



21 Years of conversation with Older People in Scotland

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¹ Thank You to the 85 Food Train customers who were interviewed for this report, many of whom shared the same name but, all credited (with permission) above, names have been changed when directly quoted.

Foreword

It is rare in this fast paced ever changing world, to find some things that just don't change. Listening to older voices brought Food Train to life and hearing them today we find little has altered for them. Food Train was launched in June 1995 by older people for older people, in response to the findings of a survey of older people, the mission was clear; helping older people access food with ease would help them eat better, feel better and live better.

Reading through the wonderful memories, thoughts and stories from some of our older members, it is reassuring to hear that the constant unchanging reliability of our shopping delivery service, helps people as much today as it did 21 years ago. We still use a simple method of collecting shopping lists, making up orders in local shops and delivering the groceries back to the person in need.

I joined Food Train in 2002, the first member of paid staff, working directly with the founding volunteers. They shared their strong views with me, I felt their passion and understood what had driven them to work so hard for the benefit of others during their retirement years, when they could have been taking it easy. Being older themselves, listening to their peers recounting the changes in their lives as they aged, hearing how poorly some ate, how little choice and food some had and how hard life had become evoked strong emotions in us all. Quite simply, finding older people alone, hungry and without help, was abhorrent to Food Train's founders. They hoped their solution would be short term and that, in time, care provision would extend to food access; sadly the picture 21 years on is demand on a scale unimagined by our founders. It is heartening to read the positive impact Food Train has on the lives of the members. They rejoice in the simplicity, reliability, compassion and contact that we bring to their lives every week. Hearing people tell of their renewed ability to eat with choice, with dignity and without worry would warm the hearts of our late founders.

As a charity, we exist for the good of others, but it can be hard to keep on track with constantly changing external pressures. This report shows we are still listening, still hearing, still talking and still helping in the way our older members want and need us to; a fitting tribute to the vision set 21 years ago that we all strive to uphold today and for all our futures.

Michelle Carruthers MBE

Chief Executive

Summary

This report is an external analysis of Food Trains impact on the lives of their customers. Their views have been explored through 85 semi structured interviews which were conducted in early 2017, as part of a small-scale research project. In addition to this core data, staff and volunteers participated in interviews and discussions, services were visited and existing data was analysed to provide a rich picture of how Food Train operates in its drive to provide customers with the best possible support to age well. In exploring the impact that Food Train makes in the lives of its customers, ideas about how older people can be supported to maintain autonomy were prominent. Gawande, in his investigation into different ways to support older people, *'Being Mortal'* (2014)² described how the support offered by the services he visited was determined by the unique needs of the people they served and that those delivering the services;

'all believed that you didn't need to sacrifice your autonomy, just because you needed help in your life' (Gawande, 2014)

The idea of being autonomous in old age, when your health is deteriorating is further explored in Gawande's book, referring to Dworkin³, who defines autonomy as the freedom to be;

'authors of our own lives' (Dworkin, 1986).

Food Train believes in supporting older people to be autonomous, even when they need help in realising their wishes. People who become members of Food Train are provided with the opportunity to retain their autonomy in making seemingly small decisions, that those with better mobility or health may take for granted; having the right to choose the loaf of bread or type of milk you prefer may seem trivial until this is added to the plethora of restrictions that may come with being unable to drive, use public transport or carry your own shopping. Aging and social isolation can start to erode people's opportunities for choice and autonomy. Older people can often lead rich and interesting lives, their wealth of life experience and increasing appreciation of simplicity can teach us all in unexpected ways. In this report older people have told us that Food Train enables them to stay in their own homes for longer, that they find joy in the weekly and reliable visits from volunteers and that the service is consistent and valued. They told us that simple choices matter, that eating alone can lead to a reduced appetite, loneliness leading to depression can be avoided through simple acts of kindness and that small household tasks like changing light bulbs and half filling the kettle can be the difference between sitting in the dark for hours and not having a simple cup of tea all day. Thousands of older people across Scotland are supported by Food Train, a charity that agrees that you can still be autonomous, even when you need help.

² Gawande, A. (2014) *Being Mortal*. Illness, Medicine and What Matters in the End. Wellcome Collection.

³ Dworkin, R. (1986) Autonomy and the demented self. *Milbank Q.* 1986;64(Suppl. 2):4-16.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11649885>

In summary, this small research project has established that Food Train positively impacts the lives of its customers with a suite of simple services;



Figure 1 Impact of Food Train

Introduction

Food Train has 21 years' experience working with and for older people, providing food access in direct response to their needs and co-producing new services. Developed in the town of Dumfries in 1995, by older people for older people, in response to declining social care provision and a growing problem of food access, Food Train is a charitable social enterprise with limited company status, governed by a board of Trustees/Directors. They are an organisation deeply rooted in the community working with local volunteers to help people live the kind of later life they want. They deliver work locally and nationally and have experience of designing new work alongside older people. Food Train has been involved in nutrition and hydration advocacy for many years and works with others to influence policy and practice in Scotland. All Food Train developments have been led and shaped entirely by members and volunteers in local areas, they respond directly to what customers say. All service users are members, who pay a £1 membership fee. Food Train's mission is to help older people to eat well, live well and age well. Their objective is to directly provide, or signpost to, the low level practical support that helps older people to stay independent in their own homes for as long as possible and remain in control of their daily lives.

Initially the charity was entirely led by volunteers, before getting funding to employ staff so it could respond to increased demands. Since 2002, Food Train has seen considerable growth, first regionally, then in the number of services offered, then nationally. Today, in addition to grocery shopping, they now provide handyperson/household support, befriending visits, trips and clubs, library services to housebound older people and a neighbourhood meal sharing project, matching volunteer cooks with malnourished older people living nearby. Launched initially to tackle food access problems, they now also help with fall prevention, reducing loneliness and improving social contact, reducing malnutrition and improving food intake, and helping with delayed discharges from hospital. Food Train services are available across Scotland supporting 2,650 older people with 1063 volunteers involved, assisted by 39 staff and led by ten volunteer Trustees. In the last year they delivered over 43,400 grocery orders, provided in excess of 8,000 library resources, 15,000 befriending hours, 2,000 plus handyperson jobs and our new meal sharing project donated over 3,000 meals to older people in need – all by volunteers. Each regional Food Train offers different services from a menu depending on what already exists locally; if they don't provide it directly they simply link up with other organisations who do, so they can ensure our older members get the full range of help they want and need. Listening to older people and taking their views, feelings and ideas into account when planning service is at the core of everything Food Train do.

Currently Food Train has bases in Dumfries & Galloway, West Lothian, Stirling, Dundee, Renfrewshire and North Ayrshire as well as Glasgow where their Meal Makers service is also based.

Food Train works to respond flexibly with one question at the heart of every discussion, meeting or action;

What will this do to improve the quality of life of our customers?

If the answer to this is, *'we don't know'*, they ask older people, and if the answer is yes, Food Train will act, then keep asking and checking, changing as necessary to give the best possible service. Food Train works to enable older people to stay in their homes, with the support they need and to continue making choices, which is as Gawande (2014) puts it;

'This is the very marrow of being human' (Gawande, 2014)

Customers

The people (customers) interviewed had an average age of 83. Ages ranged from 68 to 99 with some people not wishing to disclose their age. There were 65 female customers and 20 male. It is also important to note that several of the people we spoke to did not consider the label older person to apply to them and this highlights how important it is not to apply homogenous labels to groups of people in aging as in any other stage of life.

Method

Initially, Jane conducted semi-structured interviews with all members of Food Train's management team which led to the generation of themes and referrals to other staff and volunteers who had experiences to share about caring for older people or aging themselves. Working with the staff team a person from each region was invited to undertake training in social research skills, as well as co-producing the research tools and questions. A group of eight Food Train volunteers and staff were trained around informed consent and ethical practice in research and subsequently developed a question prompt sheet. Three groups of semi structured interview questions were also agreed. The research team then considered processes sensitive to their experiences of working directly with older people. We developed information and informed consent forms. Lively conversations about food and shopping, memories and meals as well as health and support needs followed. In the case of the Meal Makers service, which does not have face-to-face contact, interviews were conducted over the phone with verbal consent recorded.

The questions were designed to open conversation about experiences of food and food access, types of support and the impact of health on diet. In addition, space was offered for discussion around special memories, for example, favourite meals. Recurring themes were around barriers to food, shopping and cooking, the changing role of food and drink as well as the social benefits from accessing Food Train.

Staff and volunteers were asked about the issues they encounter and how these are resolved. They were asked how the organisation helped older people and what other services they thought might help older people further, as well as the other services that they worked with and how this approach complemented their work. This demonstrated an organisational culture that was focused on listening, reflecting and ensuring that the people they support are central to decision making.

Findings

There were three dominant themes in the interview data. The first and most frequent, with 80% of the respondents mentioning it, was how being a customer of Food Train helped to reduce social isolation. The second theme was around issues of food access and how Food Train improved poor access to food. Finally, the third theme considered the impact of Food Train on reduced appetite, either through loneliness and demotivation or as a natural consequence of aging.

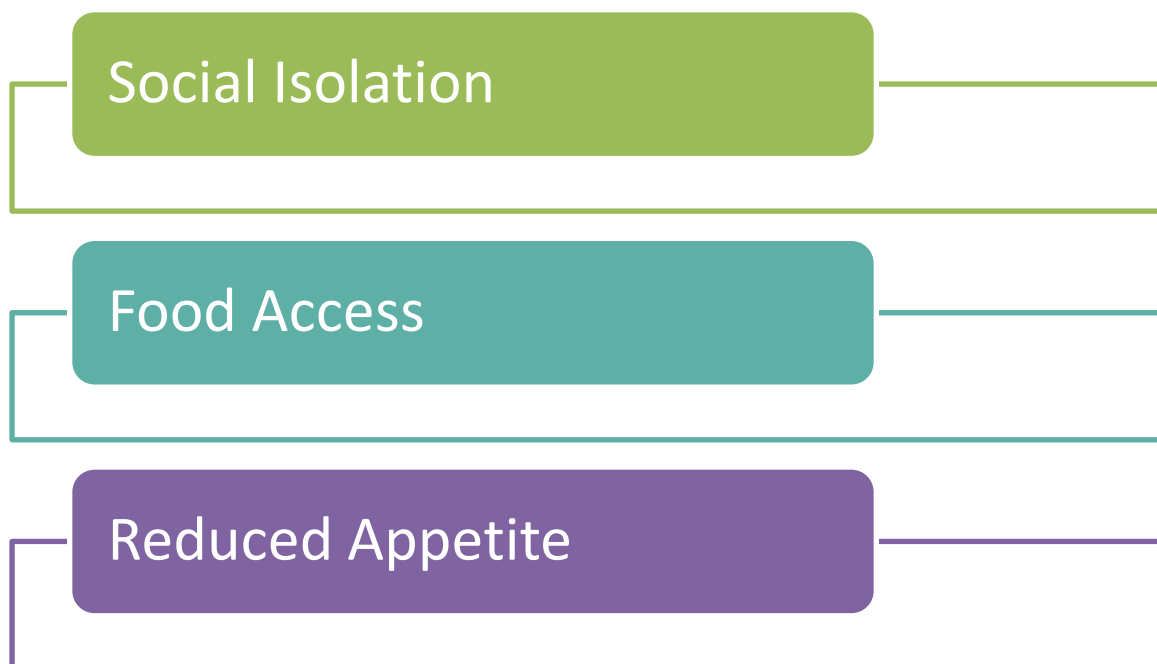


Figure 2 – Dominant Themes

Social isolation is a crucial factor impacting on quality of life for older people and for Food Train customers the grocery delivery service, home support service, befriending, library and Meal Makers service reduce social isolation in a myriad of ways. Customers looked forward to weekly visits and phone calls often the only regular visit or contact they have. They enjoy a short conversation, someone taking an interest in them and feeling listened too. Food access is affected by local transport, local shops diminishing or finding it difficult to compete with larger stores in terms of pricing. Food access is also affected by diminished health, the ability to carry shopping, manage cooking safely and being physically isolated in rural areas. Customers have reduced appetites due to ill health, poorly fitting dentures and poor access to dental services however, more customers report reduced appetite through loneliness and inactivity. Customers report eating and drinking as a means to socialising which directly impacts the ability to eat well; if people are alone and lonely they are not motivated to eat. If they cannot use kitchen appliances safely and the only food available is cold this also demotivates some customers. Food Train impacts on these core challenges through the provision of simple, local services which are developed with older people and supported by dedicated community volunteers.

What did customers say?

Almost all the customers interviewed referred to the social aspect of eating as being really important, with increasing social isolation being a factor in low appetite and motivation to cook. This was coupled with diminishing health and physical changes which made customers less confident to go out and shop, prepare meals safely and eat well.

The majority said that Food Train or one of its services, Meal Makers or Food Train Friends; a befriending service was the only regular access they had to other people. They spoke repeatedly of losing their partners and friends as a factor in reduced appetite, with many of the men in particular lacking confidence in preparing food, having had wives who had taken responsibility for this.

Weekly visits from Food Train were also evidently empowering customers to remain as independent as possible, stay in their homes longer and be less reliant on family or neighbours. The service was highly valued by all the people interviewed and frequently described as a lifeline which enabled them to be more independent. The social aspect of deliveries was also valued – the time to have a *'wee chat'*. There were several people who said Food Train was keeping them alive by ensuring they had regular access to fresh groceries;

***'If I didn't have Food Train I'd be dead.'* (April, 88)**

Those customers living in more rural areas talked about the lack of local services, absence of local shops which are significantly diminishing in number or poor public transport. However, many customers praised highly the local services where these existed; the local butchers, fish van and chip shop which delivered fresh food or meals, and the taxi service which gave one lady a food hamper at Christmas. These services were extremely important in terms of retaining independence. A number of people however, spoke of the additional cost of buying in local shops and using taxis so financial resources were also a concern.

The role of Meal Makers is equally valued in the terms of having someone to talk to, who brings home cooked food to them and who they frequently see as a friend.

***'My volunteer with the Meal Makers usually comes round every week and she'll sit and talk to me. She'll bring me a roast dinner or soup and a dessert sometimes too. The food is really good, my volunteer is very nice.'* (Betty, 97)**

The joy of local and traditional foods was also a regular theme with Meal Makers customers, many of whom relished the chance to share a meal or learn how to cook smaller portions of their favourite foods;

***'He [volunteer] brings mince and tatties. His cooking is smashing and I could eat it all day long. He's also mentioned that he'd like to show me how to cook mince and tatties at home.'* (Bert, 72)**

Social Isolation



Figure 3 Eating Alone

Customers told us that the Food Train delivery was often the only visitor they had each week; people looked forward to the visit and the conversation with the volunteers. They felt supported and safe in the knowledge that someone would come, that the volunteers would unpack and store the shopping, and take time to get the best products and deals in each shop. A number of interviewees had moved back to Scotland with their partners who had then passed away which had left them feeling isolated. In addition to this, a number of couples had retired to Scotland after years of holiday visits and had difficulty accessing support networks when left alone in bereavement. Several also spoke of friends who they used to go out with but who had now passed away and of family members who had moved away for work and this had made things more difficult.

***'I always like to try different things. We used to go abroad and we went out for a bar lunch every week when my husband was alive. I used to go out with friends but they have all died now.'* (Iris, 87).**

Attending events such as lunch clubs, outings and accessing the befriending service was also hugely appreciated. Several customers stated they felt that having the delivery and associated services had prevented admission to hospital and some customers stating they would not be able to manage without the support they receive from Food Train. Lizzie (70) for example, said ***'I wouldn't be able to survive without Food Train.'***

Similarly, their own health issues meant they were unable to go out independently to restaurants, cafes or lunch clubs.

'I don't attend outside activities such as lunch clubs because I struggle to walk and have a walking stick. In order to go out I need someone to accompany me and be confident with supporting me physically as I'm scared of falling and injuring myself'. (Alan, 86)

Couples could also be restricted from going out by their partner's health issues. Heather, for example, said she loves to go out for the change of scenery but her husband Jimmy doesn't. She loves chatter and company but Jimmy has hearing problems so he rarely goes out to the lunch club. Jean too spoke of her husband's health issues and how Food Train had helped them:

'I'm not a good cook. Bill [husband] used to be but his father, mother, brother died and he went blind and I think he died too. Food Train has given us a new lease of life - going to meetings and having company. I wouldn't go out with just Bill.' (Agnes, 75)

Many of the people interviewed lamented the fact that they no longer eat out and would love to be able to go out for a meal for the opportunity to socialise and have a change of scenery or food. Others said they were happy not to go out for a meal, they had not enjoyed doing so in the past and had no wish to do so now preferring their own company or the *'wee treat'* of a Chinese takeaway every week. For others though this reluctance was founded on feelings of embarrassment at being seen in a wheelchair or being thought clumsy, and issues around swallowing or digestion. This sense of shame and being a nuisance was also evident in relation to shopping for some interviewees.

'Walking is difficult. I use a scooter. I just go in and out of the Co-op for a few things. Try to be quick so I'm not in the way - I don't take the scooter in, there's no room. I couldn't walk around a supermarket too far. No, I don't want to go or be seen going around in a wheelchair.' (Roberta, 88)

Those interviewees who did go out for meals with family and friends or to Lunch Clubs emphasised the social aspect. Joan (92), for example, talked of how she went out twice a month with three friends saying, *'lunch is for fellowship not food'*. The social aspect of food preparation, cooking and eating came across strongly in the interviews. Making and cooking a meal was something they did for their family or partner. When they no longer had a partner or family living at home some interviewees felt that some of the point of cooking was lost.

How Food Train reduces Social Isolation

The methods used by Food Train to reduce social isolation came from listening to their customers who want to remain as independent as possible in their own homes.



Figure 4 - Customers Core Values

As mentioned above, the majority of people interviewed said that Food Train deliveries were often the only visitor they had each week, with the exception of short visits from care staff and those customers with local family who visited regularly, many customers felt lonely and isolated much of the time.

Food train staff and volunteers shared 136,000 hours with older people in 2016.

People felt their social world beginning to diminish as they aged. For example, going out for meals in the past was mentioned frequently, with partners who had since died and with friends, who have also passed away, gone into residential care or were no longer able to go out because of their own health issues. Fred (70), for example, said that his wife had been a great cook so he had never bothered to cook for himself and *'kept out of the kitchen'*. He talked of how he enjoyed going out for a meal when his wife had been alive and how they had done this frequently. Since his wife died, however, he almost always ate alone at home and would not go out for a meal on his own. Similarly, Iris (72), who felt eating a variety of foods and trying new things was very important, had not been out for a meal in three years because she was unsure of which places were physically accessible for her.

Customers felt they were less isolated and were confident that their delivery would come each week; whatever the weather the volunteers seemed to find ways to make their deliveries and were much appreciated.

A dominant theme was that of extended independence; customers felt they were able to stay at home rather than go into residential care or be in hospital for extended periods because they could arrange their own deliveries and Food Train would *'keep an eye out for them'*. A significant number of the people interviewed eat alone for the majority of their meals. Although some did not mind this, others felt it detracted from their enjoyment and, in some cases, was a factor in their loss of appetite. James (88), for example, buys mostly ready meals, soup and tinned vegetables. Although he used to enjoy cooking he can no longer stand for very long. He says he has a good appetite but feels he does not eat as much as he used to. John rarely eats with anyone else and the positive impact of company and having food prepared for him was clear:

'A neighbour brought a huge Christmas dinner on a plate for me and I ate the lot because it was made for me. I enjoy going out but I depend on my friends as I can't get out on my own. I go to a weekly group at lunchtime but the landlady picks me up and takes me back. I can meet up with friends there for a drink and some nibbles – it's a lifeline.' (Jim, 88)

Local people were equally important; the neighbours who dropped in with a cooked meal or who could be relied on to pick up bits of shopping, the friend who brought a fish supper every week and people like John's pub landlady who picked them up for a visit. The kindness of other community members was particularly important for those people whose family lived away.

Food Train always endeavours to demonstrate respect for its customers in consulting and considering them in service design, development and delivery but, ultimately Food Trains success can be related to a core focus on being kind as well as professional. In individual interviews with the senior management team it became clear that each member of the staff and volunteer team were valued in the same way the customers were valued. The organisation has clarity of purpose which negotiates the need for professional and well managed services with a drive to promote kindness, friendship and respect. Customers valued being listened too, having a moment to laugh with someone else, a quick cup of tea and the simple joy of companionship.

Food Access

The main challenges with accessing food were people's ability to physically travel to shops, negotiate large shops and return home with groceries. Many customers were unable to leave home without support as they could not manage steps, stairs and other physical barriers, gates for example. Some felt unsure about using wheelchairs or mobility devices, others were unable to drive or simply had very limited access to public transport – some rural areas may only be able to access one bus per day which was limiting not least because of reduced confidence in being able to get their groceries in time for the return journey, **12% of the customers interviewed were completely housebound.**

Health impairment was also very challenging for customers; reduced mobility coupled with toileting problems has the capacity to limit someone to a very small area in their own homes, and some people had medical issues such as difficulties in chewing or swallowing.

'I try to have variety with my meals but I unable to cook for myself anymore due to my poor eyesight and arthritis which means I can't get out the house. I don't attend outside activities such as lunch clubs because I struggle to walk and have a walking stick. In order to go out I need someone to accompany me and be confident with supporting me physically as I'm scared of falling and injuring myself. My health really prevents me from doing things.' (Alan, 86)

Once issues around access to food are resolved through a Food Train grocery delivery there are also challenges with preparing the food. The majority of interviewees who said they were less able to cook attributed this to health reason e.g. inability to stand for any length of time, arthritis in their hands making food preparation difficult, poor eyesight, needing both hands for a walking frame.

'Due to health reasons I can't really cook for myself any more as I can't stand for long periods of time at a counter. This means I can't chop things like vegetables and it's quite frustrating so I get fed up.' (Bert, 68)

However, some interviewees continued to cook and prepare their own meals but relied on their carers to heat up the food at meal times and then tidy up afterwards. For many people this enabled them to continue eating home cooked meals with fresh ingredients but in a way which was less tiring for them.

How Food Train increases food access

In 2017, Food Train made **over 43,400 grocery deliveries to 2,650 customers**. In addition to this over 3,000 meals were shared through the Meal Makers

service. This delivery service is organised by groups of volunteers who speak to each customer by phone or in person and hand write their grocery orders which are then organised into shopping lists. Another group of volunteers then shop for each customer individually. Customers are free to order anything the supermarket they choose stocks and volunteer shoppers look for the freshest foods, special offers and favourites of the customers they come to know so well.

They spend hours each week shopping and carefully packing the orders. The delivery team offer to unpack and store groceries if the customer wishes. They also let customers know if any food they already have is out of date and, if the customers wishes, dispose of it. The Meal Makers service is an online hub for volunteer cooks, some of whom are neighbours or people working in local services. For example, a children's nursery in one area prepares an additional lunch for an older person in the community.

This innovative online service links people of all ages to share meals and builds communities; many of the 600 volunteer cooks last year were students relocated to a new area for their studies and enjoying the company of older people whilst sharing a meal. **Food train builds communities by connecting people of all ages.**

Reduced Appetite

Many of the customers felt that their appetites had become smaller or that they had lost interest in eating. As we age appetite reduces naturally; when we are less physically active we require fewer calories for example, but health issues can also impact on our appetites. **58% of the customers said their appetite had significantly reduced.** For some this was because of medical issues such as difficulties in chewing or swallowing. Other customers saw this as part of the process of getting older. Although customers repeatedly said they preferred fresh foods and home cooking, **79% were reliant on a microwave for all their meals, which were often processed foods.** Some people then felt that there was less point in cooking for themselves because their appetite was so small and this created a lot of wasted food (pack sizes sold in supermarkets are often too large for just one, or for a small appetite).

'My appetite is much smaller and I don't eat a lot. I have a children's ready meal for my evening meal most days' (Hamish 86)

Meal Makers customers who are unable to leave their homes easily expressed great enjoyment on sharing a meal. Eating alone was identified as a factor in reduced appetite: **25% of people** interviewed said they **always ate alone** and a further 25% said they ate alone almost always and that this was a factor in having a reduced appetite. Customers frequently mentioned a lack of variation in diet and this was a concern.

'It's difficult to know what food is available as I never go to a store and can't see what's on the shelves. Tesco used to send out a sheet of what's available but they don't now.' (Edna, 90, who has been confined to the house for eight years)

A lot of the people interviewed expressed a preference for traditional, plain food made from fresh ingredients – homemade soup in particular was mentioned by almost everyone interviewed; 91% of customers said they wanted to make fresh soup. The remaining 9% were still able to make this soup themselves and enjoyed this enormously while those that could not echoed the words below;

'I used to really enjoy making my own soup. I'd make big batches of it and freeze it and it would last for weeks at a time. I'd take a portion out of the freezer and have one every day. Making soup is something I miss doing.' (Bert, 68)

People spoke of having to eat what was available when they were growing up, of the need to use everything and not waste food.

Many had also grown up during the war and experienced food shortages and rationing which contributed to this view point. While many of those interviewed expressed a preference for plain, traditional food, others wanted something a bit different; like the weekly treat of a fish supper or a Chinese meal.

How Food Train impacts on Reduced Appetites

In just one year, 2016 Food Train shared 15,000 befriending hours with their customers, moments of human connection which reduced social isolation, helped people to feel less lonely and by sharing meals and drinks impacted on reduced appetites. In 2016, Food Train also completed over 2000 small repairs and household tasks for older people, sharing a cup of tea and a conversation at the same time, reminding older people that they are cared about and not alone in our communities. Reliable and regular deliveries of fresh foods meant that customers could make smaller meals and rely on having food replaced in the following week. Staff and volunteers made sure customers were aware of items on offer in their local stores, some areas were able to arrange trips to the supermarkets and this was much appreciated because;

'It's difficult to order different things when you're not looking at the supermarket shelves yourselves'. (Mary, 66)

Food Train works to provide recipe ideas, tempting customers with fruit and vegetables they may not have tried or encountered before. Many customers enjoyed trying new things but were also confident in returning items which is part of the service provided to them.

Conclusion

Food Train as a charity has evolved much like many other grassroots community organisations but, unlike some organisations who rapidly expand; it has taken steps to ensure that being kind to members of their community is central to the services they provide. A plethora of small acts were evident in each office I visited and in the informal conversations I had with staff and volunteers, many of whom were themselves retired and recognised the need to support people across the community and maintain a service that they too may need to use in the future. The lean operating model allows Food Train to make agile decisions and to respond to requests and offers of help quickly. Whilst in discussions with the team in Dumfries, the staff were writing birthday cards to members, ensuring a personal connection was made with every customer. I witnessed volunteers walking thousands of steps each day in the supermarkets, regularly on their hands and knees searching for a favourite pot of jam or the freshest loaf of bread because each customer, like all of us, has favourites.

Food Train volunteers make it a personal mission to improve life in a multitude of small ways for their customers. This organisation has expanded rapidly, adding new areas to its service annually but, they manage this with practical and achievable steps. They are perhaps, one of the most naturally reflective organisations I have encountered in over 20 years in the social sector.

100% of Food Train customers told us they were happy or delighted with the service they got from Food Train.

Food Train is impacted by the huge challenges facing the social sector generally in terms of funding but, like many organisations established to support older people, they are also impacted by a culture in the UK that has a hard time acknowledging the inevitability of aging. If we are lucky we will all enter old age; we will, like the participants in this study remember times when we were more able to engage with the world on our terms. The impact that Food Train has made over 21 years of development is to support thousands of older people across Scotland to have a continued voice, to make choices about their lives and be visible in their communities. We know this because like Food Train, we listened to the people they support. It has been a privilege to hear the stories of 85 older people as well as talking with Food Train Staff and Volunteers and mirrors the experience of his own research described by Gawande;

‘There are people in the world who change imaginations. You can find them in the most unexpected places’ (Gawande, 2014)

The Research Project Team

Dr Jane Rowley – Research Design

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This research project was facilitated by Dr Jane Rowley. Jane's Doctoral work focused on the lived experience of older men in recovery from addiction. Subsequent work with its focus on the user voice has included developing participative curriculums in Higher Education across Europe, older peoples experience of support and activity groups, veterans in recovery from trauma and family support. The analysis was conducted by Jane and Dr Kim Slack, a social researcher with expertise in participative research, and previously a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Education at Staffordshire University. Her research focuses on issues around widening participation and the learning experience of young people and adults, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The customer interviews were carried out by a specially trained team of Food Train staff and volunteers which included a representative from each Food Train base area. This team undertook training in social research, learning about consent and ethical practice. They embodied the culture of Food Train in sensitively and professionally carrying out each interview with the customer, then demonstrating skill in recording all the responses and making a hugely valuable contribution to our understanding of customer experience.

Food Train was awarded funding through the Big Lottery Fund – Accelerating Ideas, to develop a project plan for their proposed Eat Well, Age Well programme. An additional output through this funding was dedicated to a small-scale research project which would investigate and analyse Food Train data to inform production of a Knowledge and Impact report considering the impact of Food Train in supporting older people and most importantly the views of older people themselves.