FAIR-food Community Research: findings about volunteers

Thank you for helping the FAIR-food Community Researchers carry out their research across Southampton community food (food pantries, marketplaces, food clubs and social supermarkets).



There were different topics: digestive health conditions, neurodivergent people's experiences, access to food in Mansbridge, dignity, and food waste. You can find out more about their projects here: https://fair-food.org.uk/working_with_us/community_research/Southampton/

One strong finding across all the projects was how much volunteers are valued. The Community Researchers put forward a recommendation that food aid volunteers be celebrated at events like tea parties and get awards for what they do.

What did our Community Researchers learn about community food volunteers?

“My research showed how pivotal and appreciated the volunteers are. One member said how grateful they were and said they needed some kind of recognition, as without them, the pantries couldn't run. They were viewed almost like a highly respected family member, who could offer support and advice when needed, and always a friendly ear.”

“I was surprised to find out in some of the pantries, there's a waiting list for volunteers. Very positive. Think it's because they've gone through the situation and have respect and time to put in.”

“I learnt from my interviews that the service users think that the volunteers are friendly, helpful, lovely, awesome, caring, good listeners, welcoming and supportive. They don't just sell the food but have a connection with the shoppers, which is good if somebody is lonely and going through some challenges.”

Why did our Community Researchers put forward the recommendation to celebrate volunteers?

“I spoke to one of the most popular volunteers (a beaming smile, friendly advice, a warm welcome & no judgement) and I asked her directly what she thought the volunteers would like. She said that some volunteers just want to come in, do their bit, and go. They don't want any fuss. She also suggested that it would be nice for them to be waited on and looked after i.e. role reversal, and as such, she suggested an afternoon tea.”

“I think there should be a tea party or event, but I think it would be nice, if the service users were asked, if they wanted to be involved in helping to organise or create this event. This will help them feel that they are giving back.”

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