ANNUAL REPORT 2025–26

Food Train
a trusted lifeline for older people

A trusted lifeline

Supporting older people to

eat well

stay connected

live independently

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eat well

stay connected

live independently

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Welcome from our Chair

A year of challenge, change and renewed purpose

The year from April 2025 to March 2026 was one of challenge and change for Food Train. Ongoing rising costs, pressures on public funding and growing demand affected charities across Scotland. For Food Train, these pressures were very real, and the Board had to make some difficult decisions, including the closure of our Renfrewshire branch following the loss of local health and social care partnership funding.

Throughout the year, our focus remained firmly on the older people who rely on Food Train. Our staff and volunteers continued to provide practical support, friendship and reassurance, helping people access food, stay connected and live independently in their own homes. Their commitment demonstrates every day why Food Train is a trusted lifeline for older people.

We also looked firmly to the future by launching Food Train's new five-year strategy, strengthened our oversight through the introduction of governance subgroups convened by our Trustees and supported investment in fundraising and service improvement. These steps are vital because the need for preventative, community-based support is growing, while the funding available to provide it is becoming increasingly uncertain.

As Trustees, we recognise the responsibility we have to protect Food Train's long-term future while continuing to provide high quality services today. This continues to require careful decisions, stronger partnerships and a greater focus on demonstrating the difference our work makes.

On behalf of the Board, I thank every older person who places their trust in Food Train, along with our volunteers, staff, funders, donors and partners. Your support has helped us continue through an extremely demanding year and build stronger foundations for a sustainable future.

Alan Dalziel
Chair of the Board of Directors and Trustees

Chief Executive reflections

Protecting what matters while preparing for the future

This year marked 30 years since Food Train began with a small group of volunteers in Dumfries. What started as a local response to older people struggling to access their shopping has grown into a trusted lifeline supporting people across Scotland to eat well, stay connected and live independently.

That anniversary gave us an opportunity to celebrate everything our members, volunteers, staff and supporters have achieved together. It also made us think carefully about what the next chapter should look like. Scotland has changed significantly over those 30 years. Our population is ageing, more people are living alone and public services are under increasing pressure. The need for Food Train has not gone away. If anything, it has become more urgent.

I will not pretend this has been an easy year. Funding reduced, costs increased and we had to close our Renfrewshire branch when its funding ended. That was an incredibly difficult decision because it affected older people, volunteers and colleagues who had built trusted relationships over many years. We are grateful for everything they contributed, and we will carry the learning from that experience into future decisions.

At the same time, we continued to look forward. In February 2026 we launched our Strategy 2026-2031, developed through engagement with older people, volunteers, staff, trustees and partners. It gives us a clear direction, improving access to food, preventing malnutrition, strengthening social connection, protecting choice and dignity, and helping older people remain confident and independent.

We also strengthened our voice. Food access is not an optional extra. It is fundamental to health, dignity and independence, yet responsibility for supporting older people to access food continues to fall between different parts of the system. We will keep making the case for earlier investment in practical, community-based support, before people reach crisis.

I want to thank our volunteers, staff, trustees, funders and partners for everything they have contributed during a demanding year. Most importantly, I want to thank the older people who place their trust in us and continue to shape what Food Train is and what it needs to become.

Roseanne McLuskie
Chief Executive Officer

WHO WE ARE AND WHY OUR WORK MATTERS

Practical support that helps older people remain at home

Most older people want to remain in their own homes for as long as possible. However, ill health, bereavement, reduced mobility, a lack of transport or limited family support can make everyday activities such as shopping, preparing food and staying connected much more difficult.

Food Train provides practical and social support before these difficulties become a crisis. Our services include weekly shopping deliveries, supported shopping, help at home, befriending, group outings, library deliveries, Meal Makers and our national Eat Well Age Well programme.

This preventative support can also help older people return home safely following a hospital stay, reducing some of the practical barriers that can contribute to delayed discharge or readmission. Reliable access to food, help at home and ongoing social contact can all play an important part in helping someone recover and remain independent.

An older person may use one service or several as their circumstances change. This flexibility allows us to respond to the whole person rather than treating each need in isolation. Our experienced staff work alongside volunteers to provide support that is personal, reliable and rooted in local communities.

A shopping delivery is never only about shopping. It is also a regular point of contact, a friendly conversation and an opportunity to notice when something may have changed.

THE OUTCOMES WE WORK TOWARDS

Better access to food

Prevention of malnutrition

Stronger social connection

Greater choice and dignity

Increased confidence and independence

OUR YEAR IN NUMBERS

Evidence of practical support, connection and volunteer action

4

163,800

volunteer hours with an estimated social value of £2.08 million

1,745

older people supported each week on average

7,748

volunteers contributed during the year

748 **volunteers active at any one time on average**

Reach and support

20,938	cumulative monthly reach across the year*
539	new members welcomed

Connection

1,816	befriending home visits
108	group outings with up to 8 attendees per trip

Food & practical support

201	supported shopping trips with up to 8 attendees
4,386	meals shared through Meal Makers

*How cumulative reach is calculated. The monthly figures are added together across the year. A person receiving support in several months is included in each relevant monthly total.

Access to food and practical support

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Helping older people maintain choice, dignity and independence

Access to food is fundamental to health and independence, but it cannot be taken for granted. Ill health, reduced mobility, bereavement or a lack of transport can make shopping and preparing food increasingly difficult. Food Train provides reliable access to food while helping older people retain choice and control. Our connected services also provide regular contact, identify concerns early and create opportunities for friendship and greater independence.

CHRISTINE'S STORY

Christine was referred to Food Train after being admitted to hospital following a fall. She had lost two stone in weight, could no longer visit the supermarket and was spending most days alone. Her confidence had declined, and she had lost access to many of the things she once enjoyed.

Food Train began delivering Christine's shopping each week. Over time, she built trusted relationships with the volunteers who visited and felt able to talk about how isolated she had become. A member of staff visited Christine at home to understand what mattered to her and introduced her to Shopping Buddy and the homebound library service.

Christine now attends Shopping Buddy trips fortnightly, while continuing to receive shopping deliveries on the other weeks because she values the volunteers' visits. She can choose her own food again, has improved the variety and nutritional quality of her diet, and has joined outings where she enjoys singing, dancing, quizzes and lunches with other members.

Practical food support, trusted relationships and opportunities to reconnect can work together to improve nutrition, confidence, dignity and independence.

Finding concerns early and supporting people before crisis

Malnutrition in later life is often hidden. It can be caused by ill health, bereavement, loneliness, difficulties shopping or cooking, financial pressure, or a combination of these factors. Its effects can include reduced strength, falls, slower recovery from illness, hospital admission and loss of independence.

Through Eat Well Age Well, Food Train works with older people, families, carers and professionals to improve awareness, identify risk and connect people with practical support. We use the Patients Association Nutrition Checklist to support conversations about appetite, unplanned weight loss and changes in eating.

ALL OLDER PEOPLE SCREENED

6,771 older people screened between January 2019 - March 2026

1,113 identified as being at risk, equal to 16%

20% **of people screened during 2025 were identified as being at risk**

FOOD TRAIN MEMBERS

2,999 Food Train members screened since November 2022

588 Food Train members identified as being at risk, equal to 20%

13% → **1%**
identified as being at risk

Our partnership with Renfrewshire Sheltered Housing, which has continued separately following the closure of our Renfrewshire branch, shows what regular screening and early support can achieve. Tenants are screened every six months and provided with advice and signposting. Since screening began in 2022, the proportion identified as being at risk reduced from 13% in 2022 to 1% in 2025.

Connection, friendship and wellbeing

Helping people feel part of their community

Social isolation can affect confidence, appetite, physical health and emotional wellbeing. Many Food Train members live alone, have experienced bereavement or have fewer opportunities to leave their homes. A regular conversation, trip out or shared activity can matter every bit as much as the practical support provided.

Food Train creates different ways for older people to stay connected, from befriending and supported shopping to group outings and library deliveries.

THE ORDINARY MOMENTS MATTER

A blether

Choosing books

A favourite shop

Sharing lunch

Connection also supports better nutrition. Eating alone, bereavement and poor mental health can affect appetite and motivation to prepare food. By combining practical food support with friendship and regular contact, Food Train can respond to several connected needs rather than treating each one separately.

> "It is such a relief and comfort to know this service is available to Mum. I live in America, so I do not know what Mum is eating or how she is living. **A phone call does not tell me that.** Having someone check in on her and make sure she is getting everything she needs is a godsend. I can contact the team, and they give me feedback following the volunteers' visits, which is priceless. Mum is really enjoying her visits and the support she receives from Food Train. Thank you to everyone for easing my worries about living so far away."
>
> Family member, West Lothian

CONNECTION IN ACTION

1,816 befriending visits

201 supported shopping trips

108 group outings

502 library deliveries or visits

VOLUNTEERS ARE AT THE HEART OF FOOD TRAIN

Local people giving time, care and practical support

Food Train began with volunteers in Dumfries more than 30 years ago, and volunteers remain at the heart of everything we do. They shop, drive, deliver, cook, befriend, support outings, deliver library books, help in our offices and serve as Trustees.

7,748	**volunteers contributed**	**£2.08m**	**estimated social value**
163,800	**hours given**	**748**	**volunteers active at any one time on average**

These figures demonstrate the scale of the contribution, but they cannot capture its full value. Volunteers provide reliability, local knowledge, kindness and trusted relationships.

Liam's journey with Food Train

Young people across Scotland identify a lack of opportunities, work experience, contacts and confidence as barriers when thinking about their future careers. Volunteering can provide a valuable route into practical experience, helping young people develop skills, confidence and connections while making a meaningful contribution to their communities.

Liam joined Food Train shortly after his 16th birthday. He was quiet and lacked confidence in social situations but wanted to gain experience supporting others before studying social care.

After being matched with Food Train member Ellen, Liam gradually became more confident and comfortable speaking with others. He began supporting monthly outings and now regularly helps as a bus escort and with shopping deliveries.

Liam has become a reliable and valued volunteer who is now helping his local branch recruit others. His story demonstrates how volunteering can strengthen communities while also building a young person's confidence, skills and aspirations.

Joined at 16 → **Confidence** → **More involved** → **Giving back**

FRIENDSHIP ON EVERY PLATE

Sharing food, conversation and friendship

Dieter joined Meal Makers because he wanted to share food and company with someone living alone. He was matched with Peter, a retired airborne paratrooper, and the pair quickly developed a warm friendship. Peter lives with a visual impairment and other health conditions, but continues to enjoy painting and sharing stories from his life. Dieter prepares meals that are balanced, nutritious and enjoyable, including Peter's favourite beef curry.

For Dieter, the friendship they have built is every bit as important as the food. Their visits are filled with conversation, stories and humour.

> “Every visit with Pete is memorable. He's lived a life most couldn't have dreamed of.”
>
> “On paper we are completely different, but in person we are one and the same.”
>
> Dieter, Meal Makers volunteer

A YEAR OF CHALLENGE AND CHANGE

Responding honestly to funding pressure and rising costs

The environment in which Food Train operates became more difficult during 2025-2026. Older people faced higher food and household costs, while charities experienced rising employment and operating costs alongside reductions in public and grant funding.

From April 2025, increases in the National Living Wage and employer National Insurance added significantly to the cost of delivering services.

THE COST OF DELIVERING SERVICES INCREASED

£82,624 → **£109,063** Employer National Insurance costs

+£26,439 in one year

RISING COSTS
Employment & operating costs

REDUCED FUNDING
Grants ended or reduced

LOWER INCOME
From core services

PROTECTING LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY

As part of a wider organisational review to support the delivery of our 2026-2031 strategy, we reviewed our national support services to reduce overheads and direct more of our resources towards frontline operations. This led to changes in how national functions were structured and formed part of our responsibility to strengthen the organisation's long-term sustainability while keeping support for older people at the centre of our decisions.

A DIFFICULT DECISION

One of the hardest decisions was closing our Renfrewshire branch following the withdrawal of funding. The closure affected three members of staff and more than 60 volunteers, as well as the older people they supported. We are grateful to everyone who contributed to the branch and recognise the genuine loss experienced within the local community.

THE WIDER CHALLENGE

Food access and preventative support for older people continue to fall between different parts of the system. Some funders view this work as a statutory responsibility, while health and social care services under financial pressure may view it as work for charities. The result is short-term and uncertain funding for support that helps prevent crisis, maintain independence and reduce avoidable pressure on health and social care.

SINCE THE END OF THE REPORTING YEAR

Dundee Health and Social Care Partnership funding for Food Train will end in September 2026. Food Train has committed to continuing the service in the short term while working to develop a sustainable model, but the decision demonstrates how vulnerable essential community services remain when funding is short-term or discretionary.

The Scottish Government's Programme for Government recognises Scotland's ageing population, prevention and the importance of supporting people within their homes and communities. However, it does not make specific commitments on older people's access to food or malnutrition prevention. This leaves continued uncertainty about where responsibility for this support sits and how it will be funded and risks leaving more older people without the support they need to eat well and remain independent.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

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Launching our Strategy 2026-2031

In February 2026, Food Train launched its Strategy 2026-2031. It was shaped through engagement with older people, volunteers, staff, trustees and partners. Our vision is that every older person has access to nutritious food, compassionate support and the connections they need to thrive, reducing malnutrition, tackling social isolation and enabling people to live with dignity and independence.

OUR FIVE OUTCOMES

Better access to food

Prevention of malnutrition

Stronger social connection

Greater choice and dignity

Increased confidence and independence

OUR AMBITIONS BY 2031

2,000 → **4,000**
older people supported

11 → **18**
local authority areas

1,200 → **3,000**
volunteers

STRONGER FUNDING

Increase multi-year funding, with no single source providing more than 40% of income

BETTER EVIDENCE

Improve our systems, evidence and understanding of impact

OUR 2026 MANIFESTO

Backed by our members, who have said loudly and clearly, “We deserve greater dignity and independence”, our Manifesto sets out five calls to action to help ensure every older person in Scotland can eat well, age well and live well at home.

OUR FIVE ASKS

1. Ringfence funding for community-based food access for older people
2. Enshrine the right to food for older people in Scots law
3. Launch a national malnutrition prevention and screening programme
4. Invest in volunteers and community-led support
5. Involve older people in food and health policy design

INFLUENCE, PARTNERSHIP AND PROGRESS

Using our experience to help shape wider change

Food Train's work extends beyond the services we deliver each week. We also use the experience of older people, volunteers and staff to influence policy, strengthen practice and help others understand why access to food, malnutrition prevention and social connection matter.

Making older people's needs visible

We continued to contribute to the development of Scotland's Good Food Nation agenda, making the case for older people's access to food and nutrition to be recognised within national policy.

We facilitated the round table event Eating Well As We Age: What’s Working, chaired by Trustee Tracy MacInnes. More than 75 representatives from the NHS, local authorities and the third sector attended, highlighting shared concerns around malnutrition prevention, food access, funding and the need for more joined-up working.

Food Train welcomed Neil Gray MSP, then Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, to our Dumfries pop-up café, and Angela Constance MSP to our West Lothian service. Chief Executive Rosie McLuskie and Dietitian Jen Grant attended both visits to discuss our services, malnutrition prevention and the needs of older people.

In a separate engagement, Rosie and Jen met Jenni Minto MSP, Minister for Public Health and Women's Health. The discussion focused on Eat Well Age Well, Meal Makers, Food Train's wider service provision and the importance of ensuring older people can access nutritious food and preventative support.

These engagements gave Food Train an important opportunity to bring the experiences of older people directly to national and local decision makers. They helped strengthen awareness of the barriers older people face in accessing food, the risks associated with malnutrition and the preventative value of Food Train's services. They also helped us build relationships and create opportunities for continued dialogue about how older people's needs can be better reflected in policy, commissioning and funding decisions.

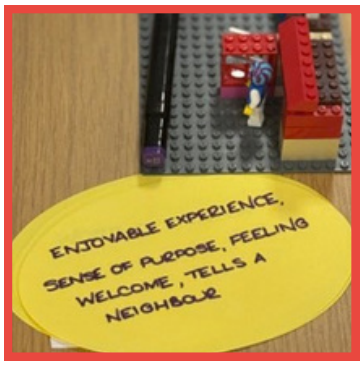
Neil Gray MSP & Rosie McLuskie

Rosie McLuskie, Jenni Minto MSP, Lorna Farquhar

Angela Constance MSP, with Food Train volunteers

Listening, learning and building capacity

Food Train took part in Volunteer Scotland's No Volunteers No Community campaign, highlighting the essential contribution volunteers make to strong communities and preventative support. We also held a facilitated volunteer workshop using Lego Serious Play. The workshop helped volunteers explore what needed to change, identify the issues that mattered most and contribute directly to the development of our Strategy 2026-2031.



Lego Serious Play

Volunteer Scotland's No Volunteers No Community

Strenthening our fundraising

We welcomed Jayne Forbes as Food Train's first Fundraising Manager. Jayne immediately began developing our fundraising approach and organised our first themed appeal around Mother's Day. This created a new way to tell the story of our work and, importantly, helped people who care about Food Train understand how they could support us and make a difference for older people.

OUR FINANCIAL POSITION

Managing pressure while protecting services

Food Train experienced a challenging financial year. Total income reduced while expenditure increased, resulting in a deficit of £170,189.

Income reduced by just over 9%. This reflected the ending or reduction of several grants, lower income from charitable activities and continuing uncertainty within public sector funding. Expenditure increased by approximately 1.6%, including higher employment and operating costs, investment in fundraising, governance and service improvement, and costs associated with closing the Renfrewshire branch.

Food Train ended the year with total funds of £1,186,096. This included restricted funding and designated reserves connected to property, equipment and vehicles, which are not all available for day-to-day services. The General Fund remained above the three-month expenditure level required by our reserves policy.

	2024-2025	2025-2026
Total Income	2,032,657	1,839,264
Total Expenditure	1,977,374	2,009,453
Surplus (Deficit)	55,283	(170,189)
Designated Reserve	430,588	486,321
Restricted Reserve	202,536	139,859
General Reserve	723,161	559,916
Total Members Funds	1,356,285	1,186,096
Income Analysis		
Donations & Legacies	135,477	139,349
Charitable Activities	1,840,894	1,658,523
Other Trading Activities	27,551	26,537
Investments	20,543	14,570
Other Income	8,192	285
Expenditure Analysis		
People Costs	1,389,429	1,350,703
Vehicle Costs	226,469	248,954
Premises Costs	119,895	122,023
Running Costs	223,923	246,522
Governance Costs	15,722	37,732

GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Strong oversight for a sustainable future

Good governance is essential to protecting Food Train's purpose, reputation and long-term sustainability. Our Trustees are also Company Directors and provide strategic oversight of the charity's work, finances, risks and performance. Day-to-day management is delegated to the Chief Executive. The Board met six times during 2025-2026, using a mix of online and in-person meetings. During the year, we established four governance groups covering:

Finance and Sustainability

People and Culture

Governance and Risk

Communications and Advocacy

Each group includes two Trustees who share the chairing role and work alongside relevant staff, bringing closer scrutiny, practical knowledge, experience and clear accountability to the Board's oversight.

BOARD OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The Board approved the new Strategy, monitored finances and risks, oversaw and approved the Renfrewshire closure, strengthened reporting and supported investment in fundraising and organisational development.

Food Train maintains a live risk register which is regularly reviewed by the Board. New Trustees receive a structured induction, support from existing Trustees and opportunities to develop their understanding of the charity and their governance responsibilities.

Trustees serving during 2025-2026

Alan Dalziel, Chair
Helen Blackwell
Emma Connor, retired 13 June 2025
Bruce Hedley, Vice-Chair
Tracy MacInnes
Scott Macfarlane
Mary McKee
Colette Robinson
Tessa Munro
Liam Watson, co-opted 12 May 2025

Company Secretary and Chief Executive: Roseanne McLuskie

LOOKING AHEAD

Turning our Strategy into practical change

The year ahead will continue to focus on putting our Strategy 2026-2031 into action while protecting the quality and sustainability of existing services. This is not growth for growth's sake. Our immediate priority is to strengthen what we already do, improve operational efficiency and capability, and prepare Food Train for sustainable growth.

Quality and consistency

Improve the quality and consistency of existing services

Evidence and impact

Improve systems, evidence and impact measurement

Secure funding

Diversify income and build more secure multi-year funding

Governance and resilience

Maintain strong governance, financial oversight and resilience

Older people's voices

Raise the voices of older people on food access, malnutrition and social isolation

Volunteering

Strengthen volunteering through clearer support, flexible opportunities and recognition

Scotland's ageing population means preventative support will become more important, not less. Helping older people access food, maintain relationships and remain independent at home should be recognised as essential community infrastructure, not an optional extra.

THANK YOU

We are grateful to every older person who places their trust in us, every volunteer who gives their time, every member of staff who keeps services moving and every Trustee who provides leadership and oversight. We also thank our funders, donors, corporate supporters and partners. Your support enables Food Train to be a trusted lifeline for older people across Scotland.

THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS AND PARTNERS

We are grateful to the organisations, trusts, foundations and individuals whose support made our work possible during 2025-2026. Their commitment is critical to the continued provision of our services and enables older people across Scotland to access food, practical support and meaningful connection.

TRUSTS & FOUNDATIONS

The Russell Trust

Souter Charitable Trust

The Hugh Fraser Foundation

The Alexander Moncur Trust

Annie Ramsay McLean Trust for the Elderly

Cordis Charitable Trust

The PF Charitable Trust

The W M Mann Foundation

Crerar Trust

Batchworth Trust

Lady Eda Jardine Charitable Trust

Lady Marian Gibson Trust

Callendar Charitable Trust

Mrs Rhona Lynn

NATIONAL, COMMUNITY & CORPORATE SUPPORTERS

Players of People's Postcode Lottery

The National Lottery Community Fund

Foundation Scotland

SP Energy Networks

SGN's Safe and Warm Community Scheme

CVS Falkirk

Third Sector Dumfries and Galloway

League of Friends Newton Stewart Hospital and Community

PUBLIC SECTOR PARTNERS

The Scottish Government

Dumfries and Galloway Health and Social Care Partnership

Dundee Health and Social Care Partnership

Fife Health and Social Care Partnership

West Lothian Council

Scottish Borders Council

Falkirk Council

Renfrewshire Council

NHS Forth Valley

Supporting older people to eat well, stay connected and live independently.

Food Train
a trusted lifeline for older people

eat well

stay connected

live independently

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