



community
food and health

(scotland)

Emergency food aid: a National Learning Exchange



A National Learning Exchange hosted by Community Food and Health (Scotland) on 25 February 2014 at The Melting Pot, Edinburgh

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Headline messages

Community food initiatives have been tackling food poverty for over 20 years. However, the urgency with which communities are expressing need for emergency food aid has intensified. Communities are requesting greater, immediate need and, as a result, community food initiatives are facing **dynamic and growing demands** for emergency food aid.

Scotland has a wealth of **expertise and experience** in community food work. This includes those who are addressing food poverty through delivering, evidencing and enabling community food and health activities. **Working together** to build on this knowledge, understanding and appreciation is key to effectively responding to the need for emergency food aid.

‘Collaborate – strength is in the collective.’

‘Provide a hand up not a hand out: ensure your clients are receiving wider support from your own or other organisations.’

A stronger **evidence** base that focuses on understanding food poverty in Scotland and the impact of emergency food aid would strengthen the position of community food initiatives. This evidence is complex and should build on different types of evidence to capture a comprehensive picture of the causes of food poverty, the need for support and the impact of food aid.

A **food plus** model that goes beyond food parcels refers to providing stability and continuity; offering access to healthy affordable food; developing cooking skills; and creating opportunities for people to seek further support and advice. Through the food plus model, community food initiatives are contributing to long-term outcomes for communities.

By identifying and understanding the needs of local communities, as well as building on local capacity, community food initiatives adopt **community development** approaches to improve access to healthy affordable food, develop social cohesion and create opportunities for people in communities.

Considering these issues, there is a **critical risk** that, while community food initiatives respond to demands for emergency food aid in local communities, their energies, resources and time are being diverted from core activities.

‘The fast-increasing growth and complexity of the issues; the difficulty of setting some more attention to preventing food poverty given the growing and urgent pressures to meet it.’

What is this report about?

Demands for emergency food aid are an emergent challenge for community food initiatives across Scotland. In February 2014, Community Food and Health (Scotland), or CFHS, invited key individuals to share their experiences and understanding of supporting communities that are experiencing extreme food poverty and in need of emergency food aid. This is a complex and challenging agenda and there was broad recognition that this learning exchange must mark the beginning of ongoing collaboration across sectors in this specific, but dynamic, concern for community food initiatives.

This report captures and shares insights from experts in the field, as well as providing a resource to influence and inform this ongoing discussion and collaboration. In addition to capturing the ideas, thoughts and aspirations of those attending, this report also draws on responses to a 'Key Messages' template that CFHS has shared more widely when seeking views from stakeholders.

Participants at the event represented the following organisations:

- Bo'Ness Academy
- Central and Western Integration
- Child Poverty Action Group (Scotland)
- Community Food Moray
- East Lothian Foodbank
- Edinburgh Community Food
- Edinburgh Cyrenians
- Fife Community Food Project
- Food Standards Agency
- Glasgow South CHP
- Glasgow University
- Inspiring Scotland
- Just Play
- Lanarkshire Community Food and Health Partnership
- NHS Health Scotland
- NHS Highland
- NHS Lothian
- Nourish Scotland
- Poverty Alliance
- Rowett Institute of Nutrition and Health
- The Scottish Government
- The BIG Lottery
- The Storehouse, Bo'Ness
- Trussell Trust
- University of Sheffield
- University of Warwick

Structure of this report

This report captures and documents discussions at the National Learning Exchange. During the event, participants were asked to reflect on case studies that were presented on the day as well as key questions that prompted discussion and debate. This was a challenging and complex **programme**. As a result of sharing knowledge, experience and aspirations, a number of cross-cutting themes were identified:

- What is a community food initiative response to emergency food aid?
- Collaboration
- Evidence
- Practice development
- Influencing and informing policy
- Progression
- Recognising risks.

This report reflects the discussion around these key themes.

Case studies

In order to share examples of current practice at the event, case studies were developed by community food initiatives to highlight creative and constructive ways of responding to extreme food poverty.

These case studies provided an opportunity to explore examples of practice and consider the question 'What is a community food initiative response to emergency food aid?' Key messages from these case studies are highlighted throughout this report and the full texts are available from the case studies section of the CFHS website.

- Just Play, Angus
- North Lanarkshire Food Aid
- Kirkcaldy Foodbank
- The Storehouse/
Bo'Ness Academy

Presentations

The learning exchange provided an opportunity to share current thinking, insights and expertise from key people working in food poverty, emergency food aid and anti-poverty. The following presentations were delivered, providing in-depth analysis from key experts in the field.

Hannah Lambie-Mumford, a leading academic expert from the **University of Sheffield**, presented on food poverty and emergency food aid in the context of social justice and the right to food.

Where is the Justice? What does it mean to be providing emergency food aid in Scotland?

Justine Geyer from the **Scottish Government** provided an insight into food aid provision across Scotland and the demand for this type of support.

Overview of Food Aid Provision in Scotland

Fiona McHardy, a research and policy officer from the **Poverty Alliance**, reflected on its work alongside people in poverty to share 'lived experiences' of food poverty.

What does food aid mean for individuals and families?

Talking points

Throughout this report a number of talking points have been identified. These highlight some of the key issues that have been raised either for further action or for exploration, and they provide an indication of the issues being discussed. These points are relevant for everyone who was at the National Learning Exchange, but they may also be useful for people who were not in attendance as points for initial discussion with colleagues.

What is a community food initiative response to emergency food aid?

Through exploring case studies, participants were asked to consider the question, 'What is emergency food aid and how are community food initiatives responding to this need within communities?' Recurring themes emerged, all relating to long-term impact, engagement and local communities.

Support Reducing isolation
Connected
Participation Dignity
Choice Empowerment
Challenging attitudes Cooking skills Financial inclusion stress management
Information
Tackling stigma

Food plus

A **food plus** model that goes beyond food parcels refers to providing stability and continuity; offering access to healthy affordable food; developing cooking skills; and creating opportunities for people to seek further support and advice. Through the food plus model, community food initiatives are contributing to long-term outcomes for communities. By focusing on people, rather than food, community food initiatives are able to creatively support individuals and families in need.

‘Provide a *hand up not a hand out*: ensure your clients are receiving wider support from your own or other organisations.’

Responding to need

Adopting **community development** approaches enables community food initiatives to address local needs and provide tailored support for vulnerable individuals and families. By identifying and understanding the needs of local communities, and building on local capacity, community food initiatives provide opportunities to improve access to healthy affordable food, develop social cohesion and create change for people in communities.

‘Food is the first line of support but can be the beginning of a whole lot of help.’

Reach

Engaging with the most vulnerable people is fundamental to ensuring that food aid is **reaching those most in need**. Issues of accessibility such as stigma; travel costs; confidence; quality of food; skills; awareness; and mental health are key barriers which need to be recognised.

‘Urgent need to help those who do come so that they do not need to come again; urgent need to contact those who do not come.’



case
study

key messages

Just Play

This case study reflects a proactive approach to developing practice and increasing capacity to support vulnerable families experiencing food poverty in Brechin, Angus. By delivering cookery sessions in partnership with a local food bank, Just Play is responding to need within the community by providing additional dimensions to food aid locally.

- Just Play works with families across Angus who have a child/ children aged 0 to 3 years and where there has been criminality or police involvement within the family. There are currently more than 50 families attending Just Play with a history of issues such as domestic abuse and substance misuse.
- Through a proactive and responsive approach, Just Play has been able to diversify and develop existing practice in response to identified needs for emergency food aid by local families. Just Play is now delivering cooking sessions in Brechin covering cooking on a budget, developing skills and confidence in cooking and introducing new foods to families.
- Just Play works closely with Angus Foodbank, which has shared a list of items that would be given out in a typical food parcel. As a result, Just Play has developed cookery sessions which are compatible with these ingredients. This has enabled Just Play to develop additional dimensions to the provision of food aid by developing the skills and capacities of families.
- Key to the success of this approach has been partnership working with the local Health Improvement Team, the Brechin Health Visiting Team and Angus Foodbank.
- Challenges associated with this project have included developing new ways of working with families through cookery sessions and over-subscription of the group.

Collaboration

National collaboration

Scotland has a wealth of expertise and experience in community food work. This includes practitioners in the field, academics and policy makers who are addressing food poverty through delivering, evidencing and enabling community food and health activities. Working together to build on this knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the successes and challenges of community food activity was identified as being imperative to effectively contributing to a fairer, healthier Scotland.

‘Experience and understanding of established community initiatives already plays a key strategic role locally and nationally and deserves ongoing support.’

The issue of food spans a number of areas of policy and practice. These different elements need to come together to truly understand and address the fundamental causes of food poverty, the need for emergency food aid and the impact of food aid work.

Working across sectors to realise a shared understanding of what success could and would look like was identified as key to effectively working together. The wealth of experience and expertise in Scotland was repeatedly acclaimed and participants insisted that the key to taking this agenda forward was collaboration across sectors.

‘Food should be part of existing systems to tackle poverty and crisis and not be springing up as a separate isolated service.’

Local partnerships

Community food initiatives provide a voice for communities that are experiencing food poverty. By working in partnership with other local organisations, community food initiatives can share their understanding of local causes of food poverty and the resulting need for support. Partnership working in this way can:

- ensure that effective referral/signposting pathways are in place
- help inform and influence local services to ensure that they effectively meet the needs of communities.

Working together to share knowledge in local communities is fundamental to ensuring individuals and families receive the right help at the right time.

Networking

Formal and informal networking opportunities can enable community food initiatives to share good practice and effective models of support. In addition, they can facilitate organisations to explore different types of responses; for example, if they are new to food and health activities, working in urban/rural communities or are expanding the type of support they provide.

Talking points

- **There is a need to maintain momentum by bringing together experts to reflect, refresh and continue to drive this agenda. This discussion needs to be ongoing and far-reaching across different sectors.**
- **Considering the cross-cutting nature of food, how can we reflect on the breadth of issues associated with food and facilitate joined-up approaches to tackling food poverty?**
- **What opportunities are there to utilise different networks across Scotland to share understanding and practice and to recognise impact?**



This case study reflects an integrated model of emergency food aid that aims to support people experiencing severe food poverty across North Lanarkshire in a holistic and long-term way. Within a range of coordinated interventions, North Lanarkshire Food Aid (NLFA) provides emergency food aid to supplement existing food bank provision in North Lanarkshire and offers a home delivery service where necessary.

NLFA offers a range of coordinated interventions that have been designed to deliver a holistic and long-term approach, including:

- emergency food aid from local co-ops or home delivery as necessary
- information packs
- transition support: food vouchers for North Lanarkshire community food co-ops
- community food co-ops
- healthy eating workshops covering cooking on a budget, cooking skills, food safety and nutrition advice
- free phone information helpline for clients.

Between November 2013 and January 2014, emergency food aid was distributed at twice the initial anticipated rate. In addition, demand for healthy eating workshops was higher than anticipated – in the first two months 31 sessions were held, with 205 people attending, against a target of 600 participants over the 18-month project period.

The whole basis of the NLFA approach is to focus interventions through existing networks of food co-ops in North Lanarkshire. Through this mechanism, clients have a welcoming experience and an introduction to the services that offer long-term support to families.

Through monitoring activities, NLFA has been able to identify the main reasons for referrals as being:

- no other local food-banks exist
- other food banks are unable to support clients owing to demand
- clients could not physically collect emergency food aid.

Challenges have included identifying and engaging with referral partners and ensuring that warehousing and delivery systems are not overloaded and that existing customers are not affected.

Evidence

A stronger evidence base that focuses on understanding food poverty in Scotland and the impact of emergency food aid would strengthen the position of community food initiatives. This would enable organisations to demonstrate impact and to deliver effective responses to demands for emergency food aid. This evidence base should build on engagement with communities and opportunities to capture learning from current approaches.

Participants felt that there would be value in strengthening the evidence base for:

- Cause: understanding fundamental causes of food poverty and the reasons why communities are in need of emergency food aid.
- Need: understanding the different types of need that people are experiencing, e.g. short-term crisis; long-standing issues; destitution.
- Impact: understanding the 'journey out' for those accessing emergency food aid. What is the short- and long-term impact of emergency food aid? What impact is specific to addressing food needs and what is beyond food? What works for who, and why?

'Contribute to making the case for preventing food poverty.'

'Working together – coordinated work, coordinated evidence.'

“Hard” and “soft” evidence is important in capturing the work practitioners do and the hardships people experience.'

The following points were highlighted in relation to evidence:

- Developing methods for gathering evidence in a non-intrusive way is crucial. Reports of questions that people can be asked when receiving food aid can be a barrier to seeking this form of support.
- Engaging with people already accessing community food initiatives, for example through fruit and vegetable co-ops and cookery sessions, provides an opportunity to engage with communities and build an understanding of local causes, needs and impact.
- Case studies are one potential solution to gathering evidence in a non-intrusive way. Specifically, case studies that reflect good practice, i.e. understanding need, effective collaboration, community development approaches, impact and advocacy/campaign efforts, were highlighted as being useful.

Talking points

- **What can research tell us about national and local causes, need and impact of emergency food aid? What gaps in evidence are there and how can we address these gaps to establish an evidence base for community food initiatives tackling food poverty?**
- **How can we create opportunities to capture and value different types of evidence? How can we capture consistent evidence to truly reflect different needs in different communities, effective practice and longer-term impact?**



This case study reflects a model of emergency food aid that builds on current community structures to provide emergency food aid and promote dignity within the local community. By working in partnership with local organisations, food aid is reaching individuals and families through support services already engaging with families working towards social inclusion.

- The establishment of Kirkcaldy Foodbank arose from growing anecdotal evidence of food poverty in the area; increasing demands from Kirkcaldy's only provider of food parcels (the Salvation Army); the local Citizens' Advice Bureau highlighting increasing requests for food aid; food banks further afield receiving requests from Kirkcaldy; and a community workers' forum that raised the need for emergency food aid within the community.
- A number of different models of operation were explored, but ultimately a simple system was adopted that utilises the strength of the volunteers as well as the existing capacity of agencies already engaging with, and supporting, individuals and families in need within the local community. By working with agencies to refer and distribute food aid through satellite points, this increases access and reduces stigma for the recipients of food aid.
- Partnership working has resulted in additional elements of in-kind support such as help in establishing storage from Fife Council; advice and training from Fife Voluntary Action; website support, shelving and technical support; and development support from Fife Community Food Project.
- Challenges have included ensuring that demand does not exceed supply – the number of referral agencies has been developed incrementally where capacity and resources have allowed. Measuring impact has also been identified as a challenge.
- Kirkcaldy Foodbank has been established to provide regular food aid to those in need; however, this is within the context of a wider debate on the future of food banks and what the roles of the voluntary and statutory sector are or should be. Fife Council has been a firm supporter of Kirkcaldy Foodbank, but has been clear in stating that food banks should not be permanent.

Practice development

Community food initiatives have been tackling food poverty for over 20 years, and practice to address issues of access, affordability, skills and culture is customary for many established initiatives. However, communities are increasingly expressing greater, immediate need and, as a result, community food initiatives are facing dynamic and growing demands for emergency food aid.

The urgency of demands for emergency food aid creates challenges for community food initiatives in tackling food poverty:

- Communities are experiencing extreme food poverty for a diverse range of reasons. Staff and volunteers of community food initiatives need to be aware of current issues associated with food poverty, such as welfare rights, human rights and fuel poverty.
- Food poverty and the need for emergency food aid are social justice issues. Approaches that focus on promoting dignity, empowerment and choice for communities are paramount to creating effective change.

- Continuing to expand and develop new approaches for raising the profile of community food initiatives and their activities is crucial to reaching people who are living in extreme food poverty. Recognising and targeting specific communities, for example the 'working poor' population, is essential to reaching the most vulnerable people.

Food can be an element of activities specifically focusing on food and health, or it can be part of a wider programme of activities. For example, Just Play's case study demonstrates how food can be built into current activities.

'Community food initiatives have the right approach. Feed back best practice through CFHS.'

'Support ... those with scope for development and expansion, as well as the passion and drive to look beyond the initial issue encountered to get to the root of the problem.'

Talking points

- **Capacity building: how can we support community food initiatives to have an understanding of welfare issues, ensuring that they have the capacity to provide appropriate advice and direct people to the right services at the right time?**
- **What opportunities are there for continuing to increase the profile of community food initiatives and promoting their services within local communities?**
- **Development funding for organisations delivering, or looking to deliver, community food and health activities can generate long-term impacts. How can we provide development funding which creates sustainable change for people experiencing food poverty?**



The Storehouse/ Bo'Ness Academy

This case study reflects an approach to responding to the need for emergency food aid through a partnership between the Storehouse and Bo'Ness Academy. Through the Storehouse, food aid is being distributed to families experiencing extreme food poverty in Bo'Ness. Partnership working with the Academy is a key source of food donations as well as a means for increasing knowledge and understanding of food poverty locally and community involvement.

The Storehouse

- The Storehouse is an independent organisation offering emergency food aid to individuals and families living in Bo'Ness. It has been operating since 2010 and currently has 14 volunteers. Food aid is delivered by car to individuals and families in need by volunteers, or through use of a church minibus as required.
- The Storehouse currently receives no funding. However, it has support from Falkirk Council through rent-free premises and relief of rates for an industrial unit that is used for storage.
- Identified challenges include meeting demand within the local community and relying on organisations that initially referred people to keep them informed of changing circumstances regarding the need for emergency food aid.

Bo'Ness Academy

- Bo'Ness Academy launched the first phase of its Community Food Project in 2010, with the intention of serving the local community with local, healthy, low-cost, quality food. The project has evolved as the partnership with the Storehouse has grown, working with students on a student-led project and changing relationships with private sector providers.
- In 2012 pupils from Bo'Ness Academy presented to staff and pupils at six feeder primary schools about the Storehouse and the need locally to support families and individuals who are experiencing food poverty. This has resulted in all primary schools becoming committed to the project. As an inclusive community project, this has enhanced community spirit and raised awareness of both the project and local need.
- Identified challenges include the transient nature of the pupils involved in this project and ensuring that the educational, social and community values are maintained while keeping the project student-led. In addition, it has been vital to build in procedures to maintain the confidentiality of the families and individuals receiving support.

Influencing and informing policy

Considering the need to address fundamental causes of food poverty and create long-term sustainable change for communities, a focus on policy was a key issue for participants. Clear policy direction that addresses issues associated with extreme food poverty can provide opportunities for community food initiatives. Owing to the wide-reaching nature of the food issue, it is essential that the demands for emergency food aid are reflected across different policy agendas in order to tackle the underlying causes of food poverty.

The need for more evidence has been highlighted as a key theme within this report already and would also support policy developments. Although there is a need for evidence on the underlying causes, experience of need and impact of emergency food aid, there is also a wealth of experience and expertise to draw on from within the community food sector. Bringing together different types of evidence can only enhance and strengthen our understanding in this area. Continuing to engage with different stakeholders in the field, including practitioners, policy makers, academics and funders, is critical to taking this work forward in addressing the need for emergency food aid.

‘Lack of food is never a standalone problem; it is the result of deeper life issues or complications. If these go unaddressed the individual will continue to need support to eat; creating an unnecessary reliance is a real risk.’

Talking points

- Learning exchanges between practitioners, policy makers, funders and academics enable sharing of experiences and emerging challenges, and create opportunities to develop knowledge as well as influence action.
- Food banks are a crisis response relating to poverty, access and welfare – how do we ensure they do not become a permanent feature of our welfare system?
- There is a need for a better understanding of operations in rural or large geographical areas. Are there some areas that are not well served by some form of emergency food aid response?

Progression

It was widely reflected that the need for food aid is a journey, both for people living in extreme food poverty and for the community food initiatives that are responding. A common thread of discussion was a need to understand different levels of need and the different types of support that can enable people at different stages.

Building on an appreciation that different communities have different experiences of food poverty, a common theme was the need to have conscious start and end points for providing emergency food aid. The phrase 'a hand up, not a hand out' reflects the consensus that food aid should focus on building the capacity and capability of communities to respond to the pressures of food poverty beyond the provision of food parcels. Having clear end points, beyond providing food parcels for people accessing emergency food aid, was recognised as being vital to ensuring support is constructive.

'People need to be able to make a journey along a route from emergency/crisis aid to affordable food. Preventative work and moving people on – empowering and enabling.'

Talking points

- What understanding is there of the range of needs within communities and how can these needs be understood in terms of community food and health activities, i.e. need for cooking facilities, skills development, access, affordability, inclusion?
- What local support is available – is there access to healthy affordable food? Are cookery sessions on offer? What specialist advice services can people be directed or referred to? What community food and health activities will have a long-term, sustainable impact?

Recognising risks

Current challenges and anticipated future change led participants to reflect on risks for community food initiatives. It was clearly echoed that the most critical risk is that while community food initiatives are responding to demands for emergency food aid in local communities their energies, resources and time are being diverted from core activities.

‘The fast increasing growth and complexity of the issues; the difficulty of setting some more attention to preventing food poverty given the growing and urgent pressures to meet it.’

Established community food initiatives are working to tackle fundamental causes of food poverty across Scotland in a range of ways. Through work focusing on access, affordability, culture and skills, community food initiatives are creating sustainable change for communities. However, as they respond to immediate demands for emergency food aid, there is a risk of these core activities being displaced.

‘Need to convert crisis management into long-term transformation and the focus to move from symptom to cause.’

Talking points

- How can we account for social outcomes while ensuring that food/ economic outcomes are addressed?
- Do community food initiatives have the capacity to meet increasing demands for emergency food aid?

Conclusions

Demand for emergency food aid is a growing issue and community food initiatives are responding in creative and constructive ways within communities. Through building on current community food and health activity, and sharing learning, community food initiatives are addressing issues associated with food poverty.

There is a strong consensus across the community food sector that collaboration is key to addressing the underlying causes of food poverty and the resultant demands for emergency food aid. There is a wealth of expertise and experience in Scotland, providing a strong platform to build upon. Momentum has been built and this needs to be maintained to support community food initiatives contributing to a fairer, healthier Scotland. The experience and understanding of established community initiatives already play a key strategic role locally and nationally and deserve ongoing support.

Collaborating within the community food sector and across different sectors that associate with food is vital to effectively influencing and informing policy and practice. The current focus on alleviating

the need for emergency food aid, and anticipated growth in demand going forward, creates a strong risk that community food aid activities are diverted from creating sustainable change for people experiencing food poverty. 'A hand up, not a hand out' resonates with the aspirations of community food initiatives to tackle food poverty within communities.

Creative and constructive community food responses, which are based on a model of food plus, are building capacity within communities and contributing to long-term changes. Learning from these approaches, understanding of the fundamental causes of food poverty, the need for support and the impact of emergency food aid all need to be enhanced in order to effectively support communities to contribute to a fairer, healthier Scotland.



Emergency food aid: a National Learning Exchange

25 February 2014 10.30 am to 4 pm
The Melting Pot, Rose Street, Edinburgh

Programme



10:30	Networking
11:00	Welcome and introductions Pauline Craig, NHS Health Scotland
11:10	Where is the justice? What does it mean to be providing emergency food aid in Scotland? Hannah Lambie-Mumford, University of Sheffield
11:35	Food Aid in Scotland Justine Geyer, Scottish Government
11:50	Case study discussions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is emergency food aid and how are community food initiatives responding to this need within communities?
12:30	Lunch
13:15	What does food aid mean for individuals and families? Fiona McHardy, Poverty Alliance

13:30	Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Considering different approaches to responding to the need for emergency food aid, what are the expected or intended outcomes? What elements of community food and health activities are most effective at promoting empowerment, inclusion and dignity? What evidence do we need to gather to learn from these approaches? How can we ensure the right people are reached by food and health activities aiming to promote social justice?
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14:15	Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can community food initiatives be supported to respond to demands for emergency food aid? How can community food initiatives be supported to promote social justice: dignity, choice and empowerment?
15:00	Break
15:20	Discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What next?: Key messages for policy makers, funders and practitioners going forward
15:50	Closing remarks Pauline Craig, NHS Health Scotland
16:00	Close



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