

# Woodlands Community Café and Veg Box Scheme



Integrating anti-poverty and climate  
breakdown work

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## Integrating anti-poverty and climate breakdown work

### Introduction

Woodlands Community Development Trust has been at the forefront of providing sustainable and healthy community meals and food since 2013<sup>1</sup>. Their approach is one which tackles poverty and climate breakdown holistically, while building community resilience and wellbeing.

In recognition of the important learning that could be derived from this expertise, in 2019 the Scottish Government Food Insecurity Team provided a bespoke extension of the Fair Food Fund Grant, to enable Woodlands Community to document their best practice. This funding also enabled the Community Café to keep their doors open after other Scottish Government funding came to an end. *Addressing The Community Need, Woodlands Community Development Trust food work evaluation report* by Dr. Helen Traill, forms part of that learning.

This report complements and draws upon that evaluation, focusing on Woodlands Community Café. It also looks at Woodlands Community Veg Box Scheme, drawing on a recent survey of users.<sup>2</sup> The Neighbourhood Food Service, which was a specific emergency pandemic response, is discussed in Dr. Traill's report. For details of WCDT various food services see Appendix 1.

This paper considers Woodlands Community Development Trust (WCDT) food work in the context of wider social, economic and environmental developments and some relevant local and national policy. It investigates how aspects of current anti-poverty policy and practice, in relation to tackling food insecurity, contribute to meeting climate change targets, as well as other important aims including improving health, treating people with dignity and respect, and supporting community cohesion. In particular, it looks at how far the model used by WCDT integrates the need to act holistically to tackle both climate breakdown and poverty and inequality.

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<sup>1</sup> WCDT has been running a weekly community café since late 2013. In its lifetime the café has served over 20,000 healthy vegetarian and vegan meals. Since November 2020 they have also been running a fortnightly veg box scheme, which distributes seasonal fruit and veg boxes sourced from a local wholesaler. Both the café and veg box schemes are offered on a pay what you can afford basis. See Appendix 1 for more details.

<sup>2</sup> WCDT Veg Box Users Survey Analysis 2022

## Context

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report published in February 2022 has been described as the bleakest warning yet. The IPCC said, *“Climate breakdown is accelerating rapidly, many of the impacts will be more severe than predicted and there is only a narrow chance left of avoiding its worst ravages.”*<sup>3</sup>

In addition, the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic, the cessation of economic support to mitigate it and other economic and political crisis leading to an escalating cost of living crisis is intensifying already high levels of poverty and inequality. While environmental and social justice issues have in the past been seen as discrete issues, voices which articulate a holistic understanding of the interconnection between them are being increasingly heard.

The IPCC report is clear that adapting to the climate crisis requires *“Inclusive governance that prioritises equity and justice...”* and *“laws, policies, processes, and interventions that address context specific inequities such as based on gender, ethnicity, disability, age, location and income.”*<sup>4</sup>

The Scottish Government’s *Update to the Climate Change Plan 2018 – 2032 Securing a Green Recovery on a Path to Net Zero*, notes that Scotland’s *“Good Food Nation ambitions cut across five key areas of health, social justice, knowledge, environmental sustainability and prosperity.”*<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, the *Glasgow City Food Plan 2021 – 2031* states

*“We want Glasgow to be a city where tasty, healthy, affordable food is accessible to everyone. Where local food enterprises are supported and celebrated. Where we produce, provide, purchase and consume food that is good for the planet, good for animal welfare, and for good for those involved in growing, making and selling it. In doing this, we will work towards an inclusive, sustainable, resilient and fair economy for our whole community.”*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/resources/press/press-release>

<sup>4</sup> C.5.6

[https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/report/IPCC\\_AR6\\_WGII\\_SummaryForPolicymakers.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGII_SummaryForPolicymakers.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/securing-green-recovery-path-net-zero-update-climate-change-plan-20182032/>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.gcph.co.uk/assets/0000/8206/FINAL\\_GLASGOW\\_CITY\\_FOOD\\_PLAN\\_June\\_2021\\_.pdf](https://www.gcph.co.uk/assets/0000/8206/FINAL_GLASGOW_CITY_FOOD_PLAN_June_2021_.pdf)

## Current responses to food poverty - impacts on climate

In the UK 30 % of emissions are caused by the food system as a whole. This includes emissions caused by agriculture, packaging, waste food, transportation and refrigeration, and of land-use change overseas including the deforestation and cultivation of pasture for production of commercial commodity crops and animal feeds that the UK consumes.<sup>7</sup>

Following decades of rising poverty and an increasingly threadbare UK social security system, foodbanks, which rely on supermarket food waste have become a mainstream solution to rising food poverty. Currently most food policies support the redistribution of supermarket waste via food banks as a way to tackle both poverty and food waste at the same time. This has led to the development of intermediary charities like Fairshare who handle the logistics of collection, storage and distribution of food waste. In the financial year 2020-21 the Scottish Government provided £2.5 million to Fairshare to support supermarket distribution of waste food.

On the face of it this seems an ideal solution: it prevents large amounts of waste food being destroyed, so reducing carbon emissions and meets the need to tackle food poverty at the same time. However, academics and others have argued that creating an ever more integrated infrastructure supporting intermediaries only serves as an incentive for supermarkets to continue producing waste. Kayleigh Garthwaite, Fellow at the University of Birmingham comments

*“Charity has long provided an outlet for surpluses that might otherwise topple prices or lead to public shame and high disposal fees for companies. Researchers have argued that ‘the benefits of using food waste to feed people accrue primarily to the food industry while absolving responsibility of the government to address food insecurity.’”<sup>8</sup>*

Meanwhile, in recognition of the long term need to reduce emissions generated by food waste, the *Making Things Last: a circular economy strategy for Scotland* commits to reducing food waste by 33 % by 2025 and by 50% by 2050.<sup>9</sup> Thus, models which rely on supermarket waste are not a sustainable response to food poverty.

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<sup>7</sup> Food, Farming, and the Climate Crisis: How we can feed people and cool the planet Land workers Alliance. 2019 <https://tinyurl.com/y2fso9z9>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/25/big-business-food-banks-subsidise-reputation>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/making-things-last-circular-economy-strategy-scotland/documents/>

## Future policy changes

Since their onset it has been recognised that many users feel stigma in being forced to rely on food banks to make ends meet. The Scottish Government proposal to replace food banks with a cash first approach aims address this issue.

Ideally, a cash first approach would ensure that people on low income have sufficient to purchase food in the same way as everyone else. However, currently the Scottish Government does not have all economic levers needed to ensure that wages and/or social security entitlements are sufficient to enable this.

In these circumstances, the government should take what steps it can to boost income from social security entitlements and employment as far as possible. But it must also make other provisions which are non-stigmatising, treats people with dignity and respect, reduces waste and tackles climate change more broadly.

## Beyond waste - other problems with supermarket supplied models

Food waste is a key but there are many other reasons why models which financially support supermarkets are problematic from a climate point of view. Much supermarket produce relies on large scale mono crop production requiring long distance transportation and refrigeration. This also has a detrimental impact on land use. For example, large scale soya production (a common ingredient in processed foods) and changes in land use to expand the meat industry has led to extensive deforestation and land degradation in the global south - an important factor in climate breakdown.

The Scottish Governments *A healthier future: Scotland's diet and healthy weight delivery plan* states that improvements in health

*"...requires a joined-up approach to food, where Scotland continues to grow as a Good Food Nation and where good, affordable, locally sourced food is at the heart of our efforts to ensure everyone in Scotland has a healthy diet."*<sup>10</sup>

It also includes the commitment to halving childhood obesity in Scotland by 2030. Supermarkets sell highly processed food which often has high levels of fat, sugar and salt. Excesses of these foods are a major cause of obesity and ill health. Similarly, diets high in meat consumption are also associated with greater health risks compared to predominantly plant based diets.

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/healthier-future-scotlands-diet-healthy-weight-delivery-plan/>

## WCDT Community Café and Veg Box Scheme

How does WCDT's approach differ from other models and how does it integrate tackling food insecurity with meeting climate change targets?

WCDT Community Café food is all freshly cooked, avoiding highly processed foods which cause climate breakdown through detrimental land uses changes. Also, both the Community Café and the Veg Box Scheme have provided either vegetarian or vegan food from the outset. Reducing meat consumption also reduces emissions caused by detrimental land use changes.

WCDT do not use waste food. Instead, they provide fresh, seasonal food sourced from local wholesale providers. Their suppliers, Seasonal Produce, who also supply the catering trade and several other community food organisations, state that

*"Making the right food choices and having access to real fresh produce should be available and affordable to everyone. At Seasonal Produce we take pride in trying to source locally grown, seasonal fresh produce and work with our suppliers and customers to achieve this."*<sup>11</sup>

This reduces emissions caused by long distance food miles, refrigeration and excessive packaging. Supporting local suppliers also benefits the local economy.

The Glasgow City Food Plan States

*"Locally produced food bought from a local retailer can be worth almost ten times as much to the local economy as the same food from a long distant producer, purchased in a supermarket. Glasgow needs to both grow and source more food locally."*<sup>12</sup>

This was particularly important during the pandemic. WCDT suppliers Seasonal Produce, commented that

*"With your help and from a number of our customers who traded throughout the pandemic Seasonal Produce was able to keep our doors open and continue to trade in what was a terrible period for the whole industry."*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> WCDT interview with Seasonal Produce Company Director 2022

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.gcph.co.uk/assets/0000/8206/FINAL\\_GLASGOW\\_CITY\\_FOOD\\_PLAN\\_June\\_2021\\_.pdf](https://www.gcph.co.uk/assets/0000/8206/FINAL_GLASGOW_CITY_FOOD_PLAN_June_2021_.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> WCDT interview with Seasonal Produce Company Director 2022

## Diet and education

WCDT have complemented their food provision with support to enable people to learn how to cook healthy vegan and vegetarian food. Pre pandemic, in addition to providing a three-course vegan or vegetarian meal at the Community Cafe, WCDT provided vegan and vegetarian cookery classes. The Veg Box Scheme also provides recipe cards and advice on how to cook healthy plant-based food on low budgets.

Dr. Traill states that

*“...the café brings together both those with a strong moral orientation to food justice, encouraging other people to avoid food waste and eat healthily, and those who come principally for company and free food, and yet are exposed to those who are interested principally in the café’s ethics. This bridging effect is also encapsulated in the general sense of the café as a space of learning (especially from the highly knowledgeable staff). There is a suggestion from a respondent in one survey that the cafe ought to provide information on its environmentally sustainable ethos “more overtly”, but the subtlety of the café’s approach may be more successful and certainly the glowing reports in previous evaluations of the learning and exposure to food justice and vegetarian cooking would speak to this.”*

Policy makers have so far been reluctant to promote alternatives to meat-based diets and there has been no specific focus on supporting or developing alternatives to food banks which are vegetarian or vegan despite the clear benefits for climate breakdown and health.

This may in part be due in part to the belief that people are generally reluctant to change their dietary habits. Nevertheless, the experiences of WCDT food services shows that this is not necessarily the case and that often people are very willing, with the right support, to improve their diet and make healthier choices.

The Veg Box Scheme Survey asked participants how the scheme had benefited them. Eighty-six percent said that the scheme had ‘stopped me from going hungry’ and/or ‘reduced the strain on our household budget’ Eighty-six percent also stated that it had ‘helped me to eat more healthily’ and over a third said that it had made a ‘really significant difference to the way (they) eat ‘.<sup>14</sup>

*“Anecdotally, there have been a good deal of users who have said that through accessing the veg boxes and the recipes cards and learning materials provided, they have made changes, to varying extents, towards adopting a vegetarian/vegan diet, which these data support.”<sup>15</sup>*

The report *Research into public attitudes to climate change policy and a green recovery*, by Ipsos MORI and conducted for the Scottish Government, asked participants *“To help reduce*

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<sup>14</sup> WCDT Veg Box Users Survey Analysis 2022

<sup>15</sup> WCDT Veg Box Users Survey Analysis 2022



*carbon emissions from farming, would you be willing to eat less red meat?" 70% said they would.*<sup>16</sup>

Intensive agriculture has a hugely negative impact on the eco system and consequently on our climate. This includes loss of soil fertility, erosion, increased flooding, chemical pollution of rivers, biodiversity losses and more. However, the costs of mitigating these harms (for example cleaning up water sources or spending on flood prevention) are not reflected in the price of industrially produced food making it artificially cheap. Consequently, although organic food production is more sustainable, it is more expensive and especially so for people on a low income.

In these circumstances, and until other policies are in place which support organically grown food to come down in cost, in WCDT have taken a pragmatic approach and do not exclusively make use of organic foods.

Staff are also very much aware of the need to make education around diet and the environment realistic. Dr. Traill comments that

*"Staff would regularly show awareness of the place café attendees are often starting from and rooting any advocacy in an understanding of the limits within a deeply unequal society of access to environmentally friendly food. This was well encapsulated in this comment, from one of the regular cooks:*

*"If you're on a really tight budget, even if you are interested in local food, at the end of the day, you're not necessarily going to have the money to spend on getting local food, because it generally tends to be more expensive. If they're just there for a hot meal and a friendly face as I said, that's not really something that we can lecture people about or try to encourage them to spend more of their money on a locally grown lettuce, for £1.50 when you could get one for 25p out of Lidl."*<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2020/12/securing-green-recovery-path-net-zero-update-climate-change-plan-20182032/documents/research-public-attitudes-climate-change-policy-green-recovery/research-public-attitudes-climate-change-policy-green-recovery/govscot%3Adocument/research-public-attitudes-climate-change-policy-green-recovery.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> Dr. Helen Traill, Addressing the Community Need: Woodlands Community Development Trust food work evaluation report March 2022. Glasgow.



## Promoting dignity and respect

Providing food for people on low incomes, in a manner which respectful and dignified has always been central to WCDT's community food work. As noted above WCDT does not source its food from supermarket waste. This also supports its ethos of treating people with dignity. As a number of academics and others have commented, there is a strong sense of stigma attached to the idea that while no one would ordinarily choose to purchase or eat waste food, it's perfectly acceptable for people on low income to do so. As Dr. Traill comments, WCDT's model

*"...gets away from using waste food to feed stigmatised people, which has been highlighted as problematic by food scholars."*<sup>1819</sup>

Unlike other models, access to the Community Café and Veg Box Scheme is not means tested and people self-refer. Both the Community Café and the Veg Box Scheme operate on a pay what you can afford basis. Commenting on the contrast with food banks, one Veg Box user said

*"I've been to standard food banks before and the difference in how you get treated is huge! Xander is kind and clear and treats everyone with a huge amount of respect. I also like the pay what you can aspect and love the moments when I can pay it forward."*<sup>20</sup>

The Community Café provides much more than simply a meal for those who are struggling to put food on the table. People come to get a break from caring responsibilities, to combat loneliness, manage stress and poor mental health, learn new skills, seek money advice and to make friends and enjoy the sense of community.<sup>21</sup> In the pre pandemic Café 10-15 people volunteered every week, helping to prepare a three course dinner for up to 80 people, under the supervision of two Café staff. When everyone sits down to eat together, there is no need for anyone to feel shame or stigma since there was no way for anyone to know whether someone had come to supplement their income, volunteer or for any number of other reasons.

During the pandemic the Community Café was either closed or operated, where permissible, as a stripped back, socially distanced outdoor lunch. Dr. Traill found that even in its most basic form

*".. the café is still highly valued. The main suggestion from many surveyed was simply to keep the café going: "get it indoors if possible" and "Nothing in particular. Just that it keeps going!"*

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<sup>18</sup> In the UK, see Lambie-Mumford, H. (2017) *Hungry Britain. The Rise of Food Charity*. Policy Press: Bristol.

<sup>19</sup> Dr. Helen Traill, Addressing the Community Need: Woodlands Community Development Trust food work evaluation report March 2022. Glasgow.

<sup>20</sup> WCDT Veg Box Users Survey Analysis 2022

<sup>21</sup> The pre pandemic Café also provided services such as money advice (in conjunction with the CAB) and music classes.

*“It still fills hearts and minds, soothes isolation, and overcomes anxiety, speaking to the social importance of what social scientists call commensality (eating together)<sup>22</sup> ..., the concern that the café in some form keep going speaks to the importance of the café in the social lives of participants. As one respondent put it: ‘It has been a social lifeline for me’”<sup>23</sup>*

Visiting the Café on its fourth anniversary, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said

*“The work being undertaken here is a fantastic example of communities acting together for the benefit of them all. We know the positive impact on people’s health that freshly prepared, healthy food can have. To be not only providing these meals, but also growing produce and teaching the cookery skills to enable members of the community to provide them for themselves and their families, is a tremendous service.”*

*“Equally important though, is providing a place for members of the community to meet and engage with each other, sharing a meal and conversation. Many people, especially the elderly, may suffer from loneliness and isolation that can affect both mental and physical wellbeing. Projects such as this one play a valuable role in benefitting the local community in so many ways.”*

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<sup>22</sup> See e.g. Smith, M. and Harvey, J. (2021) Social eating initiatives and the practices of commensality. *Appetite*. Vol 161: 105107; Blake, M. (2019) More than just food: Food Insecurity and Resilient Place Making through Community Self-Organising. *Sustainability*. 11(10). 2942. DOI: 10.3390/su11102942

<sup>23</sup> Dr. Helen Traill, Addressing the Community Need: Woodlands Community Development Trust food work evaluation report March 2022. Glasgow

## Conclusion

Globally we are already experiencing multiple human and biosphere disasters because of climate breakdown and to successfully meet this challenge, we must find solutions that tackle poverty and inequality at the same time.

Current policies, including those aimed at addressing food insecurity, are failing to sufficiently integrate climate and anti-poverty work. They are also failing to act with sufficient urgency.

To avoid incentives for supermarkets to continue to produce food waste and to reduce stigma policy makers have identified the need to end food banks. This is very welcome and needs to be implemented as a matter of urgency.

But future policy must be much more ambitious. Problems with our food system do not stop with food waste. Rising emissions caused by multiple aspects are a major cause of climate breakdown. Aspects also contribute to obesity and poor health more generally.

Dr. Traill's evaluation (and other recent survey work) clearly demonstrates how the WCDT model is successfully integrating anti-poverty and climate work. Testimony from users as to the impact and importance of the support they receive speaks clearly to the value of WCDT's food work both for individuals and for the community.

Despite these successes, at the time of writing, current funding for both the Community Café and the Veg Box Scheme is insecure. With the winding up of the Climate Challenge Fund, WCDT has only been able to continue to deliver the Veg Box Scheme through subsidising it from reserves and Community Café staff are on short term contracts with funding due to come to end over the summer of 2022.

Yet, given the urgency of climate breakdown and the worsening levels of poverty the value of this model has never been more apparent. WCDT and others working to a similar ethos need adequate, long term secure funding to allow them to continue this work.

Equally, it is critically important that the many years of learning and experience gained through developing the WCDT approach is not lost. WCDT provides policy makers with an exemplar model of how to address multiple crises and integrate anti-poverty and climate work in a compassionate and holistic way.

Alongside other anti-poverty measures, a new approach drawing on the successes of WCDT needs to be funded, scaled up and rolled out to replace current models. The IPCC could not be clearer, we do not have much time left, the window of opportunity to act and stave off catastrophic climate breakdown is closing fast. It is time for policy makers to make bold and decisive change.

## Appendix 1

2010	Woodlands Community Garden created.
2011-2012	Cookery classes held over winter months.
June 2012	Film Screening and Discussion Event, about impacts of austerity in Greece and Greek model of local support centres. Helps influence thinking behind developing an alternative model of support to foodbank.
Autumn 2012	'Cookery with a Conscience' Cookery Class. Partnership with night shelter for destitute asylum seekers. Meals provided for asylum seekers at the end of class.
2012/2013	Fundraising and planning for a bigger scale project. Secured funding from Lottery Support and Connect Programme.
December 2013	Launch event for 'Local Food Social Support Hubs' held. Beginning of 18-month project funded by Lottery with 3 part-time staff.
2014/2015	'Local Food Social Support Hubs' rebranded as 'Pop Up Community Café'. After initially rotating venues and dates, a settled venue of Windsor Hall on Monday evenings is secured.
Autumn 2015	Lottery funding comes to an end, crowdfunding appeal helps plug initial gap in funding and several small grants secured to allow service to continue. Cafe runs with 2 rather than 3 part time staff.
2015/2016	Café re-establishes at new venue of Fred Paton Centre, and attendance continues to increase.
2016-2019	Café principally funded by a combination of Scottish Government and Lottery Funding, but also reliant on a portfolio of small grants and donations to meet full costs. Continues with 2 staff, one cook and one front of house. Additional support services and activities added to the café, including Citizens Advice Bureau advice, music workshops and a meditation group. Attendance at cafe averages 70-80 people per week, with over 40 volunteers involved in the project.
November 2019	Scottish Government Food Insecurity Team provide a bespoke 18-month extension of Fair Food Fund Grant, to enable us to document best practice. This funding also enables café to keep doors open after other Scottish Government funding comes to an end.
March 2020	Community Café Suspended due to pandemic.

May 2020	Neighbourhood Food Service (NFS) established in partnership with Queens Cross Housing Association, Flourish House and Maryhill CCH, funded by a range of emergency Covid funding schemes. Delivers over 20,000 meals in 12 months.
November 2020	Veg Box Scheme begins, run independently of the NFS, funded in part by Scottish Government Climate Challenge Fund. Run on fortnightly basis, with 25-30 households benefiting each fortnight.
April 2021	Due to impact of pandemic, Scottish Government allow small underspend from previous year to be carried forward into this financial year.
May 2021	Neighbourhood Food Service stops when Covid funding finishes.
July – Nov 2021	A simplified Outdoor Community Café runs on our Events Terrace, before taking a break for the winter. Using our NFS Partner Flourish House for kitchen.
March 2022	Scottish Government funding comes to an end (both Fair Food Fund and Climate Challenge Fund).