

### **What problems are your projects facing and what could be the solutions?**

Several people commented on the need for better transport and storage. Suggestions included shared vans (especially refrigerated vans) and community-based cold storage. Several people highlighted that electric vehicles would be preferable while another suggested old ice cream vans as one potential option.

There was significant discussion around dignity in distribution. Several people pointed out that references to “food waste” were unhelpful and could feel insulting. Terms like “intercepted” or “rescued food” were thought to be preferable. People also commented that even then, a lack of choice, variety and nutritional value meant foodbanks and community meals were not necessarily offering a service as positive as it could be. An excess of bread was highlighted as a further concern around produce that groups needed to dispose of due to an inability to redistribute it.

Several people noted that much of the produce received had extremely short shelf life, meaning rushed distribution and little flexibility for recipients. Problems were also identified around recipients lacking even basic tools like can openers, let alone adequate refrigeration, storage and cooking skills, tools and facilities to prepare good meals using intercepted food. It was also stressed that we cannot allow ourselves to think that “beggars can’t be choosers.” People who need our help should still be entitled to some control over their lives, including their diet.

Some recipients were seen as lacking cultural knowledge of available produce (particularly an issue for new immigrants and asylum seekers), leading to a lack of engagement and wasted food, while some providers felt they lacked knowledge of other food cultures (e.g. Halal.)

There was some concern over the way redistribution systems work. Several groups expressed concern at the costs of Fairshare deliveries and whether the supermarkets should contribute much more towards these costs. Some also raised concerns about Fairshare packaging and the environmental impact of the operation. Supermarkets’ position in the system was also questioned, with people asking if it was appropriate that so much “waste” is produced (especially bread) and whether community food projects receiving this “surplus” were in fact somehow “greenwashing” the supermarkets, whether they should be contributing their logistics systems to deliver their own produce, and how a food system might be created that would reduce waste while also ensuring greater access to good food.

It was acknowledged that foodbanks and community meals are only one part of a much wider societal issue around poverty. Many recipients are facing complex challenges and good food is often a low priority. Some people felt that knowledge of food has declined over the last fifty years as focus has moved from community to convenience. Some also described problems familiar to many volunteer-led initiatives; lack of time, money, energy and volunteers to get everything done and difficulties with unpredictability of volunteer labour.

### **What successes are your projects having?**

Some projects have experienced significant successes which should be celebrated. For some, it took some encouragement for them to recognise these successes. This meant that these discussions were extremely enjoyable.

Some projects were pleased to see more and more service users willing to try new foods, particularly at community meals. Some felt the quality of food being intercepted played a part in this. Several

commented on how successful community meals had become in other ways too; being used as community-building tools, bringing people of different ages, classes and cultures together. Some noted that such community building exercises had flourished as people began sharing their food cultures, recipes and other support with and without the direct input of the project. Many projects seemed to be producing less waste recently too, mostly due to increased management skills and better ideas on how to use certain produce that arrived.

Volunteers were discussed at some length. Many people felt that the volunteers were one of the greatest assets of their organisations. In some cases, recruiting and retaining volunteers had been a great success, chiefly as a result of one-to-one support, asking people to make a firm commitment, creating new opportunities, setting specific development goals, providing adequate training, listening to their needs, showing real appreciation and emphasising how worthwhile the work is. One organisation was finding it difficult to provide enough work for the glut of volunteers it now has on file!

A number of projects have seen service users become volunteers (and vice versa in a few cases.) Such cases were regarded as particular successes, especially since several groups have also seen volunteers go on to paid employment, in part as a result of getting good work experience from volunteering.

Some people highlighted the growing understanding of service users' needs within their groups, including trying to find ringpull cans for those without a tin opener. Several groups had also expanded service users' horizons somewhat by offering cooking classes and growing workshops to open up wider conversations about what and how we eat.

It was pointed out that food donations at Sainsbury's have increased significantly, in line with increased engagement with the issues within stores. Several projects also reported how well certain partnerships had developed, with retailers, Fairshare and other organisations. Some praised other retailers for actively seeking projects to receive their surplus. Partnerships with local colleges have enabled some groups to get free Health and Safety and Food Hygiene training.

Some projects have added additional services to their foodbanks and community meals. Most provide some degree of signposting, several provide cooking classes, some offer some social security advice and one even offers HIV testing and ESOL classes to refugees and asylum seekers. There was a general feeling that such services go beyond meeting the original basic need met by a foodbank, thus increasing the dignity of the service user and helping prevent them needing to return to the foodbank later as their other difficulties persist.