



Going further together

Oxford Food Access Alliance final report, May 2019

The best action plans come from shared empowerment

The Oxford Food Access Alliance has always been led by Experts by Experience, and this has been significant in several key ways.

First of all, people with experience of food poverty are more likely to be sensitive to local need, and more clued-up as to realistic solutions. The Experts who are part of Oxford's alliance have become a sounding board of consultants on the effectiveness of different initiatives. For example, whether a map contains all the relevant locations, whether a leaflet is of use, where there is a gap in provision or an unrepresented community. As such, they have started to achieve the alliance's aim of becoming a centre for learning which ensures professionals and politicians are aware of and better able to respond to the issue of food poverty.

Secondly, alliance meetings have developed into nitty gritty discussion, sharing and prioritisation sessions – rather than sticking to a set agenda. If an issue has energy, it is addressed at a meeting. It has been a process of unlearning and throwing away the meeting agenda, but it has also been rich ground for some key ideas and potentially game-changing initiatives – such as the drive to set up an Oxford Food Club. Some initiatives are already operational (such as Blackbird Leys Community Fridge) and some are at ideas stage (a lunch space for homeless women) but all have a huge amount of energy around them.

Alliance members have also built up a heartening shared understanding and way of working. Members have built skills and confidence, in learning to understand and interact with each other, listen and get their voice heard, both within the Alliance and in local and national arenas. This activity has been supported through one-to-one meetings outside of the bimonthly alliance meetings, where members have worked together to develop project plans and personal effectiveness plans. This has resulted in some significant outcomes for individuals, including employment.

The cornerstones of this work have been:

- Recruiting the Experts by Experience first, who then recruited the Professional Experts
- Sharing food at the start of each meeting
- Developing alliance aims and a theory of change as a touchpoint
- Visits to inspiring projects around the country
- Ground rules for visits which account for the needs of individuals e.g. those who need some quiet time
- Using visits to build friendship, humour, trust and mutual understanding
- Filming, journaling and taking photos of visits
- One-to-one meetings to develop project and personal plans
- Light touch action planning – go with the energy
- A dash of luck and supportive partners to initiate projects locally.

Activity took longer than expected to get going, but is more effective as a result of 'going together'.

"It has been a process of unlearning – realising that the energy people bring around a particular issue or solution is more important than my meeting agenda"

Hannah Fenton, Good Food Oxford

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“A year ago, I wouldn’t have had the confidence to leave my house. Now I’ve gone to London, Manchester, Newcastle. We went and spoke to MPs at the House of Commons. I’ve talked to the national media. I’ve been on two panels – one on homelessness and one on food poverty. Recently, I found out I got a job working with homeless people. It’s been a journey.”

Monica, Good Food Oxford

Our challenges and learning

The key challenge has been ensuring the same level of engagement from ‘professional experts’ as from experts by experience. There is a temptation for professionals to think this is “not for them” or that it’s not “high level” enough. However time has proved the process to be effective, and the professionals gathered around the alliance are just as important as those who are members of the alliance. Varying the times of meetings is also useful – sometimes meetings are during daytimes and sometimes in the evenings and at weekends.

Our key achievements and impact

- As the alliance is led by experts by experience, local initiatives are relevant for local people and fill genuine gaps in provision. This is true of one successful initiative which is working with at least 150 people a week (Blackbird Leys Community Fridge). And will be true of others in the pipeline.
- Alliance membership has been impactful for the individuals involved, building key skills of all members. Project planning and individual effectiveness planning have been key. One member of the alliance has moved into employment as a result.
- We hope the alliance will build its reputation and continue to function as a centre for Learning, so all initiatives in Oxford address food access as successfully as possible.

Our next steps

The alliance will be continuing its work for at least another year, working to deliver the action plan on the basis of the aims and the theory of change. This will include delivering local initiatives, as well as speaking and campaigning locally and nationally.



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