

Nourish to flourish –

food, fun and family learning



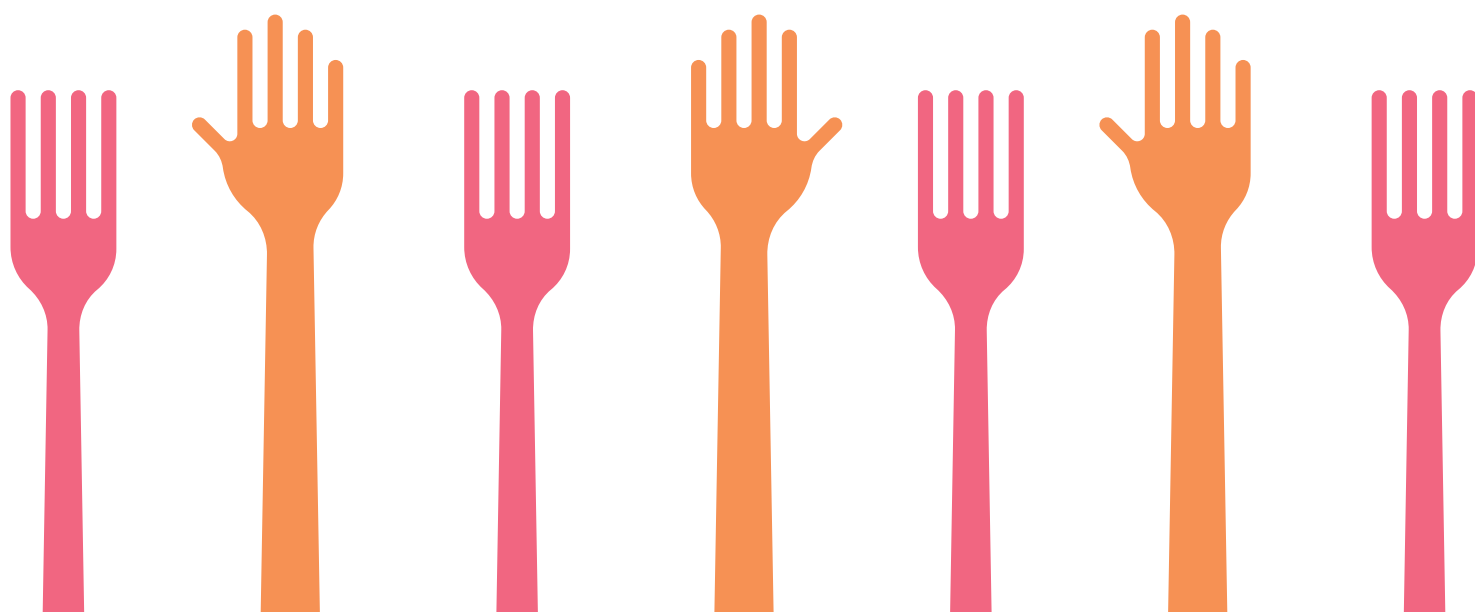
**A review of Children in Scotland's
partnership programme
Food, Families, Futures (2015-2020)**

by Shelagh Young

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Introduction



“... reports that some children were arriving at school badly undernourished and unable to benefit from education were common. Philanthropic measures to alleviate suffering, many instigated by teachers using personal funds, spread throughout the country.”

Reports from the 19th century quoted by Alan Finch in 'The Provision of School Meals Since 1906: Progress or a Recipe for Disaster?', January 2019

“There are just a lot of kids out there who are hungry. I bought all the food for the breakfast club myself, and for PE, paying money for buses as it was just becoming really obvious that kids could not take up opportunities because they had no money.”

Jennifer Abernethy, Principal Teacher, Health and Wellbeing, Stirling Council, 2020

In more than 150 years of compulsory school education we have managed to turn the wheel full circle. The increase in poverty right across Scotland has led to teachers once again covering the cost of food and other basics for children and families in their communities from their own pockets.

The Food, Families, Futures programme (FFF) set out to help schools avoid repeating history by encouraging and supporting people to do things differently. It moved beyond the focus on individual children's nutritional needs by involving whole families and communities. It also moved the goalposts. Instead of measuring success by the number of good quality calories in and attainment levels out, it asked schools to think about bringing food into the work of building better relationships and assessing what difference that makes. Not just relationships with extended families but with a much wider range of local community groups, Third Sector organisations and public services.

This was no accident. It was by design. The attainment challenge in particular and Scottish policy in general requires that schools focus on family learning. It has long been recognised that a child's first and most important teachers are the adults who care for them from birth. What has been more difficult to see, through the tangled spaghetti of policies, programmes and piecemeal

efforts, is the power of food to help achieve this much-needed greater positive engagement with families.

What the pioneers working together under the FFF banner want to tell you is that focusing on food as a way of bringing people together as equals has yielded unimaginably positive results – for staff, for volunteers, for children, for families and for Scotland's communities.

Their message is that even if poverty and food shortages ended tomorrow, they would still want to find ways of enabling their local communities to cook and eat together.

This report aims to tell you more about how people have been brought together through food and to persuade you to do it too.



What if? The ideas driving a movement



“I grew up in Glasgow. When I was wee, the children who got free school meals also got a meal in the summer. The rest of us cottoned on and used to play in the swing park near the school. We weren’t daft. We knew the dinner ladies would come out and shout out ‘does anyone want a bit of spare pudding?’ It got me thinking – we used to do it. Why did it all stop? **What if** we did things differently?”

Nancy Clunie, Head Teacher, Dalmarnock Primary

“We had been working with Andy Milne at [the regeneration forum] SURF looking at how schools could become more engaged with a range of community activities. I started thinking **what if** Children in Scotland could become an enabler, a facilitator working to develop quality food provision in line with a set of values? Our goal was to bring food into a range of community activities that brought people together. Once we started being approached by potential funders, I felt we could play a part in making something happen.”

Jackie Brock, Chief Executive, Children in Scotland

On the surface Dalmarnock Primary has it all. Fabulous building complete with kitchens, motivated staff and a warm and friendly atmosphere. It is also in an area in which life expectancy is lower than the Glasgow average. Child poverty and deprivation are higher than average. It has several children from families whose first language isn’t English and a significantly sized local Chinese population which, for a mix of reasons, was somewhat distanced from other local populations whose children attend the school.

Nancy Clunie, the headteacher at the school, could see that the children who struggled to learn were often hungry. She could see that parents loved and cared for their children but were often worn down by the scale of too many everyday challenges. She knew that the school, though not always seen as a comfortable, open, welcoming place by every family, was at least familiar to them. Nancy asked herself a question: What if my school could make a bigger

difference to the quality of life for many more people than the children we see every day?

While Nancy and others were working on making change happen at the chalkface, Children in Scotland's Chief Executive Jackie Brock and her team seized the chance to tackle some long-standing niggling problems. One of those was what Jackie called "Fortress School".

Children in Scotland knew that many schools were trying different ways to meet the needs of children who were struggling. Concerns about attainment levels and the links with poverty and deprivation were on the agenda but had yet to be crystallised in the Education (Scotland) Act 2016. There was a clear and pressing need for schools to do better at becoming more approachable and enabling parents to feel more involved. The Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 had required headteachers and education authorities to improve parents' involvement in their own child's education and in schools more generally. By the time Jackie joined Children in Scotland as CEO in 2012 it was clear that progress on this was patchy and slow.

Added to this, Scottish Government policy around children, education, poverty and wellbeing was pointing every school towards radical change. The focus on wellbeing in the National Performance Framework and Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), the aforementioned Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006, the Curriculum for Excellence, the Welfare Reform Act 2007 and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (which addressed among many other things eligibility for free school meals) – the common thread was change. Nothing looked like a call for business as usual and yet change in schools and their relationships with families and their wider communities seemed exceedingly slow.

There was another problem bothering people at Children in Scotland and many others, including school staff and policymakers: A rapid growth in numbers of families worried about or unable to make sure they had enough food to eat. In the professional jargon of poverty professionals this is known as food insecurity. The answer to this problem had become food banks. While nearly everyone loves to see a seemingly spontaneous upsurge in generosity and community action, the stigmatising nature of food banks and the marked absence of more dignified alternatives were of profound concern.

Lindsay Graham, policy consultant and an early influencer in the field of free school meals, admits to being embarrassed by having been unaware for too long of the plight of many families outside term-time. It took a chance conversation with an invited guest from the US to make her aware of the impact of losing free school meals during the holidays. She followed this up with a Winston Churchill Fellowship report investigating the issue of 'holiday hunger', which helped eventually to persuade policymakers to take

it seriously. She played a key role in awareness-raising across the UK and in engaging and supporting policymakers and practitioners, including in schools and, of course, Children in Scotland.

By the time FFF went live in 2016 the importance of dignity in food provision was becoming much harder to ignore. In 2015 the Scottish Government convened an Independent Food Working Group under the chairmanship of Martin Johnstone. It reported in June 2016, emphasising the need to ensure a dignified response to food insecurity. The principles and values the Group's members outlined went hand in hand with those underpinning Children in Scotland's vision for FFF. They wanted people with direct experience involved in decision-making, for the social value of food to be recognised and for people to be able to contribute and exercise choice.

What the Independent Food Working Group recommended:



- 1** **Involve people with direct experience in decision making**
People who have faced food insecurity should be involved in the shaping and delivering of food security, from advising strategic working groups to everyday running of local food centres.
- 2** **Recognise the social value of food**
Projects which aim to build community around food often help to create the feeling of a place where people choose to go, rather than have to. A dignified system is one which recognises the social and transformative value of food in the community.
- 3** **Provide opportunities to contribute**
Part of the stigma people face is the feeling of being a 'scrounger' and a 'skiver'. A more dignified system tackling food insecurity would provide opportunities for individuals to volunteer in different roles, to share and learn new skills, to grow their own vegetables and to participate in local community life.
- 4** **Leave people with the power to choose**
Adults in our society typically exercise choice over the food they buy. This choice is sharply constrained for people on low incomes. Our response to food poverty should ensure that, as far as possible, people are able to choose what they eat; that the choice available should include fresh and healthy food; and that where people can pay something for their food they have the dignity of doing so.

Ref: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/dignity-ending-hunger-together-scotland-report-independent-working-group-food/pages/7/>

FFF was designed to offer all those things by bringing schools closer to their communities. By the time the Scottish Government responded to the 2016 Food Working Group report with a Fair Food Transformation Fund in 2017, FFF was in action.

It initially targeted three local authority areas, Glasgow, Eastern Perthshire and North Ayrshire. FFF offered schools an opportunity to be supported in co-creating local solutions for providing dignified and respectful responses to hunger and food insecurity. It embedded this in suggested activities which increased opportunities for community engagement and family learning. Plus, it brought in corporate sector partners, keen to get on board by providing funding and gifts in kind, which schools and local authorities would have found difficult or impossible to reach.

FFF was not a programme designed simply to solve so-called 'holiday hunger'. It was set up to make a more meaningful difference to people's lives both by meeting immediate needs – such as the stress felt by many families during school holidays – and improving the confidence, learning and attainment of children and their families. Another fundamental aim was to make much better use of community assets outwith normal school hours and term time.

What then? How FFF flourished



“We thought we would get 30 families but on sign up day we had over 70. We had to go along and ask Children in Scotland for some more money.”

Nancy Clunie

“We needed to ask people – “what do you want to do?”. It’s about food so we thought we’d put on a meal so people can talk [...] It was great – we thought we would get about 60 in a small village. Then we had about 90 – then we had 220! I said to my husband I might need £500 for my Christmas present to cover the extra costs.”

Jennifer Abernethy, Principal Teacher, Health & Wellbeing, Stirling

Co-creating the right style of food-focused gathering by encouraging school and local authority staff to develop and test ideas with children and families

was written into the heart of FFF from the outset. That hadn't always been the case with successful projects which were already underway when FFF became a new route to funding. Some of the project's leads admit that, under pressure to work at speed and fuelled by a reasonable understanding of what might work, they just acted. Even so, in many cases, participation rates were good right from the start.

Neil Orr, a community development worker in Glasgow and FFF project manager from 2018 to 2020, recalls working with Nancy Clunie at Dalmarnock Primary to help them build on what Nancy calls "some small in-school projects". The school's efforts to bring more parents into school enabled them to get much-needed feedback. It was clear parents valued help with homework and so a weekly after-school homework club was born. While school staff helped children with their work, Neil and his small team joined up with parents to make a meal they could all sit down and share. No one thought that all work and no play was a great idea. So Tuesday nights at Dalmarnock Primary developed to embrace outdoor play specialists who were invited in to ramp up the fun.

With 100 to 150 people sitting down and regularly eating together every week, the team at Dalmarnock felt they were really breaking down barriers. Elsewhere in the city another school was capturing attention. Ibrox Primary had been concerned about childhood obesity and experimenting with work that combined sport and physical activity with healthier eating.

In summer 2016 both schools ran well-attended summer clubs supported by FFF. Both brought in partners including NHS Health Improvement Teams, community play workers, sports coaches, Active Schools co-ordinators and other organisations such as the local Citizen's Advice Bureau and Police Scotland. The big difference was that Dalmarnock's club required at least one adult to attend with their children while Ibrox ran on a children-only basis.

2016 also saw food and fun club style activity in the other two FFF target areas, Eastern Perthshire and North Ayrshire. In 2017 FFF extended its reach. Having secured further funding it supported two summer clubs in West Dunbartonshire and further growth in the other target areas. It also saw the focus on preparing and sharing good food increase with the introduction of community chefs into holiday clubs backed by increased provision of ingredients for cooking as a result of support from Children in Scotland's corporate partnership with food distribution company Brakes. Its Meals & More programme grew out of sustained engagement with several charities and campaign organisations and became a registered charity itself in 2018.

Ibrox Primary did not have a cooking kitchen but FFF helped them link up with a local community centre and soon community chef Andy became a popular character with the children. Pedalling to school on a green bicycle

loaded with the necessary supplies for that day's shared meal was a pretty unique contribution to a fast-growing trend. That summer Glasgow City Council offered more than 4,600 places across seven sites, five of which were school venues. In Perthshire, clubs ran in four sites across Perth City and Eastern Perthshire, offering more than 400 places to local children and their families. Term-time and holiday clubs flourished in other areas too. North Ayrshire's Irvine Royal Academy kept before and after-school work going for 40 students across the full academic year. West Dunbartonshire ran week-long clubs with daily meals for 400 places for children and their families and Perthshire reached similar numbers with a combination of family activity and the chance to sit down and share a healthy meal.

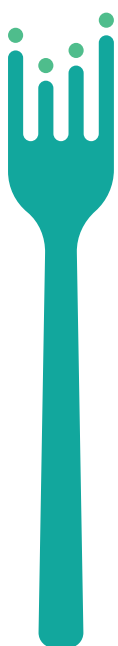


"My wean just loves it. She's been buzzing all week about coming to this summer camp"

Parent

Many flowers were blooming, and a lot of learning gathered along the way. Children in Scotland captured this in an FFF Handbook which was published to help make it as easy as possible to get even more community-based clubs off the ground. Initiatives eventually included a focus on families whose children have additional support needs in West Dunbartonshire, holiday fun clubs at Sunnyside Primary school in Clackmannanshire, a wholly parent-led club in rural Stirlingshire and, just as Neil Orr readied himself to move on, a flurry of interest from more local authorities and schools.

The main aims of Food, Families, Futures are:



To improve the health and wellbeing of children, young people and families



To create a supportive environment for parents/carers to bond, listen and better engage with their children's learning



To provide the opportunity for young people and adult members of families to gain qualifications and certification in subjects related to the local economy



To engage the wider community (i.e. local organisations, businesses and local groups) to support activities which develop life skills, knowledge and potential employment routes for people



To make better use of community assets outwith school/term hours and foster stronger relationships within the communities in such a way that the programme continues after year one.

FFF project leaders were encouraged to be inclusive. From design to delivery, pupil and parent engagement was encouraged at every step. Most of the FFF leads took the important decision to make it a universal offer so that no child felt stigmatised and no family felt excluded. That did not stop them making tactful approaches to families they guessed or knew might need it most. But this was done in ways which avoided further dividing the school community into the haves and have nots. Some were fearful that the numbers would be overwhelming, but this did not become a problem. Rationing wasn't needed and the open-door style approach enabled parents to bring along siblings who were not pupils if they wanted or needed to.

There is no mystery magic ingredient that makes an FFF style project work. The recipe is simple. There must be food, shared prep, shared eating and ideally shared clearing up. As Phill Mathis, Depute Headteacher at Sunnyside Primary School, Alloa puts it:

"Our parents are way more open with us because we are on first name terms. I'm not Mr Mathis, I'm Phill and they talk to me more. I roll my sleeves up and we might have a conversation over the chopping board, and they mention something, and I can say - oh well have you heard about this or could you do that? Just drop it into conversation [...] We've had families who have really hit crisis where we've been able to build on the relationships we've got with them and help them out when they are in need. And we've had people say - we really didn't have anywhere else to go."



"Food is the central feature of Food, Families, Futures. The emphasis is on family / community preparation, with expert support where necessary. The intention is not to recreate the 'school lunch' experience – the purpose is to create a holiday experience of preparing, eating and clearing up by the children and families."

It is also important not to focus on hunger or just on children. Phill Mathis noticed numbers rising when they changed the name from something food-related to simply calling it Family Fun Club. FFF project leads found that the greatest positive impact for children and families was experienced when parents or other family carers attended the projects with the children, for some or all the time. Taking part in some activities together strengthened relationships in every direction. The strong message emerged that FFF is for building stronger local communities and family/school relationships, not for childminding.

Neil Orr was always keen to see his community organising role diminish in importance as leadership was handed over to the community. He cites one strong example in Stirlingshire, but opinion is divided on how realistic it is to move beyond meaningful parental engagement to parent-led as the norm.

For one thing the pathfinding work is not yet completed. There is still much to learn, in particular how to ensure this type of work is sustainable. The outcomes and what people cherish about this work is described later in this report but for now the last word goes to Phill Mathis:

“Even if we didn’t see families having such big problems, bringing them together would still be brilliant. We want positive destinations for everybody – the children and our families. We want them to think of lives that can take them anywhere. Whether they stay here or want to reach out beyond Alloa. This sort of learning together and being together is about creating that positive future.”

What were the barriers?



“There was a line of school catering professionals down one side the table at the meeting, arms crossed defending their territory. We’d been cooking in a tent in the pishing rain because we couldn’t get permission to use the kitchens. We had Donna, a qualified community chef who could answer all the health and safety questions before they were asked. We got into the kitchen in the end but it wasn’t easy.”

Neil Orr, Community Worker/FFF project worker/manager

“The people we’ve got to talk to are not the people who are experiencing the need, it’s the people who don’t understand [...] You’ve got a wee person standing in front of you – hungry or unkempt or dirty – what are you going to do? Not feed them because their dad might have a big telly?”

Jennifer Abernethy

Attitudes can be powerful barriers and FFF project leads became experts in breaking through them. Success in some matters was hard-won and there have been some setbacks and failures.

✕ Food hygiene

Nancy Clunie was aghast when her school's kitchens were declared out of bounds. Catering staff operate under what Neil Orr calls a "regime of fear". It's their job to take strict measures to ensure the food served from their kitchens is safe and frightening to think what might happen if they fail. Everyone respects that but the immediate outcome was that Dalmarnock Primary School's first food-focused events relied on a diet of sandwiches.

Sandwiches day after day became, as Nancy says, pretty boring and they didn't create the joyful sharing of food that was core to the FFF vision. Worse still, catering staff policed consumption to ensure anything uneaten after a specified period was binned. This resulted in the mortification of a parent who had stashed spare sandwiches away to ensure she had something to eat that night as there was too little to go round at home. The unedifying spectacle of people's bags being rifled through and sandwiches confiscated became the tipping point. As Neil pointed out, you can buy a sandwich from Greggs without the staff following you out of the shop to make sure you eat it within a prescribed period. Why couldn't parents attending FFF events be similarly trusted? There needed to be a way of staying safe while bringing more respect for people's dignity into the equation.

With Neil's support and the appointment of a community chef, tasty hot meals and the ability to share food prep with all the participants became a reality but not, at first, by using the school kitchen. Local councillors visiting the school in a summer downpour were surprised to find a hot meal for 200 people being prepared in the playground tent on portable cookers next to an empty kitchen stocked with thousands of pounds worth of publicly funded equipment. The missing ingredient until then had been effective political support. Within a short time, Neil, the FFF project manager and Donna, the well-qualified community chef, were in much more productive meetings with the school catering team. Access to the kitchens was granted.

Similar challenges looked set to frustrate FFF partners at Sunnyside Primary School in Alloa but their catering team took a more pragmatic approach. Jaki Reid, Principal Teacher of Improving Outcomes in Clackmannanshire Council's Education Development Service, explains:

"Class Cuisine [who are contracted to provide meals to schools in Clacks] have been great – they don't cook on the premises the food is delivered but they have said – you can use the kitchen. You just have to get the training in place. They've shown people how to use the kitchens. We now have a policy and a way of doing that in place. It has been quite arduous but worth it. They know what they are talking about – they have this unblemished record and we have worked well with them."

Sunnyside has now registered as a food business bringing it within the ambit of the relevant inspection regime. According to Depute Headteacher Phill Mathis the work involved has been justified many times over by the benefits.

✂ Investment and buy-in

The money which Children in Scotland helped bring to the table was supplemented, matched or exceeded by resources secured more locally. For example, in Sunnyside's case Phill Mathis's time was covered by Pupil Equity Funding and, in Stirling, Jennifer Abernethy and her colleagues secured local authority funding.

Pitching for money in some cases exposed ingrained ideas that fuelled resistance. People questioned why FFF was organised around a universal offer rather than targeting the most deprived. Why meals for parents were being funded when their main responsibility was child wellbeing. People pushed for their resources to be celebrated in external publicity when project managers felt this could be stigmatising or exploitative. Initial communication of the project focused on poverty, but this rapidly changed to an emphasis on the core partnership aspect of the work and the offer of fun, accessible activities alongside meals.

Bureaucracy was named as one of the biggest barriers. Doors needed opening through networking and gentle persuasion. Minds needed opening to the potential of a combination of a simple shared meal and light touch, enjoyable shared activities to achieve the degree of family learning and community engagement that many a more complex strategy created under Scottish Education's National Improvement Framework had not yet managed.



“Going into the local authority was like going into someone's house - we were respecting it but trying to make a change. Sometimes you found someone waiting for an outsider to show them how it could be. It takes the pressure off them if they have some encouragement and some different ways of looking at how to do something. We often just helped people go away and think differently.”

Neil Orr

Budget holders sometimes felt uneasy about the celebratory and inclusive approach that might be criticised for failing to specifically target the most deprived families or take an insufficiently obvious “teaching” approach to family learning. Councillors made comments about needing to “teach people how to cook” rather than offer free meals. There were undercurrents of concern around the age-old theme of the deserving and the undeserving poor.

Many participants believe these concerns are answered by the outcomes. But cost and sustainability are less easy circles to square as the Sustainability section below shows.

✂ Location

Holiday fun clubs with food have generated strong and sustained community participation quickly in towns and cities but rural areas have struggled. Numerous reasons have been identified, ranging from the distance people need to travel to reach the venue to patterns of seasonal working in some rural areas which make it difficult for adults in the family to participate in the school holidays.

Minibus pick-ups have been helpful in solving travel issues. However, if adult family members cannot attend with children, rules on providing day care contained in the Public Services Reform (Scotland) Act 2010 come into play. Stirling Council opted for shorter two-hour sessions as these are not considered to be day care under the law and therefore release the providers from some of the legal requirements placed on day care providers. Unfortunately, and not unexpectedly, families whose travel time might come close to or even exceed the length of the session were far less likely to get involved.

This strengthens the case for term-time not just holiday provision. FFF was attractive to funders and educators in places where free school meals are crucial to many because it provided a means for them to tackle the increasingly concerning issue of ‘holiday hunger’. But family learning and good parental engagement are considered crucial to succeeding in the attainment challenge. FFF and other initiatives are showing that both are made more possible by engaging families through food and fun events at the times when they are most willing and able to get involved.



✂ Sustainability

People make programmes work and the most successful FFF work has created a movement of people learning through doing. But costs, both financial and in terms of human energy, have sometimes proved too high to ensure the work is sustained.

In Stirling, Jennifer Abernethy realised that their first model, run primarily by staff employed by the local authority, was too costly both financially and in terms of staff commitment. Version two was contracted out to the Third Sector following a significant hiccup involving procurement rules and this arrangement looks set to continue.

At Dalmarnock Primary Nancy Clunie and her staff team gave up significant chunks of their own time during holidays and evenings to keep the work going. Even before schools were closed because of the Covid-19 pandemic, there were no summer clubs planned for 2020. For Nancy, whose personal circumstances have changed, the workload seemed too great and the costs too difficult to cover with so many other pressures on the school budget. Outdoor play had already been handed to the charity PEEK to run and Nancy says she would consider handing over her school premises to another organisation to run events if the money was there to fund them. But what about the families themselves taking charge? Nancy remains doubtful:

“I think that’s right in theory but it’s not practical – who would take the lead? I didn’t have a holiday the first three years it was running. It was my choice. People said – oh poor you but no – I enjoyed it. It was like a holiday but that can’t go on. And it cost a lot of money, £20 to £30k last year. That was PEF money but where is the buy-in to sustain that?”

Over in Alloa, Phill Mathis sees it differently. Some would say that he might be overly modest in assessing the degree to which his skills and personality have been crucial in making the FFF work a success. At Sunnyside Primary School there are two weeks of FFF-style events in the summer, two days in the Easter holidays and weekly after-school events in term-time. He acknowledges that PEF money has part-funded the time he has spent on it but now, he argues, the planning process is in place and refreshing those plans, including capturing and responding to ongoing participant feedback and engagement, is now far less time consuming than designing from scratch.

Finding community groups and other local contacts to bring outside learning into the school was a steep learning curve but now those relationships are forged and are growing more organically. The time commitment during the events themselves is shared out between staff and some parents on a voluntary basis. In short, Sunnyside School still needs ongoing funding, especially for good quality food but feels it has created a sustainable model.

What worked? The outcomes



“The greatest positive impact for children and families is experienced when parents/carers attend the project with the children, for some or all of the time.”

FFF Handbook

“My daughter was a wee bit stroppy. She wasn’t able to go in amongst them all and just be a player in fun, and now she wants to volunteer with PEEK and she’s a dream. These kids’ mental health are going through the roof. They’re achieving their full potential.”

Parent

Picture a police officer sat having a relaxed chat over coffee with a man who, the last time they met, spat at him and, the time before that, threatened him with a knife. That’s the sort of observation FFF managers make about the power of their work to improve community relationships. Just like the teachers and learning assistants running events, invited guests such as the Head of Social Work in Glasgow, the police, fire officers, debt and welfare advisors, were all encouraged to participate. In return for the opportunity to fulfil the remits they have to meet with some of the people they might normally call “hard to reach”, they were encouraged to eat with the families and to roll up their sleeves and get on with the food prep and the washing-up.

The point was to break down barriers and then encourage some learning. It worked. Phill Mathis admitted he had to drop the teacher inside and accept that a great deal of learning happens just through chat, through play, through cooking, through becoming comfortable and confident enough to ask for advice and to really feel it and hear it when kindness and good advice is offered.

In Glasgow a substantial Chinese minority of parents had become somewhat isolated from and misunderstood by other locals. As a result of coming together at FFF style events, what had been perceived as lack of friendliness was soon better understood as often being caused by language difficulties. When school staff and other people with formal roles in the community became closer to the Chinese parents, some of their concerns were better understood.

One of those concerns was the safety of two busy roads between the school and where many of them lived. Group support for a lobby to introduce traffic restrictions delivered a lasting legacy: speed restrictions and a pedestrian crossing that the police had long thought desirable, but which required community pressure to achieve. And, of course, a sense of pride and achievement for the families involved.



“This is a great opportunity for families to come together, do different activities, meet other people as well that they might not get to meet out of school”

School teacher, Ibrox

Gender was an issue. Most FFF events saw more mums, grannies and aunties engage than male relatives, which reflects the traditional division of domestic labour in the wider world. But, as other organisations have learned, specifically inviting dads makes a difference, as does making sure that activities are co-created. Nancy Clunie observed a gender bias in the cooking and prep of food but a splendid role reversal took place when the men started a great “rice competition”. Prompted into action by observing community chef Donna doing it “wrong”, they talked themselves into hosting a meal of their creation, deploying an array of rice cooking gadgets and techniques in competitive pursuit of the best-tasting grains.

Many other parents right across the FFF family benefitted from skills training in food hygiene with local health improvement teams and others enabling them to gain Royal Environmental Health Institute Scotland (REHIS) qualifications.



“One day I want to be a chef”

Child

Jackie Brock was always clear that the quality of food was as important as the sharing of meals. Food banks are often unable to provide fresh food and the poorest families can be very limited, often because of their living conditions rather than their skills, in their capacity to afford it, prepare it and cook it. Obesity and other forms of convenience and fast food-related malnutrition are a serious concern in Scotland. Many parents fear squandering precious resources on meals their children won’t eat.

FFF leads found that parents themselves were often surprised to learn how broad their children's tastes became when they ate with friends and had some involvement in how the meals were made and served. FFF ignited a passion in children for good food and for learning how to make it.

▼ Crunchy chicken goujons being prepared in a West Dunbartonshire summer club alongside chefs from En Croute



A child's feedback to Children in Scotland provided on an evaluation visit to a summer club in a Glasgow school ▲

 **"I've made more friends because there's been a mixture of people"**

Child participant

Better use of resources, from schools to school kitchens, that lie dormant for many weeks of the year was also a positive outcome. School premises are not owned by school staff but their passion and their pride in the culture and the warm, welcoming spaces many have created sometimes leads to inflexible, proprietorial behaviour. Some barriers created by this have been broken down but there is still a lot of work needed to maximise the value of what Nancy calls "our children's money" by opening school spaces to more people more often.

 **"We need to stop doing stuff that doesn't serve our communities well and we need to start doing stuff with the resources we've got – opening our dormant schools, using those resources and bringing food into it as well."**

Lindsay Graham, Policy Consultant and Campaigner

Local people leading remains a desirable but, as yet, not widely realised goal but all the FFF clubs have been deemed a great success by those who organised and the vast majority of those who participated. Local evaluations show that the clubs improve the quality of life and opportunities for children and their families. All the clubs have met the aims of the programme, including:

- Children and families have enjoyed opportunities to prepare and enjoy healthy and nutritious food together in the sometimes-challenging holiday period and before and after the school day
- Based on the pilot schools in 2016, it is expected that school staff will see a longer-term impact on relationships, learning and engagement of children and families
- Parents have gained skills and qualifications
- Communities have come together to develop, deliver and enjoy the clubs
- School buildings and grounds have been used as a community hub and resource.

Everyone who contributed to this report agreed that the voices, experiences and contributions of the children, young people, families, practitioners, volunteers and partners involved in the planning and delivery of the clubs, had ensured FFF achieved its goals.

What next? Ensuring social justice-based renewal for our communities



The Covid-19 pandemic has thrown our world into turmoil. The frailty of our provision for the most weak and deprived in our communities has been exposed but so too have the myths that people are unwilling to volunteer or too selfish to behave as if they care about other people. Communities have responded magnificently in exceptionally stressful times in a wonderful show of solidarity and community-led grassroots action. Lockdown has created or revealed the loneliness and social isolation that too many experience but the yearning to see or hear from family and friends has never been shared so widely nor responded to with such generosity of spirit.

We are seeing collective efforts to support families but also work conducted innovatively and creatively across all aspects of children's services – voluntary,

public and private. Significant investment is being made by the Scottish Government to offset the worst of the financial impact of the pandemic on Scotland's most disadvantaged families. At the time this report was completed (first week of June 2020), the most recent statistics available from the Scottish Government show that around 150,000 meals are being provided on a daily basis, with 122,000 children entitled to free school meals, largely through vouchers and direct payments.

This support was made available as part of the Scottish Government's £70 million Food Fund to ensure support is in place for people whose access to food is affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, including those having to self-isolate; older people; and families entitled to free school meals.

The high numbers included in the provision for free school meals indicate a reassuring response to those families who have experienced loss of income during the pandemic and an impressive commitment to sustaining those most in need, but of course they won't come close to the real scale and don't tell us about quality. At the time of producing this report, it is difficult to gauge the true reality of hardship faced by families as a consequence of the pandemic, and the wider impact of this support. There are few other 'hard' numbers evidencing how agencies have addressed the needs of families that are newly vulnerable.

Yet the nature of the Scottish Government's response, coupled with the way programmes such as FFF have given greater profile to issues of food, poverty and community resilience in Scotland, is instructive as we envisage priorities for renewal post-virus. Sustaining an exciting and effective family and community-led way of working so that it becomes the new social settlement will become one of Scotland's greatest challenges.

The FFF model has relevance and learning to spare in helping us get to grips with this challenge. Its pioneers proved that sharing food helps create lasting relationships.



"If you really want to make a friend, go to someone's house and eat with him... the people who give you their food, give you their heart."

Cesar Chavez, civil rights activist

They harnessed local energy and support without a pandemic to kickstart kindness. Their work shows how to build stronger relationships and achieve valuable learning through making and sharing tasty, nutritious meals together. Despite their ups and downs along the way, every contributor to this report believes that other school teams can do it and that more must try.

Opening schools to families beyond established school hours has broken through barriers, built trust and changed lives for the better. It has also made much better use of school premises and other resources which otherwise would be empty for 175 days of the year.



“We provide the conditions in which all children can be healthy and active. Our schools are loving, respectful and encouraging places where everyone can learn, play and flourish. We provide children and young people with hope for the future and create opportunities for them to fulfil their dreams.”

Scottish Government vision for children and young people

Ref: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/dignity-ending-hunger-together-scotland-report-independent-working-group-food/pages/7/>

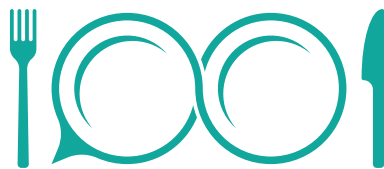


▲ An arts and crafts activity in a West Dunbartonshire summer club

Building on the basics through innovations became the norm in the response to the pandemic. Jennifer Abernethy in Stirling and her colleagues thought about the issue of choice and began to supplement the core provision with a voucher system giving children access to activities, such as sport or dance, organised by other organisations. During the response to the pandemic, this principle was extended to transferring money directly to individual families so they could afford food and gain access to services that could be made available during this period for children and their families.

Consideration has been given by some to a programme design which would offer paid alongside free places to achieve some cross-subsidy. Others are sticking with their current model and finding supporters willing and able to keep on sharing the costs. All are hoping that children and communities continue to flourish as a result.

Ongoing influencing work and useful resources



Children in Scotland is currently developing its manifesto for the 2021-26 Scottish Parliament. Learning from the FFF project will feature prominently in the way calls on challenging inequality are articulated, and the influencing work stemming from this.

The FFF Handbook draws on the evidence from the clubs for achieving critical project goals. These include increased levels of parental engagement, bringing the local community much closer to schools, improving the health and wellbeing of children, young people and their families, and making stronger links with local businesses and community organisations. A food-focused, fun club is a recipe for success in the community.

The Handbook underlines the fundamental principles of local decision-making, engagement and access to publicly-owned schools and other community facilities, dignified approaches to food provision and wider access to services. The response to Covid-19 has demonstrated that it's absolutely vital to follow these principles in times of emergency and as we adjust to 'the new normal'.

To download the Handbook and all other resources related to the FFF project, click [here](#) to visit this page of Children in Scotland's website.

This page includes access to the 2019 edition of Children in Scotland's publication Meaningful Participation and Engagement of Children and Young People: Principles and Guidelines, which is also informed by learning from FFF and would be a valuable resource for anyone considering setting up a similar programme in future.

Nourish to flourish – food, fun and family learning

A review of Children in Scotland's partnership programme
Food, Families, Futures (2015-2020) by Shelagh Young