefit...ask them for that to be low-income families but don't have to be free school meals, they could be just above the threshold...There might be the occasional family without low income who is in it, for example fear of new foods, and they would benefit.' [Rachel, organiser]

'We want it to be something which any family, of any socio-economic income background, has the fun moment "we're part of this!" and: "I do think that families from all backgrounds could benefit from this."' [Mark, supporter]

'I don't know the stats around this, you'd have to look at that, but I think there's probably a higher number of children who are...in lower income families, there tends to be a higher number of children with educational needs because of the effects of living in poverty, dysfunctional families, trauma, and how that impacts which I find really, really sad.' [Laura, organiser]

'It's often the welfare officer or the family liaison officer that manages the project in the school and some of them have fed back that actually the bonus for them about Brite Box is that it's actually giving them a platform to have a conversation with families who are typically hard to reach, who don't engage with other things, and so this being a positive conversation to start with is a good thing for them.' [Fred, organiser]

The different length of use and approaches in allocation (e.g. universal vs selected recipients and food aid vs implemented through the curriculum), suggest a range of different outcomes can be achieved through the scheme and their impact can potentially outlast participation in the scheme. These outcomes need to be further investigated.

'I'd say last year [when we only gave it to free school meals], that the emphasis on the child being part of the process for some of the families probably wasn't there. People came and collected it. I'm sure they cooked it, but I didn't see the engagement from the children in the same way. Whereas I do feel this year [when all children receive it], that the children have been gaining the skills as well as the parents. I feel like it's probably impacted on the children more this year.' [School Head teacher]



IMPACT

OVERALL FEEDBACK

- 93.6% of respondents said overall, their experience of BRITE Box has been positive
- 83% said their children are excited when they get a BRITE Box, only 2.8% said they were embarrassed.
- *'Thank you. It's a weight off my shoulders once a week. That's a really positive thing in my week'*
- *'I would like to thank you, not only has this helped out a lot with trying new food but it has given me and my sons something to enjoy creating tasty and healthy food, plus one less stress on a Friday, Thank you'*
- *'When she goes to school [9-year-old] she says mommy I can't wait to bring my Brite Box to cook it by myself so she's so happy and even me, I am very happy.'*
- *'She [9-year-old] is enthusiastic about it, it's the magic of what it is going to be this week.'*
- *'It is an awesome scheme to be a part of and quite literally given us a meal some days when we've run out and it's exciting'*
- *'I'm thankful that we can experience Brite Box. I think this should be a must in every family as it really helps to have and learn variety of recipes from different countries, not more left over shopping and the most important I have happy children with proper meals on the table'*

'IT'S A TREAT AND IT'S SOMETHING THAT WE WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO DO IF IT WASN'T BEING PROVIDED BY BRITE BOX'



OVERALL FEEDBACK

Brite Box was very positively received. The excitement children had in terms of looking forward to and receiving Brite Box were features in almost all the parents' interviews and was also an aspect supporters and funders highlighted. Parents explained that Fridays had become special days, in which children received, in the words of one mum, 'their mystery box', and families engaged in food-related activities together. Several parents spoke of gratitude for the scheme, in terms of the support it provided and the impact it had on their families, others of wanting to continue with the scheme next year or beyond.

The sense of excitement has also been confirmed by teachers and school officers. In the words of one headteacher: 'The buzz was universal.' The teacher in charge of the scheme at one school told us that the *'bonus for us as a school, is that actually it's something amazing that we can do for these kids and it doesn't take up extra time'*. When asked if they would recommend it to other schools, the headteacher at one school told us *'every school [should] have a year group that goes through a year of Brite Box. You know, and you could get such good economies of scale, couldn't you?regardless of what your life experience is, I do believe that these things are best done universally, if you're going to get success. I would definitely encourage other schools to take part.'*

[Sandra]: 'So it's really great –there's nothing I can add or take away from it –I would say it's just perfect.'

[Jerry]: 'Brite Box has been a great joy for us ... I think it is absolutely brilliant. Whoever is looking after and funding this, it is an absolute benefit for our community and our school, we certainly benefited as a family. Just thank you to whoever is organising it.'

[Delia]: 'We really, really enjoyed the food, and the quality of the ingredients, and the meals, and the –and it was easy to follow. So I would say, overall, it was a really positive experience' (only had it for 4 out of the 6 weeks allocated)

[Lucy]: 'Just think it was a really, really good, way of getting kids involved and teaching them skills in the kitchen. Like I said, my daughter's only six, so even she was able to use, and make use of –or we, we all enjoyed doing the task together'



IMPACT ON FOOD BUDGETS

- **74.1% said BRITE Box helps them with their food budget**

The three issues most mentioned in the parents' interviews were:

1. Trying new foods
2. Bringing the family together
3. The impact Brite Box had on family finances, food security, and food budgeting



As a result of the cost-of-living crisis and the rapidly rising food prices, many parents have told us how they have had to downgrade where they shop and the types of food products they buy. It is important to note that many of the parents interviewed, their children are entitled to free school meals, and a number have in the past used additional food aid support.

[Alison]: 'I mean it's extremely helpful at the moment. We are up to our eyeballs, especially with the cost of living increases. It's quite worrying.' [is BB helpful in food budgeting?] 'I'd say yes, very much so.'

[Samira]: 'It is helping a lot. We receive every Friday, so it's very helpful for the weekend as well.'

[Jacky]: 'And just having that box that would cover a meal for two days was just such a massive help for us.'

[Lexi]: 'I kind of shop around like several supermarkets to find the best prices. And that's also why, broadening your repertoire of things that you can cook. Because every new recipe that you learn you can then offshoot that and do different recipes with it with the cooking skills that you've learnt and it brings new ideas.'

THE IMPACT OF BRITE BOX, THEREFORE, ON FAMILIES' FOOD SECURITY, FINANCES AND FOOD BUDGETS HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE. 12 OUT OF THE 15 PARENTS INTERVIEWED HAVE TOLD US THAT BRITE BOX HAS HELPED THEM MANAGE THEIR FINANCES AND FOOD BUDGETING.



IMPACT ON INTRODUCING & TRYING NEW FOODS

ALL PARENTS MENTIONED THE POSITIVE IMPACT BRITE BOX HAS HAD ON FOOD-RELATED BEHAVIOURS, NOT ONLY ON THEIR CHILDREN, BUT ALSO ON THEMSELVES.

- 87.3% said their children had tried new foods because they have been involved in preparing/cooking them
- 86.5% said BRITE Box has introduced them to new flavours
- 85.7% said they have tried new foods since starting BRITE Box

There are several elements that came out strongly in the interviews, trying new foods was one of them. Brite Box has introduced families to a wide range of new flavours, ingredients, cooking styles/techniques, and cuisines. Parents explained that children were more likely to try new foods and flavours if they came from a Brite Box and they were involved in the cooking process. According to several of the parents, this was particularly true of vegetables. In addition, it was also clear that this trying new food, tastes and ingredients was an experience that the entire family engaged in and looked forward to since Brite Box.

[Alison]: 'We're trying new things which is amazing and the flavours are phenomenal.'

[Sandra]: 'I love the vegetables and introducing my kids [to] new vegetables, new food, new, new menus is really great.'

[Lucy]: 'Brite Box was quite good for the fact that it offered something different that we wouldn't have usually tried before.'

[Doris]: 'Because [of BB] especially my children [two kids aged 4 and 9], they like broccoli, you know, there's carrots and things and because of Brite Box they normally put the courgette so now they love courgette as well' ... 'we've tried different things and it's things that Brite Box put in, we use it and then we eat it.'

In the online questionnaires participants described a range of new foods (vegetables, specific dishes, protein foods) and flavours (herbs and spices) that they and/or their children had been introduced to as a result of receiving Brite Box. A number commented that they had been introduced to new foods without specifying what those were; the sentiment related to increased willingness to try new foods because of exposure to them via Brite Box. For example, one participant stated 'My son is more open to new foods. I think this is in part because he has had a chance to participate in making the meal'. Table VI gives examples of participant feedback, organised into key themes.

- *'Kids have enjoyed more vegetarian dishes than before'*
- *'Jambalaya was a big hit and full of different flavours. My boys now try more different things like falafels for example'*
- *'New flavours with new and different vegetables'*
- *'Chicken stir fry with ginger and soy sauce - we never knew how easy it was to make that taste just like a takeaway'*





NEW FOODS & SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS CHILDREN

The importance of Brite Box to trying new foods and food related experiences was also brought up by parents of children with autism and those considered fussy eaters. These parents considered the scheme particularly useful in helping them and their children manage food experiences and trying new foods.

[David]: 'He [8-year-old son with autism] has a very restricted diet, but ... he started to, to enjoy the chicken and he liked the flatbread, he was very happy to, to try this ... because he was involved in cooking, involved in the smell, the taste of the ingredients'... 'Cooking together for the autistic children, it could be something very helpful, because of touching the ingredients, touching the food, touching the meat, the vegetables. It's something very beautiful, very beautiful and all these sensory experiences are very good for them.'

[Jacky]: 'Yeah, I've got one pretty fussy twin and he [9-year-old] actually tries new things now, which is brilliant...it's the excitement of making stuff together, cooking together. Erm and then if you've gotta make it, you've gotta try.'

[Lucy]: 'She [6-year-old] would be quite a fussy eater but I found that if she helped prepare the food, she's quite willing to try it and try different things. She's eaten a more varied diet from the Brite boxes that we received... so we've been able to like explore different food options than we had before.'

BUILDING CONFIDENCE & NEW SKILLS



- **80.7% said their children had gained confidence with cooking since they started BRITE Box**
- **78.5% said their children are more confident about food/cooking since starting BRITE Box**

The parent interviews very much confirm these findings. In the interviews, parents spoke of growing confidence in their children with regard to cooking and the way they handle themselves in the kitchen. The growing sense of confidence in the kitchen was also clear regarding several parents and in the way children and parents worked together in the kitchen.

The questionnaires and interviews indicate that most parents agree that they and their children gained new and different kitchen skills (Table VII). In terms of specific skills gained, the most common ones were preparing vegetables, followed by knife skills, working with meat/chicken and using the hob (Table VIII). Additional skills identified by participants included following recipes (n=2), eating a wider range of foods (n=2), weighing, improved concentration, hygiene, working together and general cooking skills (all n=1).



[Sandra]: 'He [13-year-old] really thought he would never cook like professional but the food that he made so far is really good and they're [the entire family] impressed.'

[Alex]: 'I suppose speaking from experience before having these boxes it's not having the confidence to try new things and to try new cooking skills and cooking with the children.' 'Oh I'm [Alex-parent] not sure how to do this' and she's [14-year-old] like, 'Oh I think we do it this way.' So we're kind of like helping each other along the way.'

[David]: 'You know, he's [8-year-old son with autism] learning the name of the vegetables, of the food, of the ingredients, of the spices.'

[Alison]: 'Just putting foods together to prepare and he's [8-year-old who has ADHD] learning all sorts of different food preparation techniques like grating cheese or chopping something.'

[Josie]: 'I think definitely sort of chopping skills, frying skills definitely especially when the meat is cooked, checking when the meat is cooked, like browning meat,' 'you know and I even get told [by an 8-year-old] like, no, you need to stir it like this and I'm like fine, you do it then!'

- **70.2% of parents said they had learnt new & different kitchen skills because of BRITE Box**

The acquisition of new skills has not been limited to children. Several parents mentioned their own growing confidence and new skills as a result of using Brite Box.

[Alex]: 'I would never have known how to chop up a garlic, because I don't usually use fresh garlic ... and just other kinds of skills like zesting a lemon and things like that. I just -I've always wanted to cook from fresh, but I've never had the confidence.'

[Sandra]: 'For me, it's very difficult to know how to cook some vegetables... with Brite Box, yeah, I really, really learn how to cook them, how to use them because sometimes you see in the market that you don't, you don't have a clue how to cook a vegetable.'



COOKING & EATING TOGETHER MORE AS A FAMILY

- 82% said they cooked together more than before because of BRITE Box
- 54.4% said they eat together as a family more since they started BRITE Box

Recipients agreed or strongly agreed that a range of food-related behaviours were increased by Brite Box, including cooking together, eating together as a family and talking more about food (Table IX).

There was a very strong sense in the interviews of parents seeing Brite Box not only in terms of food security, trying new foods, and or gaining new skills, but also as a family activity/event. **Parents talked with pride about how Brite Box helped bring their family together. The scheme has helped parents cook and eat more often with their children.** This was particularly noticeable in single-parent households, where issues of time and stress are often a hindrance on such

[Alex]: 'It's just amazing how simple these recipes are, but how enjoyable they are to make. And it just brought us closer as a family as well'.

[Lexi]: 'I would say yes it has, yeah. And it's something special that we do together as well. So it's a chance to bond, not just over eating and sharing, but cooking the food, the opening the Bright Box and seeing what's in the Bright Box' 'It's something that's like ours. We do it together. It's like special time for us. It's something that we look forward to. Yeah, it's been good. It's been positive.'

[Lucy]: 'It became more of a family... it was a much more enjoyable experience that we got to do it together and cook together. Whereas, usually, like I said, I would usually just go ahead, get the meals cooked and done and we'll sit down and eat it. Whereas, it became more a family affair'.

EATING MORE HEALTHILY, EATING MORE VEGETABLES & IMPACT ON FOOD WASTE



- 57.7% said they eat more vegetables since starting BRITE Box
- 52.5% said they eat more healthy foods because of BRITE Box
- 47.6% said they use more leftovers since starting BRITE Box

Brite Box influenced several healthy eating behaviours. Greater awareness of what healthy eating means and entails, particularly with regard to eating more vegetables and fresh produce was also mentioned by most parents in the interviews. Parents also spoke of how their attitude towards food waste and cooking changed, given that there was very little waste in cooking Brite Box recipes.

[[Doris]: 'Before [Brite Box] we like we don't really like a lot of vegetables, we know a few, but because of Brite Box they put different vegetables and then we try so now we know a lot of vegetables'.

[Lexi]: [9-year-old who has ADHD] 'You know, like textures that he just wouldn't try, he will now eat... so vegetables is a big one. He would be really not willing -if he can see any kind of recognisable vegetable in the food he wouldn't eat it. It's like a behavioural thing for him. So with this he will try and eat [vegetables].'

[Sandra]: 'You don't have anything left over erm, because if, if the recipe, let's say, is -it needs two eggs, the box comes just with two eggs which is great.'

'WHAT IF WE DON'T LIKE IT? WHAT IF THE CHILDREN DON'T LIKE IT?' AND THEN THAT'S A WASTE AND I HAVEN'T GOT ENOUGH MONEY TO WASTE THE FOOD - BUT BECAUSE WE'RE GETTING THESE BOXES, THE FOOD ISN'T GOING TO WASTE.'



PARENT

'WE COOK AND WE KEEP THE MAJORITY OF THE RECIPES - WE'VE GOT A LITTLE FOLDER IN THE CUPBOARD'

USING RECIPES & CHEF BOOKLET



- 95.5% of respondents said they would use some of the recipes again (Table X11)
- 93.7% found the Chef Booklet useful
- 74.4% said they always follow the BRITE Box recipe

Ten out of the fifteen parents interviewed said that they kept most of the recipes in order to reuse them at another time. Several parents told us they created folders with Brite Box recipes. We were told that the reuse of recipes helped families reduce stress around mealtime and with their food budgeting, as they knew the exact quantities required and the fact that the kids would eat the meal.



[Alex]: ‘...since we’ve had these boxes I’ve checked all the recipes, so we can go back to them and make them because we know how to do it.’

[Sandra]: ‘I put the menus on the table and then said to my boys [aged 8, 9 and 13], ‘What do you want to, to cook –to eat this week? Choose two or three of them. They chose , I know what ingredients to buy, get from shop and just cook for, for –meals for two days, from Brite Box which is really great.’

[Mary]: ‘I tend to keep the recipe cards because they’re useful so I might try them again another time even if I haven’t cooked them and erm, if I have cooked them I keep the ones that are... have been kind of unanimously liked in the household.’

[Josie]: ‘We cook and we keep the majority of ... the recipes that they give and we’ve got a little folder in the cupboard.’

[Lexi]: ‘I’ve kept all the recipes.’

[Doris]: ‘It has helped me a lot as well because now there are some recipes that when we cook them they’ll say oh mommy, don’t throw it away because we have to buy our own stuff and then we will do it again’ ... ‘she [9-year-old] will always say mommy we have to keep it and then we will cook it again and sometimes we will cook it again.’

In terms of the chef booklet, participants found the chef booklet useful. Only one parent in the interviews spoke in length about the booklet.

[Doris]: ‘She [9-year-old] has written a lot in that book [chef booklet] because she has tried because before I don’t allow her to hold a knife or to do anything but because of that now she knows all the terms to use, mommy no, today I want to try this one, mommy today I want to try this cut and so yes she makes her own notes so she has used a lot of different skills and cutting, yes she has.’

Asked to name their top three favourite recipes, a total of 87 responses were given (Table XX). Vegetable lasagne, followed by katsu curry, sausage dishes, pizza, chilli con carne and Moroccan meatballs were the top-rated recipes.



BRITE BOX & MENTAL HEALTH

- 65.2% said that taking part in BRITE Box had improved their mental wellbeing

The positive impact of Brite Box on parents' mental health was brought up in several of the parent interviews. Single parents and those with three children or more spoke of how Brite Box **took the pressure off them and alleviated the stress and anxiety they would normally have around mealtimes**; stress and anxiety borne out of the lack of time and energy to cook and the fear that the children won't eat.

[Doris]: 'It helps me a lot for two days because I cook every day fresh food, every day, yes, so you can imagine if Brite Box takes two off me.'

[Sandra]: 'It's less stress. It gives more fun to my boys. Sometimes, the boys, they have to deal with me. Erm, having depression, anxiety is pretty bad when they, only have a mum there and nowhere else to run away... cooking and fun in the kitchen is one way to keep them occupied.'

[Mary]: 'I'm putting less stress on them eating it because I haven't paid for it and that sounds awful but... but it really does feel like that and I don't put a lot of stress on them but I feel the stress I suppose if they don't eat meal'... 'having Bright Box just kind of takes that pressure off and I think that's important for children to be able to be free to make choices about what they eat a little bit and try new things, both those things are important so yeah, that's been the main benefit for me and for the kids.'

[Josie]: 'Yeah so you could relax on a Friday if you know one day of the week is sorted for you'... 'bonding with the children as well, that excitement they have and chipping in and bringing us together as opposed to me sort of being stressed out to do din



SECTION 3

ADDITIONAL BENEFITS

CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN)

In our discussions with Brite Box organisers and in our plans for this report we did not consider asking questions related to how the scheme impacts SEN children. As a result, there were no specific questions related to SEN children in the online questionnaire. The subject did come up, however, in the interviews with three parents to SEN children and with schoolteachers and school officers. It is important, therefore, to take this limitation into account when examining the quotes below. The interviews provide anecdotal indication that Brite Box plays a role in supporting SEN children in a number of different areas.

[Lexi]: 'I think sometimes if you just present something on the plate they don't know what's in it and they might be less willing to try. But the fact that he [SEN 9-year-old who has ADHD] takes part in the cooking process means that he's much more familiar with what's gone into it and he's more likely to eat it. So yeah, it's really helped introducing him to new foods' ... 'I think this would really be a good thing for a lot more children with special educational needs. It's helpful in so many different ways. It's not just about the eating, it's about just following instructions, the maths, the language involved in preparing and the new skills learnt. That's a big winner for us.'

[Alison]: [SEN 8-year-old] '...has ASD, ADHD and also challenges with talking' ... 'he's really eager to mix everything and do what he can in the preparation. And it's actually really helpful from an OT point of view as well because he's using his fingers.' 'He needs all the skills he can get really because his attention is very differing.' 'I think this would really be a good thing for a lot more children with special educational needs. It's helpful in so many different ways. It's not just about the eating, it's about just following instructions, the maths, the language involved in preparing and the new skills learnt. That's a big winner for us.'

[David]: [has a SEN 8-year-old with autism] 'Cooking together for the, the autistic children, it, it could be something very helpful, because of touching the, the ingredients, touching the food, touching the meat, the vegetables. It's something very beautiful, very beautiful and all these sensory experiences are very good for them and the food they experience is something very good. I'm very happy about it.'

The above responses have been corroborated by interviews conducted with schoolteachers and school officers. They have spoken to us about the impact Brite Box has on SEN children and the feedback they have received from parents. It is important to note, that several schools allocate Brite Box to SEN children, regardless of their families' financial situation. This might be an issue that is worth looking at in other schools as well and that should be included in any future research and or assessment of Brite Box.

[School teacher]: 'There's a particular family who's a single parent with a son, who was finding communication a bit difficult, as you do, particularly as boys get older, and she said it massively enhanced their weekends because he sort of does it, they can do it together.'

[Head Teacher]: [the school allocates Brite Box to SEN children]: 'I mean for one of our boys [a SEN child] who was in Year 5, he's in Year 6 now, his mum said, 'It's just the most amazing way of starting off the week because we get in the car. He's looking at what's in the Brite Box there. We go home. He cooks the dinner, and somehow, our weekends are now a bit different.' I thought that was so interesting. It's kind of given them a routine and a... Obviously because he... as an autistic person, very kind of logical and organised, and he'd kept all his recipes and needed to kind of make his own kind of Brite Box year folder and, you know, he will go back and cook those recipes.'

LITERACY AND NUMERACY SKILLS

Another important issue, that came up in the interviews with parents, was the potential impact of Brite Box on children's education, specifically their literacy and numeracy skills. This is an interesting issue that, in hindsight, should have been asked about in the online questionnaires. Nevertheless, 12 out of the 15 parents interviewed spoke of how following recipe instructions and using the chef booklet helped their children's literacy and numeracy. The three parents who did not share this view had children who are in secondary school. Based on the interviews, it appears that additional educational support might only be relevant to primary school age children and those with SEN.

[Alison]: 'It's just very helpful because he [SEN 8-year-old] can find it hard to follow instructions. But it helps with understanding how to read a recipe, in measuring, so there's maths involved, there's understanding language.'

[Sandra]: 'My, my eight-years-old, he's learning measurement because he had to weigh - so he's - yeah, it's a part of learning.'

[Josie]: 'Definitely literacy skills and also understanding instructions and understanding what does that mean, and sort of applying that to sort of real life and definitely measurement skills and getting scales and the measuring jug and showing them where the marks are and what to do, yeah definitely.'

[Lexi]: 'It definitely enhances his [SEN 9-year-old who has ADHD] skills of being able to plan things and the pictures and everything done. Yeah, definitely. You know - yeah, it shows him how to methodically work through. And those tasks - those skills can be applied to like doing his homework when he's gotta manage and break it down into sections and do it methodically.'

[Jacky]: 'They're [9-year-old twins] quite reluctant to read books. Erm they'd much rather play. But I say to them like, 'If you're gonna help in the kitchen you need to read the instructions' and they do. They sit there and they read it and they work out the time and how long we've got left and things like that. So yeah, definitely it's benefitted that way.'

[Doris]: 'She's [9-year-old] very good at her writing so yes she loves it [chef booklet], yes it has helped her a lot... she'll do her notes with the Brite Box because she's so excited, she always wants to put what she has done in the book.'



VOLUNTEER PERCEPTION & FEEDBACK

For volunteers, the care taken with organisation and preparation of Brite Box to underline the importance of those receiving it was an important part of the value and ethos of the scheme: *'I like the effort that goes into it....it's not just about feeding, not just a ready meal, it's the spirit of it.'* [Tom, volunteer]

This is very much part of the overall aim of Brite Box; to demonstrate that the recipients are valued by using the best quality ingredients, preparing and presenting boxes with deliberate effort and care: *"...not getting surplus or lower quality food, we want it to feel like a gift...something very positive, not a good handout. It had to be a positive experience.'* [Fred, organiser]

The benefits from Brite Box extend beyond its recipients and include the volunteers who help run the scheme. From the interviews conducted it was clear that volunteers were involved with Brite Box for various reasons, including wanting to help, recognition of their privilege (particularly in relation to the pandemic), and valuing the specific activities of Brite Box:

'I became aware of how lucky we were in the pandemic – we didn't profit but stayed the same...we're doing ok.' [Lucy, volunteer]

'Like the Brite Box idea of preparing food for families to cook.' [Dolores, volunteer]

'I wanted to do something local. I can walk to it and it's a day I can do. Also support local people.' [Yvonne, volunteer]

'It's targeted and worthwhile, going out to families and children...it has broad but specific reach. [It] involves education.. children being taught how to cook. This one appealed.' [Sian, volunteer]

'[I was] one of six, we never went hungry, we were poor...[it's] contradiction for me that children are going hungry, a kind of madness.' [Alison, volunteer]

The majority (93%) had not been involved with food aid pre-pandemic, although many expressed a personal interest in food and nutrition which drove their interest in becoming involved with a food aid initiative:

'Cos I found it hard to think we live in a country where families struggle to feed themselves, it's close to a basic right.' [Mark, volunteer]

'[I] knew about the impact of healthy eating, I know about food and cooking and the cost for the environment of packaging is not good. Cooking is a life skill.' [Imogen, volunteer]





VOLUNTEER PERCEPTION & FEEDBACK CONT.

For organisers, volunteers and funders, too, key reasons for involvement with Brite Box were the time children and families spent together in purposeful activity, and the additional skills gained by both children and their carers which were perceived as lacking in some. This was identified not just as a short-term gain, but an investment in social capital with potential for longer-term benefits, including social justice.

'[they] can do this all together...it is massive in keeping people together, the satisfaction at the end of the day to eat what has been prepared, it's a virtual loop especially for people who might not have high self-esteem.' [Noel, volunteer]

'It's tangible – family time, life skills, activity, trying new food.' [Lola, volunteer]

'The value of Brite Box? Life skills, nutrition, helping local people, it benefits mental & physical wellbeing, the life skills mean it is long-term and sustainable. The social side of cooking and eating is so important – it clears your head, it is mindful and tactile, it's time away from screens, it engages senses, children feel proud to share what they've prepared with the family.' [Katie, volunteer]

However, most were clear about the benefits they themselves gained from volunteering. Much of this related to the values they perceived in Brite Box, the ethical value of supporting skills development and from a personal perspective, the sense of community and fun, which came as much from the set-up and organisation of Brite Box as from the people there:

'Awareness of other people's problems, not just a focus on self. You get a nice glow, the absolute clarity of helping.' [Lucy, volunteer]

'[...] bad week, bad news, it's one small good thing. There's a satisfaction...you look at the news and there are bad things going on...debilitating as you can't do anything about the war in Ukraine, little about the environment, there's a lot of food poverty here, inequalities – it brings you down. But you can do something, do one small thing, and you don't feel so disempowered. I always feel better and feel good.' [Katie, volunteer]

'What do you gain? Clear purpose...you feel you're being useful. Really nice to be part of a team, I'm a sole worker otherwise. All are accepted, you walk in and are greeted with smiles, it's never felt awkward even from the beginning. It's enlightening, it shows what humans can do. The ethos is kindness. We are all like-minded.' [Alison, volunteer]

'[I] have absolute conviction it's a fantastic cause, it's very well-run. The aims are wonderful with total buy-in. They [organisers] are impressive, dedicated, selfless people...the other people are super nice, it's a nice place to go.' [Sian, volunteer]



FUNDER & SUPPORTER PERCEPTIONS

'And that's where the ideas started popping of, "there's the potential here to start something that is more than just getting food to children that aren't getting meals." There's also an opportunity to generate excitement about cooking and healthy food.' [Louis, supporter]

'One of the things I really liked about it was, there was the secondary agenda which was about, sort of bringing families into the kitchen. Vulnerable families into the kitchen. So, as well as just this supporting thing, it was just a fun thing to do. It was a good thing. That was something that really appealed to me.' [Adam, funder]

'Also it's the whole bonding within the family of cooking. That whole experience of cooking a meal and then sharing the meal afterwards. That's what the project brings from it.' [Louise, supporter]

'I quite liked the fact that, yes, it was looking at kind of food insecurity but it was try-, trying to tackle it or approach it from a way that kind of didn't come from a kind of traditional charity angle but really kind of [yeah], you know, packaged it up as a kind of, you know, cookery- 'Let's do something as a family together,' so I quite liked that idea..' [Mary, funder]

'I was just very impressed with the sort of nature of it. As it was a bit more than a sort of binary food bank type operation. There was sort of underlying community spirit and a good thing about it. So there was a lot of resonance with it.' [Adam, funder]

'It's a life skill cooking. We don't want to bring up the next generation of children, where they just pop a film and put it in the microwave.' [Belinda, supporter]

'It's a case of obviously because in schools these days they don't do a lot of cooking, just the basic skills that the kids need, so that's one element of it..' [Louise, supporter]

'We want to unlock social capital, we want to unlock social cultural capital as well. The things that don't exist right now we hope Brite Box will be that vehicle.' [Eliza, supporter]

'Here's some kid who's struggling around food, it hasn't been a happy space for him, and now they're actually a meal that the whole family can enjoy. When you get feedback from somebody saying, "Our family never ate meals together but actually one of the kids cooked a meal and we all sat round the table and ate it." That's gold. Because you're not just doing food then, you're improving people's social capital. You're helping just to build people's relationships in their own family.' [Louis, supporter]

'We particularly like the social justice side of Brite Box..... that's one of the [...] things about Brite Box is that we're offering fresh produce to children to learn new skills. So the future adult can actually cook. Because what we learn is that some of the households, in houses where people don't cook, we think it's because of the cost of fresh food..... We wanted the future adult to be able to cook and therefore mitigate future harm' [Eliza, supporter]



SECTION 4 RECOMMENDATIONS & ANNEXES



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK

The research carried out for this report has largely addressed the aims and answered the questions that were set out. Nevertheless, through this work, it has become clear that there are additional areas and questions that require more detailed research. These are collated below, and it is our intention, should we get the requisite grant funding, to include these in our future research.

1. What is the impact of Brite Box on skills such as literacy & numeracy in children?
2. To what extent does participation in Brite Box enhance food acceptance and improve dietary intake in children with limited diets and/or sensory difficulties?
3. How do differences in the length of time Brite Box is made available affect outcomes such as dietary intake, new habit formation, novel food acceptance & consumption, literacy & numeracy (if they do)?
4. What is the impact on children and families of a universal vs. a targeted approach to Brite Box? (i.e. what are the differences when whole classes or year groups receive Brite Box as opposed to individual children within a class receiving Brite Box)?
5. Are there different and/or additional benefits of Brite Box being incorporated into the curriculum rather than used solely as a food aid resource?
6. To what extent and in what ways does Brite Box enhance mental health and wellbeing of children and families?
7. And, finally, what is the impact of Brite Box on food-related behaviours beyond its lifespan?

ANNEXES - DETAILED DATA TABLES WITH QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

ANNEXES

All annexes of data and full questionnaire responses can be found / requested in the additional presentation: "BRITE Box KU report annexes 2023".

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