

Following the publication of our recent [research](#), the Poverty Alliance is running a series of regional workshop events for those involved in delivering emergency food aid in Scotland. The aim is to provide opportunities for networking, peer support and learning, and to connect with wider anti-poverty work and campaigns.

We believe that to tackle food poverty requires efforts to address its underlying drivers – namely problems with the social security system (including sanctions), inadequate benefit levels, and low pay. Our research found that emergency food aid providers feel strongly about these issues and would like better information on how to offer effective support.

Speakers at our first session were: Angus McIntosh (Senior Solicitor at Castlemilk Law and Money Advice; Hanna McCulloch (Policy and Parliamentary Officer at Child Poverty Action Group Scotland) and Carla McCormack, (Policy and Parliamentary Officer with the Poverty Alliance). Their presentations can be [downloaded here](#).

Key Messages:

- **Appeal sanctions:** Benefits sanctioning is a key reason why people are turning to food banks – with benefits payments stopped people have no money for basic necessities. Rate of sanctions appeals is very, very low – but where they are appealed the DWP's decisions are often overturned. The complexity of the process and vulnerability of clients mean very few appeals are being processed.
- **Get good advice:** It is vital that people who have been sanctioned have access to justice and are supported to make an appeal. One way of reducing the need for food banks is to encourage more reviews and appeals. Being able to speak to a specialist advisor within the food bank is more effective than when they are referred on to an external advice service.
- **Know about hardship payments and the Scottish Welfare Fund:** There are other benefits payments which food bank users may not be aware of but to which they may be entitled. This includes people who have been sanctioned. It is important to get specialist advice so you know your welfare rights.
- **Challenge Stigma:** Benefits recipients are highly stigmatised and public attitudes have generally hardened towards them in recent decades. Stigma affects claimants' wellbeing and may impact benefit uptake. The media is often to blame for stigmatising poverty and food bank users in particular. Seeing poverty as an individual problem ignores the real causes and fails to hold Governments to account.



Key discussion themes:

- **Working with advice services:**

What Works: bringing advisors into food banks; co-locating services; having good relationships and communication with local services.

Challenges: complexity of issues faced by people who are using food banks; lack of time and appropriate space to provide suitable advice; lack of volunteers with appropriate expertise; adhoc nature of support which can be offered; limited resources.

What is needed: faster and more streamlined appeals process; more investment in welfare rights advocacy; more support for advisors and training for food bank staff and volunteers; political lobbying on legality of sanctioning.

- **Stigma and challenging public attitudes:**

The stigma of food banks: people travelling to food banks outside of their communities so they won't be recognised; problematic attitudes among frontline service providers; public attitudes towards those with addictions as 'undeserving'; attitudes and values of volunteers which may reinforce stigma.

How to challenge it: engaging with mainstream and local media and sharing real-life stories; challenging people on an individual basis; poverty awareness training for staff and volunteers.

Key feedback:

- **New connections:**

Discussion, networking, and partnership development at the event were particularly useful. Participants made new contacts with Council and NHS staff, advice services, food co-ops and other voluntary groups.

- **New learning:**

Facts about sanctioning and Scottish Welfare Fund; the importance of welfare advice for food bank users; ideas on involving other agencies; information on services in local area; issues of stigma and poverty.

Our next event is in Edinburgh on Tuesday 16th June 9.30am–12.30pm.

Click [here](#) for more information and to register.
Further events are scheduled for Aberdeen (27th August)
and Inverness (22nd October).

Any questions contact:

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