EMERGENCY FOOD PROVISION:

DIGNITY DURING COVID-19

ONLINE WORKSHOP REPORT

DIGNITY IN PRACTICE

The Poverty Truth Community

NOURISH SCOTLAND

CONTENTS

Executive Summary

Background:

As a response to the increase in food insecurity and consequent demand for emergency food provision resulting from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the Dignity Team made up of Nourish staff members, volunteers[1] and peer network organisations (PNOs)[2] designed and delivered a series of online workshops to ensure dignity was at the heart of emergency food provision.

Workshop Overview

Aims:

+ Develop a deeper understanding of dignity
+ Reflect on how dignity is enhanced / undermined in their practice
+ Begin developing practical ideas to enhance dignity in their practice

Content:

+ Introduction to Dignity in Practice project, development of the Dignity Principles[3] and their adaptation during COVID-19
+ Interactive exercise to practice understanding of Dignity Principles in food provision
+ Presentation from a community food organisation detailing COVID-19 adaptations
+ Personal reflection on experience of dignity being enhanced / undermined and actions to take post-workshop to enhance dignity in participant's own projects

Delivery and participation:

Between the end of May and the end of June, 10 workshops were delivered with 137 participants. High demand meant waitlists had to be implemented. Most participants came from Scotland, with representation from every local authority area. Participants had a wide range of backgrounds and expertise, including community workers, food bank workers / volunteers, health and diet-related professionals, project managers, funders and board members. Attendees' feedback was overwhelmingly positive, emphasising their commitment to implement the Dignity Principles in their services.

Workshop findings:

Involving volunteers and PNOs as co-facilitators provided invaluable expertise and support. Co-facilitaros highlighted the advantage of developing new skills, confidence and a sense of empowerment. Asking participants to reflect personally on a time when their dignity had been undermined propelled a deeper understanding of the concept in relation to emergency food provision and how it could be applied in practice. Participants were keen

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[1] The volunteers in the Dignity Team are people who have lived experience of food insecurity.
[2] Peer Network Organisations are community-led organisations that have been involved throughout the Dignity Project. The support they offer centres the Dignity Principles, going beyond food provision to building resilient communities
[3] For an overview of the Dignity Principles click here

to be involved in spaces to network and share best-practice on enhancing dignity. Running the workshop online gave the opportunity to engage with people throughout Scotland with no added cost and travel times. However, it highlighted digital barriers such as access to broadband and technical equipment.

Follow-up survey:

Participants were invited to take part in a follow-up survey to reflect on: actions taken to enhance dignity; challenges encountered; and actions the Scottish Government, local authorities and local organisations could do take support their work . Of the 23 who responded, eighteen were interested in receiving ongoing support from the Dignity Team and fourteen wanted to become involved with the team.

Actions taken:

+ Taking more care when making food packages
+ Establishing feedback mechanisms
+ Developing toolkits to signpost people to whole-person support
+ Sharing workshop information within networks
+ Planning to run dignity workshops within local areas

Challenges faced:

+ Negotiating conflictingunderstandings of dignity within and between organisations
+ Increasing demand on emergency food
+ Lengthy waiting times to receive funding
+ Social-distancing measures that restricted face-to-face contact

Recommendations

Scottish Government:

The importance of the Scottish Government's role in supporting emergency food provision was clear. Survey respondents emphasised government policies and engagement with communities as a way to improve the effectiveness and the dignity of the services they provide.

+ Provide long term funding for premises and core costs
+ Increase awareness of the Scottish Welfare Fund
+ Support community organisations to procure fresh produce
+ Provide clearer updates to any changes on safety guidance
+ Ensure local authorities have sufficient funding to deliver basic necessities in times of emergency

Local authorities:

The three main themes emerging for the kind of support needed from local authorities were:

+ **dignity:** lead by example ensuring local authority food provision embeds the Dignity Principles, increase accessibility of Scottish Welfare Fund to enable cash-first support, make a dignified response to food insecurity a clear part of all anti-poverty agendas

+ **collaborative working:** identify a lead within each local authority responsible for learning from and integrating best practice, strengthen collaboration across organisations to create smoother referral pathways, involve community organisations in decision-making

+ **communication:** produce leaflets with information on accessing govenerment support schemes and coordinate with community organisations for distribution, ensure regular updates on forms of government support available for community organisations

Local organisations:

Most respondents highlighted the benefits of increased partnership working across regional organisations working in a variety of sectors, expressing a desire to improve interagency collaboration and communication, particularly to avoid duplicating work.

Conclusion:

The online workshops brought together a range of stakeholders with different backgrounds and expertise in community and emergency food provision, including people from every local authority in Scotland. Participants were introduced to and reflected on the Dignity Principles in the context of COVID-19 responses and committed to take specific actions. A follow-up survey demonstrated that within weeks, some participants had already taken steps in improving how they communicated with people, the range of support they offered and opportunities for people to have more choice and control over their food. Challenges in implementing the Dignity Principles in community food provision suggest a need for further work to develop a more consistent understanding of dignity within the sector. Furthermore, the Scottish Government, local authorities and local organisations were all considered by respondents to have a role in supporting the enhancement of dignity. As a result, we intend to continue delivering online workshops to build greater capacity within the community food sector and to highlight and share best practice as it evolves.

EMERGENCY FOOD PROVISION: DIGNITY DURING COVID-19
ONLINE WORKSHOP REPORT

Background

Due to the unprecedented COVID-19 crisis, the Dignity Project, like many other projects, had to quickly adapt our work in order to continue the support and communication with volunteers[4] and Peer Network Organisations[5] (PNOs) across Scotland. The Dignity Principles in Practice were adapted to the new context[6] , and case studies emerging from adaptations from existing PNOs were shared in order to promote good practice.

Zoom weekly meetings became the norm and a popular platform for sharing information, updates and challenges. The Dignity Team gradually extended to include food groups that had been previously involved in the project as well as new ones. The team also became involved with food networks across Scotland. Through these conversations, and alongside desk-based monitoring of websites and social media, a database was collected documenting the adaptations and challenges by community food groups throughout Scotland.

With significantly increased levels of emergency provision being distributed across the country, and many new food groups stepping into emergency food provision for the first time, we believed there was a risk that dignity could be undermined. Table.1 focuses on the negative impacts on people's dignity caused by some of the adaptations having to be implemented by community food providers .

In response to this we adapted some pre trialled activities from the Dignity in Practice Volunteer Toolkit and developed an online workshop entitled Emergency Food Provision: Dignity during COVID-19. The workshop aimed to engage with existing and emerging groups involved in emergency food provision to:

+ Develop a deep understanding of dignity
+ Reflect on how dignity is enhanced / undermined in their practice
+ Begin developing practical ideas to enhance dignity in their practice

[4] The volunteers in the Dignity Team are people who have lived experience of food insecurity.
[5] Peer Network Organisations are community-led organisations that have been involved throughout the Dignity Project. The support they offer centres the Dignity Principles, going beyond food provision to building resilient communities
[6] You can find the adapted Dignity Principles here

Table. 1 Adaptations taken by community food providers that had the potential to or were already undermining people's sense of dignity

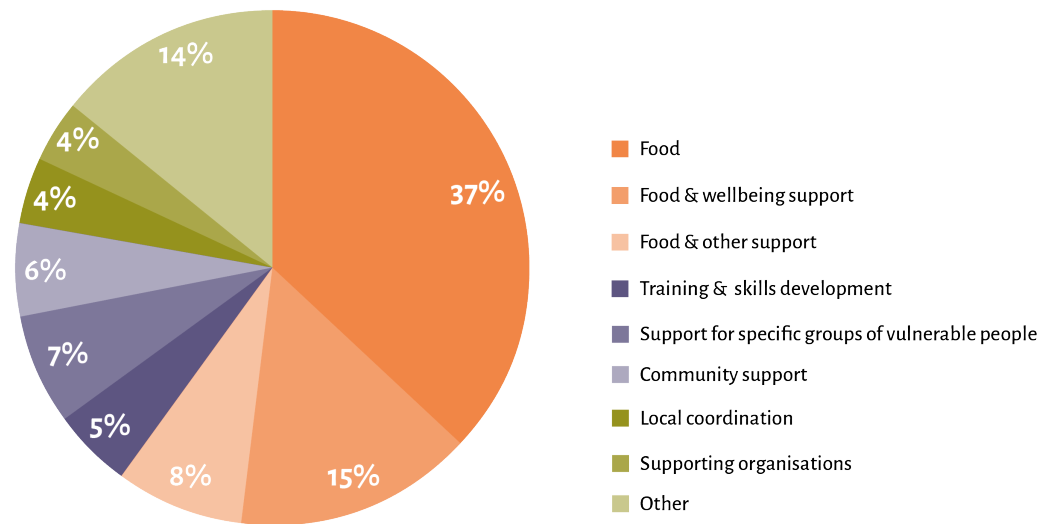| Adaptations taken by community food providers	Impacts on dignity
Cancellation of community meals, social gatherings, workshops, pausing volunteering.	Lack of opportunities for people to feel involved in community life and to feel valued and able to contribute.
Implementation of take-away services	Reduction in people's choice on what, where, when and with whom they eat.
Provision of 3-day emergency food packages	Reduction in nutritional diversity due to increased reliance on long-shelf life of food.
Increased reliance on telephone / online support	Lack of opportunities to share knowledge on government-support mechanisms as well as whole-person support (e.g Scottish Welfare Fund crisis grants, advice on benefits, house bills advice, etc.)
	Lack of communication support for people without digital access or who struggle to pay phone bills.

Workshop Overview

Who participated

We delivered 10 workshops between mid-May and the end of June. In total 137 people attended representing 112 different organisations (see appendix for full list). Each workshop included 8 to 19 participants.

Support provided by participants' groups / organisations:

More than half of registered participants (60%) reported being involved in a group / organisation providing emergency food during the crisis. Out of these, 37% reported only providing food, 15% provided food and some sort of social / wellbeing support and 8% provided food alongside signposting and support to access prescriptions as seen in Figure.1.
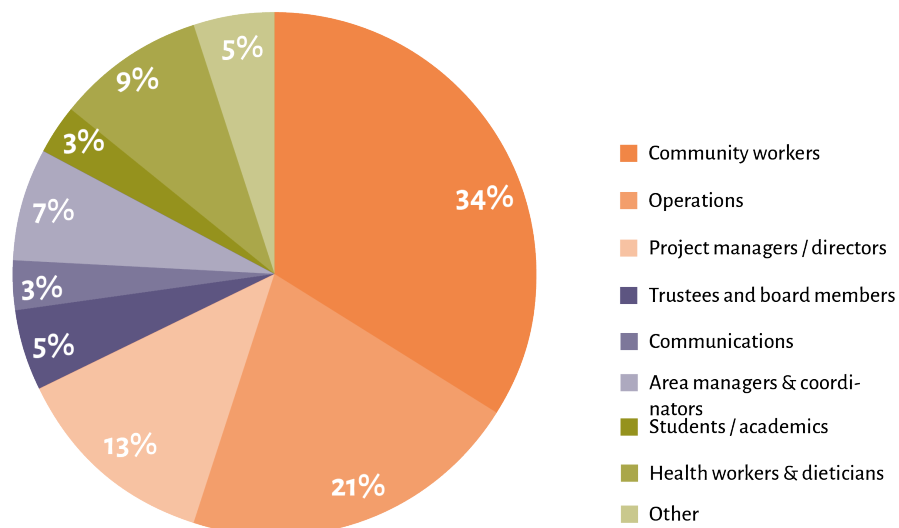
Figure.1   Forms of support offered by participants' groups / organisations

Legend:
- Food
- Food & wellbeing support
- Food & other support
- Training & skills development
- Support for specific groups of vulnerable people
- Community support
- Local coordination
- Supporting organisations
- Other

Participants' roles:

Participants roles varied widely, with the four major groups being community workers (34%) followed by people working in operations (21%), project managers / directors (13%) and health workers & dieticians (9%).

**Figure.2**   Participants' Roles

Legend:
- Community workers
- Operations
- Project managers / directors
- Trustees and board members
- Communications
- Area managers & coordinators
- Students / academics
- Health workers & dieticians
- Other

Participants' involvement in community food sector

Figure. 3 shows how the majority of participants had been involved in the community food sector for 1-3 years (28%), closely followed by 27% of participants who reported becoming involved after COVID-19.

Figure.3

Amount of time participants have been involved in community food sector

Legend:
- Post COVID-19
- Under 1 year
- 1-3 years
- 3-10 years
- 10 or more years
- Unknown
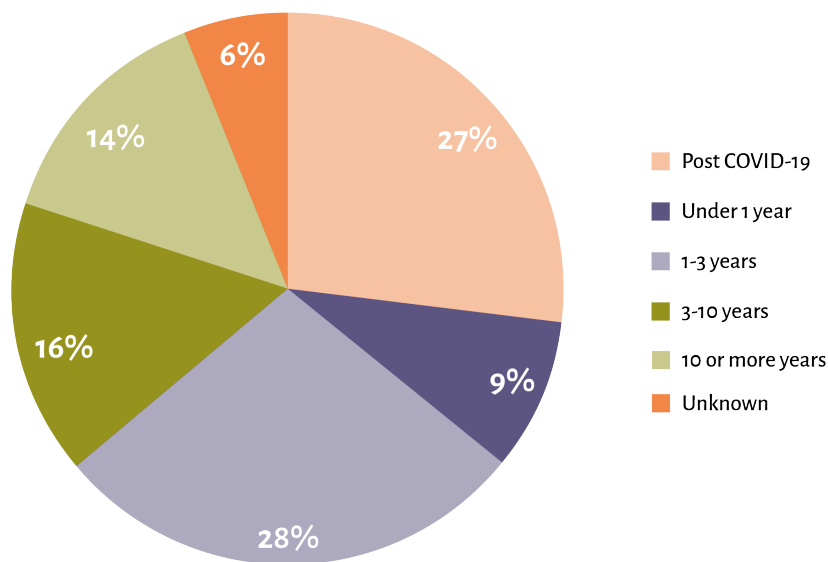
Where participant's groups / organisations were based

The majority of participants were based in Scotland (87%), followed by England (11%) and outside the UK (2%).

Figure.4

Where participants' groups / organisations were based

Legend:
- Scotland
- England
- Outside the UK
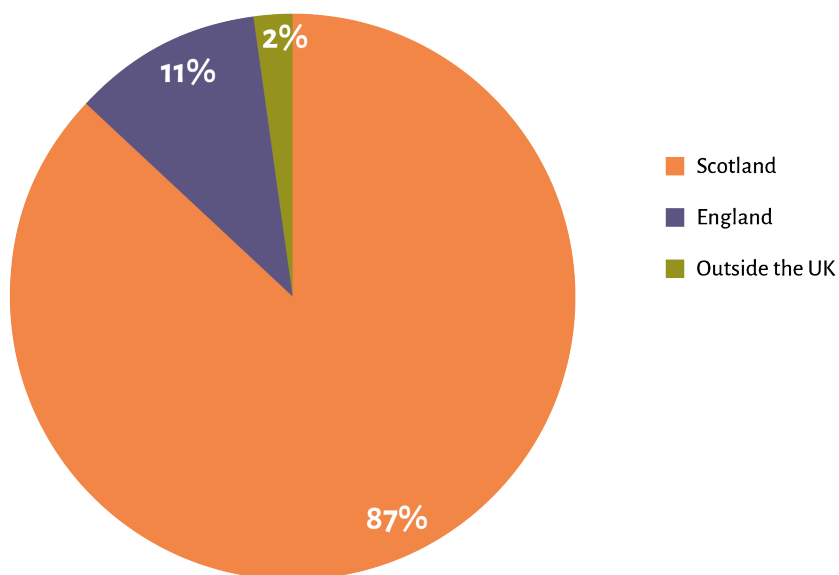
Council areas represented

Of those working in Scotland, there was at least one participant involved in a group / organisation in each of the council areas. The council areas with the highest number of participants were Glasgow City (39), Edinburgh (21), Fife (14), Aberdeenshire (12), Stirling (12) and Highlands (8).

Figure.5

Participants per council area
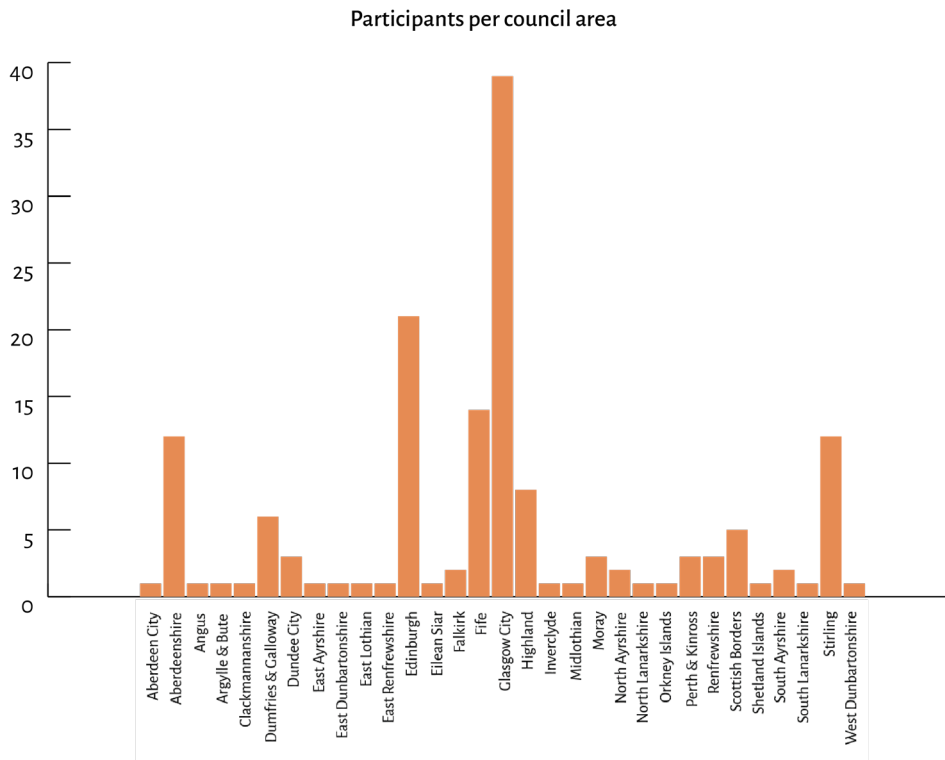
Immediate Workshop Outcomes

Actions participants committed to take to enhance dignity

At the end of the workshop participants were asked to reflect on what they had learned and commit to take actions to put this knowledge into practice. These actions reflect a theoretical and practical understanding of dignity:

+ Increase or establish avenues for two-way communication between community members and those providing emergency food, establishing feedback mechanisms and involving people in decision-making

+ Rethink ways in which to continue involving volunteers, particularly those in vulnerable categories

Participants said:

"Consult with people rather than assume. Everyone will have different needs so one size does not fit all. Include people in decision making and give them choice which will ultimately give a sense of dignity."

+ Explore other Dignity in Practice tools to share and use with co-workers and volunteers

+ Implement continuous service reflection guided by Dignity Principles

+ Begin partnerships with local organisations with varying remits including those focusing on mental and physical health as well as financial and social support, to provide whole-person support

+ Use the Dignity Principles as a way to guide funding choices.

+ Become involved with the Dignity Team.

"Ask people with lived experience about ideal solutions and then work backwards from there with organisations and policy makers"

Participant's workshop feedback

Overall, participants reported achieving a deeper understanding of dignity theoretically and in practice. Participants appreciated having an opportunity to hear about case studies, meet people involved in community and emergency food provision, reflect on their own practice and develop ideas for improvement. In regard to the workshop design, participants enjoyed working in small teams and the use of interactive activities.

"It was great to get a deeper understanding of dignity. Relating to what it feels like to be in a situation where dignity is not afforded to you is a very good learning tool. Great moderators and clear examples and practical learnings"

Implementing change: results from follow up survey

To further understand how the online workshops impacted emergency food provision, we sent out a survey on average 5 weeks after participants attended the workshop. The purpose of the survey was to ask participants about changes implemented to enhance dignity, challenges faced trying to do so, the kind of support they would need from the Scottish Government, local authorities and local organisations and whether they would like to stay involved in the Dignity Project. From 23 respondents, 18 were interested in receiving ongoing support and 14 in becoming involved with the Dignity Team.

Actions taken by participants to enhance dignity

The actions participants took to enhance dignity focused on different goals. Some of these actions were about implementing changes in the context of emergency food provision in **day to day interactions**. These included putting "greater thought into the making of food parcels" and using transparent visors as opposed to facemasks to "be as welcoming as possible with a smile"[7].

Other participants mentioned taking actions to **enhance people's sense of control and power to make choices**. This included beginning to account for religion as a factor that influences dietary requirements.

> *Case Study: feeling a sense of control*
> *For a participant from a community association, sharing information from the workshop with fellow trustees, led the group to always include offering choice to community members as a cornerstone of their project in funding applications. With funding received, they have been able to offer a wider variety of food in their meals. This association is now looking to incorporate the Dignity Principles in their other food-related projects.*

Participants also reported adding new forms of support and communication to further enhance dignity. These included developing a toolkit that community members and frontline service users can use to refer people to sources of support, particularly financial support, establishing a new helpline for community members shaped by the Dignity Principles and introducing a feedback mechanism to involve community members in the shaping of the service. Specifically, one project is "slowly creating an environment for people to join, share, learn, propose and lead activities during this period of lockdown". These actions all have the potential to enhance dignity by ensuring people feel nourished and supported as well as involved in decision-making.

Participants mentioned **sharing the information from the workshop** and recommending the workshop to others within their networks. This has already enabled productive discussions on how dignity can be enhanced within networks. Furthermore, a participant's recommendation of the workshop to a poverty steering group led a councillor to attend the workshop. Now, people in this network are planning to discuss the possibility of offering a dignity workshop to local partners.

[7] Although not explicitly stated as a reason behind the choice of using transparent visors, the Action on Hearing Loss charity highlights that the use of clear visors makes it easier for the 12 million people in the UK with hearing loss to communicate through lipreading.

Challenges found by participants when trying to enhance dignity

One of the main challenges in implementing practices to enhance people's sense of dignity was the fact that **the understanding of 'dignity' varies across individuals and organisations**. For a participant, having their project based on premises owned by a faith-based organisation meant having to negotiate differing views on enhancing dignity. Similarly, someone highlighted conflicting views when working in partnerships with others who prioritised the practicalities of delivering food over the role of dignity in food provision. Within organisations, varied understandings of dignity between colleagues and volunteers has been difficult to navigate. It is clear that the concept of dignity can be difficult to approach with the potential to trigger defensive responses.

> *Case Study: varying understandings of dignity*
> *One participant with a coordinating role in their local authority area has found it challenging to meet their remit of increasing consistency in emergency food responses. The participant described some of the responses as "paternalistic", yet highlighted that it is difficult to question them as they emerge from a sincere belief in helping others.*

Another challenge has been working with the **constraints of social-distancing** as this has led to the reduction in opportunities for face-to-face chats and in-depth conversations. Social-distancing has also meant that for some services people are no longer able to self-refer, people need to queue outside of buildings, and volunteers, many within vulnerable categories, have had to isolate.

Additionally managing capacity and **operating in "emergency mode"** has resulted in difficulties. For some, lacking organisational capacity made meeting high demand strenuous, while for others, capacity was hindered by lengthy waits in receiving funding. **Working with donations** led to inconsistencies in food supply which hindered organisations ability to ensure variety and offer choice. Moreover, embedding dignity is a process, and volunteers and staff in many of these projects are already beginning to shift their work to keep up with continuously changing contexts.

Recommendations

Scottish Government:

The importance of the Scottish Government's role in supporting emergency food provision was clear. Survey respondents emphasised government policies and engagement with communities as a way to improve the effectiveness and the dignity of the services they provide.

+ Provide long term funding for premises and core costs
+ Increase awareness of the Scottish Welfare Fund
+ Support community organisations to procure fresh produce
+ Provide clearer updates to any changes on safety guidance
+ Ensure local authorities have sufficient funding to deliver basic necessities in times of emergency

Local authorities:

The three main themes emerging for the kind of support needed from local authorities were:

Dignity:

+ Ensure local authority food provision leads by example by implementing the Dignity Principles.
+ Make a dignified response to food insecurity a clear part of all anti-poverty agendas
+ Increase accessibility of Scottish Welfare Fund application process to enable people to access cash-first support

Collaborative working:

+ Identify a lead individual within each local authority who is responsible for bringing in best practice to implement locally
+ Strengthen collaboration across organisations to create smoother referral pathways
+ Involve community organisations in decision-making

Communication:

+ Produce leaflets with information on accessing government support schemes like the Scottish Welfare Fund for community organisations to distribute to their existing networks
+ Ensure regular updates on forms of government support available for community organisations

Local organisations:

Most respondents highlighted the benefits of increased partnership working across regional organisations working in a variety of sectors, expressing a desire to improve interagency collaboration and communication, particularly to avoid duplicating work.

- Work in locality clusters across statutory, private and voluntary agencies with a collaborative exploration of values and principles that underpin respective approaches
- Coordinate the sharing of resources and information across organisations
- Ensure all organisations have a platform to share their expertise
- Work collaboratively on funding opportunities when it is mutually beneficial

Conclusion

The online workshops brought together a wide range of stakeholders with different backgrounds, expertise and located across different areas. This included people from every local authority in Scotland, with a high representation of community workers, people working in operations, and project managers / directors of community food organisations. Participants committed to take specific actions at the end of the workshop, and the suggested changes they intended to make demonstrated an understanding of the Dignity Principles and how they can be put in practice. Feedback from the workshop provided an opportunity to address requests promptly and to understand the impact of the workshops on participant's understanding of dignity.

A survey conducted three weeks after the final workshop revealed some initial insights about the practical implications of the workshop, highlighting how people involved in emergency food provision are taking actions to embed dignity in their projects. Some participants had already taken steps in improve how they communicated with people, the range of support they offered and the opportunities for people to have more choice and control over their food. Challenges mentioned point towards the importance of achieving a more consistent understanding of dignity within the sector. As a result, we intend to continue delivering these online workshops to build greater capacity within the community food sector and to highlight and share best practice as it evolves. Importantly, the Scottish Government, local authorities and organisations within local networks, were all considered to have a role to play in working collaboratively to support the enhancement of dignity throughout food provision.