

Nourish Scotland and  
The Poverty Truth Commission  
January 2018



# Dignity in Practice



Learning, tools and guidance  
for community food providers



# Context

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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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Olga Bloemen, Elli Kontoravdis and Chelsea Marshall from Nourish Scotland and Caroline Mockford and Cath Wallace from the Poverty Truth Commission.

# Acknowledgements

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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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## 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

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## → 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.

## → 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’.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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

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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, 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 (instead of, for example, 'feeding people in need') created a welcome opportunity for all those involved in the response to reflect on supporting people beyond charitable provision.

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 Poverty<sup>2</sup> 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.*<sup>3</sup>

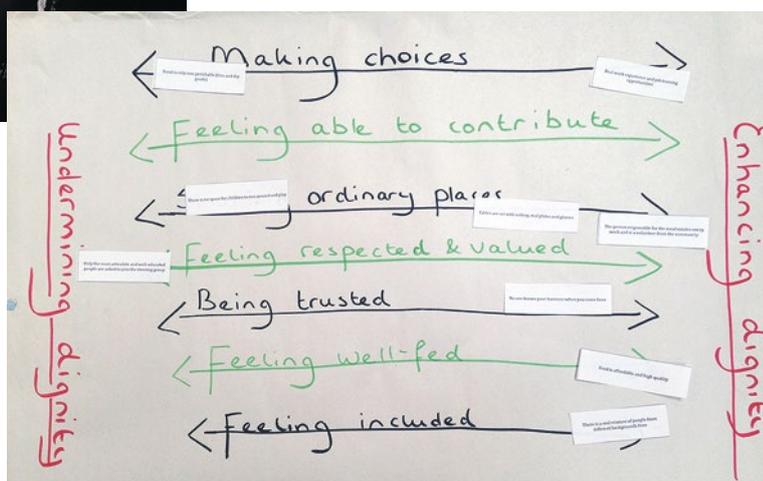
The Working Group identified the following four Dignity Principles to guide the design and implementation of dignified responses to food insecurity:

- 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"<sup>4</sup> 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.



<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Independent Working Group on Food Poverty (2016) *Dignity: Ending Hunger Together in Scotland*, p 13.

<sup>4</sup> 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.”<sup>5</sup>

## → ‘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. These Dignity Principles in Practice complement the Dignity Principles identified by the Independent Working Group on Food Poverty in 2016 and were developed with the support of a wide range of stakeholders engaged in community food provision, including people with experience of 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**

<sup>5</sup> Independent Working Group on Food Poverty (2016) *Dignity: Ending Hunger Together in Scotland*, p 3.

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*“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

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## Methodology

During the first ‘Listening’ phase, the project team spoke with participants at four community-based organisations;<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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).

<sup>7</sup> 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 Cafe, West Dunbartonshire Community Foodshare and Woodlands Community Cafe.

# Tools for community food providers

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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/](http://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

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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/](http://www.nourishscotland.org/the-dignity-project/) for more practical resources and examples.