

# Emergency food aid: a National Learning Exchange



community  
food and health  
(scotland)

## Summary report

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.’**

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 space for people to seek further support and advice. Through the food plus model, community food initiatives are contributing to long-term outcomes for communities.

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

Considering these issues, there is a **critical risk** that, while community food initiatives respond to demands for emergency food aid, 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.’**

Through a complex and challenging **agenda**, participants explored how community food initiatives are responding to demands for emergency food aid and how they can contribute to a fairer, healthier Scotland. Through food plus models, community development and reach, community food initiatives are responding in creative and constructive ways to tackle food poverty in communities.

Cross-cutting themes of **collaboration, evidence, practice development, influencing and informing policy, progression and recognising risk** emerged from discussions.

## Talking points

Talking points have been identified which highlight areas for further discussion or exploration and provide an indication of the current aspirations and concerns of those responding to demands for emergency food aid. A total of 15 talking points are detailed within the **full report** accompanying this summary.

- 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?
- 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.
- 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?
- Development funding for organisations delivering, or looking to deliver, community food and health activities can generate long-term impacts. What opportunities are there to provide development funding which focuses on creating sustainable change for people experiencing food poverty?
- How can we account for social outcomes while ensuring that food/economic outcomes are addressed?

In order to share examples of current practice, **case studies** have been developed by community food initiatives representing creative and constructive ways of responding to extreme food poverty.

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.

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

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, **Kirkcaldy Foodbank** increased access and reduced stigma for recipients.

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 six 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.

Demand for emergency food aid is a growing issue and community food initiatives are responding in creative and constructive ways. 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 on to address current issues.

The current focus on alleviating the need for emergency food aid, and anticipated growth in demand in the future, highlights a clear 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 a fairer, healthier Scotland.