FoodFit 2016 Programs Report

FoodFit by the numbers
From January to December 2016, FoodFit programs were delivered at nine sites. From January:

- Hillhurst Sunnyside Community Association, Calgary, AB
- Interior Services, Kamloops, BC
- The Local CFC, Stratford, ON
- The Table CFC, Perth, ON

New partners in September:
- Kitsilano Neighbourhood House, Vancouver, BC
- Interfaith Food Bank, Lethbridge, AB
- Mission Services, Hamilton, ON
- Partageons l’ espoir/Share the Warmth, Montreal, PQ
- The Alex CFC, Calgary, AB

460 adults (ages 19 to 88) and 61 youth (ages 12 to 18) participated in 31 FoodFit programs, 3 FoodFit Youth programs and one monthly FoodFit Alumni program.

45 volunteers – 39 adults, 6 youth – logged over 1725 hours for our partners in the FoodFit program last year.

Over 5,400 healthy meals were shared in the program and 4,230 healthy snacks were served to program participants.

Many new community partnerships were developed: local secondary schools, YMCA (Stratford), Community Health Centres, Public Health Units, local fitness instructors, and referrals from medical teams, dieticians, and other health providers.

In June, Community Food Centres Canada (CFCC) embarked on a 5 year FoodFit project with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) with a goal to roll out the program through delivery partners to reach up to 3000 Canadians motivated to live a healthier lifestyle. CFCC recognizes the generous support from PHAC and our financial supporters: Brian and Joanna Lawson, Lawson Foundation, Royal Bank of Canada, and anonymous donor, and our in-kind support from Pulse Canada, Steps Count Canada, Dr. Mike Evans and the Evans Health Lab.
FoodFit program participant outcomes

Eating healthier

With easy to understand nutrition resources and lots of hands-on learning in the kitchen, FoodFit participants gain the knowledge, skills and confidence to prepare healthier meals and snacks. 83% of participants reported improvements in their food preparation and safety skills, and 97% learned something new about preparing/cooking healthier meals.

82% of participants increased their daily fruit and vegetable consumption. Only 46% of participants were eating 5 or more servings of fruit and veg at the beginning of program, this increased to 66% by the end of the programs.

71% of participants have increased the amount of whole grains in their diet. The recipes shared and sent home in the program contained the right ingredients for success for FoodFit participants: 97% found the recipes easy to follow, 97% found the meals and snacks shared in the program appetizing and tasty, and 80% of participants had already used FoodFit recipes at home during the program.

“FoodFit taught me that to eat healthy tastes good and when looking for food choices in the store what is the most nutritional dense option to choose. The more nutrition the more satisfied and healthier I will be.”
— Interfaith Food Bank

“FoodFit has made a significant impact on how I see eating healthy. The shift in thinking what I can’t have to what I can add in is a positive encouragement and has liberated the way I cook. I’m very appreciative for the opportunity to learn new things.”
— The Local CFC

“I now approach cooking from the perspective of what ‘healthy’ I can add in, rather than what I have to leave out.” — Hillhurst Sunnyside
Participants are making healthier choices they can live with! Many participants commented on healthier substitutions they are making: replacing applesauce for sugar, spices and herbs to replace salt, yogurt or avocado instead of mayonnaise, homemade instead of store-bought salad dressings and soups, making “sweet treats” with vegetables (chocolate beet cake, avocado pudding), water instead of sugar sweetened beverages, beans instead of meat in burgers, squash for spaghetti, whole grain pasta, putting beans in smoothies for protein, using more lentils and legumes.

“FoodFit has opened up my eyes to exploring more combinations of ingredients to make a balanced meal. It has also taught me about trying new ingredients.” – Mission Services

“FoodFit helped me enjoy food I never liked before and how to make things healthier.” – Hillhurst Sunnyside

“I learned to be versatile, the ability to modify recipes and not be bound to unhealthy ingredients.” – The Alex CFC

“I’ve been able to learn ways to substitute healthier alternative and how to build a healthy plate. I also learned more about the benefits of eating healthier.” – The Alex CFC

“The most positive change the FoodFit program has made in my life is I feel I am equipped with great information and recipes to create some beautiful meals.” – Hillhurst Sunnyside

Over 2/3rds of FoodFit youth participants tried a new food in the program. Including: chili, tofu, bean burgers, salad in a jar, bok choy, beets in chocolate cake, sweet potato, fennel. 96% of adult FoodFit participants tried a new food or an old food in a new way during the program.

“I had no idea sweet potatoes were orange on the inside!” – FoodFit Youth, The Table CFC

“FoodFit helped me enjoy food I never liked before and how to make things healthier.” – Hillhurst Sunnyside
Moving more
FoodFit encourages participants to increase their daily physical activity - participants share a group 30 minute walk every week in the program. 62% of participants increased their daily average steps over the course of the program - on average, the program boosted steps by over 2000 daily - that’s over 1.6 more km daily!

“FoodFit has helped me to be more aware of the small daily choices that I can make towards living a healthier lifestyle.” – The Local CFC

“FoodFit provided the motivation to diet and exercise that resulted in actually getting a job delivery flyers – walking and climbing stairs.”
— Kitsilano Neighbourhood House

“FoodFit has motivated me to continue working on the healthy eating and exercise on my own.” – The Table CFC

“I don’t have to run, just start! It was fun watching my endurance improve over the 12 weeks – from 670 steps to 6,000!” – The AlexCFC

“Being healthy means be careful with yourself, your body. Do exercises and do physical activity. Have healthy food and be happy.” – FoodFit Youth, The Local CFC
Making new friends
Group support and social connection are key ingredients to participant success in FoodFit. 91% of participants reported meeting a new friend, with 93% making a social connection with someone they felt they could count on for support.

“The FoodFit program has helped me feel much more connected to this community.” – The Table CFC

“The most positive change that FoodFit has made in my life was to connect me to some amazing people that have helped me make huge improvements to my life both physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially.” – Interior Services

“I learned you are never too old (76 years) to learn something new – ‘new tips’ and suggestions from other members of the program are priceless.” – Interior Services

“I made new friends. I was able to get out there and meet other ladies and made a network.” – Hillhurst Sunnyside

“I needed something I could participate in where I did not feel judged and I was able to contribute.” – Interior Services

“The programs are terrific – the friendship, the support, encouragement.” – The Table CFC
Feeling better
The FoodFit program introduces many ways for participants to measure their health or gauge their fitness level – helping them define ‘healthier’ in their own terms. 77% of FoodFit participants reported an improvement in their physical health, and 74% noted improved mental health.

“My health is better and I feel confident and in control of my decisions. At the end of the day I am in charge of my health.” — The Table CFC

“J’ai moins peur de changer mon mode de vie et essayer d’être beaucoup plus sain.” <I’m less afraid to change my lifestyle and try to be much healthier.> — Share the Warmth

“I’ve been feeling great both physically and mentally. I know I’m putting good food in my body – so grateful for this program.” —The Local CFC

“My mood and level of happiness have improved. I feel lighter and more alive than I have been in a long while.” — Hillhurst Sunnyside

Changing families – the reach beyond the program
The FoodFit program reaches beyond the direct participants: we estimate an additional 311 adults and 240 youths could be indirectly impacted in households shared with our participants.

Almost all FoodFit and FoodFit Youth participants would recommend the program to a family member or friend.

“FoodFit has changed our lives and our health. We are no longer a processed food family. We have incorporated fruits, greens, seeds, different proteins into our daily lives. I plan and am conscious of what comes into the house and our mouths.” — The Local CFC

“Before FoodFit my husband would not eat my cooking, no he loves eating the meals I prepare. Thank you FoodFit!” — The Local CFC

“My girlfriend and I are living a healthier life. We buy more healthy foods and substitutes for our meals. We prepare raw salads every day with a varity of fresh ingredients. We are more conscious of our grocery purchases. It feels nice to prepare affordable, fresh, delicious and healthy meals together.” — The Alex CFC

“FoodFit reminded me to put myself back in the equation of my family’s health.” — Hillhurst Sunnyside
“Since starting FoodFit with my mom, I’ve started helping in the kitchen a lot more. It’s helped me learn that I love to cook and I’ve been eating a lot healthier.”
— The Local CFC

“I’m really glad we did the salad lab as I got over a lot of my “food fears” and I will definitely prepare these salads for my family.”
— FoodFit Youth, The Table CFC

“FoodFit taught me I am important enough to take care of.”
— Hillhurst Sunnyside

Feeling the FoodFit difference
Of the 121 participants who reported living with preexisting chronic disease or health conditions at the beginning of the program (e.g. type 2 diabetes, prediabetics, hypertension, high cholesterol, arthritis, chronic pain, depression, overweight/obesity, anxiety, poor sleep patterns), 64% felt the FoodFit program helped them to better manage their condition.

Of those participants recording biometric health measures:

- 38% of participants increased their level of fitness during the FoodFit program (based on age, gender and heart rate measurements).
- 25% of participants lowered their BP status (anywhere from stage 2, stage 1, pre hypertensive, to normal) – 55% stayed the same.
- A total of 25 participants lost 42.2 inches (107.2 cm) from their waistlines – an average of 1.7 inches (4.3 cm, equivalent to one pant size).

“Even though I have health issues, I’ve been given knowledge that will allow me to lead a better life and as I continue to practice the things I’ve learned I should be able to live a longer life. I’m glad to have taken the FoodFit program – no regrets.” — The Alex CFC

“Exercise and good eating habits go hand in hand. You feel better about yourself.” — Kitsilano Neighbourhood House

“Knowing that even a small change is a success feels good!” — The Local CFC

“I have better blood sugar readings. I have learned healthier meals to make at home and new skills that make me more comfortable in the kitchen.” — The Alex CFC
What’s in the box? Confidence and skills!
In the final week of the FoodFit program, participants are broken into small groups for the “What’s in the Box Challenge”. Each group is given a collection of core ingredients and a list of kitchen staples they can use to improvise and create a new healthy dish to share with their FoodFit team and special guests. Some participating sites invite “celebrity” judges or family to attend the graduation meal and share in these (mostly) edible creations.

This exercise demonstrates the ability of community members to work together, some taking on leadership roles for the first time, tests their confidence and skills to create a healthy, delicious dish without the aid of a recipe or input by the facilitator – the participants are truly helping each other in this fun and popular challenge. Facilitators report very few “flops” or “disasters” and gush with pride about the creativity and determination of their FoodFit teams to “get it right and make it good.”

Participants:

“I am really excited about trying my new skills with these grocery items! What’s in the box?” – Mission Services

“I really feel confident to try new things now. I’m much more comfortable in the kitchen.” – Interior Services

Facilitators:

“The results weren’t as successful as I had hoped but they had lots of fun with the activity!” – The AlexCFC

“It was fun to see participants brainstorm recipes and in some cases come up with ideas that were completely different from any that I had thought of!” – Kitsilano Neighbourhood House

“Recipe improvising and preparation in the kitchen serves as a nice ending to the whole 12 week program and gives participants an opportunity to put their knowledge and skills into practice.” – Share the Warmth

“Today was AMAZING! I LOVE the final cooking challenge so much. We had mango green curry chicken, spiced cauliflower basmati rice, Japanese style edamame and kale salad, warm tomato chickpea salad, and curried white bean burgers.” – Hillhurst Sunnyside
Some examples of the ingredients and the creations FoodFit teams prepared together in 2016 (courtesy of FoodFit Hillhurst Sunnyside):
Looking forward: Maintaining a healthier lifestyle

Starting in 2017, facilitators will be following up with participants who have completed the FoodFit program to offer annual questionnaires. We are looking to find out if FoodFit graduates are able to continue using the knowledge, skills, motivation and social supports after the program has finished. We will be able to compare annual results with pre/post program data collected from each participant.

This summer, FoodFit Trainer Kate Van (from The Local CFC) will be interviewing 2016 FoodFit participants in a cross-country search to collect most significant change stories. With help from CFCC’s stellar communications team, we look forward to including these stories that capture the diverse backgrounds, life challenges, and FoodFit successes in our 2017 FoodFit report.

Many of our 2016 graduates are motivated and well prepared to keep on with the FoodFit motto: eat healthier, move more, make new friends.

“Food Fit has motivated me to continue working on healthy eating and exercise on my own.” — The TableCFC

“I have made changes from FoodFit and have no desire to go back. I now have recipes and ideas which inspire me to create healthy and delicious meals. I’ve been feeling great both physically and mentally. I know I’m putting good food in my body. I’m so grateful for this program.” — The Local CFC

“It’s important to be with people. I want to commit to personal learning and carry it forward with power and inspiration.” — Hillhurst Sunnyside