

Box Chicken: Providing some healthy competition to fast food outlets

Evaluation Report



Shift

Formerly
We Are What We Do

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Introduction

Many young people, particularly in relatively deprived areas, live in environments where social, cultural and environmental conditions combine to make it difficult to sustain healthy habits and behaviours.¹ In these obesogenic environments, fast food outlets selling high calorie, high fat, high sugar foods are a prominent feature, and the poor diets they promote have a significant impact on young people's health, performance at school, and overall wellbeing.^{2,3}

Shift (formerly known as We Are What We Do), in partnership with Create London, has piloted a practical solution to this problem which provides access to healthier food options that are appealing and socially relevant enough to be freely chosen by young people, shifting their purchasing habits in the short run, with the potential to affect their tastes longer term.

We developed and prototyped a mobile fast food business serving hot, tasty, cheap, quick, yet healthy food. During a four week test period in September and October 2013, we were open in Forest Gate, Newham, east London which is an area dense with fast food outlets and in close proximity to four secondary schools: Forest Gate Community School, St. Angela's Ursuline School, St. Bonaventure's School and Stratford School Academy.

Working with street-food caterer Giles Smith, we created a menu with a focus on chicken cooked in a much healthier way than its deep fried alternatives, yet still costing under £2.50 for students. We also created a brand identity that would appeal to young people, under the name Box Chicken, and did some basic local marketing.

The enterprise provided training opportunities to local unemployed young people through Create Jobs.

We monitored the project closely, assessing how healthy it was and how popular it was with young people and examined the financial sustainability of the model in order to understand whether this could be a solution that can be scaled across the capital. This report outlines the extent to which we were able to provide healthy, popular and financially sustainable food to the community, and shares what we learned in the process.

¹ Butland, B et al (2007) Tackling Obesities: Future Choices – Project Report 2nd Edition. London: Government Office for Science. ² Bagwell, S. (2011) The role of independent fast-food outlets in obesogenic environments: a case study of East London in the UK. Environment and Planning 43:2217-2236. ³ Mental Health Foundation (2006) Feeding Minds: The impact of food on mental health. London: Mental Health Foundation & Sustain Sorhaingo, A & Feinstein L. (2006) What is the relationship between child nutrition and school outcomes? London: Institute for Education.

Background and context of the intervention

The way we eat as a nation has shifted over recent years. Longer working hours, more households with two working parents, and other factors mean that despite the recession, large numbers of meals are being bought and eaten outside our homes, and more of these than ever are at fast food outlets.⁴

Fast food outlets provide quick, accessible and affordable food, and are increasingly selling menus dominated by fried chicken and chips.

Nationally, around four fifths of fast food outlets are independent outlets rather than large chains.⁵ These small independent fast food outlets operate in a highly competitive market, with tight margins and very price sensitive customers.⁶ While independent outlets provide a variety of fast foods, including curries, kebabs and pizzas (with typical prices ranging from £3.50 to £7.00), many sell mainly or exclusively fried chicken and chips (with typical prices between £1.50 and £3.00).

Chicken and chips provides a slightly higher margin for retailers and can be sold at a lower price as they rely on lower cost inputs (poorer quality cuts of chicken and low cost chips), use simple preparation techniques, and can be cooked directly from frozen, minimising wastage. Chips are also the highest margin product on most fast food menus: in 2007, fast food outlets could buy 100g frozen chips for 5p and sell 100g fried chips for 50p, a cash margin of 90%.⁷ The recent recession resulted in a further shift towards fried chicken and chips.

While the economics of chicken shops allows them to serve affordable food that is popular with their customers, these fast food outlets also contribute to an environment that can have a negative impact on health as well as a number of other social and environmental issues. These problems are particularly acute in urban deprived areas such as our focus area, Forest Gate in the London Borough of Newham.

Health

Youth obesity is a national problem: more than one in three children aged 10–11 years are overweight or obese and obesity costs the NHS as much as £4 billion annually.^{8,9} Studies suggest that around a quarter of the energy intake of young people is from eating snacks bought in the immediate environment surrounding the school buildings.¹⁰ The high-fat,

energy-dense foods served in the fast food outlets that dominate the high streets around many schools contain high percentages of recommended daily allowances.

Studies from the US have shown a fast food outlet within 0.16km of a school is associated with at least a 5.2% increase in obesity rates among 15–16 year olds.¹¹

Procurement and preparation

In order to hit the lowest possible price points, fast food outlets frequently favour the cheapest cuts of meat, and the cheapest suppliers. Higher welfare chicken is not usually considered. Equally, they are often opting for the cheapest oil, which contains higher levels of saturated fats, and not changing it frequently, which causes the formation of toxic degradation products.¹² Hygiene and health and safety standards are also frequently below satisfactory, something which consumers are concerned about.¹³

Litter and the environment

Many chicken shops are unpopular with local residents and the local council due to the litter they cause, often left on the street by customers ordering food to take away. This takes the form of bones and other food waste, which can smell unpleasant and attract vermin, and packaging which is often made from unsustainable materials such as polystyrene.¹⁴ Keep Britain Tidy's annual survey on the state of the local environment shows that fast food litter increased by six percent between 2010/11 and 2011/12 (from 23% of sites to 29% of sites reviewed).¹⁵ They find that perceptions that fast food is cheap and disposable make fast food packaging particularly likely to be dropped. Littered areas are also more likely to attract further anti-social behaviour and crime.¹⁶

Anti-social behaviour and space

The widespread popularity of fast food outlets shows they do play an important role in people's lives: providing affordable, filling food in a warm, free, relatively safe third space for (particularly young) people to spend time in. For Muslim young people, fried chicken shops are one of the few alcohol free spaces serving halal food that are affordable and accessible.¹⁷ However, by providing space to spend time in, they can also be the source of anti-social behaviour, a problem reported by schools, local residents and local councils.¹⁸

⁴ Bagwell, S. (2011) The role of independent fast-food outlets in obesogenic environments: a case study of East London in the UK. Environment and Planning 43:2217–2236. Butland, B et al (2007) Tackling Obesity: Future Choices – Project Report 2nd Edition. London: Government Office for Science. ⁵ Allegra (2009) Eating Out in the UK. London: Allegra Strategies ⁶ Bagwell, S. & Doff, S. (2009) Fast Food Outlets in Tower Hamlets and the Provision of Healthier Food Choices, London: Cities Institute. ⁷ Bagwell, S. (2011) The role of independent fast-food outlets in obesogenic environments: a case study of East London in the UK. Environment and Planning 43:2217–2236. ⁸ NHS (2012) National Child Measurement Programme: England, 2011/12 school year. London: The Health and Social Care Information Centre, Lifestyles Statistics ⁹ NICE (2012) Obesity: working with local communities Costing Report. London: National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. ¹⁰ Sinclair, S & Winkler, J. (2008). The School Fringe: What pupils buy and eat from shops surrounding secondary schools. London: Nutrition Policy Unit, London Metropolitan University ¹¹ Currie, J., DellaVigna, S., Moretti, E. & Pathania, V. (2009) The effect of fast food restaurants on obesity and weight gain. Working Paper 14721, Cambridge, Mass: National Bureau of Economic Research. ¹² Bagwell, S. (2011) The role of independent fast-food outlets in obesogenic environments: a case study of East London in the UK. Environment and Planning 43:2217–2236 ¹³ Shift (formerly We Are What We Do) research ¹⁴ Cities Institute (nd) Fast food takeaways: A review of the wider evidence base. <http://bit.ly/1hHNpfj> ¹⁵ Keep Britain Tidy (2012) How clean is England: The State of England's Local Environment. London & Wigan: Keep Britain Tidy ¹⁶ Cities Institute (nd) Fast food takeaways: A review of the wider evidence base. <http://bit.ly/1hHNpfj> ¹⁷ Bagwell, S. (2011) The role of independent fast-food outlets in obesogenic environments: a case study of East London in the UK. Environment and Planning 43:2217–2236. ¹⁸ Shift (formerly We Are What We Do) research (2013)

CHICKEN SHOPS

Fuelling London's youth

MORE SHOPS WILL BE
OPEN SOON

Numbers of fast food outlets are increasing by 10% every year in the UK



Independent outlets now represent four fifths of the UK fast food market

Now available across London

8273

TOTAL NUMBER OF FAST FOOD
OUTLETS IN LONDON

258

LONDON BOROUGH
OF NEWHAM

The average meal deal

Percentages of Recommended Daily Amount provided by a single meal in a chicken shop. Based on a meal of 3 pieces of fried chicken, regular fries and a regular soft drink and a 2,000 kcal diet for women

58

% KCAL

51

% SAT FAT

52

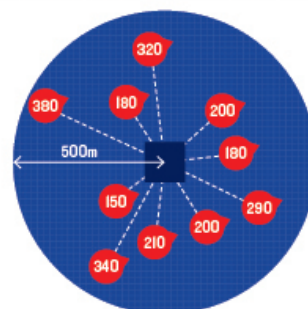
% SALT

A standard
meal contains
zero portions of
fruit and veg!



School specials

Every school in Newham is within 500m of a fast food outlet. Studies have shown a fast food outlet within 160m of a school is associated with at least a 5.2% increase in obesity rates among 15-16 year olds



Forest Gate Community School Fast food outlet

The teenager's choice

Based on a survey of 13-14 year olds in Newham

38

% EAT FAST FOOD
ONCE A WEEK

12

% EAT FAST FOOD
EVERYDAY

What our customers are saying...



"They are a bit
dirty and greasy"



"You can't recycle
the packaging"



"It must be really
bad quality meat"



"There is so much
rubbish outside"



"The food keeps
my kids full"



"The shops are
real trouble spots"



"It's a place to
hang out with
my friends"



"It's cheap and
I get served
very quickly"

Our approach

Reversing this shift in the way we eat is incredibly hard, and fast food outlets are serving a growing need in the current market place, providing cheap, filling food and a warm, free, relatively safe third-space for people to spend time in. Rather than trying to

dramatically shift current eating culture, we need strategies for working with the current fast food culture to make more hot, tasty, cheap options available that are also healthier.



Young people enjoying chicken and chips in Birmingham



Local research

Over the course of 2013, Shift carried out in-depth research into the issues of youth obesity, chicken shops and urban culture, focusing on the London Borough of Newham.

Desk research

To understand what influenced young people's eating habits, we did desk research, collating existing information from studies on youth obesity and fast food in London and Newham.

Newham, one of the three most deprived boroughs in London, has over 258 hot food takeaway outlets, of which 28% are fried chicken shops. All secondary schools in Newham are within 500m of a fast food outlet. 38% of 13–14 year olds eat fast food about once a week, 12% everyday.¹⁹

Newham also has the fifth highest levels of obesity in England amongst Year six students. 25.6% of Year six students in Newham were obese in 2011/12, compared to a national average of 19.2%.²⁰ The prevalence of diabetes in Newham is the highest of any borough in London.²¹ Ethnic minority groups are at particular risk of diabetes: Black Caribbean and South Asian people are more than twice as likely to develop the disease compared to the general population.²² The borough has also seen an increase in the diagnosis of Type 2 diabetes (formerly known as late onset diabetes and relating to obesity) in children aged 16 or under.²³

Mapping

The area around Forest Gate station is a typical fast food hotspot. In this area, there are five primary schools, four secondary schools and 29 fast food outlets. We mapped these and spoke to students and teachers about the most commonly used walking routes.

Observational study

We spent time in three fried chicken shops in Forest Gate, Newham. Over a one week period we gathered data on customer demographic, ordering patterns, eating patterns, spending patterns, and any littering or anti-social behaviour incidents.

Workshops, survey and ethnographic study

We ran workshops in local secondary schools (Forest Gate Community School, St Angela's Ursuline School and St Bonaventure's School) and with sixth form students who were members of Newham Youth Council, canvassed opinion on the attraction of fast food outlets. We also carried out an anonymous survey with members of Newham Youth Council, extracting current eating and spending patterns and opinions on fast food and outlets.

This complemented an ethnographic study we undertook in Hansworth, Birmingham, following young customers of Dixy Chicken and interviewing them about their eating behaviour.

Interviews

Finally, we undertook interviews, workshops and conversations with stakeholders, including:

People working with young people

- Teachers at St Bonaventure's, St Angela's Ursuline school, and Forest Gate Community School, Newham
- Youth workers at Newham Youth Council, Community Links and Tim&Barry youth work
- A New Direction, helping young people into employment in East London
- The Living Wage Foundation

Restaurants and food experts

- General Managers of two London-wide chains of fried chicken shops (NAMES OMITTED) and a store manager at one of the branches
- The Sustainable Restaurant Association
- Jackson Boxer, owner of Rita's café, a high end chicken shop in Dalston
- The Ginger Line, curators of pop up restaurant experiences across East London
- Forest Gate Women's Institute, who set up a community café in Forest Gate
- Jamie Oliver's Ministry of Food, Stratford
- Editors, food technicians and marketers for Tesco's food magazines and websites

Local and national government and public health

- David Christie, Councillor for Beckton Ward, Newham
- Ellie Robinson, Councillor for Forest Gate North, Newham, Chair of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission
- Tim Baker, Assistant Director Public Health, Newham
- Tim Madelin, Senior Public Health Strategist, Tower Hamlets
- Dan Metcalfe, Head of Marketing Planning, Health and Wellbeing Directorate, Public Health England

Our initial research can be found here:
<http://cl.ly/0n0q101H1u1S>

¹⁹ Own research (2013) ²⁰ National Obesity Observatory (2013) Data tables: Electoral Ward and MSOA NCMP obesity prevalence – NCMP 2009/10 to 2011/12. London: Public Health England. ²¹ Barts and the London & Clinical Effectiveness Group (2011) City & Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets Diabetes Risk 2011, London: Barts and the London & Clinical Effectiveness Group. ²² Barts and the London & Clinical Effectiveness Group (2011) City & Hackney, Newham and Tower Hamlets Diabetes Risk 2011, London: Barts and the London & Clinical Effectiveness Group. ²³ NHS Newham (2011) Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, Newham 2010, London: NHS Newham.



"If they opened a restaurant in the school grounds we wouldn't go – we like going out at lunch and getting off the grounds, otherwise we look like junior kids"

Student, Angela's 6th form, Newham

"It's cheap and nearby and I like the food"

Young person, Birmingham

"It's got to be quick. Unless they can serve everyone instantly we wouldn't go. We don't have time to queue in our lunchbreak"

Student, Angela's 6th form, Newham

"I kind of mind that it's unhealthy, and I would go to a place with healthier food as long as other people went there."

Young person, Birmingham



Independent
fast food
outlets in
Forest Gate

Our research showed that what attracted young people to fast food outlets was food that was cheap, quick, close and tasty.

Young people also enjoyed the independence of spending their own money off the school premises.

CHEAP

LESS THAN £3

QUICK

LESS THAN 20 MINS
FROM SCHOOL

CLOSE

LESS THAN 200M
FROM SCHOOL

TASTY

HOT AND
FLAVOURSOME

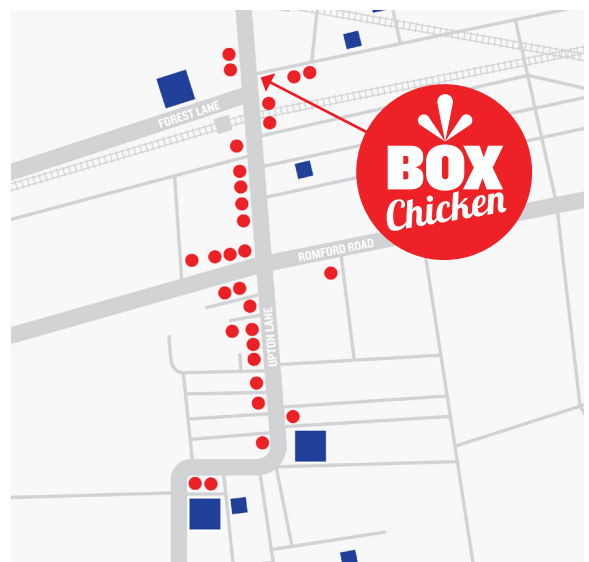
Project overview

Based on the insights from the research and engagement phase, Shift initiated a project providing an alternative to fried chicken in Forest Gate, introducing food that was just as cheap, quick, close and tasty. We set up a mobile catering unit on the corner of Woodgrange and Sebert Road, directly opposite the Forest Gate rail station and very close to Wanstead Park overground station. The van was less than 100m away from Forest Gate community school and approximately 1.5 km from St Angela's Ursuline School and St Bonaventure's schools.

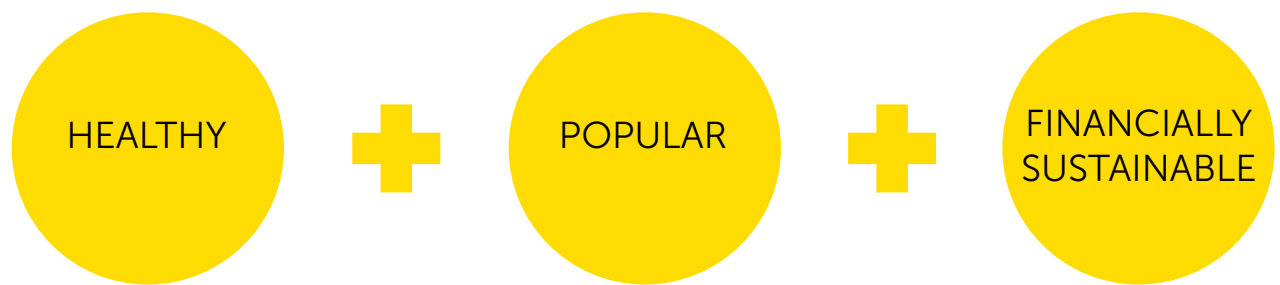
The mobile catering unit was open during the students' lunch hour and after school, from 12 noon to 5 pm Monday to Friday, from 23 September to 18 October 2013. The target audience was school students at Forest Gate Community School, St Angela's and St Bonaventure's, as well as members of the local community.

We worked with Giles Smith, an experienced caterer with his own mobile catering unit, to develop the recipes, and deliver the food. It served a menu of hot, quick and cheap one pot meals, but with substantially less sugar, fat, salt and calories and an increase in fruit and vegetables compared to the average chicken shop meal.

Access to the van was unrestricted and students and adults were served with equal priority. Students were charged a lower price for a standard chicken box (£2.50 compared to £3.50 for an adult). From the second week of the project, smaller snack pots were available at £1.50. The snack pots were introduced in response to demand for cheaper and smaller options, and to appeal to students looking for a snack after school.



Project aims



Healthy

The project aimed to provide an alternative to existing fast food outlets for young people in the area. By providing accessible, healthier foods which were also quick, hot, cheap and tasty, we wanted to enable young people to substitute some of the meals they would have otherwise purchased at unhealthy fast food shops with nutritionally balanced food purchased at Box Chicken. Our goal was to decrease the sugar, fat, salt and calories and increase the fruit and vegetables consumed by young people and adults in Forest Gate community during the lunch and after-school period.

Popular

We also aimed to present healthier foods as popular and socially acceptable. We wanted to make young people familiar with new, healthier foods and thereby subtly shift young people's eating behaviours towards healthier options without nagging.

We wanted to show that healthier food that was simply marketed as hot, tasty and fast could be popular enough to compete with much less healthy fast food outlets.

Financially sustainable

We wanted to assess whether mobile street food could be a financially sustainable way of providing healthy fast food to the audiences who usually choose less healthy fast food. Our aim was to break even, before the caterer's salary was included in the costs. We also wanted to explore the consequences of different pricing models, and investigate the options for cross-subsidising affordable meals for young people with more profitable sales to other audiences.

Socially responsible

In addition to these three primary aims, we also aimed to provide at least two young people with work experience, giving them the opportunity to find out about certain aspects of setting up a food business including market research and food preparation; minimise the impact of the van on litter in the local area; and test how a mobile catering unit could function as a space for young people to spend time in.

Project outcomes

Health



What we did

The first component of shifting the diets of people in the area was creating food that was significantly healthier than the food available in the local area. We worked with a registered nutritionist to develop nutritional guidelines for each portion, in line with Public Health England's guidance for Change4life recipes. The caterer then developed four recipes which were in line with this nutritional guidance, yet still tasty and quick to serve: Caribbean chicken, Spanish chicken, Peri Peri chicken and a Veg box. The recipes used lean chicken, and plenty of fresh vegetables and spices to create flavour.

Did it work?

Once the recipes had been developed we had the nutritional value of a standard portion of each recipe tested in a nutritional testing laboratory (Eurofins Food Testing Laboratory).

The nutritional testing showed that the four meals were each in line with Public Health England's guidelines on healthy eating. The average 300g box contained at least 1 1/2 portions of vegetables, only 373 calories, 7g of sugar, 8g of fat, of which only 1.5g was saturated fat, and less than 1g of salt.



Popularity

What we did

The second big challenge was to get people to come and buy our healthy food.

Listened to our audience

While developing the concept, we talked to young people in the area about what they liked about fried chicken shops and what they would want from a fast food outlet.

Tested with young people

After developing the recipes, we ran a test event at St Angela's school, giving out free samples for young people to try to ensure that the food appealed to local young people, and asking them to rate the taste and appearance, and give feedback.

Relevant brand identity

In addition to ensuring that our target audience liked the food, we also developed a brand identity for Box Chicken that was designed to be appealing to young people. Our aim was to create something that fitted in culturally with existing tastes and habits, positioning Box Chicken as a normal, mainstream product. Box Chicken was not described as a healthy eating initiative to customers, and neither was it presented as a school-backed initiative, to avoid the negative associations that young people might have with these types of projects. The name was in line with popular chicken shop brands, and its visual identity took cues from other fast food outlets, but with a slightly cleaner, more refined, aspirational slant. The boxes we used were Chinese takeaway packaging branded by a simple sticker aimed to appeal to teenagers.

Local marketing

In addition to creating a sense of familiarity with the branding, we also recognised that for our target audience, social proof was particularly important: it was key that Box Chicken was seen as a popular and normal option. We encouraged students to start visiting Box Chicken by advertising it at the test event, and distributing money off flyers amongst the students at St Angela's via the 6th form student governance body. Students were given loyalty cards at the test event, and loyalty cards were available during the month of the project, giving customers a free chicken box after eight purchases.

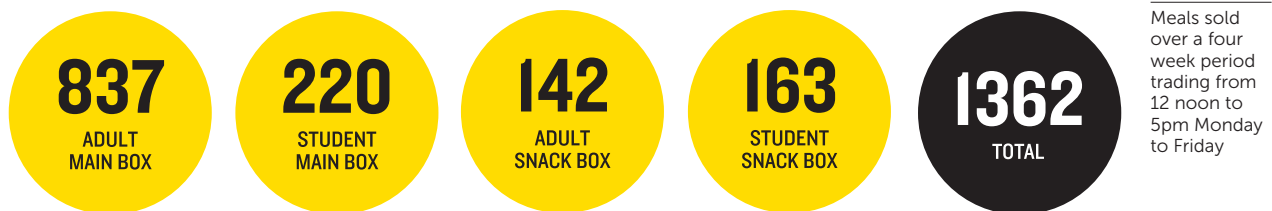
Did it work?

During the month of operation we did daily counts of the number of portions sold, and counted how many of these were served to young people in school uniform or small children. We surveyed members of the local business community and interviewed business owners in the immediate vicinity of the van about their perceptions of Box Chicken. We also conducted two sets of surveys with young people at St Angela's. Directly before the project started, 112 young people (one tutor group from each year) filled in a food frequency questionnaire, answering questions about the types of food they typically ate. The same group of students filled in a questionnaire afterwards, indicating whether they ate at Box Chicken, and gathering their perspectives on Box Chicken.

Altogether, we sold 1362 portions of Box Chicken. Of these, 383 portions were sold to young people (28%), and the remainder were sold to adults in the local community.



A brand identity that would appeal to young people



The location of the van was closest to Forest Gate Community School which does not allow students out at lunch time. It was in the middle of a large number of retail outlets, and between two stations. This may account for the fact that we sold more portions to adults than we had initially anticipated. When we moved the location of the van to within the school grounds of St Angela's Ursuline School for a final day of trading, we sold significantly more student portions during the morning and lunch breaks: four times as many student portions on the final day compared to an average day during trading opposite Forest Gate Station.

Comments from students, teachers and members of the community supported the idea that students at St Angela's and St Bonaventure's would have bought food from the van more frequently if it had been located closer to their schools. As an example, a group of boys from St. Bonaventure's came every Friday, and when told that the van might move closer to their school next they all shouted "Yeeeeesss!"

This experience confirms that it is essential to be very close to a school in order to target its students, preferably within 200m, and also suggests that proximity to schools has the potential to significantly increase overall sales, improving profitability.²⁵

The feedback surveys from students showed that approximately 17% of the St Angela's students had eaten at Box Chicken. Only 16% of the students indicated that the location of Box Chicken was convenient, but 68% of all the students surveyed said that if there was a local outlet selling food similar to Box Chicken, they would visit it at least once or twice a week.

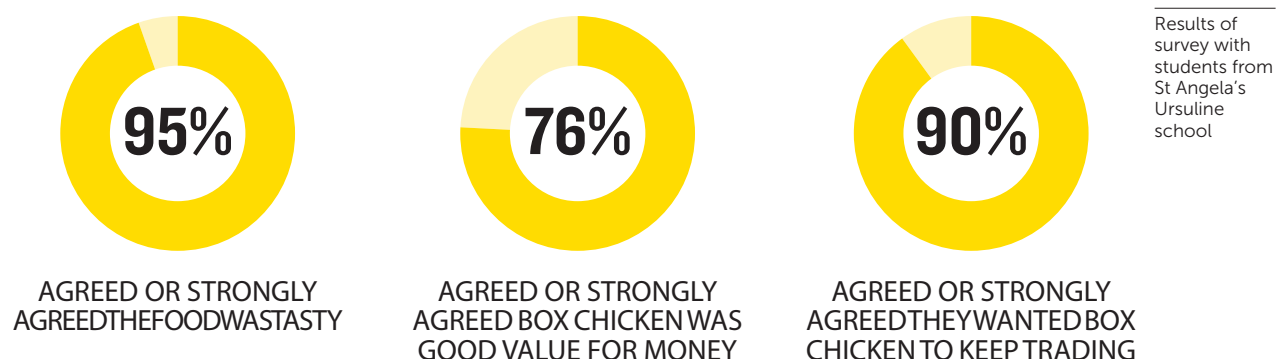
Of the 121 students at St Angela's that we surveyed, 21 students had eaten at Box Chicken. Of these

students, 95% agreed or strongly agreed that the food was tasty, 76% agreed or strongly agreed that Box Chicken was good value for money, and 90% agreed or strongly agreed that they wanted Box Chicken to continue trading in Forest Gate.

Customers were enthusiastic about the taste of the food, and were attracted by the smell from the large cooking plates at the front of the van. There were numerous unsolicited comments praising the taste such as: "Cheers, really good", "Delicious", "So good" and "The best thing". The packaging was seen as attractive ("trendy") and the van generated a broadly positive response ("so cool, I might bring money tomorrow").

Several comments suggested that Box Chicken could compete with fried chicken outlets. In addition to comments comparing Box Chicken favourably with fried chicken, we saw several instances where people made the decision to buy Box Chicken in preference to fried chicken. For example, two students came to get some Box Chicken for themselves and their mum, discussed taking two boxes and then some from Dixie, but in the end ordered three boxes and decided against additional deep fried chicken. One man bought fried chicken first and then, seeing the van said: "Damn, I didn't see this".

However, Box Chicken also filled a different niche. Many people either bought second boxes to take home for parents or children, or to eat themselves for dinner. Parents asked their children to bring Box Chicken home for them. For example, on the final day, one boy bought two boxes, then had a full loyalty card and took a third one saying "I'll have one now, one for my mum and one for tomorrow". The caterer also received requests to deliver food to businesses and to cater for events.



Customer profile
Students

Several students spontaneously praised the taste, and commented that they liked the availability of an alternative to fried chicken.

"Best chicken I ever tasted."

"It's really good, convenient and we like it a lot"

"There only dodgy places around otherwise"

Customer profile
Local business owners

People working in the immediate vicinity responded very positively to the availability of a hot and tasty, but not fried, lunch option. One local business owner liked the Peri Peri chicken box so much he came back and bought seven boxes for his staff. A man from a local taxi business bought six boxes for his drivers, one of whom came back to tell us he liked it a lot.

"This is good because the only option around here is fried chicken"

Customer profile
Parents with young children

Box Chicken was also surprisingly popular amongst younger children, with several parents eating lunch with their children at the Box Chicken tables.

"OMG that looks good innit, I want".

"It's really good food Mum!"

"It's better than Beast Quest!"²⁶



²⁶ Beast Quest is a popular children's video game.



Financial sustainability

What we did

Because Box Chicken was an experiment, Shift minimised the risk to the caterer, who was paid a fixed salary for the four week period, test events and menu development. The caterer was responsible for buying the ingredients, and kept the takings to ensure that he was motivated to maximise profits. The caterer recorded all outgoings and sales. In the analysis below, the caterer's salary and the costs of branding are separated from the daily costs and income, as they were set at a level which was appropriate for an initial project, but are not necessarily reflective of costs should it be scaled.

Did it work?

A profit making enterprise

Total income from the sale of Box Chicken was £3,170.00. The running expenses (not including the branding expenses or the caterer's salary) came to £2,208.56. The project therefore made £970.44 before the branding and caterer salary are taken into account. To cover the cost of a caterer on London Living Wage, Box Chicken would have needed to generate £1,000 more per month, which is the equivalent of around 50% more meal sales.

Great potential for growth

These results were achieved within only one month of trading, a stage when new food businesses are usually working hard to attract customers, adapt to customer demand, and iron out operational issues. The figures therefore only show a glimpse of the ultimate potential the Box Chicken business to

attract customers and generate revenue. The fact that that glimpse was very positive is a very good indication of potential sustainability.

Other forms of financial support

The social benefits of the project enabled it to attract other forms of financial support, in addition to the initial grant funding from Create. The council waived trading fees and we were able to procure supplies at reduced rates, including orange juice and fruit tubes from innocent, and coconut water from Fountain of Youth. Publicity during the project also led a supplier body (The Poultry Council) to seek a meeting with us to explore ways of reducing input costs. These concessions suggest that if the project was extended, it could potentially attract sponsorship and in-kind donations from suppliers, contributing towards longer-term financial sustainability.

Promotion for caterer

The project attracted a lot of press coverage, including a feature on the One Show and an article in The Observer Food Monthly. This publicity raised the caterer's profile and led to offers of further work, which could cross-subsidise the part of the project aimed at young people if the project were to be repeated.

Awareness of issue

Finally, the publicity is indicative of a high level of concern around youth obesity and interest in new strategies to address this, which suggests that further grant funding could be found to subsidise an extension of the project.

Procurement and preparation

We aimed to serve food that met at least RSPCA Freedom Food Standards and also to ensure high standards of hygiene and food safety.

It became immediately clear that we would need to provide halal chicken to be popular in the local community, which is not currently compatible with RSPCA Freedom Food Standards.

The caterer had a level 3 hygiene rating and each of the assistants were trained in food hygiene and preparation, receiving a City & Guilds Level 2 in Food Safety and Hygiene for Catering.

Litter and the environment

We aimed to minimise litter and food waste from Box Chicken through the provision of bins.

A litter check was conducted once a week, by means of a walk to count the number of Box Chicken boxes discarded on the streets immediately surrounding the van (within a 300m radius). No Box Chicken litter was found on any of the checks.

The packaging used was 100% recyclable, unlike the polystyrene many takeaway outlets use.

Two members of the local community independently remarked on the fact that Box Chicken boxes were not dropped as litter.

"It doesn't surprise me. Chicken and chips is a very quick thing. But the kids saw the Box Chicken food being cooked slowly in front of them, and thought it was a bit special. So maybe they were less likely to drop the box because of that."

"Box Chicken kept it all tidy. There weren't bits of paper and packaging strewn about. The people that bought it kept it quite tidy. There were plenty of bins. I think it had nice packaging. That instills in someone that it's nice food and they perceive it differently. They take more care than they would have otherwise."

Anti-social behaviour and space

We set up a gazebo and two tables with chairs. The chairs and tables were used by customers, including students, almost every day and we received positive feedback on the space. For example, one customer commented that she felt very comfortable and

welcomed. The space was used less on the rainy and colder days, suggesting that it may not fully meet young people's need for a third space for hanging out throughout the year.

Training and employment

We aimed to provide two young people with work experience, giving them the opportunity to find out about certain aspects of setting up a food business including market research and food preparation.

We provided two young people with work experience through Create Jobs. One was between GCSEs and A levels and wanted some research experience. She assisted with surveys and data entry during the test event. The other was an unemployed graduate, who worked in the van three days a week for the month of the project, assisting the caterer with food preparation, sales, set up and clean up. Through their training they received a City & Guilds Level 2 in Food Safety and Hygiene for Catering. The weeks before and after the project she assisted in data entry of the student survey, undertook research into local authority policy around fast food, and conducted follow up interviews with local businesses.

According to her exit interview, she gained confidence in her ability to tackle new challenges, interact with people and willingness to get involved in basic tasks, where this was necessary, alongside some experience in social research. On the last day of her internship, she was offered a research job with the Liberal Democrats.

More widely, we provided opportunities for four volunteers to gain skills and experience that helped them further their careers. They gained experience in ethnographic research, measuring the impact of healthy eating interventions, survey design and administration, and food preparation and service. Two of the four went on to secure further work on the basis of their volunteering, and the other two, who are still students, believe that their experience will improve their employability when they graduate.





Some local government money is being spent on healthy-eating education programmes but those tend to be exercises in preaching to the converted...

Compared to that the Box Chicken project starts to look like the only practical effort to do something.

Jay Rayner, *The Observer*

London Evening Standard



Healthy alternative: low-fat Box Chicken street food vans will park near schools

Chicken vans offer pupils a low-fat takeaway lunch

Sophie Goodchild

VANS selling "healthy" fast food will be stationed outside schools to tackle obesity and bad eating habits.

The Box Chicken project offers London schoolchildren alternatives to deep-fried chicken and taps into the trend for street food.

The meals will be cheap and made from good-quality stewed poultry, which is low in fat. Peri-peri chicken will be one of the dishes on the menu.

The pilot is launching next week for a month near secondary and some primary schools in Forest Gate in Newham, one of the most deprived areas of London. If successful, it will be rolled out across the capital.

Arts Council England and Legacy Trust UK are funding Box Chicken, which is commissioned by arts organisation Create London and run by We Are What We Do - WAWWD - a not-for-profit organisation which focuses on changing behaviours.

It is a response to growing concerns about the negative impact of takeaway food on health. Celebrity chef Jamie Oliver is among high-profile figures who

Taste tester: trying Box Chicken



have campaigned to improve the diets of the UK's schoolchildren. There are more than 8,000 fast-food outlets in London, WAWWD research shows, and sales of fried chicken across Britain grew by 36 per cent between 2003 and 2008.

The WAWWD findings also show east London has the capital's greatest density of fried chicken takeaways, and 38 per cent of 13 to 14-year-olds in the borough of Newham eat fast food about once a week.

The organisation's Nick Stanhope said healthy eating awareness campaigns have "limits", and the way forward is to offer children healthy alternatives to what they already like.

"You could do a walk-to-school campaign and provide healthy salads but it's not compelling," he said. "Familiarity and the normality of expectation is really important - hence the Box Chicken van."

Fidelma Boyd, deputy headteacher at St Angela's Ursuline School, in Forest Gate, which is backing the project, said: "We look forward to it being a powerful way of changing our students' eating behaviour. "We know how the nature of their future lives will be, quite literally, dictated by what they eat."

the one show



See clip from
The One Show at
<http://bit.ly/170MQUT>

Conclusions

The ubiquity of chicken shops on high streets in deprived urban areas of the UK is a result of powerful economic and social forces, and Box Chicken was a small local experiment aimed at testing whether healthy food could compete at all against tasty, quick, and above all cheap fast food. Our aim was to show that it was possible to provide a healthy, popular and financially sustainable alternative to the food currently available on the high street in Forest Gate.

A month was too short to test whether Box Chicken was able to substantially alter the diets of the young people in the area. The project was, however, able to provide some evidence that it is possible to provide fast food which is both healthy and popular. **Our evaluation clearly shows that young people rated the taste of Box Chicken food highly, and that they, and members of the broader Forest Gate community, wanted food of this type to be available locally.** The Box Chicken project demonstrated that there is an appetite in communities like Forest Gate for alternatives to fried fast food, and that it is possible to create a menu which is both hot, quick and tasty, and also significantly healthier than the alternatives which dominate many high streets in urban deprived areas in the UK.

The project also confirmed previous findings that the location of fast food outlets is a critical factor in their popularity. Box Chicken was a modest attempt to alter for the better the environment in which young people make food choices. The fact that we were unable to locate the van within the critical 200 – 400m of the two target schools meant that while we were able to introduce a very welcome alternative in the area, we were not able to alter the food choices in the immediate vicinity of the school. **Our experience suggests that future locations of healthy fast food outlets would need to be just as close to schools as chicken shops, if not closer, if they are to compete.** If the project was to be repeated or developed, council support would be extremely important in order to achieve this.

The project was also too short to explore all the possible innovations that could improve the financial sustainability of the model, but it did show that **there are options for developing the project into a financially sustainable business which could be explored further,** involving suppliers, catering partners, and other funders and sponsors with an interest in improving young people's health.

In terms of social responsibility, the project clearly demonstrated that **takeaway food can contribute positively to the local environment, both socially and environmentally.** We saw that young people and adults alike valued friendly service highly, and that it is possible to create spaces which are comfortable for and used by a wide cross section of the local community. We also saw indications that people took care in disposing of the Box Chicken packaging, possibly prompted by the more sustainable, aspirational packaging. If the project was rolled out more widely, it would be important to observe whether this effect holds if a larger proportion of customers are students.

The positive experience of the young people doing work experience indicates that outlets like Box Chicken have the potential to build employability skills. The involvement of Shift (formerly known as We Are What We Do) and Create Jobs, who have experience in providing career-building internships, was a key part of the success of the work experience component of the project. Future iterations of the project could potentially involve a wider range of training and work experience partners if this aspect was emphasised.

Finally, the project generated **a high level of interest and engagement from local partners including the council, local schools (particularly St Angela's), public health departments in East London, local business networks, and street food networks in London and nationally.** This was extremely helpful in making the project successful, and it also suggests that drawing on the expertise of partners with experience in health and nutrition, local regulation, catering and business development would be vital to developing the Box Chicken model into an initiative which was able to provide healthier, popular food at scale.