

Understanding the Dignity Principles in practice – Summary of Findings

In 2015, Scottish Ministers established an Independent Working Group on Food Poverty, tasked to consider the issues related to food poverty and make recommendations on future actions. The Group's report, ***Dignity: Ending Hunger Together in Scotland*** (2016), identified the following four **Dignity Principles** that Ministers agreed should guide the design and implementation of more dignified responses to food insecurity:

1. Involve in decision-making people with direct experience of food insecurity.
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 came out of the Independent Working Group's recommendations, seeking to support responses to food insecurity that align with the Dignity Principles. Working towards this sits within the Scottish Government's vision of becoming a Good Food Nation.

Dignity Principles in Practice

With support from the Fair Food Transformation Fund, Nourish Scotland and the Poverty Truth Commission worked together 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 responses to food insecurity that promote and restore dignity.

The project team worked closely with staff, volunteers and those taking part in community food initiatives throughout Scotland to understand what dignity looks like in practice. It was clear from this work that understanding the Dignity Principles from the perspective of someone experiencing food insecurity changed the way decisions would be made. This 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.

The following **Dignity Principles in Practice** provide a way for community food providers to reflect on the design and delivery of their work. Staff, volunteers and those taking part in initiatives are asked to consider how their work 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

The information and case studies below are examples of how community food providers are already bringing the Dignity Principles into practice.

Further resources are available on [Nourish Scotland's website](#) for community food providers to use with staff, volunteers and those taking part in their work to reflect on dignity in practice. Activities available online include:

- Observing Dignity in Practice
- Dignity in Practice Scenarios
- Reflective Questions
- 'Our Commitment to Dignity'

DIGNITY PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE: NOTES FOR PROJECTS

1. Involve in decision-making people with direct experience

How does our work make people feel involved in decision-making?

Listening to the views and experiences of people with lived experience of food insecurity is an important part of shaping services that deliver effective and dignified support. People should feel able to share their views and to have those views taken seriously in decision-making. Community organisations should consider how their decision-making structures empower those taking part to shape the design, activities and direction of the project. Not everyone involved in a project will want to be included in every aspect of decision-making, but 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 sharing their views.

What community organisations can do:

- Create structured platforms for inclusive decision-making
 - Steering groups, regular focus groups, inclusive board membership
- Build a culture of participation for staff, volunteers and participants
 - On-going informal discussions and clear feedback about how decisions are taken forward, ensure that people will feel more comfortable making suggestions and that ideas can be shared and developed swiftly.

Case Studies:

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. (*Dignity in Practice*, p 21)

2. Recognise the social value of food

How does our work make people feel able to take part in the community?

How does our work make people feel nourished and supported?

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 food every day. Experiencing food insecurity can therefore be socially isolating and undermine people’s ability to take part in community life.

Community organisations can make nourishing food available in places people already go or develop ways for people from diverse backgrounds to access food at low or no cost. Food sourced and provided through community food initiatives should be high quality, culturally appropriate and socially acceptable. It is important to consider how the *design and delivery* of projects can help people feel nourished and supported by being there - physically, emotionally and socially.

What community organisations can do:

- Create welcoming spaces for people to share food in the community
 - Community meals, cooking and baking clubs, places to share a cup of tea
- Encourage existing groups and projects to bring food into their work
 - After school programmes, food share tables, community growing
- Use high quality, fresh food
 - Raise unrestricted funds, partner with local retailers/restaurants/community growers, register for FareShare, local buying clubs, grow your own
- Connect with specialist advice services
 - Active referrals, sign-posting, co-location of advice services

Working towards the Dignity Principles:

Evidence shows that people experiencing food insecurity can find it undignified to have to access emergency food. To help address this, projects can make emergency support more discreet.

- Make emergency food available in places people already feel comfortable
 - Food parcels available at referral sites, food share tables, community larders or fridges with more open access

Case studies:

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. (*Dignity in Practice*, p 14)

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. (*Dignity in Practice*, p 18)

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. (*Dignity in Practice*, p 14)

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. (*Dignity in Practice*, p 18)

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. (*Dignity in Practice*, p 33)

3. Provide opportunities to contribute

How does our work make people feel valued and able to contribute?

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 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. People should feel 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.

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. When people feel able to pay something for their food, they should have the dignity of doing so.

What community organisations can do:

- Increase the ways that people can share their skills, time or experience
 - Volunteering in the kitchen, setting/clearing tables, making cups of tea, telling stories, sharing skills with others
- Work with those taking part to find sensitive ways for people to contribute financially, if appropriate

Working towards the Dignity Principles:

- Offer training and support to staff and volunteers on the relationship between poverty and inequality, including how food insecurity affects people's lives
- Move the focus of attention away from providing food to people and towards working *with* people to promote and restore dignity
- Remove unnecessary barriers to taking part, such as collecting too much personal and sensitive information

Case studies:

Building a culture of participation

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. (*Dignity in Practice*, p 24)

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. (*Dignity in Practice*, p 24)

4. Leave people with the power to choose

How does our work make people feel a sense of control?

People should have the power to make choices about what, where, when, how and with whom they eat. Community food providers should consider the specific food choices they provide and how they can work with others in their area to ensure that those experiencing food insecurity have a variety of options to access food - enabling food experiences that are culturally appropriate and dignified.

What community organisations can do:

- Increase the places and spaces where people can access food through choice
 - Community meals, community larders/fridges, food share tables
 - Support community projects to include nourishing food in their work
- Increase choice of affordable fruit and vegetables
 - Fruit and veg barras, collective buying schemes, community growing spaces
- Provide choices that take religious, cultural and dietary needs into account
 - Dietary restrictions and preferences include kosher foods, halal meat, vegetarian/vegan diets and a range of food allergies or intolerances to foods such as nuts, wheat, soy, dairy, eggs and shellfish

Working towards the Dignity Principles:

- Increase control over what is included in a food parcel
 - People select their food by packing their own bags, choosing from options displayed on a table or using a 'shopping list' of available items

Case studies:

Growing you 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. (*Dignity in Practice*, p 9)

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. (*Dignity in Practice*, p 10)

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 quality ‘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 easily 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. (*Dignity in Practice*, p 32)