

Forty attended our third event from the Aberdeen and wider Aberdeenshire area, including food bank volunteers, community workers, health care professionals, housing support and addictions services.

Following feedback from our previous events requesting more time for discussion and networking, we started the event with reflection on our understandings of the term 'food poverty' and then discussion of our different organisations' responses to it. This is a summary of how attendees defined food poverty:

What is food poverty?

It's about money:

- Not being able to afford food
- Having limited or no means to buy food – in a crisis or on an on-going basis
- Spending a high proportion of your income on household food costs
- High food prices

It's about physical access:

- Being unable to access a healthy, balanced diet
- Lack of access to places selling healthy food at affordable prices

It's about family life:

- Having to make choices about how food is shared within a family
- Not being able to prepare and eat a meal together as a family

It's linked to other affordability difficulties:

- Lack of money for energy to cook food
- Having to choose whether to eat, heat, or pay rent etc.
- Having to make choices about buying food and other essential items

Our first speaker was Dr Flora Douglas from the Rowett Institute at Aberdeen University who spoke about her recent research for NHS Health Scotland – ['The nature and extent of food poverty/insecurity in Scotland'](#) as well as other research projects she has been involved in on food poverty and the use of emergency food aid.



Flora highlighted that low-income households in Scotland spend 18 to 20 per cent of their income on food, compared with 8 per cent for those on the highest incomes.

On researching the use of emergency food aid, Flora reflected on the resourcefulness and creativity of those receiving food parcels, with participants explaining techniques for cooking with minimal energy use and making food parcel items last as long as possible. She also commented on the feeling of powerlessness expressed at times by emergency food aid recipients.

Attendees then discussed the challenges facing their organisations in terms of responding to food poverty:

What is the biggest challenge facing your organisation regarding growth in food poverty and the numbers of people accessing emergency food aid?

- Ensuring sufficient quantity and quality of food supplied to food banks and lack of control over this
- Limited resources to meet increased demand (funding, volunteers, donations)
- Cuts to other services reducing wider support available
- Further changes and reductions to benefit entitlements
- Lack of capacity to support people with health related issues
- The mental health impacts of food poverty and the lack of support for this
- Recognition among health professionals of the health consequences of food poverty
- Emergency food aid work detracting from ability to focus on preventative interventions

Chris Mathieson from Grampian Housing Association then spoke about the range of partnership working they are involved with which includes the provision of money and benefits advice in emergency food aid settings. Basing the advice service within agencies allows them to be far more reactive than when clients are passed on via referrals.

Advisors have also provided training to staff and volunteers within the emergency food aid services. However Chris did identify a number of logistical challenges to such partnership working in terms of communication and remote management of staff. On-going challenges are also likely to include increased demand for advice with the roll out of Universal Credit and further welfare reforms.

The final presentation was from Peter Kelly who spoke about the stigma of poverty and the Poverty Alliance's 'Stick Your Labels' campaign which seeks to challenge stigmatising attitudes and misconceptions about the reasons why people experience poverty in this country. Attendees were keen to get more information and resources on 'poverty myth-busting' to use in their own settings.

Our final event will be held in Inverness on 22nd October. For more information and to register [click here.](#)

Any questions do contact Mary Anne MacLeod at Maryanne.macleod@povertyalliance.org.

