



Engaging experts by experience during Covid-19 Food Poverty Action Aberdeen, final report, May 2021

Responding to crisis with emergency food and support

2020-21 has been a year unlike any other, with the pandemic having significant impact on how Community Food Initiatives North East (CFINE) and Food Poverty Action Aberdeen (FPAA) deliver services such as emergency food, financial inclusion support, and engaging with experts by experience to make their voices heard.

CFINE's premises (including community pantries and food bank) closed to the public in March, and we switched to contactless home-delivery of emergency food arranged via a free phone number and referral. Our main focus, working with the FPAA alliance, has been on responding to the increases in food insecurity during this time.

Research was conducted by surveying those who received food by the new model of provision. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive and indicated that this approach was more dignified. Crucially, the level of engagement with our other support services such as financial inclusion increased over the period.

A group of 'experts by experience' was formed and was due to meet just as the pandemic struck. We had to switch our approach to engaging those with lived experience due to restrictions.

A final year student researched "The Experience of Tackling Food Poverty within Aberdeen during Covid19" which involved interviewing those with lived experience including food bank beneficiaries and pantry members.



“ New and innovative models of provision can prove effective in increasing engagement with beneficiaries to help tackle the underlying causes of food insecurity.

Dave Kilgour, Development Work Manager

This activity was assisted by financial support and other advice from Food Power.
www.foodpower.org.uk



Our challenges and learning

The obvious major challenge was that of the global pandemic, and its effects on local communities. CFINE and FPAA partners had to completely alter our operation to respond to the crisis, and this meant changing the way we engage with experts by experience.

This meant engaging in different ways such as phone interviews, which proved an effective way for people's voices to be heard, particularly when lockdown meant increased loneliness/isolation and subsequently willingness to speak up about their position.

“ The pandemic has shown how vulnerable we all are. Without the support I got from CFINE I would have gone hungry for sure and now I have my benefits sorted. I'm a bit more hopeful about the future.

Beneficiary (Anonymous)

Our next steps

We are continuing to explore new and innovative models of dignified provision and engagement with experts by experience, which will feed into strategic partnerships and policy making.

As restrictions ease, our intention is to reconvene the original 'experts by experience' group in order to explore and amplify the voices of those affected by food poverty/insecurity, and the effect the pandemic. Aberdeen city council has recently reconvened the third sector grouping, with the intention of directly feeding into the Community Planning structure.

Our key achievements and impact

- Quick and effective change in operation to respond to the pandemic, supplying thousands of households with emergency food in time of crisis.
- Rapid research via phone of beneficiaries receiving emergency food, providing valuable insight and highlighting situation faced by so many.
- Identified new ways of reaching out to experts by experience, with plans to re-connect with those we were unable to meet with in person.
- Explored new and innovative models of provision, promoting dignity and tackling stigma.