



Dignity in Practice



Learning, tools and guidance
for community food providers



Context

This report has been developed with and for community food providers, including those providing emergency food aid.

It is a practical resource to help projects think about what dignity looks like in practice and how this can be achieved.

This report is based on examples that reflect the hard work of individuals throughout Scotland who have come together, all too often in response to crisis, to support each other. It provides support without judgment to community and voluntary organisations that want to overcome the barriers to placing dignity at the heart of all action. This project and report were co-produced by people with lived experience throughout.

Ending household food insecurity and becoming a Good Food Nation requires all of us to work together. We will need both national action to secure decent incomes and the strategic and coordinated development of community food infrastructure to deliver on health and social inclusion.

Project team

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this report by sharing their thoughts, views and experiences about dignity, and grappling with often challenging questions, during the course of this project.

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Front cover images

Top: Granton Community Gardeners' harvest meal 2017, Edinburgh

Middle: MAXwell Centre, 'Tend and Share' project, Dundee

Bottom: Broth Mix, a project by Open Jar Collective at the Kinning Park Complex, Glasgow, photo: Clementine Sandison

Back cover: Granton Community Gardeners, Edinburgh

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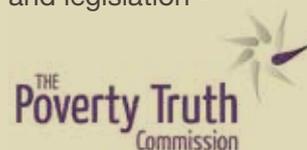
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Project partners

Nourish Scotland is an NGO campaigning on food justice issues in Scotland. We believe tasty and nutritious food should be accessible to everyone, be sustainable and be produced, processed, sold and served in a way that values and respects workers. Our distinctive contribution is that we read across food issues – health, social justice, the environment, and the local food economy. We also link the levels, supporting grassroots community efforts and influencing national policy and legislation – using each to inform the other.



The **Poverty Truth Commission** brings together some of Scotland's key decision makers with those living at the sharp end of poverty. They work together towards overcoming poverty in Scotland, ensuring that those affected by decisions are central to decision-making. The Commission believes poverty will only be truly addressed when those who experience it first-hand are at the heart of the process.



Glossary

→ Community food initiatives

The term ‘community food initiative’ is used in this report to mean any project or activity related to the promotion of growing, harvesting, preparing, sharing, distributing and/or enjoying food in the community. This may include projects delivered by community, voluntary, statutory or private sector organisations or agencies.¹

→ Community food providers

We use the phrase ‘community food providers’ as a broad term for community and voluntary organisations providing a response to food insecurity, from provision of emergency food aid to supporting people to grow and enjoy fresh food in the community.

→ Emergency food providers

The report uses the term ‘emergency food providers’ to refer to projects or organisations that are *primarily* or *only* delivering emergency food aid (e.g. distributing food to ‘clients’ or ‘service users’ without any expectation or opportunity for people to contribute financially or through sharing their skills or experiences). The most common forms of emergency food aid are distributing food parcels through a food bank or providing a free meal at a soup kitchen.

→ Household food insecurity

This project focused on ‘household food insecurity’ and uses the term ‘food insecurity’ interchangeably to mean the full spectrum of experiences from worrying about accessing enough food, making compromises to quality or quantity of food eaten to going without. Household food insecurity is: ‘The inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so’.²

¹ The report refers to community food ‘projects’ rather than ‘services’ because the groups involved and those taking part in these initiatives preferred this language. Participants were particularly conscious to avoid the terms ‘service provider’ and ‘service-user’, which can create barriers between staff, volunteers and those taking part in community initiatives.

² Dowler, E. (2003) ‘Food and Poverty in Britain: Rights and Responsibilities’. in: E Dowler & C Jones Finer (eds) *The Welfare of Food: rights and responsibilities in a changing world*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing. This corresponds with the definition used by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation and the Independent Working Group on Food Poverty.

Introduction

Communities cannot be held responsible for, or bear the disproportionate burden of, food insecurity in Scotland, but, with appropriate support, the community food sector is well placed to respond to current crises and promote and restore dignity at a local level.

People experiencing food insecurity have made it clear that what they face is not only the lack of adequate food, negative impacts on their health or stress about being able to feed their family from one day to the next – food insecurity often comes with feeling shame and disempowerment, experiencing social stigma and being isolated. Community food initiatives can provide emotional and practical support, as well as inclusive spaces for people in the community to access, share and enjoy food, regardless of their circumstances. As such, community food initiatives have an important role to play in protecting and restoring people's sense of dignity.

At the same time, we need to make sure that any support that people are accessing on an emergency basis is embedded within a wider response aimed at enabling good food for all. We need strategic, concerted and properly resourced action across the board to end food insecurity in Scotland and protect and realise everyone's right to food. One part of this is tackling poverty, and another part is shifting the food system – increasing the local availability and affordability of nutritious, culturally appropriate and sustainably produced food. We need to build local food economies that include a thriving community food sector in *every community* – building on the assets, skills and knowledge already there, and supporting inclusive community development.

In 2016, in direct response to the recommendations of the Independent Working Group on Food Poverty, the Scottish Government committed to

promote dignity in the response to food insecurity. Placing a commitment to 'dignity' at the centre of the design and delivery of responses to food insecurity created a welcome opportunity for all those involved to review how to support people on the basis of justice, rather than charity.

This report is designed to support community food providers, including those providing emergency food aid, to consider the practical ways their projects can promote the dignity of those experiencing food insecurity and help to transition away from emergency food aid as the primary response. The guidance is relevant to all those committed to putting dignity at the heart of community food activity.

The case studies, examples and key themes set out in the report are based on experiences from current practice in a range of community food initiatives throughout Scotland. The project team explored dignity in practice with staff, volunteers and/or participants involved in more than thirty community food initiatives, through focus groups, workshops, stakeholder events, individual interviews and in-depth site visits. Organisations included independent food banks, members of the Trussell Trust food bank network and community and voluntary organisations involved in growing, harvesting, selling, preparing and sharing food together. The report aims to build on and support the important work in communities across Scotland to build a dignified food system that works for everyone.

The Dignity Principles

Scottish Ministers appointed an Independent Working Group on Food Poverty³ in 2015, tasked to consider the issues related to food poverty and make recommendations to the Scottish Government on future actions. The Working Group's report, *Dignity: Ending Hunger Together in Scotland*, stated that:

*A truly dignified system would be one where everyone is food secure, with access to adequate, nutritious and culturally appropriate food, without the need of emergency food aid. It is one where the right to food is understood as a matter of justice rather than charity.*⁴

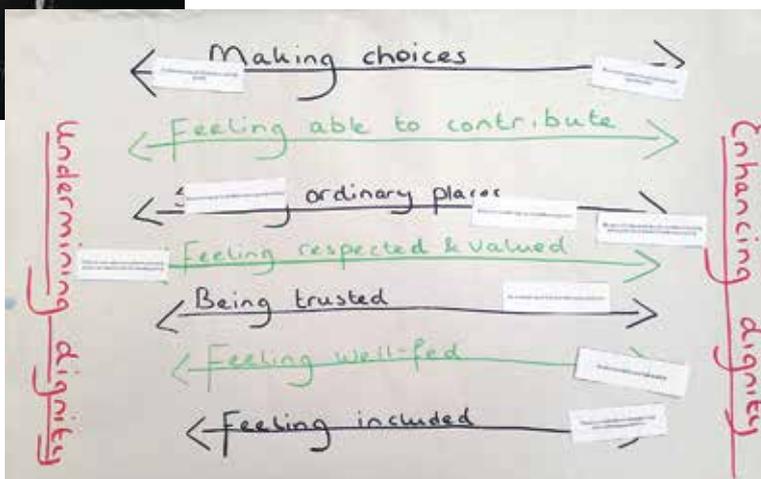
The Working Group identified the following four Dignity Principles to guide the design and implementation of dignified responses to food insecurity:

- 1. Involve in decision making people with direct experience.**
- 2. Recognise the social value of food.**
- 3. Provide opportunities to contribute.**
- 4. Leave people with the power to choose.**

The Scottish Government's Fair Food Transformation Fund (2016-18) that followed on from this work required applicants to demonstrate "how they propose to meet the four principles for a more dignified response to food poverty"⁵ identified in the *Dignity* report. Applications were considered for projects that were already aligned with this approach or would support emergency food providers to "transition existing charity-based models of emergency food provision into services that exemplify the four principles for dignified food provision".



Photos taken at a workshop of the Dignity Project peer support programme.



³ Members included: Big Lottery Fund, Bridging the Gap, Child Poverty Action Group, Church of Scotland, City of Edinburgh Council, Fareshare, Food Commission, Nourish Scotland, Oxfam Scotland, Poverty Truth Commission, STV Appeal, The Poverty Alliance, The Robertson Trust, Trussell Trust.

⁴ Independent Working Group on Food Poverty (2016) *Dignity: Ending Hunger Together in Scotland*, p 13.

⁵ This requirement was based on the recommendation in *Dignity: Ending Hunger Together in Scotland* (2016, p 14): "Any organisation which secures Scottish Government funding and support to work on tackling food poverty must demonstrate how its approach promotes dignity and is helping to transition away from emergency food aid as the primary response."

The Dignity Project – exploring dignity in community food provision

With support from the Fair Food Transformation Fund, Nourish Scotland and the Poverty Truth Commission undertook a year-long project that aimed to a) explore what the Dignity Principles mean in practice for community food provision, and b) support community food providers to reflect on and transition their practice towards a more dignified response to food insecurity.

Between November 2016 and October 2017, the project team worked closely with people with lived experience of food insecurity, staff and volunteers involved in community food initiatives and wider stakeholders to explore what dignity means in practice and develop practical tools and guidance to support community organisations to use the Dignity Principles in their work. From the beginning, the project had a strong commitment to involve people with experience of food insecurity in the process, in line with one of the core messages of the *Dignity* report: “Involving people experiencing food insecurity is where we will find the solution.”⁶

→ ‘What does Dignity mean to you?’

In the early stages of this project, we gathered views of those delivering, volunteering for and taking part in community food initiatives about the question: ‘What does Dignity mean to you?’ People from diverse backgrounds and experiences explained dignity through an experiential, rather than theoretical, perspective.

Responses consistently included feeling:

- + *trusted* as capable to make your own choices and decisions;
- + *seen as an individual*, regardless of past and present circumstances;

- + *listened to*, at both an individual level about your needs and preferences and at a project level about how projects are run;
- + *valued* as a person and a member of the community, with something to contribute.

Through these conversations, it was clear that putting dignity into practice requires thinking carefully about all the decisions that affect how someone feels about a place, situation or way they are treated – dignity is in the detail.

→ Dignity Principles in Practice

The following Dignity Principles in Practice are designed to assist community food providers to reflect on the design and delivery of their work by considering the Dignity Principles from the perspective of someone experiencing food insecurity.

The Dignity Principles in Practice ask staff, volunteers and those taking part in community food initiatives to consider how the project supports people to feel:

- + **a sense of control**
- + **able to take part in community**
- + **nourished and supported**
- + **involved in decision-making**
- + **valued and able to contribute**

⁶ Independent Working Group on Food Poverty (2016) *Dignity: Ending Hunger Together in Scotland*, p 3.

“

“It’s one thing seeing the theory and practice ‘on paper’, it’s more effective learning to see them in practice and gives me hope and strength to see peers already doing what our organisation aspires to.”

Staff participant, Dignity Project peer support programme

”

Methodology

During the first ‘Listening’ phase, the project team spoke with participants at four community-based organisations;⁷ facilitated discussions about dignity in practice with 24 community food providers at the Fair Food Transformation Fund Welcome Event (December 2016) and in workshops held in Edinburgh and Glasgow (February 2017); and hosted a stakeholders event in Glasgow (February 2017) at which 35 representatives from a wide range of organisations contributed to the conversation.

In the second phase, the project team worked closely with 10 community food providers in a peer support programme.⁸ The aim of this programme was to explore more about the detail of what dignity means in practice and to pilot

a process of peer-to-peer learning and reflection. Community food providers who participated in the programme were delivering a wide range of initiatives that supported people experiencing food insecurity to access food, including: community meals, community growing, fruit and veg barras, cookery demonstrations and classes, cooking and baking together, community larders and supplying emergency food parcels. In most cases, community food providers’ response to food insecurity included more than one activity. The peer support programme included a site visit and feedback from members of the project team, participation in reflective workshops aimed at sharing good practice and conducting and hosting peer-to-peer visits.

Report structure

PART ONE of this report is divided into five sections, explaining each Dignity Principle in Practice and providing examples and case studies for staff, volunteers and those taking part in projects to consider when working to promote dignity in community food provision.

PART TWO explores some of the immediate and longer term steps that emergency food providers can take to transition away from charity-based models towards approaches that leave people with a greater sense of dignity.

⁷ Tea in the Pot, Bridging the Gap and the Poverty Truth Commission in Glasgow and Granton Community Gardeners and Café in Edinburgh (33 focus group participants).

⁸ Bridging the Gap, Castlemilk Parish Church, Central and West Integration Network, Midlothian Foodbank, Moray Foodbank, St. Paul’s Youth Forum, Start Up Stirling, The Freedom Café, West Dunbartonshire Community Foodshare and Woodlands Community Café.

Part One

Dignity Principles in Practice



Feeling a sense of control

This principle is about the power people have to make choices about what, where, when, how and with whom they eat. Community food providers should review the ways in which they empower people through choice and work with local partners to ensure people have a variety of options to access food – enabling food experiences that are culturally appropriate and dignified.

What this feels like

“Choice’ is bigger than what food is on offer, it’s about how and when to take part.”

Participant, Dignity Project peer support programme

“Councils should help us grow our own foods at home; they can give us seeds and growing bags instead of food parcels.”

Focus group participant

What this means

Community members explained that it was inherently undignified to have ‘no choice but to go to the food bank’ when in a crisis.

Adults in our society are typically able to make their own choices when it comes to food. When we have money, we can choose from a wide variety of options available at the shops, meet friends for a cup of tea or lunch at a café and socialise with friends and family over a meal without feeling embarrassed about not having enough to share with others. When people are not food insecure, they do not have to eat the same thing night after night if they do not want to. They can take into account taste, nutrition, dietary requirements, cultural traditions, where the food comes from and other considerations that are important to them when choosing what or where to eat.

The *Dignity* report states that *“The most dignified system is one where people do not need to access emergency food aid but have the power and resources to choose what they eat”*.⁹ In the current market-based food system, when people do not have cash at hand, most ordinary avenues to access food are suddenly closed. People experiencing acute poverty have few choices but to rely on charitable food aid, and access to community food initiatives, including provision of food aid, is patchy and insufficient in many areas.

Community food initiatives have an important role to play in restoring people’s sense of control over their own lives when most of that has already been taken away in a time of crisis. As part of a thriving local food economy, community initiatives can offer diverse and dignified options for buying, sharing, preparing and enjoying food.

⁹ Independent Working Group on Food Poverty (2016) *Dignity: Ending Hunger Together in Scotland*, p 14.

How lacking a sense of control can undermine dignity

Community members explained that it was inherently undignified to have ‘no choice but to go to the food bank’ when in a crisis.

Being on the receiving end of emergency food aid removes a person’s sense of control in many ways. Food banks rely heavily on the decisions and choices made by those who donate to them, for example through charity drives at schools, churches and in supermarkets, rather than those of people who will receive and eat the food. The contents of a food parcel are typically restricted to long shelf-life items with limited or no fresh foods.

Many food bank staff and volunteers work hard to adapt standard food parcels if someone has specific dietary requirements or limited cooking facilities. For example, volunteers might exchange a bag of rice for a bag of pasta if someone mentioned this, and many try to accommodate vegetarian and gluten-free requests if possible.

However, the food bank model does not always enable staff and volunteers to take account of and respect people’s food choices. Parcels are often prepared from standardised lists (e.g. ‘Single person’, ‘Small family’), and people receiving food aid do not always feel confident or comfortable to request anything other than what they are given. In addition to these practical challenges, we also heard from some emergency food providers who thought people should be grateful for whatever they were given and were critical of anyone who left or discarded items they did not want.

Many community food initiatives establish relationships with local retailers and producers to source surplus food¹⁰ to use or redistribute through their projects. When these items are within their ‘best before date’ and of high quality, this can be a

useful way for community groups to access food at low or no cost.

The use of surplus food in responses to food insecurity can undermine dignity if people taking part do not feel they have a choice to refuse food that is not of a high quality or in date. Whilst some people may *choose* to purchase and consume food beyond its best before or expiry date, no one should *need* to because of a lack of money or other options.

Some people may feel more comfortable attending a community meal than receiving a food parcel, though the former can still take away a sense of control if:

- ✦ the menu is always decided by staff or volunteers;
- ✦ the cooking team cannot accommodate specific dietary requirements;
- ✦ staff do not allow people to take food away if they don’t want to sit with others;
- ✦ there are no other options for accessing food locally except attending a shared meal.

Most importantly, people should not be made to feel ungrateful if they choose not to accept support offered or to ask for something different. Being given no choice but to accept food that is low quality or does not suit your dietary preferences or needs can affect a person’s physical health and sense of self-worth.

A three-day food parcel provided by a Trussell Trust Foodbank¹¹ typically includes:

Cereal • Soup • Pasta • Rice • Pasta sauce • Beans • Tinned meat • Tinned vegetables • Tea/coffee • Tinned fruit • Biscuits

¹⁰ Surplus food is food that has been rejected for sale for reasons such as mislabelling, over-production, short shelf-life or being the wrong size or shape. Surplus food comes from a range of sources, like supermarkets, wholesalers, producers, manufacturers or restaurants/café.

¹¹ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/emergency-food/food-parcel/>

What community organisations can do

Community organisations are well placed to offer diverse and inclusive opportunities for people to access food when they do not have enough money to buy it through private sector options. Working with partners across the local area will enable community initiatives to respond more strategically to food insecurity by increasing the type and quality of food available to people, as well as the locations and ways they would choose to access food.

→ Increasing the places and spaces where people can choose to access food

Community food providers, including emergency food providers, can work with partner organisations to make food available where people already are or choose to go to. For example, ‘community larders’ – cupboards stocked with pantry staples – can be set up and maintained in supported accommodation for people who are temporarily without a home instead of them having to collect a food parcel at a food bank. Community centres, schools, nurseries, GP surgeries and advice centres can create ‘food-share’ tables, larders or ‘community fridges’ where anyone can help themselves to surplus foods from households, local retailers or community gardens. People taking food can have the option of giving a financial donation when they have the means to.

Community meals are another important way to ensure people experiencing food insecurity have a place they feel comfortable and welcome, where they can also enjoy a nourishing meal. Attending a weekly community meal or daily drop-in café may be how someone chooses to manage an experience of low or no income. As with other models, taking part in a community meal or other community food initiative should be a choice, rather than a necessity.

Community meals are not generally able to offer many menu choices, but they can try to cater for different cultural and dietary requirements, such as vegetarian and vegan options or using halal meat. The most inclusive and thriving community meals involve community members in setting the menus and cooking the food. One community initiative we visited supports a participant each week to purchase the ingredients and oversee the kitchen team in preparing food from their own cultural tradition – when meat is cooked, they always make sure there is a vegetarian option too. At another project, the weekly meal is cooked by community members, and every week those who shared in the meal decide on next week’s menu.

→ Increasing choice of affordable fruit and vegetables

Many community food providers are working hard to make fruit and veg and other basic foods more accessible locally, making sure people have options even within limited budgets. Several projects run ‘barras’ or stalls, selling affordable fresh foods in community centres and other places where people go in the local area. Others have started community shops or collective buying schemes.

Other community food organisations are supporting people to grow their own fruit, veg and herbs either in community growing spaces or in their own homes and gardens. This includes sharing skills and facilitating access to growing space, seeds, tools, pots and compost. Learning to grow food can enable people to feel a greater sense of control over their lives, as well as having access to fresh produce.



CASE STUDY ... a sense of control

Growing your own fruit and vegetables

The MAXwell centre in Dundee started the 'Tend and Share' project in May 2016, inspired by the increased demand for food bank referrals from their centre's staff and volunteers. The need for longer-term responses to food insecurity came from speaking with those receiving food bank referrals and realising that food parcels were only a short-term solution to the problems people were facing. 'Tend and Share' built on the centre's already successful community garden to support people experiencing food insecurity to become more independent in relation to food availability and to promote self-esteem, skills and dignity. People experiencing significant financial hardship and increased risk of food insecurity are invited to the garden to learn how to grow and cook with their own vegetables. There is an emphasis on learning comforting

and nourishing recipes, as well as ways to improve meals created from food bank parcels with the addition of fresh vegetables. Participants also learn food preservation skills such as canning, pickling and creating a 'pantry' in order to decrease food waste. People from diverse backgrounds and experiences leave the project with marketable gardening and cooking skills as well as increased confidence and the ability to grow and prepare their own food.



CASE STUDY ... a sense of control



Cyrenians veg bag delivery, West Lothian, 2017, photo: Rob Davidson

Fresh food vouchers

With support from a Community Health Improvement Grant from West Lothian Community Health Partnership, Cyrenians is piloting a subsidised local fruit and veg scheme in West Lothian. This scheme provides bags of organic produce from their farms as well as other community growing initiatives at a largely discounted rate – £6 for 8 items (instead of £10) – to families on low income. To ensure easy and dignified access, they will be distributed through the Cyrenians recovery hub, other support groups and the local Home-Start, which will promote the bags to families experiencing challenges. Home-Start will offer families the option to choose between a subsidised or full-rate bag, depending on what they can afford and in a process based on trust.

Inspired by the work of the US-based Wholesome Wave Foundation¹² and the Rose Voucher scheme¹³ in London, the bags will also be offered to families beyond West Lothian who are entitled to means-tested Healthy Start vouchers. Since 2006, the UK-wide NHS Healthy Start programme has provided vouchers for milk and fresh and frozen fruit and vegetables to eligible pregnant women and families with children under four. They receive £6.20 a week for each baby aged 0-1 and £3.10 for each child aged 1-4, which they can spend at registered retailers.¹⁴ As many areas currently lack easy access to registered retailers providing good quality and affordable fresh produce, community food initiatives such as Cyrenians can play an important role in starting to fill this gap and make the vouchers go further.

¹² For more information: <https://www.wholesomewave.org/how-we-work/doubling-snap>

¹³ For more information: <http://www.alexandrarose.org.uk/rose-vouchers>

¹⁴ With the recent devolution of the Healthy Start scheme, alongside a number of other social security powers in the Scotland Act 2016, there will be new opportunities to think about and improve the eligibility, accessibility and adequacy of these entitlements.

Feeling able to take part in community life

This principle is about ensuring that people feel able and welcome to take part in different aspects of community life, regardless of their financial situation. Community organisations can work with partners to make nourishing food choices available in existing spaces and services or develop opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to access food at low or no cost.

What this feels like

“You’re not being singled out as people needing charity. Everyone is here side by side – you don’t know why people are here.”

Focus group participant

“Here no one knows you have no money or are hungry, you’re just a person in the community, not a ‘benefit scrounger’.”

Focus group participant

What this means

This principle recognises there is a social value to food, and it is central to how we participate in community life. Not being able to afford enough food for yourself or your family has an effect not only on a person’s physical health but also their sense of social and emotional well-being. Food is at the centre of many social situations – sharing a cup of tea with a friend, celebrating the holidays, family birthday parties – as well as the less noticeable experiences of buying, preparing, sharing, eating (and hopefully enjoying) food every day. Experiencing food insecurity can therefore be socially isolating and undermine people’s ability to take part in community life.

Designing a service with an aim to feed people in need may mean projects focus

on distributing food to as many people as possible without enabling people to spend time with one another, build relationships or share food together. Although food bank volunteers are often welcoming and friendly, the nature of distributing food parcels – designed for emergency situations – means that building longer term relationships is difficult. As one director of a food bank explained, the aim was to ‘get people in and out as quickly as possible’ to reduce the time spent in a stigmatising place.

People who have low or no income should be able to access and enjoy food in the same, ordinary places that people with secure incomes can. Part of realising this is about increasing access to inclusive places where people purchase, share and enjoy

food – whether they are experiencing food insecurity or not. It is also about making sure that people with diverse backgrounds and needs can participate in community food initiatives, such as people with young children, disabled people, and people from different faith and cultural backgrounds.

This principle encourages community organisations to consider all the positive ways that they can integrate accessible, nourishing and high-quality food in the places that people already feel good about going and community activities in which people are already taking part.

How feeling unable to take part community life can undermine dignity

Emergency food providers such as food banks and soup kitchens are often located in places that people do not ordinarily go or feel good about going and have very restricted opening hours. Reliance on charitable provision inadvertently segregates and separates out those experiencing food insecurity from those who do not, placing additional stigma on their situation. For example, a person may need to make their way to an unfamiliar church hall on a mid-week afternoon, passing by a sign stating that this is a ‘food bank’.

Even beyond the food bank walls, the food in standard emergency parcels is rarely the type of food that could be shared between friends. In some cases, providers write across the tins and packets of food with an aim to prevent people selling the food to others. This means that even when someone receives a packet of biscuits or tea that could be shared, they may still be prevented from enjoying this with others if they do not want someone to know they have been to a food bank.

Some emergency food aid is distributed in bags that are clearly charitable food parcels, for example in bright blue plastic bags. Carrying one, or many, of these bags in public can call attention to one’s

circumstances and distinguishes the person from someone who has done their shopping in a local shop or supermarket.

Additionally, there are often practical burdens associated with designing parallel or segregated services for people who cannot afford to take part in community life. For example, if food is distributed in places where people do not normally go, those experiencing financial difficulties may be required to hire a taxi or take an expensive bus journey.

One particularly sensitive issue is whether and how people are asked to prove their eligibility in order to access and take part in a service. Community food providers are often operating with few resources, donated food and support of volunteers only. If ‘feeding people in need’ is the aim of a project, this can make staff and volunteers feel a need to place clear restrictions on how resources are used and food is distributed. Considering how the project affects someone’s sense of dignity, however, asks community food providers to rethink eligibility criteria to understand who is included and who is excluded by assessment processes. Being able to access food with dignity includes feeling able to take part in community life, regardless of financial circumstances.

What community organisations can do

Community and voluntary organisations have a valuable role to play in enabling people to access nourishing and high quality food with dignity through a wide range of services and spaces.

A useful question to ask of any project is whether being or feeling food insecure is the *main* reason most people take part. If the answer is 'yes', it is important to consider how to redesign this project or build effective local partnerships to ensure that people experiencing food insecurity are not isolated from ordinary places and activities. If eligibility criteria are placing additional barriers to taking part in the project, and stigma on those who do, it is important to consider ways to reduce these barriers so that people can access support in more dignified ways.

It is not necessary to create parallel or separate services such as food banks or soup kitchens for people who cannot afford to take part in community life. Instead, community groups are well placed to build effective partnerships with local organisations and businesses to ensure food is accessible in a non-stigmatising way. Nourishing food can be made available throughout the community, in places where people from diverse

backgrounds and experiences already are or choose and are able to go without stigma. This might be:

- + a healthy snack during all after school activities
- + a table of free food items at a busy community centre
- + a holiday lunch club for families with activities for the children
- + a weekly meal at an open and welcoming church, mosque, or other place of worship,
- + a low-cost shop, accessible to and used by everyone
- + a community garden that enables people to grow their own produce or share the produce from collective growing
- + cooking sessions with residents in supported accommodation to prepare a meal with donated or low cost food
- + a 'meals on wheels' service home-delivering nourishing meals to older people or people with limited mobility who may have difficulties reaching food provision, or to people in rural areas when travel distances are a barrier.



CASE STUDIES ... able to take part in community

Community Meals

Granton Community Gardeners in Edinburgh run a weekly 'Gardeners Café' in a local community centre, which takes place after their regular drop-in gardening session in the nearby community growing spaces started by local residents. "The idea was to bring people who need food together with people who like food", one of the initiative-takers from the community explains. The three-course meal is cooked by volunteers, often using produce from the

garden. People can pay as much as they can afford or feel the meal is worth, or they may choose to volunteer in the kitchen or the garden. One of the residents explains: "It's good that it's weekly, so that people can return: that builds community and everything else can grow from that!". In the longer-term they want the Gardeners Café to become a hub that can also link people into other local support services and community activities.



Granton Community Gardeners' harvest meal 2017, Edinburgh

Fruit and Veg Barra

St Paul's Youth Forum is based in northeast Glasgow, an area that can be classified as a 'food desert', with the nearest supermarket more than a mile away and no grocery stores locally. With a small NHS grant, they started a fruit and veg barra in their community centre, providing a choice of high quality fresh food from the wholesaler for cost price, as well as eggs from their own hens. They offer smaller portions of cut-up veg for those living alone and give away produce from the

garden to people to try for free. Since they started to ask people in their community directly what veg and fruit they would particularly like, they have experienced a huge increase in customers – most of them local families. Volunteers run the stall, and people come to socialise and share a cup of tea with others in the community while getting their groceries in the centre. Any leftovers items are used in the project's community meals or sold at a reduced price.

Feeling nourished and supported

This principle is about people being able to enjoy food and access support that meets their needs. Community food providers should consider how the design and delivery of their projects can work to ensure people feel nourished and supported by being there – physically, emotionally and socially.

What this feels like

“Sometimes the smallest thing is the biggest thing, such as being offered a cup of tea when you arrive.”

Volunteer participant, Dignity Project peer support programme

“Dignity is being able to buy your 5 a day for your family.”

Focus group participant

“The café provides a safe, welcoming environment for people to socialise and make connections. The social aspect of the café has become as important as the food we provide.”

Staff participant, Dignity Project peer support programme

What this means

This principle asks community food providers to consider how their projects support people to access food that makes them feel nourished and respected.

Community organisations should explore every opportunity to ensure that the food being sourced and provided through their initiative is high quality, culturally appropriate and socially acceptable.

Community food initiatives provide more than an immediate source of food. They

can and should be designed as spaces of hospitality and support, where people feel welcomed and included. There is a big difference in the ‘look and feel’ of community food initiatives run for and with local community members and services designed ‘to feed people who are hungry’. What matters is that it is a place people feel good about spending their time, rather than having to as a last resort.

MAXwell Centre, ‘Tend and Share’ project, Dundee



How not feeling nourished and supported can undermine dignity

The food bank model is designed to supply basic provisions to people in a crisis, but this can limit the type and quality of food available to people. Processed items have a long shelf life and are easier to store and distribute, but they are often lower in nutrients and higher in fat, sugar and salt than fresh foods. Sourcing, stocking, storing and distributing food through emergency food parcels means that it can be difficult to include fresh produce, dairy and breads if the food bank is only open occasionally throughout the week or there is no consistent access to refrigeration.

When people experiencing food insecurity receive low-quality food, it can feel like a direct reflection of how much they are worth in the eyes of others. The reliance on public donations and surplus food means that staff and volunteers need to keep a close eye on stock management to ensure food does not go out of date. Participants at one project explained that being given food that was near or past the 'best before' date made them feel worthless – expected to eat food that had been deemed undesirable or inappropriate for people able to pay for it.

Community food initiatives are well positioned to provide people facing a crisis

with longer-term support, but this depends on their ability to create an environment and space where people feel comfortable.

Many community food initiatives and food bank distribution sites are located in spaces that are available to them only at certain times of the week. Having to set up each week can make it difficult for staff and volunteers to create a warm and welcoming space. For example, if the hall is only opened for a couple of hours each week, it can be difficult to warm the space up sufficiently to make it comfortable for people. Community meals served with disposable cutlery and plates, because there is no time to wash up real ones, can make people feel that they are disposable too, rather than supported and nourished.

In some cases, people have been made to feel that their access to community food initiatives was dependent on their willingness to attend religious services or practice the faith in other ways. While some people may feel comfortable in a religious setting, the presence of religious symbols or suggestions that they should take part in religious activities can feel uncomfortable or excluding for people of a different or no faith.

What community organisations can do

What it takes for each individual to *feel nourished and supported* will depend on a wide variety of factors, including personal experiences of enjoying food and current circumstances related to health and well-being. However, paying attention to the quality of the food and how the space

looks and feels, alongside working closely with local advice and support initiatives, can make a lot of difference. Involving people who take part in the project in decision-making and/or running the project is key to making sure the project meets people's diverse needs.

→ Using high quality, fresh food

Community organisations have a range of options available for sourcing high quality food to use in their projects. Examples include:

- + raising unrestricted funds, instead of asking for food donations, to purchase fresh produce directly from wholesalers and local producers;
- + registering with FareShare or using other surplus food systems;
- + growing fresh herbs, fruit and vegetables to use in community meals or distribute to community members;
- + partnering with local community growing projects or allotment groups to use surplus herbs, fruit and vegetables or to plan with them to grow the types of food that could be used by the project.

To access high quality and nourishing food, many community food providers are building relationships with local producers and suppliers. This can include working with local farmers in rural areas to access surplus fruit and vegetables to use in a freshly prepared community meal, or redistributing surplus fresh milk and yogurt from a local dairy to after school groups or supported accommodation. Organisations based in urban areas are making connections with community growing spaces and local businesses, such as restaurants and local shops, that have access to fresh produce at cost price through wholesale suppliers.

Logistical challenges in terms of sourcing, storing and using fresh produce can be overcome with sufficient resources and partnership working. For example, some organisations work together to distribute large quantities of surplus food from retailers to smaller projects throughout a local area. A single purchase of a freezer can help lower project costs by reducing food waste and enabling groups to buy and store fresh produce in larger quantities.

→ Creating a welcoming space

Establishing a welcoming space requires attention to detail, like providing fresh fruit, making sure the room is warm, welcoming someone with a smile or setting tables with real cutlery and glasses. Using signage that reflects the diversity of languages and cultures of the community is also an important part of creating an inclusive space. Although many community food initiatives are limited by a lack of resources, it is important to consider the many small things that affect participants' feelings of social and emotional inclusion.

→ Signposting to support services

Spaces designed for people to build relationships and take part in community together provide non-stigmatising and effective opportunities to signpost someone experiencing food insecurity to relevant support services. Many staff and volunteers at community growing projects, for example, described how getting to know someone over a few gardening sessions could create a safe space for that person to share their story. Building trust and relationships provided an opportunity for the staff to offer appropriate support, such as helping the person to apply for a Scottish Welfare Fund crisis grant, arrange a meeting with a debt advice worker or approach a welfare rights support agency.

→ Co-location of advice services

Growing, preparing and sharing food can be a positive and welcoming reason for people to come together, build relationships and chat over a cup of tea. Some people are more comfortable and confident in community settings than approaching formal advice services, so partnerships with community initiatives can be a good way for advice workers to reach people outside of their own offices. This works well when people have the option to discuss their situation in safe and private spaces, out of sight from other community members if they choose, which helps to avoid feeling that others will 'know your business'.

CASE STUDIES ... nourished and supported

Sharing a meal in the community

Woodlands Community Café in Glasgow opened in 2013 in response to the rising levels of food insecurity in the area and a commitment to offer an alternative to food bank provision: “It was time to feed our community the best food possible!”, a staff member explained. Every week, staff and volunteers from the community prepare a three-course vegetarian and vegan meal for on average 65 people on a pay-as-you-feel basis. The food is sourced from deliveries from FareShare, donations from local businesses and

supplemented through purchases financed by participants’ weekly contributions. When possible, the coordinating staff member and kitchen volunteers integrate fresh fruit, vegetables and herbs from Woodlands Community Garden – grown around the corner from the café. They offer music and singing workshops before the meal starts, and participants are encouraged to play the piano throughout the evening. The café has also built up a partnership with their local Citizens Advice Bureau, who attend the café to provide information and advice.

Woodlands Community Café, Glasgow



Mobile community shops

Midlothian Foodbank runs a ‘Toot for Fruit’ van, a NHS-funded mobile fruit and veg shop that sells good quality produce for fair prices at locations throughout the area. Many of the customers are older people, but the van stops at nurseries too, allowing children to choose their own healthy snacks. As a pilot, the project raised money to give vouchers to families on a low income to spend at the van during the school holidays.

The driver of the van knows most of the customers well and takes specific orders. He peels and slices turnips for some of his older customers who struggle doing that themselves – and as he often ends up staying for a cup of tea, he can offer other, practical support too where needed. Midlothian Foodbank is looking to source more produce from community gardens in the area and have plans to start their own growing spaces.



Feeling involved in decision-making

This principle is about people feeling able to share their views and ideas and to have those views be taken seriously in decision-making. Community food providers should consider how their decision-making structures empower those taking part to shape the design, activities and direction of the project.

What this feels like

“We want to feel like change can happen and to be included in making the change happen.”

Focus group participant

“People who come need to be at the heart of the project, shaping it. Everyone has their part to play.”

Participant, Dignity Project peer support programme

What this means

The Dignity Report stated: “People who have faced food insecurity should be involved in the shaping and delivering of food security”. When trying to develop dignified responses to food insecurity, people who have lived experience are the experts and should be at the forefront of designing and delivering food initiatives.

Community food provision ranges from services for people who need additional support to access food – such as Meals on Wheels services – to projects run fully by and for local community members such as community cafés. Involving people with lived experience of food insecurity in decision-making can thus mean different things in different contexts. It can mean enabling people to speak up when they feel they have not been treated with dignity and offering non-judgmental support when a concern has been raised. It can also mean supporting people to be fully involved in

shaping and running the project. The weight of the decisions can range from what goes on the weekly menu of the community meal to how the project is run and developed.

Not everyone involved in a project will want to be included in every aspect of decision-making, but, in collaboration with the community, a range of opportunities should be created to facilitate different degrees of involvement. Efforts should also be made to encourage and enable those involved to make use of these opportunities, accommodating diverse needs and abilities – for example by addressing language or other barriers that keep people from having a voice.

This principle is as much about the (tangible) structures of governance and communication within a project as it is about the (less tangible) organisational culture and quality of relationships.

How not feeling involved in decision-making can undermine dignity

There is a big difference between projects taking a charity-or service-based approach, where staff and volunteers provide a service *to* someone experiencing food insecurity, and those taking a community development approach, working *with* people to support them to access food with dignity.

Projects in which all decisions are made without people's involvement leave people in disempowered positions. Sometimes there is a sense among staff and/or volunteers that the people coming in should be grateful for whatever support they receive or that they are in too much of a crisis situation to be able to share their views or be involved. As such, a charity-based

approach can reinforce an imbalance of power and status between those providing the food and those receiving it.

Community food providers can undermine people's dignity when, for example:

- + staff and/or the board make all the decisions that matter;
- + there are no opportunities for people to raise concerns and feedback or the opportunities that exist are unused;
- + concerns or ideas are raised, but they are not listened to or taken seriously;
- + only the most eloquent or confident people are asked to join the board or steering group.

Woodlands Community Café, Glasgow, photo: Nourish Scotland 2017



What community organisations can do

Building a culture of participation and trusting relationships between everyone involved (staff, volunteers and/or participants) is key for this principle to work in practice. Ongoing informal dialogue ensures that the threshold for raising concerns is low, feedback loops are short, and ideas can be shared and developed swiftly. For example, when a project is largely run by community members in

volunteering roles, they have an immediate say in how the project is delivered – as opposed to projects run solely by paid staff.

Organisations can also create more structured platforms to talk about how the project can be improved to promote and restore dignity, such as (semiformal) steering groups and focus groups, depending on what works best for the people involved in the project.

CASE STUDIES ... involved in decision making



Bridging the Gap, Glasgow, participant feedback session, photo: Nourish Scotland 2017

Board membership and steering groups

The Board of Trustees at **St. Paul's Youth Forum** in Glasgow is made up mostly of young people taking part in the project. They also have a youth committee for those under 16, and the board and the committee make key decisions together, including future plans, staff wages and appraisals. Beyond these formal mechanisms, St Paul's has developed a culture in which the young people involved feel free to give direct feedback on an ongoing basis. They are also encouraged and supported to pitch their own ideas, apply for funding and make projects happen from start to finish.

A development worker at **Central and West Integration Network** in Glasgow facilitates a monthly Steering Group meeting with participants at their weekly community meal. Steering Group members are asked to share their thoughts and feedback on any aspect of the project, and significant changes were made when the staff heard directly from participants about the range and quality of the food available, including the request for food reflecting different cultural traditions, and other practical aspects of delivering the project.

Moray Foodbank in Elgin works closely with partner organisations to establish and maintain community larders and redistribute food in locations throughout the area. Since this was a new approach for making food available to people without requiring a referral to a food bank, the development worker wanted to establish a steering group to advise and offer feedback on the design and delivery of the project. Due to the context of the work – which is delivered in multiple sites to different groups of people – the development worker has adapted the traditional 'steering group' model by engaging informally and more frequently with those involved by joining in with activities and meetings on-site. This informal approach has enabled people to share their views when and where they are comfortable, while the development worker ensures their feedback informs practical decisions and actions by the staff and volunteers.

Feeling valued and able to contribute

This principle is about feeling recognised and valued as a whole person with knowledge, skills and experiences to share. Community food providers should consider the multiple and varied ways that people with diverse experiences and backgrounds can share their time, resources or skills.

What this feels like

“Money is not a barrier to me having a meal here as I volunteer in the gardens, this takes away the shame of taking a free meal.”

Focus group participant

“I can get a lot of things for free in Glasgow, but do I get a wee bit of dignity back by being able to contribute towards the end? Better to give 20p than nothing.”

Participant, Dignity Project peer support programme

What this means

This principle is about recognising the multiple ways that people can take part and contribute to a project rather than simply receiving emergency food aid. As the *Dignity* report notes, part of the stigma for people who need to access emergency food provision is being seen as a ‘scrounger’ or a ‘skiver’. Many people feel uncomfortable for receiving something without being able to give something back. Having meaningful ways to contribute – whether financially or through sharing skills or time – can make people feel a greater sense of value, self-worth and belonging.

When people are experiencing financial hardship, the focus is often placed on their problems and deficits, instead of what they have to share. Initiatives designed to recognise and value the contribution that each individual can make require that staff and volunteers have the time to get to know participants and see them as more than ‘recipients of a service’.

In projects that are largely community-led, the boundaries between staff, board, volunteers and participants are more fluid, and people often play several roles at the same time. Offering time by volunteering at a project can be one form of giving back. Volunteering can create a sense of community, learning opportunities and the opportunity to share food. This principle also relates to financial contribution, making sure that when people can pay something for their food, they have the dignity of doing so.

At the same time, there should not be an *expectation* that everyone taking part in a service will be in a position to contribute each time they attend. Services should be designed with the acknowledgement that at certain times, people may have more or less time and resources to share, depending on their circumstances.

How not being seen as someone with something to contribute can undermine dignity

Some community food initiatives are focused on providing people with food in a crisis and have very distinct boundaries between staff and/or volunteers on the one hand and 'clients' or 'service users' on the other hand. Those coming to the project are viewed and spoken about as 'people in crisis', with little to offer in return.

Community food providers can undermine people's dignity if, for example:

- + the project is run solely by staff and/or volunteers who are recruited externally;
- + there are no opportunities for community members coming to or benefiting from the project to volunteer or contribute;
- + financial contributions are required, or donations cannot be made anonymously.



MAXwell Centre, 'Tend and Share' project, Dundee

What community organisations can do

→ Creating a culture of participation and contribution

Community food initiatives can be great spaces for people to try new things and share knowledge and skills, including cooking and growing skills. Volunteering can support people to find more fulfilling employment too. Having dedicated staff or volunteer roles focussing on volunteer coordination and support makes a big difference to the level of community involvement. It takes time to get to know everyone taking part in the project and to develop meaningful and supported opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds and experiences to take part. Encouragement and support is often required for someone to feel confident and able to volunteer, and for them to get most out of the volunteering opportunities.

→ Financial contribution

Projects may offer an option for participants to contribute through a donation box by the exit from a community café, a sliding scale of payment at a food co-operative or a way to pay at a time and in a way the person chooses (e.g. at the end of the month or when they are feeling more financially secure). Establishing ways for participants to contribute financially should be done sensitively and in consultation with those taking part. For example, even seeing the donation box or sign on a table asking you to 'pay as you feel' can make people who do not have money at that moment feel that they do not deserve to be there.

CASE STUDIES ... valued and able to contribute

Building a culture of contribution

Woodlands Community Garden and Café secured funding for a community food development worker who focuses on involving, supporting and retaining volunteers. Each person who wishes to volunteer has an optional one-to-one induction with the development worker to understand what they want out of their involvement and what support they might need. The project now has more than 100 volunteers on their list and on average

15 to 20 people help at the community meal every week. Some help with the cooking, others set the tables and clear up while yet others make music during the meal. Each week, volunteers are supported by the development worker and a community food worker, who plans the menu and supervises the kitchen volunteer team. During the week, community members can help out in the community garden that supplies some of the food for the meal.



Woodlands Community Café kitchen volunteers, Glasgow

Sharing ownership of the project

Bridging the Gap's weekly BIG Thursday drop-in session centres around a shared meal for approximately 60 people each week, prepared by a volunteer from the community. With the help of a volunteer kitchen team that rotates every 6 weeks, the person taking on the role of 'Head Chef' that week determines the menu and takes the lead in the kitchen. Staff and volunteers from other initiatives are often surprised with the level of responsibility afforded to volunteers at Bridging the Gap. The project has built confidence in individuals, creates

opportunities for people from different cultures to share their favourite dishes with the community and supports a culture of contribution. The Big Thursday drop-in also offers other volunteer roles to community members, including setting up the hall, welcoming people when they arrive, running children's activities and translating for people where needed. Project staff members are present, and can step in and support where needed, but with volunteers largely responsible for the session, they are able to focus on building relationships.

Part Two

Transitioning from a food bank



Transitioning from emergency food provision

“

“I feel embarrassment when I need to go to a food bank. You are the main provider in your family but you have to ask for help. You feel worthless for your children. Inside and up here it really gets to you! My confidence has gone down, my health is affected, I leave greeting.”

Focus group participant

“When you have to go to a food bank, your pride is out of the door. I’d rather smash a window and fend for myself than get a hand-out.”

Focus group participant

”

Context

The Scottish Government’s Fair Food Transformation Fund,¹⁵ launched in 2016, supported projects that would “transition existing charity-based models of emergency food provision into services that exemplify the four principles for dignified food provision”.¹⁶ This funding commitment was a practical step to promote the central message of the *Dignity* report:

*The most dignified system is one where people do not need to access emergency food aid but have the power and resources to choose what they eat.*¹⁷

The Fair Food Transformation Fund represented a step change in the government’s approach to food insecurity, encouraging community organisations to develop and improve ways for people to access food with dignity at a community level. It demonstrated a commitment to a future for Scotland that does not require food banks.

At the same time, this approach presented a challenge to those focused primarily on providing emergency food aid. Many organisations we spoke to felt they were providing an essential safety net and could not transition or work towards the four dignity principles until the wider context of food insecurity was addressed. These organisations believed this was due to:

1. high levels of food insecurity in their area
2. continuous (and sometimes overwhelming) reliance on their service from referral partners, including voluntary organisations *and* statutory agencies;
3. limited or no other options for people experiencing food insecurity to access food with dignity.

¹⁵ “The Fair Food Transformation Fund has been designed in conjunction with the Independent Short-Life Working Group on Food Poverty which was commissioned by Scottish Ministers to identify the issues which push people into food poverty and make recommendations on how they can be addressed.” Application form for the Scottish Government’s Fair Food Transformation Fund (2016).

¹⁶ Application form for the Scottish Government’s Fair Food Transformation Fund (2016).

¹⁷ Independent Working Group on Food Poverty (2016) *Dignity: Ending Hunger Together in Scotland*, p 14.



Photo: Nourish Scotland 2017

Emergency food providers cannot address this situation on their own, nor should they be expected to. Everyone involved in the prevention of and response to food insecurity must work together to identify the opportunities for embedding dignity in all levels, so that people are no longer faced with the limited options of receiving emergency food aid or simply going without.

In the short-term, however, we cannot ignore the fact that people in Scotland are experiencing household food insecurity. For example, refugees and migrants awaiting a decision on their citizenship status receive insufficient or no support from the Scottish Welfare Fund and are not allowed to work. Some form of emergency food provision may be needed for people in crisis, but the focus should remain on building a system in which people 'have the power and resources to choose what they eat'.

Despite the challenging context, every community food provider, including emergency food providers, can take immediate and longer term steps to (re) design and deliver their work with dignity at the centre of decision-making. Already, many emergency food providers describe a clear commitment to 'doing dignified work' and are working hard to integrate the Dignity Principles into their activities and plans.

It is possible to learn from diverse models of community food provision and develop approaches to food insecurity that promote and restore dignity in every community, building a resilient community food infrastructure that works to enable good food for everybody.

Community food providers have an important role to play in the transition from a system of charitable food aid to one based on social solidarity and food justice.

Practical steps to transitioning from a food bank

This part of the report is about the practical steps food banks can take as they transition from distributing emergency food aid as a primary or only response toward a project designed and delivered to promote and restore someone's dignity.

Working differently within your project

→ Increasing a sense of control

There are simple, practical steps that every food bank can take to increase people's power to choose the food they receive and change people's experience of the service. Instead of packing food into standard parcels, people can select the food they want and need by:

- + packing their own bags in the stockroom,
- + choosing from options displayed on a table,
- + using a 'shopping list' to choose items that a volunteer collects from the stockroom.

This also makes sure that people can choose food that fits their dietary requirements, living situations and cooking facilities available to them.

Changing how people choose the food they take home may require retraining staff and volunteers who are used to packing standard parcels, as well as rethinking the ways in which food is collected. For example, many food banks feel unable to allow people to choose the contents of their parcels because the food items they receive through charitable drives and donations from local retailers are limited in range and quantity. However, many food banks already raise financial donations to buy stock when they need it, request particular items to fill the standard three-day parcels and/or make specific appeals (for example, bags of pasta) when their stocks are running low. Enabling people to choose their own food may require adjusting those strategies, but this is a necessary step in promoting people's dignity.

→ Reducing the barriers to support

Most food banks limit the number of parcels a person is able to access (e.g. three parcels in a six-month period) and require people to prove that they are in an emergency situation for each referral. In practice, food bank staff and volunteers can and do make exceptions to these limitations, but it is not always clear when or how this happens. Individuals may be required to share even more information to prove they are in 'genuine need' and 'deserving of support'. This is likely to put them under additional stress and pressure, and often without clear guidance on how to challenge a refusal. Support and advice workers in the community may not be aware that they have discretion and may not have received training on how to support someone in these circumstances.

Reducing the practical and emotional barriers people face in requesting a food parcel referral can offer considerable relief to someone in crisis. Some food banks are open to self-referral, which may make it easier for some people to access food with dignity in a crisis. By not setting a limit on the number of food parcels a person can receive, staff and volunteers can be more responsive to the needs and circumstances of each person. In these cases, however, volunteers and staff still retain the authority and discretion to determine whether someone can access food at the food bank, or not. For this reason, accessing food from a food bank will always present challenges to a person's sense of control and self-worth.

Working differently with partners in the community

People with experience of receiving a food parcel have offered many suggestions for making food available to people beyond a food bank model.

→ Making emergency food available in community spaces

Community food providers can make emergency food available where people live or where they choose and are able to go without stigma, rather than distributing food parcels through a food bank in a time and place not of their choosing. Making food available at a wide range of locations throughout the community enables someone experiencing food insecurity to access food and support before or during a crisis with more dignity.

Emergency food can be made available at locations such as:

- + housing association or supported accommodation
- + health centres
- + advice centres, such as Citizen's Advice Bureau or Money Matters
- + schools and nurseries
- + churches, mosques and other places of worship

People could access emergency food by contacting local staff in advance to let them know the food they need and prefer, or approaching services at a publicised time and location.

Advantages of distributing food parcels at the site of an agency that is currently referring people to a food bank include that the person:

- + will not need to make an additional trip to a food bank;

- + will be less likely to experience stigma by being seen to access emergency support;
- + is more likely to know and have a relationship with the staff or volunteer member through which they have sought support.

In some instances, referral agencies are willing to make a home delivery because the person lives nearby and has established a relationship with the staff or volunteers.¹⁸

→ Developing 'community larders' or 'community fridges'

Community larders are cupboards located in easily accessible places, where people experiencing an income crisis feel comfortable going to find essential food staples without cost. They contain basic food items, like pasta, sauce, rice, tins of beans or fish, and they can be maintained easily by staff and volunteers at a wide range of services and projects throughout the community. They should be in places that can be accessed during the week and out of hours by people with and without money, such as housing associations and community centres. Community larders enable people facing food insecurity to access basic food items without the stigma and limitations of receiving a food parcel chosen and packed by someone else.

Community fridges¹⁹ are ways for communities to share and make food available to people without cost. They can take different forms, for example:

- + designated fridge spaces in a local grocer or convenience store, stocked and maintained by the shop owner with funding from the community;

¹⁸ On the other hand, this may restrict access to fresh produce and dairy products due to the additional time it takes to bring the parcel to the referral partner and then to the person they are supporting.

¹⁹ For more information: <https://www.hubhub.org.uk/Event/community-fridge-network>



Culture Kitchen, a project by The Hidden Gardens, photo: Arpita Shah.

- + central points for community gardeners and growers to drop off, share and exchange locally grown produce with others in the community.

For community fridges to support people to access food with dignity, it is important that there is no stigma or additional barriers placed on people experiencing food insecurity using them. This means they should be located in ordinary spaces, there should be no eligibility criteria and everyone in the community should be welcomed to take and share food without judgment or assumptions about their circumstances.

→ Supporting others projects to use food in their work

Many food banks have developed complex systems for sourcing, storing and distributing emergency food, including the use of warehouses, refrigeration and transport. Rather than handing out food parcels themselves, they can re-purpose this infrastructure to support projects working directly with and alongside people who are experiencing food insecurity.

Partnering with community-based initiatives that work alongside individuals facing food

insecurity will enable people to access high quality food when and where they are comfortable and help support those (like school children and families) who may be outside the reach of a food bank model.

There is an important role for a food distributor in communities to establish relationships with food producers, suppliers and retailers on the one hand and key staff and volunteers in community and youth development projects on the other. By providing a link between these groups, distributors can enable community initiatives to incorporate nutritious food in their activities and reduce food waste by collecting 'surplus food' from retailers or glut produce from community growing spaces. With more financial resources, distributors can also buy good-quality produce from local producers at a fair price and provide this for little or no cost to community food initiatives.

Dedicated staff, who are capable of building relationships with a range of stakeholders, are essential to the success of an integrated model of food (re-)distribution. These roles should be well-resourced to enable and support relationship building.

Working differently with volunteers

Most food banks rely heavily on volunteer support to operate, so transitioning to a new approach will involve retraining and working differently with those who donate their time.

Within a food bank setting, taking small steps towards integrating the Dignity Principles may require retraining frontline volunteers to approach 'clients' or 'service users' differently. For example, acknowledging the embarrassment and stigma associated with having to explain your personal circumstances in order to prove eligibility for a food parcel will mean reviewing the intake process and rationale for interviewing and collecting personal information when someone arrives. Creating a greater sense of control may mean retraining volunteers to relinquish control over what items are packed in food parcels and to support people to choose the food they would like instead.

Transitioning from distributing emergency food parcels to becoming a centre or hub for sourcing and distributing food to other community initiatives will likely build on existing volunteer skills and resources but may require some retraining or recruiting different volunteers. Food bank volunteers typically collect, transport, sort, shelve, rotate, pack and distribute food donations in standard parcels to people in crisis.

These tasks are generally separated from the places and times that people receive a food parcel, for example in a separate stockroom and on the day before 'clients' arrive. Redistributing food from local suppliers, producers and retailers to existing community initiatives requires getting to know and adapting to the needs of individual groups. For example, volunteers may transition from packing long shelf-life items into standard packs (e.g. 'individual', 'couple', 'large family') to receiving fresh food items making informed decisions about which community groups could integrate this into their on-going work.

Transitioning away from emergency food aid towards delivering a community food initiative based on the Dignity Principles is likely to require significant changes in volunteer recruitment, training and coordination. It may be that some volunteers who are committed to 'feeding people in need' will be less comfortable or less interested in volunteering for projects designed to work with and support people experiencing food insecurity. As community providers across Scotland have demonstrated, however, there are many people who are interested and willing to take part in projects that promote access to food with dignity. It is important to recognise that community food initiatives need skilled staff and appropriate resources to make this transition and sustain this new way of working.



MAXwell Centre, volunteers 'Tend and Share' project, Dundee

CASE STUDY

Transitioning from emergency food provision



Community larder in supported accommodation, Elgin

Developing community larders

Moray Foodbank has run a food bank since 2013 but began a new project in 2017 to establish community larders. The staff recognised that a high number of referrals for food parcels were being made from temporary supported accommodation facilities in the area. Working closely and directly with the workers in these facilities, the food bank began developing and adapting models for maintaining a supply of food on site. They created 'community larders', stocked with basic, dried foods supplied by the food bank, to which the residents have access in consultation with the on-site member of staff. In addition to the larders, some of the sites have also developed relationships with local suppliers and regularly collect 'surplus foods' including bread, fruit and eggs. These items are made available for residents to help themselves, and donated fresh milk is distributed between the shared kitchens in the house. The community larders have also now been rolled out to other third sector organisations and community groups such as the local college. Through targeted work, additional community groups have also been identified for future development.

The result has been that sites and agencies that were previously referring the highest numbers of people for food

parcels have made almost no referrals since the community larders have been in place. Instead, people experiencing food insecurity or facing a crisis are able to access food on site and choose what they would like or would use.

Some staff members in the supported accommodation units were cautious at the start of the programme because they were concerned that they would not be able to manage the stock levels, leading to waste. Council members were sceptical that the larders would encourage 'free-loading' and food reliance.

The opposite seems to have happened. Being able to select the food they want, rather than receiving a prepared parcel, has reduced the amount of food that was previously unused or left behind. Staff have also observed that people now take only what they need when food deliveries arrive, rather than stocking up, because they feel more food secure knowing that they would have access to the larder whenever they are in need. Staff can manage the stock based on what gets used, and they keep a close line of communication with the food bank to manage supplies, reducing waste as much as possible.

Becoming a hub for sourcing and distributing food to community initiatives

The development worker at Moray Foodbank has built relationships with local food suppliers, such as Graham's dairy and organic market garden Roseisle Gardens, to access high quality fresh food to distribute to community initiatives. Alongside this, they have developed strong and positive relationships with staff and volunteers at a wide variety of community-based initiatives, who work closely with people experiencing food insecurity. These include lunch clubs for older people, mental health support groups, cooking activities and school programmes. Over the holidays, funding was secured to set up holiday clubs at several schools that provide breakfast and lunch, as well as a range of activities organised by youth workers. These are run in partnership with a local youth organisation and local authority youth workers.

One of these initiatives is The Bridge Club at Elgin Academy, an open-access support

hub for students run by youth workers. Cooking, learning and sharing meals at The Bridge has brought students together in a new, positive and engaging way, lowering the threshold for students to drop in and take part. Many of the students they reach are those who hover just above the threshold of being eligible for free school meals and other support, but may still be growing up in households experiencing food insecurity. Staff report to have observed improvements in attendance, with fewer children reporting sick because of lack of food. The staff are also able to identify and support individual students who may not have sufficient food at home by encouraging them to take food such as yogurt and fruit away with them at the end of the day or for the weekend. In the future, staff consider themselves well placed to work directly with families and make sure they can be supported with food when needed.



Tools for community food providers

As part of the Dignity Project, we co-produced a range of activities and tools to support staff, volunteers and those taking part in community food initiatives to:

- + consider how the design and delivery of their project makes people experiencing food insecurity feel;
- + reflect on what more could be done to promote and restore dignity in practice.

You can find these resources online at www.nourishscotland.org/the-dignity-project/, including:

- + **Reflective questions** to inform a strong review of the project's practices and to identify steps that could be taken to respond to any concerns that arise.
- + **'Observing Dignity in Practice'**, an exercise to observe and reflect on what takes place in a project on a normal, busy day and understand more about the many small and large decisions that affect people's sense of dignity.
- + **'Our Commitment to Dignity'**, an exercise to develop a collective statement on dignity with staff, volunteers and those taking part in the project.
- + **'Dignity in Practice'**, a group activity to gain a better understanding of the Dignity Principles in Practice through applying them to real-life scenarios.

We will be adding more resources as we continue to work with people with lived experience, community food providers and others in the time ahead. We hope you will find them useful, do contact us with any suggestions and feedback – we would love to hear from you.

Dignity Principles in Practice

Community food initiatives can put dignity at the heart of their project by supporting everyone taking part to feel:

+ A sense of control

Having power to make choices about what, where, when, how and with whom you eat.

+ Able to take part in community life

Feeling able and welcome to take part in different aspects of community life, regardless of your financial situation.

+ Nourished and supported

Being able to enjoy food and access support that meets your needs.

+ Involved in decision-making

Feeling able to share your views and ideas and to have those views taken seriously in decision-making.

+ Valued and able to contribute

Feeling recognised and valued as a whole person with knowledge, skills and experiences to share.



Get in touch

We welcome your thoughts and feedback on this work!



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Visit www.nourishscotland.org/the-dignity-project/ for more practical resources and examples.