

Report on Consultation on Healthy Alternatives to Junk Food - in partnership with NCS The Challenge

Background

One of Healthwatch Wandsworth (HWW) strategic goals for 2015/16 is to enhance its involvement and engagement with young people at local level. In July 2015 we were approached by The Challenge to work in partnership with them on their NCS programme, a government-backed scheme open to Year 11 and 12 students that helps them to build skills for work, life and the transition to adulthood. Healthwatch Wandsworth' role in the programme was to enable the young people to be involved in a volunteering project and inspire them to create and run a campaign.

We had been made aware of local concerns around healthy eating and young people, and in particular about Wandsworth Council's intention to close 3 chicken shops. We therefore decided to create a volunteering project for the NCS group of young people called Healthy Alternatives to Junk Food.

We organised an introductory visit with 13 young people aged between 15-17 years old in August 2015 to discuss the project and identify key questions to be included in the survey. On Sunday 27th September 2015 the young volunteers spent the day at a Healthwatch Wandsworth stall at ASDA in Clapham Junction encouraging people to take part in our survey on healthy alternatives to junk food and collected 135 responses.

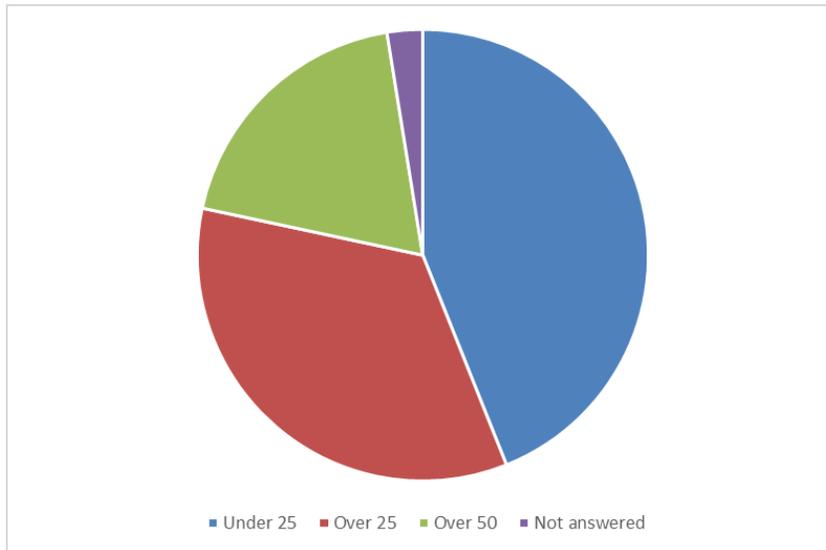
Overview of the survey

The survey included 6 open and closed questions which aimed to find out what young people like to eat that is healthy and affordable. We wanted to find out if there were any trends focusing on what already attracts young people to go and buy healthier foods and whether it was important to them to have a healthy diet.

Findings

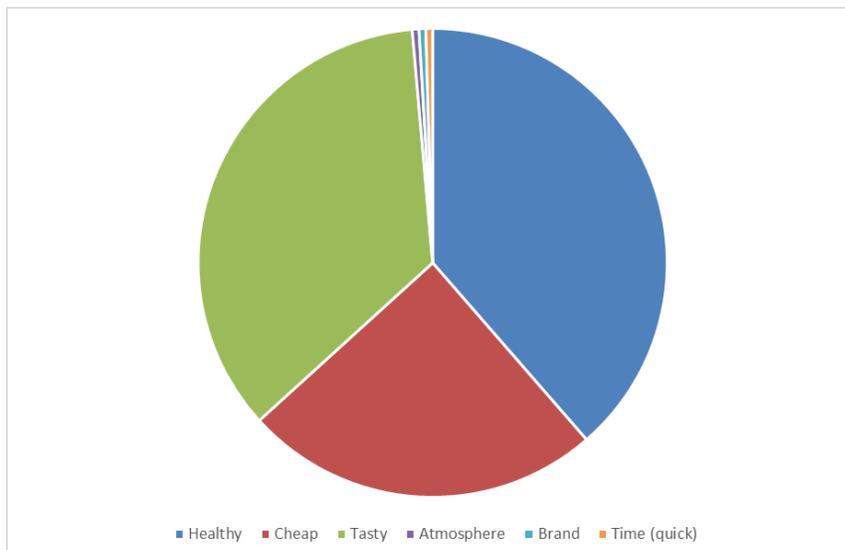
We analysed the responses from all the questionnaires which included 3 age groups of under 25 years old, over 25 years old and over 50 years old. We looked at the general responses from all the questionnaires compared with the responses from the under 25s. It was particularly interesting to look at the young peoples' responses as this was relevant to the potential closure of the 3 fried chicken shops located in Wandsworth near to local schools. We understand that the local authority want to ensure young people still have

healthy options and know what to buy which is healthier when they might come out of school hungry. The age-proportions are demonstrated in Graph 1.



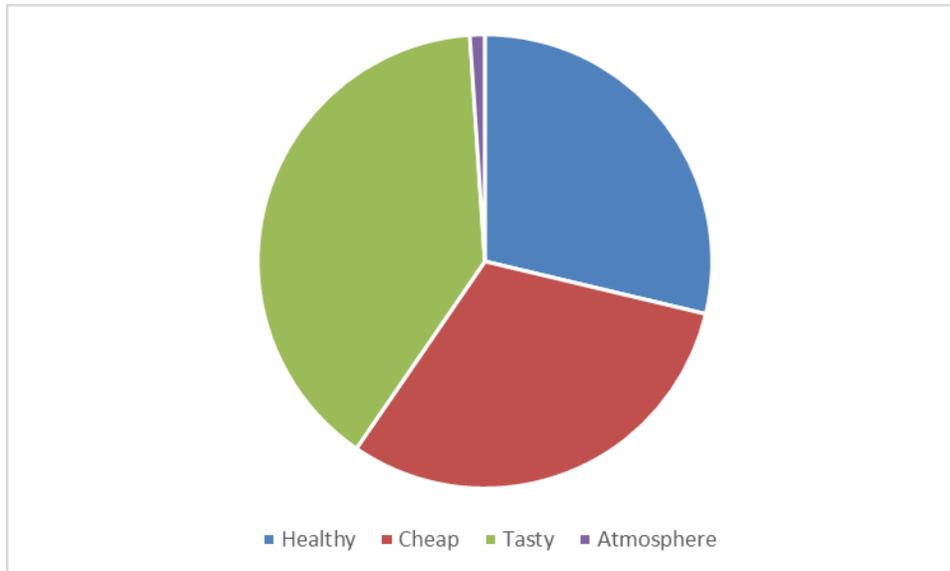
Graph 1: Age at time of survey

We asked what is important when looking for somewhere to eat. The question was closed to the 3 possible answers “healthy, cheap, and tasty” but also drew separate responses from several people. Generally, the most important aspect was that the food was healthy closely followed by the food being tasty and then cheap (see Graph 2). A couple of responses suggested alternatives to the closed questions, that people looked at food being quick to obtain and the branding was important them.



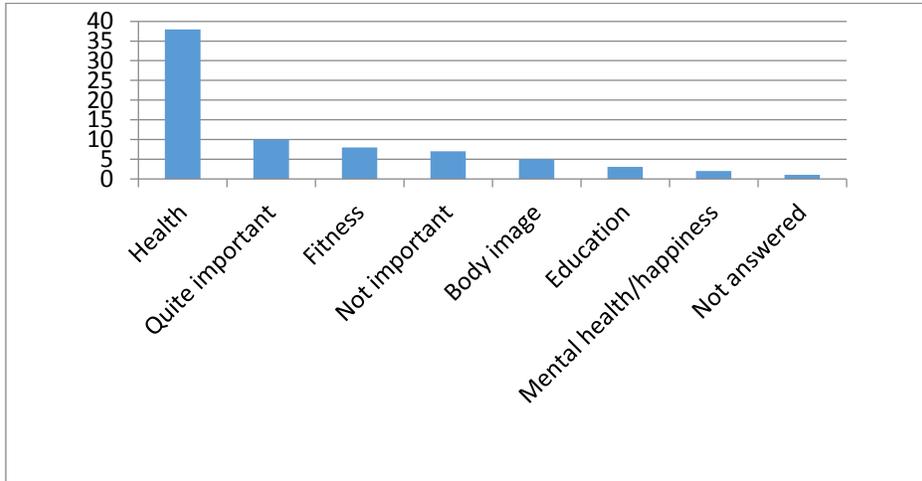
Graph 2: What is important when looking for somewhere to eat (general response)?

However, Graph 3 shows the general response is slightly different in the under 25s compared to the whole group.



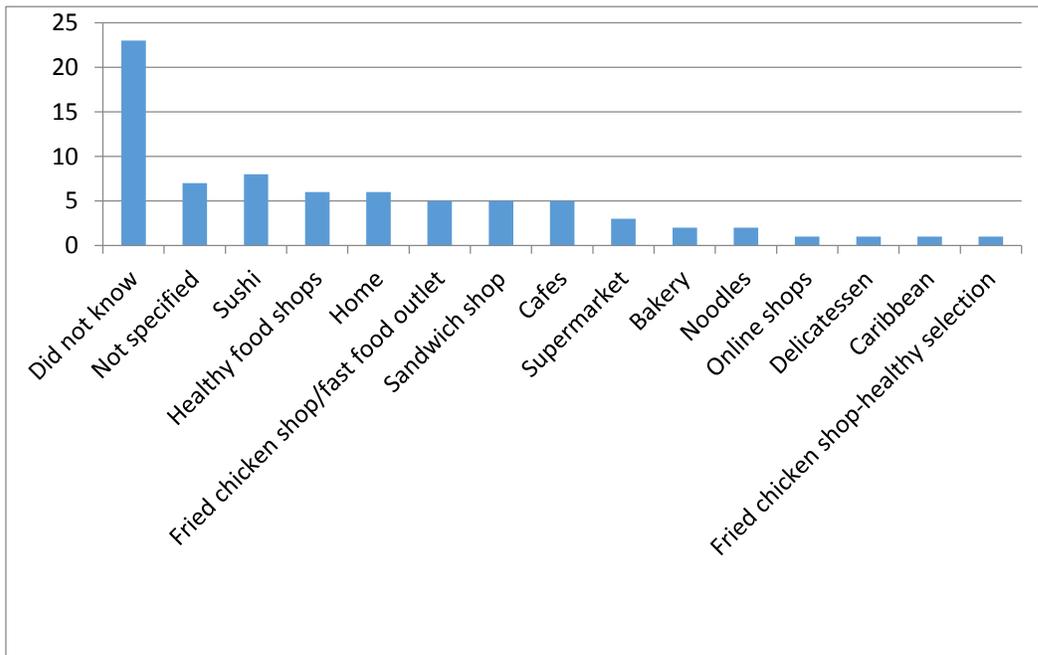
Graph 3: What is important when looking for somewhere to eat (under 25s response)?

The most important thing for the under 25s was that the food was tasty followed by cheap and then healthy. One person also suggested the atmosphere of the place of purchase was important to them as well. This suggests that alternatives suggested to young people when the fried chicken shop closes should taste nice to them if it is to attract them to buy more healthy foods, and also priced within their price-range. Overall, the under 25s placed the food being healthy as less important than cheap or tasty and so we wanted to find out how important they felt it was to eat a healthy diet.



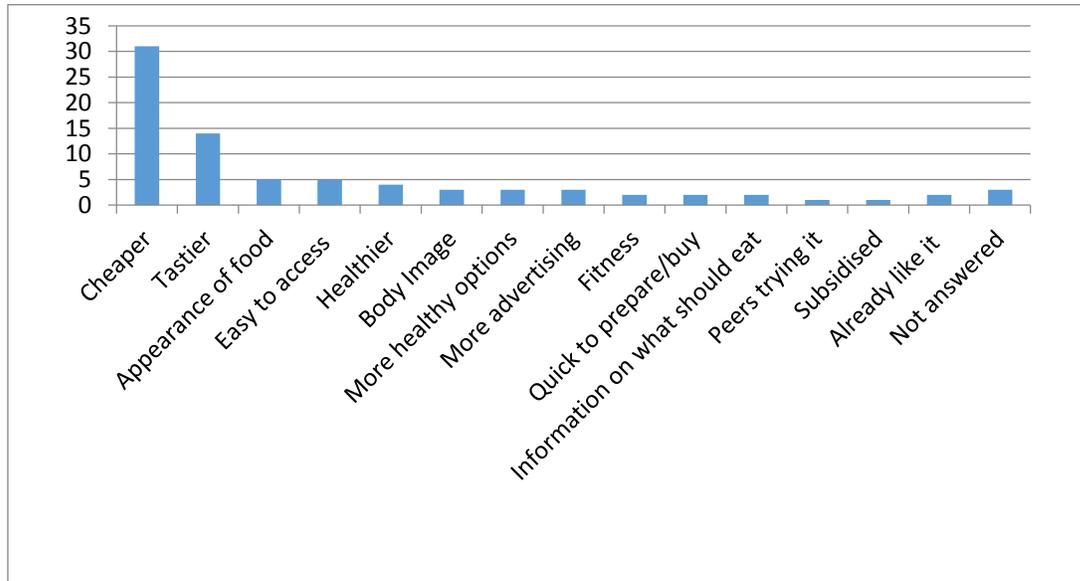
Graph 4: How/why important to have healthy balanced diet (under 25s response)

Graph 4 also suggests that most young people think it is important to have a balanced diet to generally stay healthy and several thought it was quite important to do so. A small minority thought it wasn't important to be healthy but interestingly some thought it was important for mental health and happiness. When we asked whether the young people knew of junk food alternatives, Graph 5 shows the majority said they did. There were some encouraging answers that suggested that some young people knew where to go for healthier foods, such as 8 people answered sushi, 5 people answered sandwich shops and 6 people suggested eating home-cooked food.



Graph 5: Which junk food alternatives are there? (under 25s responses)

However some of the answers were actually still unhealthy junk food, for example 5 people suggested a fried chicken or fast-food outlet, so we wanted to know how choosing a healthy alternative could be made more attractive. The main way of making healthy food more tempting for young people would be to make it cheaper. There are also a large proportion of people who said they did not know about healthy alternatives and so this might be a public health issue that needs to be addressed.



Graph 6: Making a healthy diet more attractive (under 25s responses)

Graph 6 suggests that there are many ways in which choosing healthy options could be made more attractive to young people. Several people suggested they would like more information on what they should be eating. Many people wanted healthy food to be tasty. It might be that more education is needed to show people how to choose healthy food and to show people that it can taste good as well. It seems that people are open to trying to make their diets healthier because several people suggested they wanted more healthy options to be available and people wanted these options to be easy to access.

Conclusion

To conclude, the majority of young people are aware that they should be eating a healthy balanced diet, whether this is for physical or mental health benefits. It is encouraging that young people tend to feel there are alternatives to junk food shops, such as sandwich shops and home cooking, however if we are to encourage more healthy eating, we should be aware that young people are concerned with taste and cost. Some even suggested that subsidised food might help and having more information on what they should be eating to be healthier would entice them to make healthier choices.