



Developing a Food Poverty Action Plan

Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance, final report, December 2020

From start to beginning! Reflections of our first year

As the year draws to an end we find ourselves at the beginning of a journey rather than at an end. We have a Food Poverty Action Plan that by the very process of its creation has caused growing awareness and action in Cambridge. We now have a Food Poverty Alliance with representatives from eight frontline organisations that meet regularly. Meetings are often a sharing of experience and information and the formal agenda set by us the lead organisation, quite rightly takes a back seat.

We started this journey back in Oct 2018 when we wrote a very detailed and comprehensive report on food poverty in the City. As we come to review this report we realise that we need to simplify indicators, choose ones that will fit and measure action outlined in the Action Plan and consider what represents the work of the Alliance best. With hindsight, my advice would be it's better to have a few key indicators to measure year on year rather than trying to capture all proxy indicators.

Highlights of the journey have to be our conference on food poverty in the city. The four workshops we ran were attended by over 40 practitioners, front line workers and the general public. Most of all stories tell stories. We spoke to people experiencing food poverty, ran sessions where we used 'food cards' to discuss relationships and attitudes to food and carried out in-depth interviews with women experiencing second generation food poverty. I have no doubt when it comes to families, food poverty is gendered and women still go without to feed their families.

Can we really know we have made a difference? Whilst promoting Healthy Start vouchers in communities, at holiday lunches, local events and through leaflet drops, we saw an increase of 5% in one particular low income area. However, whilst we can claim it as a success, we may have missed a chance of really knowing what the key factors for uptake were. With hindsight connecting with researchers or evaluators may have provided us with the tools to find out.

What has become apparent over the past year is that the situation is getting worse. Food poverty is the lens through which many of us view poverty. The introduction of Universal Credit means many are choosing to prioritise bills and housing above food. Community responses are necessary, but system change is imperative.

“Even though I work, if there’s not enough food. I will make sure my husband and my daughter eat.”

Holiday lunch participant

'Food poverty is a real issue for communities across our city. We've known for some time that there are high levels of inequality in Cambridge, and that families are really struggling - especially with the cost of living rising year on year. The council was proud to have got such strong cross-party backing in October last year for our motion to support the essential work of the Food Poverty Alliance. It's been an inspiration to see such a broad range of organisations working together to improve outcomes for Cambridge residents and we look forward to seeing this partnership go from strength to strength.'

Alex Collis, Lead Councillor for Poverty and Isolation and Alliance member

Our next steps

We will be focusing on delivering actions in our Food Poverty Action plan and developing monitoring and evaluation tools to assess the success of this. We have the opportunity to trial working alongside Rick Davies, the founder of a participatory model of evaluation called 'Most Significant Change' in our work with experts by experience. Excitingly, Cambridge City Council have made a commitment to supporting a redistribution hub in the City which will fulfil some of the Action Plan objectives.

Having spoken to other areas in the country, we feel very lucky to have the support of Cambridge City Council who have in place: A tackling Poverty and Isolation strategy and plan, a Living Wage officer and a councillor who takes a lead in these areas. Many other cities have not had the support and engagement the Alliance in Cambridge has had. No doubt this has strengthened the partnership. We go forward with funding from them to support the Alliance for another year.

We also have support from Food Power for a further year and are planning to work with parents at holiday lunches to really understand why some people choose not to come along and what may be the best ways to reach people. We are also going to be trialling a social supermarket market surplus veg box scheme.



Our key achievements and impact

- Published Towards a Collaborative Action Plan: A report on food poverty in Cambridge
- Written a report on Food Deserts and Food Swamps
- Created a signposting toolkit to help agencies to direct people to emergency food supplies
- Sourced funding for ingredients for holiday lunches across the city from a Cambridge college. We are in discussion with the wider University and Colleges about formalising ongoing support, both financial and from chefs and staff
- Delivered a Healthy Start vouchers campaign through training with midwives, engaging with businesses and individuals. Uptake increased by 5% in one low income ward.
- Received funding for 3 community fridges and an associated surplus distribution scheme for low income community areas of the City
- Produced and maintained an online map of community and emergency food provision in Cambridge

This activity was assisted by financial support and other advice from Food Power.

www.foodpower.org.uk