University of Chester

Department of Clinical Sciences and Nutrition

MSc Public Health Nutrition

Everyone deserves a seat at the table:
A qualitative evaluation of the role of
'The Welcome Network' in supporting
community food initiatives across
West Cheshire

Callie Austin

DECLARATION

I confirm that this assignment is my own work and has not been copied from anyone

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as well as in both lists of references. I confirm that this assignment complies with the

stated word count of 9,149 words.

Signed: Callie Austin

Student Number: 1811006

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Community food initiatives (or projects or programmes): local activities with a focus on alleviating food poverty in a socially inclusive manner (Caraher & Dowler, 2007; Nelson, Knezevic, & Landman, 2013; Nourish Scotland & The Poverty Truth Commission, 2018)
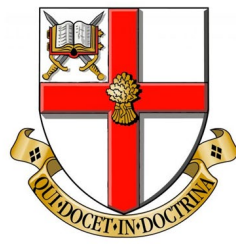
MSc Public Health Nutrition

LITERATURE REVIEW

Project Title: Everyone deserves a seat at the table:

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Student Name: Callie Austin

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ABSTRACT

Food poverty, defined as the lack of socially acceptable access to nutritionally adequate food (Taylor & Loopstra, 2016), is an increasingly problematic public health issue in the UK, particularly in the North West region of England. Statistics from The Trussell Trust (2019) demonstrate the rapid increase in food bank prevalence across the nation. Due to the low quantity of nutritious food intake among food-insecure populations, health and well-being is often compromised (Nelson, Ehrens, Bates, Church, & Boshier, 2007). The most common issues that drive people to rely on food banks for food provision include unemployment, low income and problems with the benefits system (Thompson, Smith, & Cummins, 2018).

Research almost unanimously agrees that food banks are not the solution to food poverty, as they limit access to users (Garratt, Spencer, & Ogden, 2016) and are associated with feelings of stigma (Middleton, Mehta, McNaughton, & Booth, 2017). Community activists also recognise this issue and have thus established community food initiatives (McGlone, Dobson, Dowler, & Nelson, 1999). Reliant on limited resources, however, these initiatives face barriers in their sustainability (Dowler & Caraher, 2003). The literature suggests there is a need for networking and partnership within communities to enhance the effectiveness of initiative delivery. A collaborative approach is also suggested to improve sustainability and improve public recognition of the efforts put toward the amelioration of food poverty in order to encourage the government to address the root causes of the issue.

CHAPTER 1

1.0 Introduction

Food poverty, also referred to as food insecurity, is a growing public health issue in the UK (Lambie-Mumford, 2018). It is estimated that 8.4 million people experienced food poverty in 2014 (Garratt, Spencer, & Ogden, 2016), which likely underestimates the true value since there is not a national surveillance system for food insecurity in the UK as there is in other developed countries such as the United States and Canada (Loopstra et al., 2015). Food poverty is associated not only with a lack of quantity of food but also a lack of nutritious quality (Garratt et al., 2016), and the method of acquiring food must be considered socially acceptable for an individual to be deemed food secure (Taylor & Loopstra, 2016). Figure 1 below displays the various levels at which food insecurity can occur, demonstrating that it affects more than just individuals solely experiencing hunger or limited access to food.
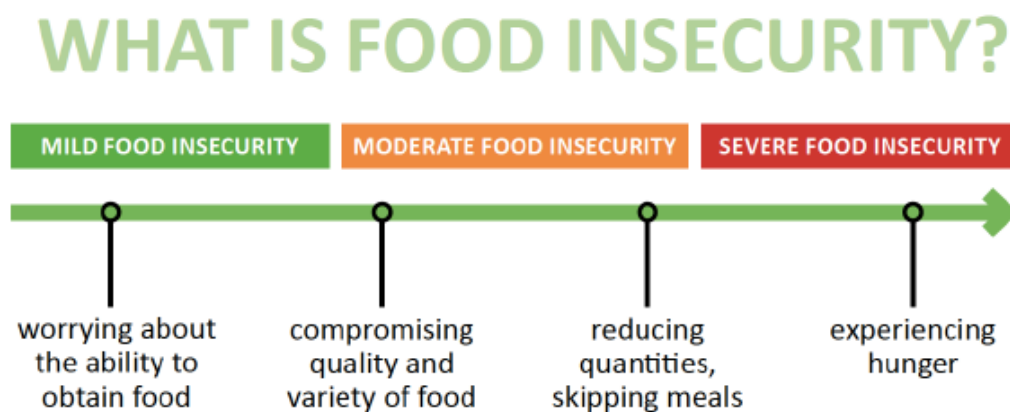
Figure 1. Graphic providing definitions of the different levels of food insecurity. Adapted from Taylor, A., & Loopstra, R. (2016). Too poor to eat. *Food insecurity in the UK. London: The Food Foundation.*

Food insecurity is a salient public issue as it is entrenched in a wide social and political context (Garthwaite & Bramba, 2015; Lambie-Mumford, 2018). Although the United Nations (1948) long ago established that governments must be responsible for ensuring that "everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food…", much of the responsibility for food provision has been transferred to not-for-profit organisations such as food banks and community food initiatives (Dowler & O'Connor, 2012). While this food aid may be helpful in the short-term for individuals experiencing crises (Caplan, 2016), evidence shows that it does not address the underlying causes of food insecurity, and the majority of those seeking food aid need long-term assistance (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012). The literature highlights that understanding the implications of the high prevalence of food poverty in the UK is essential in underlining the need for social policy changes (Lambie-Mumford, 2018). In the meantime, there is a need for more sustainable, reliable solutions to food insecurity to help those who rely on food banks (Dowler & O'Connor, 2012).

1.1 The Detrimental Effects of Food Poverty

A major issue with food insecurity is the physical harm it can cause in terms of nutritional adequacy. Foods and drinks that are energy-dense and nutrient-sparse tend to be the cheapest and most convenient options (Drewnowski, 2009). The typical poor dietary patterns among low-income populations result from the reliance on these options when purchasing food. According to the Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey, the lowest fifteen percent of the UK population by income consumed half the

'five-a-day' fruit and vegetable recommendation, excessive free sugars and saturated fat and exhibited insufficient nutritional status for essential micronutrients such as vitamin D, iron and folate (Nelson, Ehrens, Bates, Church, & Boshier, 2007). There were also greater levels of overweight and obesity among this population (Nelson et al., 2007). According to a report published by The Food Foundation, the lowest 10% of households in the UK would need to spend 74% of their disposable income to meet the nutrient recommendations outlined in the Eatwell Guide (Taylor & Loopstra, 2016). Achieving nutrient guidelines proves to be incredibly difficult for deprived populations primarily due to the high cost of healthy food.

Physical health is not the only thing that's compromised for low-income populations; mental health is a notable concern as well. Poole-Di Salvo, Silver, and Stein (2016) conducted a study on approximately 8,600 adolescents and found significant (p < .01) associations between household food insecurity and mental health problems. Food-insecure adolescents had much higher rates of overall mental health problems (28.7%) compared to adolescents without household food insecurity (9.2%) (Poole-Di Salvo et al., 2016). Another study looking at mental illness among severely food insecure individuals reported a prevalence of 18.4% [95% CI 16.7, 20.1] in women and 13.5% [95% CI 11.9, 15.2] in men (Martin, Maddocks, Chen, Gilman, & Colman, 2016). McIntyre, Williams, Lavorato, and Patten (2012) demonstrated that childhood food insecurity was a strong predictor of depression and suicidal thoughts later in life [crude OR = 2.9 (95% CI 1.4-5.8)]. Evidently, food insecurity can be a powerful indicator of mental well-being, highlighting the importance for improvements in this area.

1.2 Food Banks as the Standard Solution to Food Poverty

When financial difficulty becomes such a severe issue that people cannot afford food at all, they must resort to utilising food banks as they are an immediate source of food provision (Bazerghi, McKay, & Dunn, 2016). Food banks are defined as voluntary, community-based centres that distribute donated food items to vulnerable populations (Gentilini, 2013). Due to the ever-growing issue of food insecurity, food bank usage in the UK has increased tremendously over recent years (The Trussell Trust, 2019). Between 2018 and 2019, The Trussell Trust (2019), a non-governmental organisation and charity that manages the UK's food bank network, reported a provision of 1,583,668 emergency food supplies to those in need, which is a 19% increase from the previous year. Of this total, 1,006,050 supplies were distributed to adults, and 577,618 supplies were distributed to children (The Trussell Trust, 2019). In the North West of England, 222,722 emergency food supplies were distributed, the highest distribution by region in the UK (The Trussell Trust, 2019). These statistics only account for food banks within The Trussell Trust network, and estimates suggest that there may be as many independent food banks currently in operation as there are food banks in The Trussell Trust network (Caplan, 2016; Cloke, May, & Williams, 2016). Figure 2 provides an illustration of the rapid growth of food bank prevalence in England, Scotland and Wales over a span of four years. If independent food banks are experiencing similar usage statistics, it can be suggested that the issue of food poverty is much more ubiquitous than it seems on the surface.
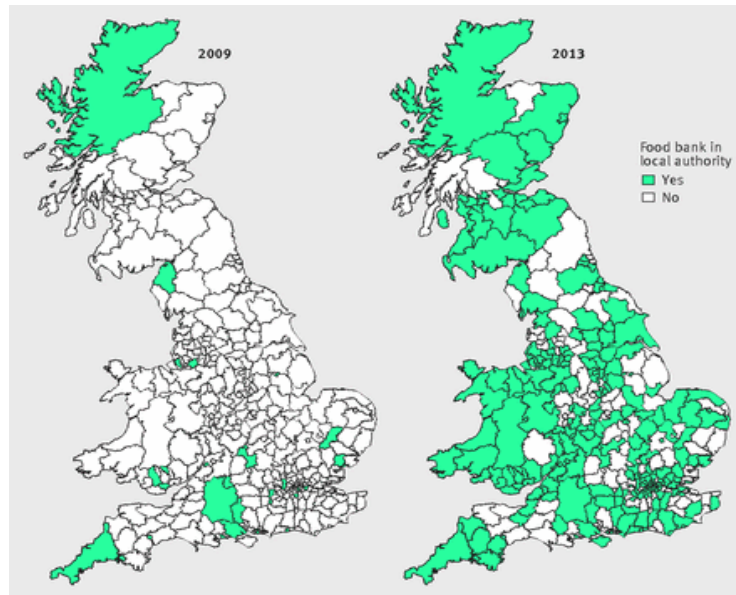
Figure 2. Comparison maps demonstrating the growth of Trussell Trust food banks in local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales from 2009 to 2013. Adapted from Loopstra et al., (2015). Austerity, sanctions, and the rise of food banks in the UK. *British Medical Journal, 350,* h1775. doi:10.1136/bmj.h1775

While food banks may be a helpful resource to those suffering from food poverty, they only provide a three-day supply of food that must be obtained through a voucher (Garratt et al., 2016). Vouchers are issued by people in positions of authority within the community including health professionals, social workers and Citizens Advice employees (Caplan, 2016), which can sometimes be a complex and lengthy process (Thompson, Smith, & Cummins, 2018). An issued voucher states the reason why the client is requesting an emergency food parcel (Caplan, 2016). The process of obtaining a voucher has been highly criticised in that it refutes people's right to food and segregates members of society into categories of 'deservingness' and 'un-deservingness' regarding food access (Cloke et al., 2016). Furthermore, food bank

users can only use a voucher for an emergency food parcel up to three times in a six-month period (Caplan, 2016). The process of obtaining a food bank parcel, coupled with the documented statistics on food bank usage, demonstrate a need for alternative support services for those experiencing food poverty in the long term.

One of the main issues with food banks is that attendees often feel a certain stigma when accessing them, identified in several studies documenting experiences of food poverty (Lambie-Mumford & Dowler, 2014). Qualitative studies on food bank clients demonstrate several common feelings among this population including perceived judgment and a loss of dignity (Caraher & Furey, 2017; Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012; Nourish Scotland & The Poverty Truth Commission, 2018). Food banks often eliminate the option to choose food, which is an important component of both health and well-being (Caraher & Furey, 2017). Moreover, food is more than just something that energises the body; it has social, cultural and religious aspects (Dowler & Caraher, 2003), deeming it a personal and sensitive subject for many people. Thus, acquiring food via undignified methods may potentiate damage to emotional well-being (Caraher & Furey, 2017). Additionally, the same food is not always appropriate for everyone: some people suffer from medical conditions or food allergies that require specific dietary intervention and adherence (Thompson et al., 2018). Not being able to make decisions surrounding food feels demeaning enough to those attending food banks, but not being able to consume all the food provided is an even greater issue (Caraher & Furey, 2017). This complication further highlights the need for a shift away from the traditional food bank model of acquiring food.

While much criticism of food banks exists among the literature, they nevertheless remain a source of food for those seeking assistance (Bazerghi et al., 2016), rendering their elimination superfluous in the meantime. Caplan (2016) argues that they are not part of the problem as they still address some aspect of need, even if only on a short-term basis. Studies agree the presence of food banks is undoubtedly helpful to those who are suffering from immediate hunger (Garthwaite & Bramba, 2015), but the data collected from users suggests that long-term food assistance is warranted in the interim as users are becoming increasingly reliant on them (Bazerghi et al., 2016). The increasing statistics on food bank usage every year indicate that there is a greater, deep-rooted issue existing among low-income populations. Food banks exist to provide short-term support in times of crises, but large amounts of repeat attendance suggest a need to identify and address the underlying issues. The statistics on food poverty, as well as the short-term help provided by a food bank, demonstrate the need for more innovative and sustainable solutions to food poverty. Research on the issues surrounding the use of food banks in the first place must be considered in order to effectively reduce the need for them at all (Garthwaite & Bramba, 2015).

1.3 The Cost of Food, Low Income and the Benefits System

Food is often the amenable component when it comes to budgeting (Garratt et al., 2016). People tend to pay rent, utility bills and other large expenses before allocating any money for food purchases (Cooper, Purcell, & Jackson, 2014; Riches, 2011). This issue has become progressively more problematic over the years as the cost of food has increased by 8% since 2007 (Taylor & Loopstra, 2016). The cost of

healthy foods has increased more than the cost of unhealthy foods in the last 10 years (Jones, Conklin, Suhrcke, & Monsivais, 2014). Furthermore, disposable income for the poorest 20% of households in the UK has decreased annually since 2004 (Taylor & Loopstra, 2016). In order to cover all necessary expenses, people often turn to the benefits system for assistance (Loopstra, Fledderjohann, Reeves, & Stuckler, 2018).

The benefits system was created to assist those who are unemployed or earning a low income by providing additional funds to help pay for various expenses (Loopstra et al., 2018). However, the benefits system has been and continues to be a subject of criticism and controversy (Beatty & Fothergill, 2014; Caplan, 2016; Cooper et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2018). Specifically, many professionals and academics argue that the Welfare Reform Act of 2012 has created more problems than it has solved (Loopstra et al., 2018). Notably, the North West region of England was listed as one of the three top regions to be most negatively affected by the welfare reforms (Beatty & Fothergill, 2014). Wacquant (2009) argues that welfare policy is designed based on a 'behaviourist philosophy' where instances of changes and/or delays to benefits occur to encourage better user behaviour. While this system is designed to motivate users to adopt good intentions, it creates an issue when benefit sanctions are mistakenly made, which affects approximately 68,000 people on Job Seeker's Allowance (Miscampbell, 2014). According to Cooper et al. (2014), 58% of benefit sanctions are successfully overturned, suggesting that mistakes often occur on the administrative side, erroneously leaving people without financial assistance through no fault of their own. A paper by Lambie-Mumford (2018) includes a statement from a manager of a food bank in Burngreave, Sheffield confirming these concerns: "I mean if

we're only going to give people three lots of food but they've been sanctioned for 6 months or something I'm not sure what they're going to do, I don't even know what the government expects them to do."

Further data on food bank users provide continued evidence that suggests the benefits system is not accomplishing its objective of providing appropriate financial assistance. The Trussell Trust found that the main reasons people visit food banks are that they are experiencing changes to benefits or delays in receiving benefits (Thompson et al., 2018). Other issues noted in reports conducted in the North West of England range from administrative delays, benefits sanctions and Employment and Support Allowance termination (Spencer, Ogden, & Battarbee, 2015). While food banks are a necessary form of emergency food provision support to address immediate hunger (Caplan, 2016; Lambie-Mumford & Dowler, 2014), the large number of people experiencing issues with benefits is indicative of the long-term, underlying issues related to food poverty. This suggests that more sustainable solutions are needed in the present time until more advanced action on the benefits system is executed.

The introduction of Universal Credit may also pose issues due to the way it's structured (The Trussell Trust, 2019). Universal Credit is set to be paid to receivers on a monthly basis in order to assist the unemployed into the eventual transition into work (Miscampbell, 2014). However, this may be difficult for users accustomed to more frequent benefits payments as they may not have experience budgeting on a monthly basis, especially if delays to their benefits payments occur (Downing, Kennedy, & Fell,

2014). In addition, upon initial application to Universal Credit, applicants must wait five

weeks before receiving any assistance (The Trussell Trust, 2019). With Trussell Trust

food banks allowing only three visits within a six-month period and providing food

supplies that only last three days (Caplan, 2016; Garratt et al., 2016), first-time

Universal Credit applicants could be left destitute in terms of food procurement for an

extensive period of time.

Issues associated with benefits extend beyond the documented troubles with

user experience (Lambie-Mumford, 2018). Many researchers argue that the existence

of food banks creates the perception that the issue of food poverty is being adequately

addressed (Middleton, Mehta, McNaughton, & Booth, 2017; Riches, 2011). This notion

has been perpetuated by some politicians and authoritative figures who argue that

supply, the increasing prevalence of food banks, is driving demand, the increasing

usage of food banks (Caplan, 2016). In other words, more people are accessing food

banks every year because more are surfacing every year. However, statistics and

qualitative research on food bank users suggest that those accessing food banks are

commonly characterised by low income, unemployment and problems with the

benefits system (Loopstra et al., 2015). Additionally, more food banks tend to open in

areas with greater funding cuts to local services and welfare benefits (Loopstra et al.,

2015). Evidence also shows that people who rely on food banks tend to still be food

insecure (Bazerghi et al., 2016), further corroborating the long-term, entrenched issues

associated with food poverty. This evidence suggests that food bank users are not

simply taking advantage of food provision services, and it serves as further evidence

for the need for improved welfare reform (Gentilini, 2013; Riches, 2011).

1.4 Alternative Approaches to Addressing Food Poverty

Extensive research has confirmed that food banks are not sufficient in achieving food security in the long-term (Bazerghi et al., 2016). To further help with alleviating the issue of food poverty, a range of community food initiatives have surfaced all over the UK (Caplan, 2016). Community food initiatives, also referred to as projects or programmes (Caraher & Dowler, 2007), are local activities with a focus on alleviating food poverty, often utilising an aspect of social inclusion to attract users and make them feel more welcome (Caraher & Dowler, 2007; Nelson, Knezevic, & Landman, 2013; Nourish Scotland & The Poverty Truth Commission, 2018). As previously noted, the prevalence of food insecurity is substantially high in the North West region of England (The Trussell Trust, 2019). It is suggested that there are over sixty food initiatives in the Cheshire West and Chester borough alone, operating within several different communities, demonstrating the passion of community members to alleviate the issue of food insecurity while also serving as further evidence of the high prevalence of food insecurity in just one borough within the North West of England.

Community food projects tend to adopt a 'rights-based approach' to ameliorating food insecurity (Dowler & O'Connor, 2012). This approach is important because, as previously mentioned, there is a high prevalence of stigma and loss of dignity amongst food bank users (Middleton et al., 2017). Community food projects tend to deviate from the traditional structure of food bank operations which helps to reduce these feelings of stigma, shame and disempowerment among food aid users (McGlone, Dobson, Dowler, & Nelson, 1999). Examples of initiatives adopting such

approaches include, but are not limited to, social supermarkets, community cafes and community gardens (Dowler & Caraher, 2003; Nourish Scotland & The Poverty Truth Commission, 2018). Acknowledging that people have the right to food provides a welcoming and supportive environment for users of community food initiatives (Saxena & Tornaghi, 2018), suggesting that a transition towards a model implementing 'rights-based approaches' to ameliorating food insecurity is a preferential method among users of food provision services.

While community food initiatives serve as welcoming and highly-appreciated resources within communities, especially those communities characterised by low-income individuals and reduced food access, studies show that they tend to face several barriers that jeopardise their progression and sustainability (McGlone et al., 1999). These barriers range from funding, credibility, training, support and various other vital resources (McGlone et al., 1999). Many food projects run on a voluntary basis and are reliant on small budgets to provide the necessary resources for successful operation (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012). Moreover, Caraher and Dowler (2007) conducted twenty-nine interviews for a study on food projects in London and found that there are often tensions that exist in defining the aims and objectives for food projects which can be challenging when requesting grants or sustained funding. Research suggests that improved access to resources and expertise may help improve the operation of community food initiatives while they are still necessary.

Another issue related to the existence of community food projects is, while they are useful for community members experiencing food poverty, they, like food

banks, may allow policymakers to avoid addressing the wider issues that cause food poverty (Caraher & Dowler, 2007; Garthwaite, Collins, & Bramba, 2015). The existence of community food initiatives is imperative to those seeking more dignified help with acquiring ample food, but it is suggested that advocating for policy change to address the core issues of food poverty is essential to making a difference and thus eliminate the need for their existence in addressing food poverty.

1.5 The Potential Need for a Supportive Network

Several studies examining the workings of community food initiatives identified a common need for their success: an agency or entity that could provide the required resources vital to their sustainability (Glowacki-Dudka, Murray, & Isaacs, 2012; Nelson et al., 2013; Pelletier, Kraak, McCullum, Uusitalo, & Rich, 1999). A study examining the imbalanced developments of community food initiatives across fourteen counties in south-western Ontario, Canada found that there was a need for a body to increase 'social capital' (Nelson et al., 2013), a central network where people have access to resources, make decisions and create policy to benefit the community (Grootaert, 1998). Authors suggest that a central agency could support the sustainability of local projects, bring them under one authority to create a common identity and provide greater recognition to the issue that the initiatives are tackling, in this case, food poverty (Caraher & Dowler, 2007).

While substantial research has been conducted on food poverty and the usage of food banks in the UK, there is a lack of research looking at what a support agency, also referred to as an umbrella or partner organisation (Caraher & Dowler, 2007), can

offer to community food provision programmes. Several studies describe the need for and benefits of networking and building social capital to support community food initiatives (Martin, Colantonio, Picho, & Boyle, 2016; Nelson et al., 2013; Pelletier et al., 1999). However, there is some criticism regarding the existence of an umbrella network as it sometimes follows a top-down approach where the projects involved feel they no longer have control over the decisions or actions executed within the project (McGlone et al., 1999). Dowler and Caraher (2003) recognise that there is also a difficulty for stakeholders to capture the drive and energy residing within community food initiatives and thus suggest the need for capacity building and engaging with local people. Due to the perceived threat that overseeing central agencies may pose, it can be suggested that these organisations must adopt a balanced approach of managing, collaborating with and supporting community food initiatives.

While there is a lack of research on the role of central agencies in supporting community food initiatives, there are organisations implementing similar principles and subsequently addressing short- and long-term issues associated with food poverty. One example is a large organisation called Community Food Centres Canada (2017) which is employing strategies to ameliorate food insecurity and is proving to be successful across Canada. This organisation helps establish welcoming food-centred spaces for community members, serves as a resource for training, skills and funding needed to sustain community food initiatives and advocates for improved policies surrounding food poverty (Community Food Centres Canada, 2017). Community Food Centres Canada (2017) has involved more than 20,000 individuals in conversations surrounding food access, including both in-person and virtual events, and has reported

that 69% of programme participants experienced improvements in their mental and physical health. The success of this organisation demonstrates that an umbrella agency may play an important role in achieving a greater impact on food security across communities, reaching more people and generating a wider platform for promoting policy improvements.

Another example of a programme employing similar strategies is a food pantry (the equivalent of a food bank in the United States) intervention in Connecticut entitled 'Freshplace'. This programme was established to alleviate food insecurity in the short-term by providing immediate access to food and in the long-term by referring clients to the appropriate support services to assist with the causative issues of food poverty (Martin, Wu, Wolff, Colantonio, & Grady, 2013). It also aims to reduce the sense of stigma associated with accessing food aid by using a dignifying approach in allowing clients to shop and choose their own foods (Martin et al., 2013). A study on Freshplace that occurred over a one-year period demonstrated a significant (p < .01) reduction in the experience of very low food security and significantly (p < .01) increased self-sufficiency by 4.1 points (measured by a verified self-sufficiency scale) (Martin et al., 2013). Another study on Freshplace that occurred over an eighteen-month period showed a significant (p = .01) decrease in the odds of experiencing very low food security by 29% (Martin et al., 2016). Freshplace demonstrates that adopting an approach that addresses the more deep-rooted issues in a dignified manner may more effectively assist those experiencing food insecurity.

Studies also show that community food projects can serve as avenues for influencing social policy change as they provide evidence for effective strategies in assisting those experiencing food poverty and for the entrenched reasons behind why people are in need of food (Lambie-Mumford, 2018). However, because community food projects run on limited resources (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012), encouraging change on a national platform may prove to be difficult. The success of some partner organisations in building social capital and establishing connections within the community (Community Food Centres Canada, 2017; Nelson et al., 2013) suggests that having a larger network connected to smaller projects may assist these advocacy efforts by giving these projects greater recognition, thus potentially paving an avenue for influencing policy reform.

1.6 Conclusion

As more and more people in the UK are forced to rely on food banks, which are designed to be a short-term, emergency source of food aid, the need to address the root causes of what drives individuals into food poverty in the first place is intensified. The statistics on food bank usage in The Trussell Trust network alone demonstrate the severity of food insecurity, and these numbers are increasing every year. As people experiencing food insecurity primarily cope with it in the long-term, it poses complications in terms of mental and physical health. While food banks can be helpful in the short-term, sole reliance on them presents several difficulties. Extensive research highlights the plethora of issues associated with the institutionalisation of the traditional food bank food provision model as a solution to food poverty: feelings of

shame and stigma amongst users, capped access on usage, lack of choice and variety and the permittance of the government to evade addressing social policy issues that cause food poverty in the first place.

Implementing social policy change, as demonstrated by several studies, is seemingly the main priority in solving the food poverty crisis in the UK. Critical effort will be required to initiate action on the national level, so, in the meantime, more sustainable, dignified and long-term solutions to food poverty are required. Food banks and independent community food initiatives, with the right support, can provide less stigmatising methods of food provision. Ensuring everyone's right to food is an important approach when working to ameliorate food poverty. With the appropriate connections, community food initiatives may also serve as tools to voice these issues and advocate for social policy change.

There is a lack of research surrounding the role that a central support agency could play in the sustainability of community food initiatives. The literature suggests that it would be useful for community food projects to have more support in order to augment sustainability and inform future developments in food poverty initiatives. There is also a need to generate potential findings that could inform policy development surrounding food poverty, primarily in terms of improved benefits system administration and other areas of welfare reform, as well as disseminate methods of best practice to address food insecurity in the present. With the success of community food initiatives and large support networks adopting rights-based approaches, there is potential to implement more dignified and long-term methods to

alleviate food poverty in the UK and, subsequently, influence policy changes to address

the root causes of the issue.

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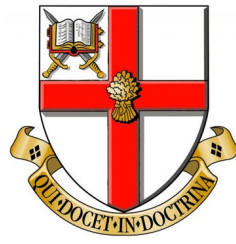
University of Chester

MSc Public Health Nutrition

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Project Title: Everyone deserves a seat at the table:

A qualitative evaluation of the role of 'The Welcome

Network' in supporting community food initiatives across

West Cheshire

Student Name: Callie Austin

Student Number: 1811006

Assessment Number: J71011

Date Submitted: 13th September 2019

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Key Words: food insecurity, food banks, community food
projects, infrastructure agency

Journal Choice:

This study is well-suited to be included in the journal entitled *Public Health Nutrition*. *Public Health Nutrition* is an international, peer-reviewed, open-access journal that publishes research on nutrition-related public health topics (Cambridge University Press, 2019). This journal specifically includes studies looking at feasible solutions to various public health nutrition issues (Cambridge University Press, 2019). As this study is an evaluation of a pilot project whose goal is to support various community food initiatives, it is thus a proposed solution to alleviating the widespread problem of food poverty in the UK. Inclusion of this study in this journal would confer recognition on a more public level.

ABSTRACT

Food poverty is a growing public health nutrition issue in the UK. Several studies exploring the feelings of food bank users reveal the stigma, disempowerment and loss of dignity associated with relying on food banks for food provision. In the West Cheshire region, several community food initiatives exist to assist in the alleviation of food poverty. Cheshire West and Chester Council established an infrastructure agency entitled 'The Welcome Network' to provide support for these projects in the hopes of alleviating food poverty in a more dignified manner. The aim of this study is to provide a qualitative process evaluation of 'The Welcome Network'.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight coordinators of seven community food initiatives within West Cheshire, UK. One semi-structured interview was conducted with a gatekeeper of 'The Welcome Network' to compare against project coordinator responses.

Participants gave an overall positive view of 'The Welcome Network' and offered a few suggestions for improvement. They also touched on the creative approach 'The Welcome Network' is employing to tackle food poverty, the value of the connections to contacts and resources that 'The Welcome Network' provides and the need for 'The Welcome Network' to clarify its purpose and definition.

With the ever-increasing prevalence of food poverty in the UK, there is a need for dignified approaches to food provision as well as an increase in advocacy to address the underlying issues of food poverty. This evaluation of 'The Welcome Network' suggests great potential for such an organisation to achieve these goals.

CHAPTER 2

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Despite the UK being one of the richest nations in the world (Saxena & Tornaghi, 2018), food poverty, or food insecurity, remains an increasingly problematic nutritional concern among more than eight million residents (Taylor & Loopstra, 2016). An individual is considered food insecure if they do not have the financial means to acquire enough nutritious food to sustain an active and healthy lifestyle (Taylor & Loopstra, 2016). Statistics from The Trussell Trust (2019), the UK's food bank network, state that nearly 1.6 million emergency food parcels were distributed among the entire UK between 2018 and 2019, with the North West of England accounting for approximately 14% of that total. The borough of Cheshire West and Chester especially suffers, with fourteen neighbourhoods ranking in the 10% most deprived in England (Cheshire West & Chester Council, 2018). Between 2015 and 2016, West Cheshire Foodbank provided food supplies to 5,409 individuals (Garratt, Spencer, & Ogden, 2016).

Due to the large amounts of people accessing food banks, Cheshire West and Chester Council recognised a need for greater support in alleviating the issue of food insecurity, specifically in terms of constant reliance on food banks (The Welcome Network, n.d.). As food banks only provide a three-day emergency supply of food (The Trussell Trust, 2019), they do not serve as a long-term source of food provision. They also do not address the most common issues surrounding food poverty such as delays to benefits and social isolation (Loopstra et al., 2015).

To help ameliorate food poverty, a project entitled 'The Welcome Network' was established as an infrastructure agency to support the delivery of food projects within the community (The Welcome Network, n.d.). It is a partnership between Healthbox CIC, West Cheshire Foodbank and Citizen's Advice Cheshire West (The Welcome Network, n.d.). It is also a pilot of Feeding Britain, a national charity working to end hunger in the UK (Feeding Britain, 2019b). The aim of 'The Welcome Network' is to "…create spaces for neighbours and agencies to come together, build relationships, and reduce stigma by providing an accessible and welcoming environment to access food, activities and support" (Feeding Britain, 2019a)

As 'The Welcome Network' is a three-year pilot project still in operation (The Welcome Network, n.d.), an evaluation of its progress is warranted. Evaluating 'The Welcome Network' will identify if there is a need to permanently establish this organisation in West Cheshire as well as inform Feeding Britain of a potential method of alleviating food poverty in other areas of the nation. An evaluation will also provide information regarding the feasibility of 'The Welcome Network' to disseminate methods of best practice and the potential to influence policy change surrounding the underlying causes of food poverty.

CHAPTER 3

3.0 METHODS

3.1 Study Design

This study is a process evaluation of 'The Welcome Network' from the recipient perspective, as the goal was to explore how, and how well, the project is being executed (O'Leary, 2017) from the viewpoint of community food project coordinators.

3.2 Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was granted from the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Life Science Research Ethics Committee at the University of Chester (Appendices A, B and C).

3.3 Population Subjects

3.3.1 Recruitment

Contact information for potential participants was collected with the help of 'The Welcome Network' gatekeeper. As described by Singh and Wassenaar (2016), gatekeepers permit researcher access to participants and often hold important contact information. The gatekeeper assisted in the generation of a diverse list of community food projects. Project coordinators were contacted via email which included a letter of invitation (Appendix D) and a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix E), both of which explained the purpose of the project and why they were contacted. Also attached to the email was the Participant Consent Form (Appendix F) which participants signed before the interview if they chose to partake in the study.

3.3.2 Sampling Strategy

Key informants were selected purposively as recruited community food project coordinators were in the highest position of expertise to disclose relevant information to the study (O'Leary, 2017). A gatekeeper of 'The Welcome Network' was also interviewed to gain a better understanding of the project as well as to use as comparison to participant responses.

3.3.3 Sample Size and Justification

'The Welcome Network' is involved with a total of twenty-one of the estimated sixty-four community food initiatives across West Cheshire. The coordinators of ten specific projects were contacted for interviews because their projects cover four of the six key areas that 'The Welcome Network' strives to support: meeting places, holiday provision, development and good food (The Welcome Network, n.d.) The other two key areas, national and local policy, are accordingly informed throughout the duration of the implementation of 'The Welcome Network' (The Welcome Network, n.d.). In addition, the ten selected projects collectively covered all geographic areas in which 'The Welcome Network' works: Chester, Blacon, Lache, Northwich, Winsford and Ellesmere Port.

Ten projects were contacted for an interview request, and seven projects responded to the recruitment email. One project shared management responsibility between two coordinators, so seven projects were included in the study, but eight project coordinators were interviewed.

A sample size of seven projects was large enough to maintain the desired geographic variety and project-type diversity. Lache was the only location not covered in this study. Including a gatekeeper of 'The Welcome Network' provided a different perspective and allowed for confirmation of whether 'The Welcome Network' is meeting its objectives. Eight project coordinators and one 'The Welcome Network' gatekeeper resulted in a final sample size of nine participants. Interviewing nine participants was practical and achievable within the time period in which data collection took place (approximately 9 weeks) and allowed for ample time for data transcription and analysis.

3.3.4 Inclusion Criteria

Project coordinators of community food initiatives operating within West Cheshire, UK were included in this study. A gatekeeper of 'The Welcome Network' was also included in this study.

3.3.5 Informed Consent

Consent was obtained from participants via a consent form (Appendix F). Participants read the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix E) and then signed the Participant Consent Form (Appendix F). Participants were given ample time to read and sign the consent form before each interview began. The original signed consent forms were retained by the researcher, and scanned copies were emailed to the respective participants.

<u>3.4 Procedure</u>

Participants took part in a face-to-face, one-to-one, semi-structured interview that took place either at their workplaces or the sites of operation for their respective programmes. These settings provided the most convenient and comfortable meeting place for study participants, both of which are important aspects of conducting successful interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Participants are more likely to share insights when they are in a familiar environment (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The interviews occurred between 14th May and 17th July 2019. Semi-structured interviews allow for rich data collection because they are guided by a set of predetermined, open-ended questions that generate further questions and topics of discussion throughout the interview (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). It was important for participants to have the freedom to discuss other topics in relation to 'The Welcome Network' as they have had more experience with the project and can touch on matters potentially not covered in the interview guide. The predetermined questions used in the interviews of project coordinators and the gatekeeper are listed in Appendices G and H, respectively.

Before each interview began, each participant was reminded of his/her guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. Each participant was also reminded of his/her freedom to withdraw from the study at any time, before a draft of the report was composed, without providing a reason for withdrawal. Participants were contacted via email when an initial draft of the report was completed and informed that they were no longer able to withdraw their interview from inclusion in the study.

Before each interview began, participants were also reminded that interviews would be audio-recorded. Interviews lasted approximately thirty to sixty minutes. At the end of each interview, participants were thanked for their participation and encouraged to contact the researcher in case they had any questions.

3.5 Data Analysis

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim using transcribing equipment and a software program. Data analysis was conducted through the process of thematic analysis using the transcripts of the interviews. Thematic analysis allows for the identification of emerging themes among the data both in terms of commonality and salience (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which was essential to evaluating the role of 'The Welcome Network'. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe the process of thematic analysis in six phases: familiarise self with data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define and name themes and produce the report.

In compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018, participant data were anonymised and stored securely and confidentially in electronic form for a minimum of ten years.

CHAPTER 4

4.0 FINDINGS

Eight coordinators of seven community food initiatives were interviewed. The final sample size generated a comprehensive list of various projects ranging from 'meeting places' alongside food bank sessions to cooking groups to one-off food-focussed events that stemmed from community groups. These projects exist across the borough of Cheshire West and Chester. For the purpose of anonymity and confidentiality, specific descriptions of each project are not provided.

Through the semi-structured interviews with participants, four main evaluative themes emerged regarding 'The Welcome Network': general opinions about 'The Welcome Network', a creative and comprehensive approach to alleviating food poverty, the provision of links and connections to enhance project delivery and the clarity of the definition and purpose of 'The Welcome Network'. Participant responses were compared against gatekeeper responses when necessary to determine if 'The Welcome Network' is meeting and remaining aligned with its stated goals, aims and objectives. Participants are numerically labelled in order to distinguish the quotes but also maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

4.1 General Opinions about 'The Welcome Network'

Project coordinators conveyed an overall positive view of 'The Welcome Network'. They specifically mentioned the support 'The Welcome Network' offered in terms of food provision.

"…we've always done food, but it's never been about the food issues, so, for us, it's more than food now and, thanks to 'The Welcome Network', it's helped us to have…a bigger variety of a lot [of food], particularly from the supermarkets and the food bank." (Participant 2)

One project coordinator emphasised the importance of having an outside source of knowledge and expertise that assists in the effective delivery of the project.

"It's about them being recognised, like, with the partners…when you sort of promote it as, 'Oh, we're working with 'The Welcome Network,' they actually see them as the lead in that field. And I think that's what has enabled me to get those partners on board and to change what we were delivering historically…" (Participant 8)

One participant commended 'The Welcome Network' for not being controlling and demanding in their approaches.

"It just seems like it's not…it's not about them. They're not about them. They're about everybody else. …it's not like they want glory for what they're doing. It's just…there's a purpose of 'Let's feed Britain, as it were.' I think that's been the joy of it is they're not like, 'Do this now. Let's do this.' It's kind of in a supportive nature. They don't take over what we do. They're not overpowering. They're just kind of there if we need them sort of thing." (Participant 2)

Another participant added a similar statement:

"They've ('The Welcome Network') come in and really worked with the group on what they (project attendees) need and what they want to do. It wouldn't have worked the other way around." (Participant 7)

The gatekeeper of 'The Welcome Network' further highlighted this philosophy of remaining a source of support to call upon rather than controlling the direction of projects.

"…one of our unique selling points is that we don't force anybody to be a part of us. It's very opt-in. It needs to come at the right time for them…We're not forcing ourselves on anybody; we're offering that support if they need it."

While project coordinators felt mostly appreciative of 'The Welcome Network', they did offer suggestions for improvement. One project coordinator explained that it would be beneficial for individual projects to be evaluated.

"…the one that 'The Welcome Network' could, I think, help with is the evaluation side of things, um, so looking at data, helping us with data, collaborating with us on data, story-gathering and dissemination." (Participant 1)

Another participant recommended that 'The Welcome Network' increase their self-advertising.

"'…I think raising their profile and having more information, um, on services that they can provide." (Participant 8)

Another participant suggested that the responsibility of 'The Welcome Network' to cover community food project support across the entire borough was too grand a task, and it would be more effective to focus their work in specific localities.

"… I believe when CWAC (Cheshire West and Chester) gave the money originally for 'The Welcome Network', the remit was across the borough, okay. I actually think that's not really helpful because the borough is too big. And it's an unreal kind of demand, unless 'The Welcome Network' was kind of 10 times the size and you had, you know, multiple [employees] running around, but they don't. So, it is just an unfair expectation, really, to be spread that thin." (Participant 6)

4.2 A Creative and Comprehensive Approach to Alleviating Food Poverty

'The Welcome Network' is supporting projects to achieve the transition from the traditional food bank food provision model to one that's more inclusive, less stigmatising and more welcoming to those experiencing food poverty. Project coordinators unanimously agreed that the traditional food bank model of food provision is stigmatising and unsustainable. 'The Welcome Network' promotes the idea of what's called a 'meeting place' where other activities are going on around either a food bank session or some other type of food provision. Project coordinators stated that this approach lessens the stigma associated with accessing community food provision and provides a dignified atmosphere. The philosophy of 'The Welcome Network' is to use the topic of food to tackle much wider issues such as reducing social isolation, signposting individuals to appropriate services (e.g., debt advice) and encouraging community interaction. One participant highlighted this philosophy:

"I think part of 'The Welcome Network', their vision of having lots of things operating in the same area, is brill because a lot of people that we talk to need debt advice, they might need counselling…but just having that hub of things all happening under one roof. It's fab, so simple. The beliefs of what 'Welcome Network' are trying to do are really what I believe in. That's why…and the food aspect. It's just there. It's so obvious that that would be such a way of communicating with lots of people…"
(Participant 5)

4.3 The Provision of Links and Connections That Enhance Project Delivery

A primary purpose of 'The Welcome Network' is to connect community food initiatives to the appropriate contacts and resources to improve the effective delivery of the initiatives. These linkages also help to cultivate relationships among the community activists working to ameliorate food poverty. Several project coordinators touched on the ability of 'The Welcome Network' to achieve this networking aspect, which helped augment the success of their projects. One participant appreciated getting to know other project coordinators from the area and having the opportunity to discuss everyone's thoughts.

"Yeah, well, these 'Welcome Network' meetings where we sit down together, there might be someone from a completely different socioeconomic background and who's working in a totally different area, so, 'Oh, we've tried this.' 'Let's try it here.' 'Oh, it works brilliant.' So, it's about bringing those different people together, sharing those ideas and seeing what's best for the people that we work with..." (Participant 2)

Another project coordinator valued the ability of 'The Welcome Network' to increase the awareness of what else is going on in the community, information which they could then disseminate to project attendees.

"Somebody's expecting something off you, aren't they? It's great to be able to say, 'Well, there's this session on, and there's this session on.' I know about those because of 'The Welcome Network'." (Participant 3)

One participant touched on the contacts that have been built through the link with 'The Welcome Network'.

"…I think it ('The Welcome Network') has done what it sort of says. …it has developed that network and developed those relationships. And I think that would have happened over time, but it would have taken longer, so it's more of a catalyst to get those relationships working." (Participant 4)

One participant highlighted the importance of being able to contact 'The Welcome Network' and obtain connections with the necessary resources.

"…I think ['The Welcome Network'] gets the complexity and the sort of messiness of community work but also knows the different agencies and has fingers in so many different pies…that [they] can then say, 'Oh, I know somebody that can help with that.'" (Participant 6)

The gatekeeper of 'The Welcome Network' described the thought process that goes behind linking projects to the appropriate contacts and resources.

"…it's very advisory, linking people together, or also taking a bit more of a bird's-eye view of, 'Well, if so and so talked to so and so, how can we link this up?' I think if you're an organisation that's providing something, you become very focussed on you and what you're doing whereas I think 'The Welcome Network' resumes above all of that and tries to see where some of the connections are that, if you were right down in the nitty gritty, you wouldn't see it."

4.4 The Clarity of the Definition and Purpose of 'The Welcome Network'

Many project coordinators voiced that the concept of 'The Welcome Network' has been fairly unclear. While the interviewed participants described 'The Welcome Network' as encouraging and helpful overall, confusion still exists as to exactly what 'The Welcome Network' is. When asked if there was anything else of importance to mention about 'The Welcome Network', one participant said,

"Just that I don't fully understand who they are and what they do." (Participant 2)

Another participant further confirmed that the purpose of 'The Welcome Network' is complex and finds it hard to explain its concrete definition, especially to individuals who may be stakeholders but do not work directly with the projects.

"…I think the biggest thing that's been the problem is trying to understand the people outside of it exactly what 'The Welcome Network' is because it's not that tangible…I would freely admit that I find it difficult to describe." (Participant 4)

Other participants agreed and offered insight as to what could potentially be done to clear the confusion. One project coordinator suggested that altering the title of 'The Welcome Network' could provide a more explicit indication of the project's focus.

"I don't like the name 'Welcome Network' on reflection because I think people don't grasp it. I think it doesn't do what it says on the tin, so I think you need something community food-related or is more intuitive or sort of straightforward." (Participant 1)

Another project coordinator specifically underscored the importance of aligning clearly articulated aims and objectives with actual on-the-ground work.

"Yeah, I mean, having a vision statement on a website or something or just some long waffle-y vision statement to be able to rattle off; I suppose that would be helpful. It's not so much actually whether you can say things in a sentence of what it's about much more about actually how it's working and what it seems to be for. But, I mean, I suppose you have to start off with the words, don't you? And, actually, making sure that all their actions are totally focussed on what those stated aims are rather than getting involved in too many other things." (Participant 6)

According to the gatekeeper, defining exactly what 'The Welcome Network' is and what it offers is a recognised challenge and will likely be resolved at an upcoming event.

"I just think we probably need to be clearer on what it is specifically that we're offering…and our plan is to have our communications much tighter, much clearer and the plan for the future all clear by this conference in October."

The gatekeeper understood the importance of clarifying the purpose of 'The Welcome Network' in order to secure a promising position for the project once the initial funding ends.

CHAPTER 5

5.0 DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to conduct a process evaluation of the role of 'The Welcome Network' in supporting community food initiatives across West Cheshire. The interviews with community food project coordinators provided valuable insights into the presence of 'The Welcome Network' as an infrastructure agency. It is important to note that studies and evaluations on food projects and associated support systems are lacking and outdated likely due to the limited resources and time of these projects to conduct research (Caraher & Dowler, 2007). Findings of this study are compared with published literature to provide updated context to the proposed solutions to alleviating food poverty.

Generating themes via qualitative evaluation was a useful approach in identifying the role that 'The Welcome Network' is playing in the delivery of local community food initiatives. An evaluation of community strategic visioning programmes found that the majority of participants involved (62%) felt that interpreting the success of programmes involves identifying process-oriented and qualitative outcomes as opposed to palpable achievements (Gruidl, 1996). The participants in 'The Welcome Network' evaluation provided verbal evidence consistent with this concept. Project coordinators discussed the 'what' and the 'how' regarding the role of 'The Welcome Network' in their projects. They did not have quantitative data to support their claims but first-hand personal experiences, which helped recognise the role that 'The Welcome Network' plays in the delivery of their projects.

A major goal of 'The Welcome Network' is to transition away from the traditional food bank model of food provision to one that is more dignified and socially inclusive. According to the findings of this study, 'The Welcome Network' is achieving this goal by supporting projects that utilise food as a central focus of other activities, thus creating an environment that destigmatises the accession of food provision and establishes a friendly community. Even though 'The Welcome Network' still supports sessions that involve food banks distributing emergency parcels, the traditional method of food provision in the UK, the various activities occurring simultaneously alongside the food bank define the location as more than just a food distribution centre, thus allowing attendees to feel more comfortable visiting the location. In a mixed methods study on food projects, McGlone, Dobson, Nelson, and Dowler (1999) highlight that overcoming social isolation improves autonomy, enabling food aid users to enhance control over their own health and welfare. By establishing comfortable spaces, 'The Welcome Network' is also enabling easier access to advisors who can connect vulnerable individuals to services such as debt advice, housing support and counselling, thus helping to address the longer-term issues associated with food poverty.

The presence of an infrastructure agency like 'The Welcome Network' brings community food initiatives together under one authority and allows for the development of relational workings and appropriate resource dissemination. Without an infrastructure agency, community food initiatives may not gain cognizance of different models of working or have an entity to depend on for resources such as contacts and expertise. Nelson, Knezevic, and Landman (2013) conducted a study on

community food initiatives across Ontario, Canada and found that the existence of

strong social networks can be vital to augmenting the success of food projects within

the community. This study specifically identified the importance of building linkages

between stakeholders, fostering trust and establishing a common identity among the

community (Nelson et al., 2013). One interviewee in this study identified that the

success of her project relied on "a master at community engagement and community

development" (Nelson et al., 2013). Another study on community food projects found

that projects that had connected with different organisations and resources were

more likely to be sustainable (McGlone et al., 1999). Both of these studies align with

what 'The Welcome Network' is doing and provide testament to its success. Findings of

this evaluation demonstrate that 'The Welcome Network' is playing a key role in

bringing community food initiatives around a central goal of dignified food provision,

nurturing collaborative relationships and providing essential resources to improve and

sustain project delivery.

One of the most salient aspects of 'The Welcome Network' is that its existence

is giving local community food initiatives a voice. Without a relationship with an

infrastructure agency, community food projects often run on limited budgets and

resources (Dowler & Caraher, 2003), so it is likely they would lack the extra time to

advocate for social policy reform, specifically regarding welfare issues. Dowler and

Caraher (2003) argue that food projects alone cannot solve the underlying issues of

food poverty. As a pilot project of Feeding Britain, 'The Welcome Network' is helping

to provide a communication platform for these local food initiatives. A study

conducted on community planning events across six counties of New York in the

United States identified a theme of needing to improve communication with local and federal governments to pursue certain goals within the community in terms of building a better food system (Pelletier, Kraak, McCullum, Uusitalo, & Rich, 1999). The study also recognised that collaboration of grassroots organisations "provide public legitimacy" to the issue of food security and "distinguish it as a genuine social movement" (Pelletier et al., 1999). As first-hand contributors to the operation of community food projects, project coordinators that have a relationship with 'The Welcome Network' are in a crucial position to provide context for the severity of food poverty and what can be done to lessen its high prevalence in the UK. 'The Welcome Network' is providing the liaison link between local community food projects and the national hunger-fighting charity, Feeding Britain, thus establishing an avenue for these local projects to influence change on a larger level.

While 'The Welcome Network' is making notable progress in the West Cheshire region, it is important for the purpose of its existence to be clarified. Employees involved with the operation of 'The Welcome Network' must be able to provide a distinct definition of what 'The Welcome Network' is and why it exists. Complete understanding of operating projects is essential for stakeholders, funders and decisionmakers involved with the future of the project. Mancini and Marek (2004) describe the importance of establishing a clear articulation of project vision and objectives in order to secure both stakeholder engagement as well as continued funding. Participants in this study described the important achievements of 'The Welcome Network' thus far, but their confusion regarding the definition of 'The Welcome Network' indicates that there is a need to further clarify its purpose.

5.1 Limitations and Future Research

The geographic location and small sample size used in this study may generate bias. This study was conducted in the West Cheshire region of the UK and, therefore, the findings cannot be directly applied to other regions with the expectation of identical results. Additionally, due to time constraints, the study was conducted on only seven of the twenty-one community food initiatives that 'The Welcome Network' supports, so the findings may not be completely comprehensive of all viewpoints of the project coordinators who have a relationship with 'The Welcome Network'. Despite these limitations, the findings nonetheless indicate that 'The Welcome Network' is demonstrating success, and a similar organisation could potentially be successful in other regions where food poverty and community food initiatives exist.

While the findings of this study provide insight into what an infrastructure agency can offer local community food initiatives, updated further research regarding evaluation of infrastructure support for community food initiatives is needed. Furthermore, 'The Welcome Network' should not be considered the solution to food poverty but a means of implementing a more creative, dignified approach until the concrete underlying issues of food poverty are addressed on the national level in the form of policy change.

CHAPTER 6

6.0 CONCLUSION

The passion of the community food initiative coordinators that participated in this study is inspiring and should not go unnoticed. All participants exhibited an unwavering desire to help lessen the prevalence of food poverty. According to the insights of project coordinators, 'The Welcome Network' seems to be harnessing this drive and energy by amplifying the work that local food projects do across the West Cheshire communities. 'The Welcome Network' is accomplishing this feat in a supportive manner rather than seizing complete control of the projects, thus evidencing their philosophy of allocating credit to the hard work of local community activists.

While 'The Welcome Network' is not likely to eliminate food poverty on its own, the findings of this study suggest that it has helped those experiencing food poverty in the short-term in a more dignifying manner by enhancing the delivery services of various community food initiatives that adopt this approach and in the long-term by signposting people to the appropriate support services that help address the entrenched issues. Additionally, 'The Welcome Network' has the potential to serve as an avenue for influencing social policy change by providing a voice for local food projects and channelling these experiences through its connection with Feeding Britain. Several studies concluded that the issue of food insecurity will not be reduced or resolved unless social policy regarding welfare is amended. Therefore, the existence of 'The Welcome Network' has the potential to influence the prevalence of food

poverty in the UK. Based on the findings of this study, the continued existence of 'The

Welcome Network' is justified, and its application to other regions in the UK should be
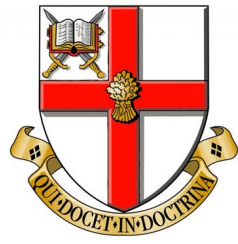
considered.

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University of Chester

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

University of Chester

Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Life Sciences
Research Ethics Committee

frec@chester.ac.uk

25th April 2019

Callie Austin
Grosvenor House, Room 348
C/O The University of Chester
Parkgate Road
Chester
CH1 4BJ

Dear Callie,

Study title: 1551/19/CA/CSN
FREC reference: Improving food provision in West Cheshire: A qualitative evaluation of the role of 'The Welcome Network' in supporting community initiatives that address food poverty.
Version number: 1

Thank you for sending your application to the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Life Sciences Research Ethics Committee for review.

I am pleased to confirm ethical approval for the above research, **subject to** the conditions listed below and **provided** that you comply with the conditions set out in the attached document, and adhere to the processes described in your application form and supporting documentation. Approval conditions are as follows:-

Recommendations for improvement of the study, to be discussed with supervisor:
- There needs to be some consideration given to the fact that 14 interviews will be conducted, transcribed, and analysed in a four week period. Given most of the interviews will presumably be conducted during the working-week, this leaves only 20 days. In light of this, does the project duration need to be amended?
- There is also scope to expand on the 'benefits of taking' part paragraph in the PIS.
- Address the leading nature of some questions in your interview schedule (e.g. question 3). From experience suggest the inclusion of some additional secondary prompt questions (if only for your own benefit) as the wording of some questions may lead to short responses.
- Please provide the details of the Dean of the Faculty for complaints.
- Please respond to question 3 in part 3 of the application about additional costs.

Please forward an electronic copy of your amendments to frec@chester.ac.uk

Approval subject to conditions 2018/19

The final list of documents reviewed and approved by the Committee is as follows:

Document	Version	Date
Application Form	1	April 2019
Appendix 1 – List of References	1	April 2019
Appendix 2 – Summary CV for Lead Researcher	1	April 2019
Appendix 3 – Risk Assessment	1	April 2019
Appendix 4 – Participant Information Sheet [PIS]	1	April 2019
Appendix 5 – Letter(s) of invitation to participants	1	April 2019
Appendix 6 – Written permission(s) from relevant personnel (eg. to use faculties)	1	April 2019
Appendix 7 – Interview schedule(s) or topic guide(s)	1	April 2019
Appendix 8 - Permission to recruit participants and conduct interviews at programme sites	1	April 2019

Please note that this approval is given in accordance with the requirements of English law only. For research taking place wholly or partly within other jurisdictions (including Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland), you should seek further advice from the Committee Chair / Secretary or the Research and Knowledge Transfer Office and may need additional approval from the appropriate agencies in the country (or countries) in which the research will take place.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of this project.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Eustace Johnson
Chair, Faculty Research Ethics Committee

Enclosures: Standard conditions of approval.

Cc. Supervisor/FREC Representative

APPENDIX B

1551 / 19 / CA / CSN - approved

frec

Fri 5/10/2019 2:11 PM

To: CALLIE LAINE AUSTIN <1811006@chester.ac.uk>
Cc: Eustace Johnson <eustace.johnson@chester.ac.uk>; Lynne Kennedy <l.kennedy@chester.ac.uk>

Dear Callie,

Thank you for submitting your response in respect of application reference 1551 / 19 / CA / CSN which was approved subject to conditions. The Committee have confirmed they are happy with your response to the conditions outlined and your application has full approval.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of your project.

Kind regards,
Dawn

Dawn Lanceley
FREC (Thursday only)
Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Life Sciences.
Bache Hall, Room 101
University of Chester
Tel: 01244 513866
Email: frec@chester.ac.uk

Please quote your MDLS FREC reference number on all correspondence

1551/19/CA/CSN - amendment post approval

frec

Wed 7/17/2019 3:12 PM

To: CALLIE LAINE AUSTIN <1811006@chester.ac.uk>
Cc: Lynne Kennedy <l.kennedy@chester.ac.uk>; Eustace Johnson <eustace.johnson@chester.ac.uk>

Dear Callie,

Further to your request for amendment to application 1551/19/CA/CSN post approval I can confirm that the Committee have approved your request for the following:-

In my original application, I stated that I would be interviewing the gatekeeper of 'The Welcome Network'. However, I did not include the interview schedule in the Appendix of my application. I only included the interview schedule for the participants, the managers of the local community food projects involved with 'The Welcome Network'. I wanted to conduct the interviews with the project managers first to inform the questions I would ask the gatekeeper of 'The Welcome Network'.

With the Committee's best wishes for the success of your project.

Kind regards,

Colleen Lee
Faculty Research Ethics Committee Secretary
Chester Medical School
Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Life Sciences
Bache Hall
University of Chester

Tel: 01244 513866
Email: frec@chester.ac.uk

Please quote your MDLS FREC reference number on all correspondence

APPENDIX D

Letter of Invitation to Participants

Dear [participant name],

My name is Callie Austin, and I am a master's student studying Public Health Nutrition at the University of Chester. I am conducting a research project focused on evaluating the role of 'The Welcome Network' in local community food provision initiatives across Cheshire West and Chester. As you manage [name of programme], you are in an ideal position to share valuable first-hand information essential to the development of my project.

If you decide to participate, I will be conducting an audio-recorded interview that will take place at your programme's site of operation and will last no longer than one hour. The interview will likely be scheduled between mid-May and early June. Your shared perspectives and experiences with 'The Welcome Network' would be a worthy addition to my research and could help to inform policy development surrounding the use of partner agencies in helping to alleviate food poverty at the local level.

If you do or do not wish to be a part of this study, please email me at 1811006@chester.ac.uk to confirm. Thank you for taking the time to read this email. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions. I look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

Callie Austin

1811006@chester.ac.uk

University of
Chester

Participant Information Sheet

Improving Food Provision in West Cheshire: A Qualitative Evaluation of the Role of 'The Welcome Network' in Supporting Community Initiatives That Address Food Poverty

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?
The research is being undertaken on project coordinators of community food provision programmes across Cheshire West and Chester that are connected to 'The Welcome Network'. The project is being conducted to identify the role that 'The Welcome Network' has played/is playing in the operation of your project.

Identifying the elements of the role that 'The Welcome Network' has played in your programme will determine if 'The Welcome Network' is meeting its goals. With this evaluation, 'The Welcome Network' could improve areas where it could offer more support as well as strengthen areas where its support has proven to be most successful. Additionally, as 'The Welcome Network' is a three-year pilot project of Feeding Britain, a national charity working to alleviate food poverty, evaluation will help to understand the role that a partner agency, like 'The Welcome Network', can offer at the local level.

Why have I been chosen?
You have been chosen because you are the project coordinator of a community food provision programme in Cheshire West that is connected to 'The Welcome Network'.

Do I have to take part?
It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw up until a draft of the project report has been composed and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw before a draft of the project report has been composed, or a decision not to take part, will not affect you in any way.

What will happen to me if I take part?
I will be conducting a one-to-one interview with you. A series of questions surrounding the relationship between 'The Welcome Network' and your programme will be asked. Interviews will be audio-recorded and will take no longer than one hour. No-one will be identifiable in the final report.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
There are no disadvantages or risks foreseen in taking part in the study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
By taking part, you will be contributing to the collection of information needed to evaluate the role of 'The Welcome Network' in the community food programme you manage. This will help recognise areas where 'The Welcome Network' has been successful or unsuccessful as well as areas where it
could improve.

What if something goes wrong?
If you wish to complain or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please contact Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Life Sciences, University of Chester, Parkgate Road, Chester, CH1 4BJ, 01244 511000.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?
All information which is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential so that only I will have access to such information.

Participants should note that data collected from this project may be retained and published in an anonymised form. By agreeing to participate in this project, you are consenting to the retention and publication of data.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The results will be written up into a dissertation for my final project of my MSc. Individuals who participate will not be identified in any subsequent report or publication.

Who is organising the research?
The research is conducted as part of a MSc in Public Health Nutrition within the Department of Clinical Sciences and Nutrition at the University of Chester. The study is organised by me, Callie Austin, with supervision from the department.

Who may I contact for further information?
If you would like more information about the research before you decide whether or not you would be willing to take part, please contact:

Callie Austin. 1811006@chester.ac.uk.

Thank you for your interest in this research.

University of Chester

Title of Project: Improving Food Provision in West Cheshire: A Qualitative
Evaluation of the Role of 'The Welcome Network' in
Supporting Community Initiatives That Address Food Poverty

Name of Researcher: Callie Austin

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the
above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to
withdraw any time before a draft of the project report has been composed, without
giving any reason.

3. I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded.

4. I understand that my name and personal details will not appear in any report.

5. I agree to take part in the above study.

_____   _____   _____
Name of Interviewee   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____
Researcher   Date   Signature

APPENDIX G

Interview Schedule for Project Coordinators

1. Tell me about your project.
   a. What kind of services does your project deliver?
   b. Who is involved?
   c. How often does your project operate?
   d. What population does your project target?

2. How long has your project been linked with 'The Welcome Network'? Tell me about your relationship with 'The Welcome Network'.

3. Does your project have an impact on people experiencing food poverty? If so, how? How do you measure this impact?
   a. Does 'The Welcome Network' play a role in this impact? If so, how?

4. Thinking back to your project before 'The Welcome Network' became involved, did your project face any challenges or barriers that were particularly difficult to overcome?
   a. Did 'The Welcome Network' provide any support regarding these challenges? If so, what kind of support did they provide, and does their support help the execution of your project?

5. Has 'The Welcome Network' been consistent in terms of the services and support they offer, if any?

6. How have you perceived the evolution of 'The Welcome Network' since they became involved with your project?

7. Are there any elements of 'The Welcome Network' that are particularly valuable or hindering to your project?

8. Has your project changed since 'The Welcome Network' became involved? If so, how?

9. Is there anything that's currently missing from your project that you would like 'The Welcome Network' to help with that they currently are not?

10. Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

   - Secondary prompt questions:
     - How did/do you feel about that?
     - Why did/do you feel this way?
     - Could you please elaborate more on that?

Interview Schedule for 'The Welcome Network' Gatekeeper

1. Tell me about 'The Welcome Network'.
    a. What is its overarching goal?
    b. How long is it set to be in operation?
    c. How many projects is it involved with?
    d. What regions does it cover?
    e. How many people does it employ?

2. Can you provide background on the idea for and the development of 'The Welcome Network'?

3. Can you describe the map of the organizations involved with 'The Welcome Network', including Feeding Britain and HealthBox?

4. Describe your role in 'The Welcome Network'. What does a typical day look like for you?

5. Does 'The Welcome Network' influence those experiencing food poverty? If so, how?

6. How do project managers feel about 'The Welcome Network' and its services?

7. How does 'The Welcome Network' find out about and approach projects that it would like to support?

8. Is it easy or difficult to fulfill the needs of all the projects that 'The Welcome Network' is involved in?

9. What do you see for the future of 'The Welcome Network' once the funding ends?

10. Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

- Secondary prompt questions:
    o How did/do you feel about that?
    o Why did/do you feel this way?
    o Could you please elaborate more on that?