



Evaluation Report

Year 2 (2018-2019)

Executive summary

October 2019

Food Power is a four-year programme led by Sustain and Church Action on Poverty, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund. It aims to strengthen local communities' ability to reduce food poverty through solutions developed locally with the support of their peers from across the UK.

The approach centres on local alliances, giving voice to those experiencing food poverty, influencing practice on the ground and leveraging in additional resources. This will enable responses to food poverty and its root causes, and sharing of learning regarding what works. Food Power aims to transform the way that people in food poverty can access support and create long-term sustainable lives free from hunger.

This report presents findings of evaluation of the second year of Food Power, based on

insights from a survey of alliances as well as interviews. The aim is to track progress, to provide lessons to inform on-going delivery and to facilitate exchanges of learning between alliances.

Food Power is externally evaluated by researchers from Cardiff University, who have taken a collaborative approach to working with the project partners and beneficiaries, whilst maintaining independence as academic researchers able to provide credible evidence of impact.

This year, key findings from the evaluation are presented under four core themes that came through from the survey responses and interviews. These were common experiences across multiple locations but are exemplified by the work of the case study alliances mentioned in each section.

Our year in numbers



65 alliances registered with Food Power

76%

attributed progress with their ambitions to having received support from Food Power



37 alliances allocated £540,000

93%

reported using resources from the Food Power website



11 regional learning networks

80%

reported that Food Power had been of quite a lot of value or more



Solutions for rural areas

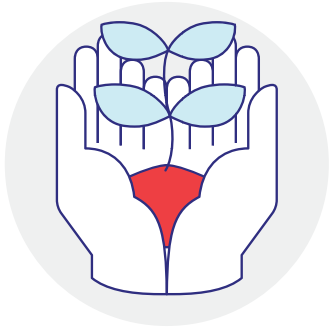
Drawing on the experiences of alliances in Moray, Shropshire, and North Wales, this thematic case study finds that despite the challenges of large rural areas, alliances have been successful in building networks, engaging a range of stakeholders, sharing information, building cross-sector collaboration, and creating partnership links that support their objectives.

Rural alliances all experienced challenges with the delivery of frontline support, particularly in terms of creating networks that extend into harder-to-reach areas. Solutions to these challenges included combining food provision with other events and services, creating additional capacity by combining efforts with partner organisations, and creating new service-provision models. Working at a strategic level is in some ways less constrained by the logistics of rural areas, although travel time and cost for meetings can be extensive. Settlement patterns and local culture shaped ways of working and feasible solutions.

Hidden poverty creates challenges for alliances in rural areas, both in terms of gathering the information needed to understand it, and creating solutions to address it. Some alliances are working across local authority boundaries, and with more than one language, requiring additional effort to find and share data. In some areas, there is no data, so solutions begin with identifying and accessing local knowledge.

Key findings:

- Rural areas are not homogenous and present varying levels of rurality and urbanity within them. Accessibility within rural regions varies according to settlement patterns, transport links and other factors.
- Alliance building and strategic work has been successful in rural areas.
- Alliances have made progress with frontline services in the more urban parts of the areas they cover; food provisioning outside of main towns remains a challenge.
- Much poverty in rural areas remains hidden and accessing local knowledge on areas of need is a challenge for alliances.
- Structural inequalities and injustices in the food system can appear particularly stark in rural regions, particularly where rural regeneration and food tourism exist alongside areas of deprivation and food poverty.



Building sustainability

Drawing particularly on the experiences of alliances in Bournemouth and Poole, Moray, and Newcastle, investigation of this theme found that there are important considerations around building sustainability, alongside funding, that have or are expected to build longevity into alliances. Although the short-term nature of financial support was perceived as a challenge, and gaps in funding were perceived to disrupt momentum, Food Power's financial support and national network has enabled alliances to exchange knowledge, share good practice and learn from others. It also enables engagement with a range of stakeholders and strengthens the foundations of alliances' work.

Embedding work on food poverty and food insecurity into job roles, local council action plans, and public health strategy supports longer term alliance sustainability at strategic level. In more community-focused activity, sustainability is envisaged through the creation of 'civilian hubs' and 'food clubs'.

Diversity of stakeholders, regular meetings, sharing the load via working groups, distributing meeting locations, and opportunities to engage with influential stakeholders including senior and strategic figures within councils and public health teams were identified as factors supporting sustainability. Organisational structure is important, with some alliances requesting additional support with governance models.

Building sustainability is understood to involve understanding and working with existing infrastructures and communities. The possibility of a long-term vision of community-led approaches, emerging from experts by experience, which can become independent of alliance support is explored, but alliances are aware that engaging people in this way can be

resource intensive and complex, particularly where diverse communities are involved.

Key findings:

- Alliances are aware that support from Food Power is relatively short-term, and provided within a broader context which tends to make long-term delivery difficult, such as lack of grant or funding security and staff turnover.
- Many are optimistic that the networking and good practice facilitated by the programme can help alliances develop resilient ways of working.
- Working with diverse partners can build sustainability with key actors being academics, public health, local authority, third sector organisations and experts by experience.
- Working groups within alliances can help share workload and support deeper focus on specific issues or themes, and distribute responsibility across organisations.
- Working in partnership with local authorities and public health boards can broaden the reach of alliances and embed action within policy and strategy, which should help embed it beyond the life of an alliance.
- Regional and national networks of alliances can support knowledge exchange, promote good practice and enable mentoring which is perceived to enable their longer-term sustainability.



Working with varied political contexts

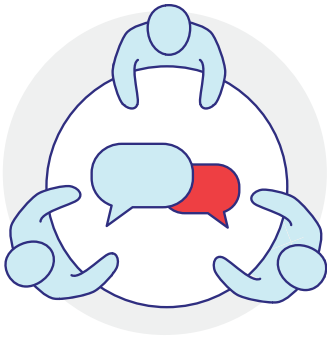
Drawing on the experiences of alliances in Moray, Lockleaze, Greater Manchester, North Wales, Northern Ireland, Shropshire, Newcastle, and Bournemouth and Poole, this theme shows a range of ways of working that alliances use to respond to a diverse political contexts, from a single ward to a devolved administration, and across a city-region, or several counties.

Smaller-scale working involved a grounded approach, building partnerships with other community-based organisations. Across larger areas, and more than one administration, progress could more readily be made through strategic working and partnerships.

Different political contexts present particularities such as the need for additional language and cultural understanding to reach certain groups, different ways of working such as sub-groups to address particular themes, additional layers of complexity working across different levels of local governance, and the need for different ways to explain the benefits of working as an alliance.

Key findings:

- Alliances are working within hugely varied political contexts, each of which present particular challenges or require them to work in certain ways. This is a complex situation for Food Power to advise on, but there are learning opportunities between alliances even if they are operating in different political contexts.
- The alliance model is not best suited to any one scale of working: there are strengths and weaknesses when focused on a single ward right up to large multi-local authority regions.
- The networking and exchange facilitated by Food Power does help alliances work within their own context. In particular, networking with alliances working at similar scales and political contexts allows valuable knowledge exchange and support.
- It helps alliances to identify key stakeholders leading across sectors to support an integrated and strategic approach. This includes engaging and involving public service leaders in conversations from the beginning.
- For larger alliances, working groups that address specific themes can share the workload and work in an integrated and coherent way towards specific goals.
- Additional language and cultural knowledge may be needed to reach all relevant stakeholders in an alliance's area. It is also important for alliances to understand the opportunities presented by national-level policies relevant to their area.



Experts by experience

In Newcastle, the Food Poverty Network recognised the importance of working with existing organisations embedded in local communities to recruit experts by experience. They also acknowledged the challenge of reaching beyond ‘the usual suspects’ to those who do not already recognise the problem of poverty in the area, and the limitations of collaborating with one particular local organisation.

The experience so far has raised a range of questions, including whether personal development was sufficient incentive to recruit people, the challenges of balancing paid work with participation, the issues of shame and pride when talking about food poverty, how to accommodate the range of aptitudes and capacities of experts by experience, the alienation of participating in events like conferences, and the suitability of the term ‘experts by experience’.

Progress so far includes experts by experience attending and speaking at academic and policy conferences, training in research skills, Leapfrog food poverty conversations and media training, influencing national conversation through media time, sharing knowledge, skills and ideas for projects with those in other areas. Food Power has helped experts build confidence and skills, given a platform for them to collaborate in other campaigns in the city, enabled them to advise service providers on what to offer, helped raise awareness of food poverty and made it easier for people to talk about food poverty. Despite interest and a training event, the Community Researchers aspect of the project has yet to attract participants.

Key findings:

- Experts by experience suggest it is very important to involve them in work on food poverty, and feel that they can contribute unique perspectives which have to be represented in this type of activity.
- Their situations, including low incomes and highly demanding working patterns, make it challenging to participate in what can be very intensive commitments.
- However, they find participation highly rewarding, particularly in terms of personal development and accessing new opportunities.
- Typical environments for networking and lobbying, such as conferences, can be highly uncomfortable and do not always enable experts by experience to make valuable contributions. Catering, session lengths and dress codes could be organised in ways which enable them to feel more welcome.
- There are mixed opinions regarding terminology and the most appropriate way to describe those who have experienced poverty; some are happy to self-identify as experts by experience, some prefer other terms.
- Accessing potential participants through existing networks and trusted organisations is likely to be most productive. However, alliances recognise that this will still only involve a limited range of experiences, and that a small number of experts cannot represent all those experiencing food poverty.
- The evaluation team approached experts by experience to become community researchers on a Photovoice project to help identify the wider impact of Food Power alliances and experts by experience projects.



Reflections and conclusions

Programme delivery and progress

Alliances were very positive about working with Food Power and of the value of the support provided. There were no substantive issues with the programme or its operation, and much praise for the team.

Although the programme's most tangible impacts remain associated with financial support, there is a clear sense that this is not the only way alliances benefit, with very positive feedback about the value of networking and learning opportunities.

Alliances would welcome a diverse, flexible portfolio of financial support opportunities, offering something for everyone.

It remains challenging to demonstrate that locally alliances are having an impact on food poverty, or that nationally Food Power is doing so.

There are some frustrations with the nature of interventions remaining too focused on individuals and charitable support, rather than challenging structural causes of poverty.

The context in which Food Power and local alliances are working is highly challenging, with everyone lacking capacity, funding and security to deliver what they want. Meanwhile, political and economic conditions make the need to address food poverty more pressing.

Evaluation limitations

The perspectives presented here are inherently limited and likely favour those with positive experiences of engaging with food poverty alliances and Food Power.

The evaluation team should continue to seek a broad range of perspectives for inclusion in the research, finding ways to engage more

peripheral actors and alliance members with limited capacity.

Future considerations and questions

Food Power continues to make good progress across its envisaged outputs and outcomes, and to be positively received by those active around the UK in addressing food poverty. As with the previous year's evaluation, it is notable that alliances gave very positive reports of their experiences of working with Food Power and of the value of the support provided. There were no substantive issues with the programme or its operation, and much praise for the team.

Whilst alliances did suggest improvements or additional areas of support, there was no suggestion that anything currently in place should be stopped or significantly changed. It is also notable that in contrast with the previous year, alliances were more confident in describing how they have worked with and benefited from Food Power. It seems that alliances and their member bodies are more familiar with the programme and its aims.

The case studies reported here demonstrate that local alliances are working with wide ranging challenges, and adopting varied ways of working. Whilst this makes a complex context for a programme like Food Power to work within, the programme seems to be sufficiently flexible and agile to respond. Alliances appreciate the resources and advice available from Food Power and recognise the value of drawing learning from around the country.

In the remaining years of the programme, Food Power should consider the following questions:

- What do alliances aim to achieve by involving experts by experience? What should reasonably be expected of them? What can they expect in return? How can Food Power showcase to other programmes and initiatives on how to empower experts by experience?
- How can Food Power best support alliances working with particular but overlapping challenges?
- What are alliances achieving and delivering that would not otherwise be happening? Are alliances able to articulate the difference they have made on the ground? How does this come together to make a difference nationally?
- What role can/should Food Power play in supporting alliances to work in an ever-more challenging context, in which demand for local services continues to outstrip capacity and resources? If there is no prospect of this easing what type of national programme will be most valuable in future?

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