

Respect, Dignity and Language in providing Community Food Support



Adur & Worthing
FOOD PARTNERSHIP

Research shows that people who use community food support, food banks and other types of food support are experiencing trauma.

The inability to provide food for yourself or your family has an impact on mental health, sense of wellbeing and physical health, causing feelings of emotional distress and guilt, while also affecting people's sense of identity and status.

Those affected feel stripped of local value and are made to feel useless. People feel shame and humiliation about their situation, guilt about their ability to feed their family, and anxiety about whether they deserve to receive support. As well as experiencing the physical pain and fatigue of hunger.

Adur & Worthing Community Food Network

The Community Food Network aims to empower those we work alongside, treating them with dignity and respect.

We aim to support our neighbours with dignity and empower people by providing as much choice as possible.

We commit to providing opportunities for people to make their own choices around food.

We believe that people should have a right to choose the food they would like to eat

We recognise the power of language.

We commit to using positive and empowering language whilst working with people, and endeavor to make appropriate choices when referring to the people accessing support.

For example:

- Using the term 'neighbour' instead of 'clients', 'service users', 'needy'
- A community café could say 'customer', like any other café

What this is not:

- Having expectations around if/how people should show gratitude
- Giving a sense of being 'put upon'
- Being made to think their request is unreasonable
- Being dismissed
- Phrases like 'they'll have what they are given'
- Generalising/stereotyping people based on certain characteristics
- Treating people in a patronising way
- Assuming people who are asking for food do not need it

People from many different backgrounds and circumstances may need food support, and we are non-judgmental in our approach.

This looks like:

- Not responding with shock to someone's circumstances
- Not discussing people's circumstances in a public space
- Recognising that some people may be in-work and still require support
- Being prepared that some people may behave in unusual or surprising ways when they are accessing support due to stress, e.g. 'oversharing', heightened emotions, anger, embarrassment

Supporting people with dignity

A person's dignity is supported by care that is tailored to their individual, personal needs.

The following are some examples from people when they felt their dignity was not respected:

- Being made to feel worthless or a nuisance
- Feeling judged
- Being treated more as an object than a person
- Feeling their privacy was not being respected when accessing a food bank, e.g., having to queue for a food bank in a busy public place
- Generally being rushed and not listened to.
- Feeling as though they must have what they are given and can't ask for things they need

Here are some examples of how to create a dignified approach:

- Giving people the opportunity and time to tell their story
- Giving people some privacy when sharing personal and traumatic information
- When giving support, starting with the most immediate problem, and working out from there
- Genuine welcome every time
- Give people as much food choice as possible
- Being respectful of people's needs and preferences e.g. gluten free, vegan, 'junk/unhealthy' food & 'treats'
- Checking in to make sure the food they are getting is as appropriate as possible for their needs
- Explain the constraints you operate under so people understand why they may not be able to get what they really want or need every time, and that it is not possible (could maybe have an online statement that you ask people to read, or link at the bottom of emails etc.)
- Minimising the number of steps someone needs to go through before they receive a food parcel
- Starting with giving someone food and making sure they are no longer hungry, before asking them to start engaging in support

We recommend a person-centered approach, which supports the person, at the 'centre of the service', to be involved in making decisions about their life - this looks like sharing the options available to them, working with them to ensure they can make an informed decision moving forward, referring them directly wherever possible, as opposed to signposting.

It is important to remember that food is an extremely personal choice. Each person's life experience, age, gender, culture, heritage, language, beliefs and identity will influence their food choices. A person-centered approach to food looks like taking the time to listen to people's individual stories, not making assumptions, providing non-western food options, making it easy for people to access food according to their dietary requirements and preferences e.g. gluten free, vegetarian and vegan options.

A person-centered approach should support and enable a person to build and keep control over their life.

Supporting volunteers

Volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds. Those with lived experience of food insecurity may find they are triggered or upset by certain aspects of their role.

Volunteers who have never experienced this sort of trauma may be very well meaning and accidentally offend someone.

Provide volunteers with an opportunity to de-brief and talk about what they are experiencing in the role

Provide appropriate training for volunteers, and sign-post them to local and national training opportunities relevant to their role

Resources

[Hunger, Trauma, Dignity and Food Support](#)

[Respecting dignity - Resources - Dignity in Care](#)

[What is a person-led approach? - Principles for effective support \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

[Why do people in poverty have poor diets?](#)