York and North Yorkshire Covid Recovery Insight Project
Food Insecurity Research
The efficacy of different food access models

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

We wanted to understand the lived experience of people accessing community food services in York.

So we talked to people that use them about **choice, dignity, reliance, self-sufficiency** and so much more…

Here's a summary of the key points related to the theme of "Place-Based Collaborative Food Access Models":

What's Strong:

- **Energy, Agility, and Responsiveness:** These models demonstrate energy, agility, and responsiveness to local needs. They can quickly adapt to changing circumstances and demands.
- **Bringing Together Statutory and Voluntary Sectors:** The models are locally grounded and owned, they are deeply rooted in community (which can increase local trust, participation, and engagement) and can bridge the gap between statutory and voluntary sectors.
- **Volunteer Engagement:** These models enable volunteers, reciprocity, and partnership/collaboration.
- **Agility:** These models can adapt and fill gaps in service provision. Place-based models offer a breadth of services and initiatives from food distribution, cooking classes, community fridges. Different food access solutions can also be tailored to the unique needs and characteristics of each local community. Recognising, no one approach fits all.
- **Desire to Feed Residents:** There is a strong (collective) 'will' to feed residents. And beyond that – 'will' to ensure all residents have access to sufficient and nutritious quality food.
- **Examples of Success:** Examples like Tang Hall Community Kitchen, Up for Yorkshire and Selby College showcase successful programmes that offer a range of services from cooking classes to courses in the community, contributing to food security.

What's Wrong:

- **Lack of Support/Coordination:** Participants notes a need for support and coordination among various stakeholders involved in food access initiatives to ensure efficient and effective delivery of services.
- **Rural-Urban Issues:** Challenges differ between rural and urban areas. Deeply rural areas face entirely different sets of challenges in terms of food access, which may require innovative solutions.
- **Resistance to Collaboration:** Some groups providing food may resist engagement and collaboration. Competition for the same funding sources can be unhelpful.
- **Accessibility:** Some provisions are not accessible to all.
- **Gaps in Provision:** There is a need for more cooking classes, especially for families, and focusing on meal prep. Participants also noted instances where provisions such as those offered by NYLAF, were not available in specific locations like Great Ayton. Geographical layout and distribution of resources can pose substantial challenges to food access efforts.
- **Sustainability After COVID:** Some collaborative efforts that worked during COVID may not have continued afterward in a post-pandemic era. What worked well? Why did it stop?

What Could Be Better:

- **Intersectoral Collaboration:** Strengthen collaboration with other sectors. Healthcare, education, social services.
- **Simplify Processes:** Reduce administrative hoops, bureaucratic processes, and questions by streamlining processes making it easier for individuals and organisations to access and provide food assistance.
- **Learn from COVID:** Embrace the flexibility that emerged during COVID.
- **Reduced Judgement:** Efforts should be made to reduce judgement and stigma associated with seeking help from multiple food provision sources, ensuring that individuals feel comfortable accessing the support they need.
- **Expand to Rural Areas:** Explore how this model can be effectively realised in rural areas.
- **Managing Gaps:** Develop strategies for managing and addressing gaps in services.
- **Adapt to Local Issues:** Tailor approaches to address local challenges, particularly in rural areas. Utilise school canteens, community halls etc.
- **Funding Support:** Require support and funding from Local Authorities and Foundations.
- **Knowledge Sharing:** Share ideas and expertise among collaborators.

Action Needed/Resources Required:

- **Establish Food Networks/Partnerships:** Creating and strengthening food networks and partnerships is essential for effective collaboration and resource-sharing among organisations and individuals working to address food insecurity.
- **System Change:** Advocate for systemic changes to address the root causes of food insecurity, indicating long-term solutions beyond immediate relief.
- **Initiation and Leadership:** Someone or an organisation needs to take the lead and drive these initiatives. Who? Where does the responsibility sit?
- **Community-Centric:** Ensure that these models are central in the community. Ensure solutions are locally relevant and community driven.
- **Address Food Storage and Cooking:** Address the ability to store and cook food.
- **Local Connectors:** Work closely with local connectors and assets. Tap into existing networks and resources.
- **Scarborough Food Network:** Establish a food network in Scarborough. (And perhaps wider)
- **Support for Y. Food Justice Alliance:** Provide resources to revive and support the York Food Justice Alliance. (Space, funding, support, connections)
- **Warehouse for Food Banks:** Food banks need a central warehouse in the city for efficient distribution.
- **Business Involvement:** Engage more businesses in food donation efforts after hours.

Here's a summary of the key points from the feedback related to the "Lived Experience" theme:

What's Strong:

- **Authenticity and Trust:** Participants appreciate the authenticity of the lived experiences shared and highlights the importance of trust in getting to the truth and reality of the situations people face.
- **Inclusive Conversations:** The open and inclusive nature of discussions allow for a wide range of experiences to be shared, and people value the opportunity to have conversations that might not occur elsewhere.
- **Confidence Boosting:** Creating a safe and inclusive space helps boost participants' confidence and allows them to talk openly, share, help, and seek support.
- **First-hand Knowledge:** There is value in getting first-hand knowledge to shape future designs and strategies related to issues like poverty, homelessness, and addiction.

What's Wrong:

- **Dominance of Certain Voices:** Some individuals with lived experience may dominate discussions if they become representatives, potentially silencing others.
- **Language Barrier:** The use of jargon or unclear language can hinder effective communication and understanding.
- **Exclusion of Certain Groups:** There is a concern that some people may not access food banks or support services because they feel they do not belong or are not represented.
- **Tokenism:** Lived experience involvement can sometimes be tokenistic, and it's important to consider whether it's genuine co-production or just a survey.
- **Engagement Challenges:** Building trust and getting people to engage can be difficult, and there's a need to ensure that participants are compensated for their time.

What Could Be Better:

- **Early Involvement:** It's important to involve people with lived experience at the earliest stages of development to influence and shape projects or policies effectively.
- **Community Engagement:** Employing community workers from within the community can help facilitate engagement and provide essential support to individuals in need.
- **Sustainability:** Sustaining conversations and information exchange is crucial, and mechanisms should be in place to allow people to influence provision continuously.
- **Diverse Representation:** Ensure that discussions include a diverse range of voices, including different age groups and marginalised communities.
- **Funding and Resources:** Sustainable funding is necessary to support these efforts effectively.

Action Needed/Resources Required:

- **Co-Production:** Involve people with lived experience from the start of projects to build trust and efficiency, mitigating policy failure.
- **Reduce Barriers:** Encourage inclusivity by reducing barriers that hinder participation.
- **Time and Sustainable Funding:** Recognise that building trust and confidence takes time and resources, including sustainable funding.
- **Influence and Policy Change:** Consider how lived experience can influence procedures, policies, agendas, and investments.
- **Engaging Those in Power:** Encourage those with power to listen, hear, and act on the insights and recommendations of people with lived experience.
- **Provision of Space and Resources:** Provide the mental and physical space, time, and financial resources necessary to enable participation.

Here's a summary of the key points related to the theme of "The Convening Power of Food":

What's Strong:

- **Faith Networks:** Faith networks play a significant role in bringing people together around food.
- **Social Reasons:** People attend food-related events for social reasons, fostering relationships and community. (A way 'in')
- **Local Area Coordination:** Initiatives like the involvement of PCSOs in meetings and relationship-building contribute to the community.
- **Community Building:** Food-centred activities, like the Tang Hall food cycle, break down barriers, foster commonality, and reduce stigma.
- **Reduces Isolation and Stress:** These activities reduce isolation and stress through a holistic approach, encouraging contributions and helping others.
- **Community Cafés:** Cafés with universal access contribute to inclusivity.

- **Hub and Bespoke Models:** Models like Community Action Officers (CAOs) in North Yorkshire.

What's Wrong:

- **Inclusivity:** Not everyone feels they belong in food-related spaces, and the food provided may not represent them, leading to feelings of exclusion.
- **Accessibility:** Issues related to transport and access can hinder participation.
- **Silos:** There is a need to break down silos and create a more holistic approach to community-building, avoiding a blame culture.

What Could Be Better:

- **Increased Engagement:** There's a need for more opportunities like this to bring people together.
- **Access and Rural Reach:** Efforts should expand to provide better access, especially in rural areas.
- **Reciprocity:** Encourage more reciprocity and consider if referrals are needed to connect individuals with services.
- **Infrastructure:** Invest in facilities, such as kitchens and infrastructure, to support communal cooking and other food-related activities.
- **Education:** Promote education about different cultural communities to foster cultural competence.
- **Networks:** Improve and broaden networks for better collaboration.

Action Needed/Resources Required:

- **Community Building:** Build communities of trust, purpose, and place, recognising that it takes time.
- **Create Welcoming Spaces:** Develop more spaces that people want to gather in.
- **Grow Your Own Food:** Support schemes like "grow your own food" to promote community self-sufficiency.
- **Co-production:** Involve individuals with lived experience to inform local needs and direction.
- **Communal Cooking:** Promote communal cooking, food-growing initiatives, supper clubs, and supermarket partnerships.
- **Inclusivity:** Create non-judgmental environments that encourage connections between people.
- **Learning and Collaboration:** Learn from and collaborate with other organisations and communities.
- **Support Marginalised Communities:** Employ and support individuals from marginalised communities to ensure representation.
- **Community Hubs:** Encourage community hubs to offer lunch and supper clubs.
- **Food as a Building Block:** Recognise food as a building block for families and communities.

Here's a summary of the key points related to the theme of "Cash First":

What's Strong:

- **Increased Chance of Success:** 'Cash First' approaches are seen as more likely to succeed and less judgmental.
- **Freedom, Choice, and Dignity:** These approaches provide individuals with the freedom and dignity to make choices about their needs.

What's Wrong:

- **Perception:** There's a perception that money provided may be spent on things other than food.
- **Agenda Alignment:** There's a question about whether food and cash agendas can be effectively linked.
- **Role of the Media:** The media may influence public perception and trust around giving money.
- **Suspicion and Trust:** There is suspicion and trust issues surrounding giving money directly.
- **Access Challenges:** Rural areas face challenges in accessing cash assistance.

What Could Be Better:

- **Reciprocity:** Explore ways to build reciprocity into a cash-first model.
- **Honest Conversations:** Encourage open and honest conversations about money and its use.
- **Reduce Stigma:** Work towards reducing the stigma associated with claiming full benefits entitlement.

Action Needed/Resources Required:

- **Funding Support:** Seek funding support from statutory sources.
- **Accountability:** Define responsibility and hold the state accountable.
- **Income Generation:** Explore ways for individuals to earn the cash and potentially give back in the future.
- **Ongoing Support:** Provide ongoing, regular support and professional services within the community food support, including benefits advice, income advice and debt management. Address employment issues also such as 0-hour contracts.
- **Cohesive Planning:** Develop a cohesive plan in each area to join up various support services.
- **Signposting:** Increase signposting to benefits and support services.
- **Food Vouchers:** Consider food vouchers as a step in the right direction.
- **Integration:** Integrate direct food provision with wrap-around services and support.

- **Coordinated Forum:** Establish a coordinated forum for food aid providers with proper funding.
- **Role of LACs:** Consider the role of Local Area Coordinators (LACs) in coordination efforts.
- **Safeguards:** Implement safeguards for income going into bank accounts in cases of domestic abuse.

Here are the key messages and insights on the theme of 'More than food':

What's Strong:

- **Commonality and Community:** 'More than food' initiatives foster a sense of commonality, community, and belonging.
- **Importance of Advice and Regulation:** Providing financial advice and adhering to standards like AQS (Advice Quality Standard) is crucial.
- **Building Personal Resilience:** These initiatives are seen as essential in helping individuals build personal resilience.
- **Maximising Engagement:** They provide a chance to maximise engagement with people facing food insecurity.
- **Tackling Causes:** 'More than food' approaches address the underlying causes of food insecurity, not just the symptoms.
- **Local Knowledge Base:** They tap into the knowledge base of local systems.

What's Wrong:

- **Consistency:** There's a need for consistency in delivering 'More than food' services.
- **Funding Challenges:** Obtaining funding can be difficult, and self-sustainability is often a challenge.

- **Stigmatisation:** These initiatives can sometimes assume that people are defined solely by their problems.
- **Reliance on Volunteers:** They often rely heavily on volunteers, which can limit the ability to offer comprehensive support.
- **Lack of Trusted Advisors:** There's a lack of trusted and qualified advisors to provide guidance.
- **Mental Health Challenges:** Engaging individuals with mental health issues can be uncertain and challenging.

What Could Be Better:

- **Training:** Provide more training for advisors and support personnel.
- **Diverse Opportunities:** Ensure 'More than food' includes positive opportunities such as workshops, communal cooking, and social activities.
- **Building on Existing Services:** Build on existing services and collaborate to avoid stigmatisation.
- **Effective Persuasion:** Develop skills and knowledge to effectively persuade people to access wider support.
- **Collaboration:** Bring services together and collaborate without creating an obvious divide.
- **Continuity and Dignity:** Maintain continuity and dignity while offering wrap-around support with a menu of services.
- **Links and Referrals:** Establish single points of contact for referrals to streamline advice and support access. Improve signposting to other relevant support groups and services.

Action Needed/Resources Required:

- **Efficient Food Waste Collection:** Efficiently collect and redistribute food waste to reduce pollution and maximise benefits.
- **Building Referral Networks:** Build referral networks and trust within the community.
- **Hubs and Collaboration:** Foster collaboration and establish thematic providers.
- **Basic Training:** Provide basic training for volunteers on engaging with individuals on more than food issues.
- **Natural Conversation Spaces:** Create natural conversation spaces in activities and social interactions.
- **Support:** Allocate resources including time, volunteers, funding, and space.
- **Change in Mindset:** Shift the mindset from problem-solving to providing exciting new opportunities.
- **Diversify Services:** Recognise that different individuals have different needs, some may need social settings, while others may require professional help.
- **Addressing Root Causes:** Address the root causes of inability to buy food and provide necessary support.
- **Local Networks:** Establish local networks for collaboration.
- **Involving Foodbank Attendees:** Consider involving foodbank attendees in governance or decision-making.
- **Funding and Training:** Allocate funding and resources for training advisors and support personnel.

From the summary text, core messages emphasise the need for community-driven, adaptable, and inclusive approaches to address food insecurity comprehensively and sustainably. Collaboration, trust-building, and tailoring solutions to local needs are central to these efforts.

The importance of collaboration and partnership within the community is a recurring theme seen as vital in addressing food insecurity effectively. There's also a consistent emphasis on the need to tailor solutions to the specific needs of different communities, whether they are urban or rural. Effective communication and engagement with the community, including individuals with lived experience, is highlighted.

The accessibility of food-related services and initiatives is a significant concern. Ensuring that everyone feels they belong and has equal access to resources is crucial in reducing food insecurity. Key principles in addressing food insecurity are building trust and treating individuals with dignity and respect. Judgment and stigma associated with seeking assistance must be reduced.

Flexibility and adaptability are equally valued qualities, especially in the face of changing circumstances or crises. This includes being open to new approaches and learning from experiences. Effective resource allocation is also essential, not only in terms of funding but also in terms of time, space, and support.

Sustainability of initiatives beyond crisis periods, like during the COVID-19 pandemic, is highlighted as an ongoing challenge. There's a need to maintain and expand successful programmes. That said – moving beyond immediate relief - advocating for systemic change and addressing the root causes of food insecurity is seen as a long-term solution.