

People at the Centre Update 16



A Community Resilience Best Practice Case Study from Recovery Enterprises Scotland

As the scale and impact of COVID-19 unfolds, East Ayrshire communities are faced with an unprecedented need for food; an existing challenge in addressing food insecurity and poverty. We witnessed the direct demand within our weekly Foundations Café.

At Foundations Café, we were highlighting unmet needs, with a desire to increasing our capacity in supporting people in lower socio-economic and marginalised groups experiencing additional barriers to support through stigma and discrimination.

The Café was a community asset, engaging with vulnerable groups through low cost food in a welcoming environment; serving 900 meals during initial 5 months, and developing 20 volunteers; mainly people in recovery, committed to serving their communities.

Like most businesses, we required adapting and innovating following café closure. The team agreed in providing a mobile food provision, with initial location and vulnerable households identified through unique local intelligence where volunteers reside; established within neighbourhoods ranked in the top 5% of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

The pandemic is reinforcing the underlying health needs and risks being further exasperated. We witness people experiencing adverse health, poverty, isolation, housing, mental health, addiction, fuel poverty, food insecurity, brain injury, learning difficulties, mobility, and literacy issues.

A volunteer explained: "There are many people in my community not interacting with services, as many are low income with addiction or mental health issues. This

is leading to people's needs going unmet, as not wishing to leave the security of their own community, they have little trust. With the right backing, members of these communities with living experience, are better placed to engage."

The significant level and nature of our engagement to date has only been possible through unique connections with volunteers. We are humbled in how the community has welcomed us, opening up about their needs and feeling worthless; a community normalising unacceptable standard which we aspire to reverse!

We have membership with FareShare food redistribution scheme, supporting our approach, along with pockets of emergency funding, helping complement with toiletry and cleaning items. The community outreach is weekly, delivering 70 hampers; having increased rapidly from the 40 houses we commenced with 18 weeks ago. The hampers being the lever for initial engagement, and through developing trusting relationships, we are establishing numerous unmet needs over prolonged periods.

Our current approach having now engaged with 119 households, providing 1111 hampers. We are reaching people where many are not known to services despite the level of need. By proactively reaching out to people, opposed to expecting them coming through service doors, we achieve positive outcomes.

Our community approach is far more than providing food; its connecting on a human level, raising self-esteem and worth. Our engagement is always about treating people with respect, who have rights, strengths and aspirations. Our team is viewed as a trusted provider of assistance, returning weekly and carrying out any actions agreed.

We advocate for people by liaising with services to address; particularly demonstrating the need of focussing on a community level, inclusive of all, where they can flourish. We are enabling community connections, empowering by 'walking alongside,' and responding quickly to emerging needs. We are humbled with tenant feedback when hearing this is the first time of feeling valued and have somewhere to turn for support. We have created platforms where people feel connected, preventing from falling through further gaps.

Furthermore, we have distributed 45 Naloxone kits. This reaching some of the most at-risk groups in neighbourhoods experiencing a high number of drug deaths.

Through directly engaging with communities, many who feel seldom heard, we are sharing their views and needs to strategic partners and service providers. These communities are the experts in their own lives, living with daily challenges; not from an external perspective of knowing what's best, or generalising community engagement approaches.

Regular meetings are taking place with senior officials, where the local authority Chief Executive expressed appreciation for the work of Foundations Cafe and activities during COVID-19; recognising the added value of supporting marginalised communities, in particular families and individuals disconnected from mainstream services. We highlight approaches required in the longer term, not as an emergency response. We seek resources reflective of the demands and impact; and enabling us planning for ongoing support, opposed to uncertainty of limited funding. We have an understanding of local needs where other services are unable to connect. It shouldn't be about competitive tendering!

The value of peer support cannot be understated in how this can increase the likelihood of more successful outcomes. Our approaches are driven by people with lived experience where their views, passion and life experience are central; giving insight into the needs of the local population, thus enhancing community connection.

Our approaches also provide opportunities for people to freely give of themselves and contribute to the well-being of the community as a whole. The peers providing hope and inspiration, developing themselves as resources and giving back to their community.

We have achieved excellent outcomes to date, despite operating with logistical challenges; though with the team's flexibility and passion enhancing our progress and positive impact; becoming a highly valued provision for the community and partners.