

Executive Summary

Introduction

In response to the worsening cost of living crisis, and particularly the rising cost of fuel, in late 2022, Dundee City Council and its partners developed a response underpinned by five pillars; community food network, open door, warm clothes and blankets, advice services network, and communications and accessibility. Open Doors was focused on providing free or low cost activities in local communities, ensuring these were accessible and open to all and also that hot drinks and meals were available where possible. To limit any stigma that could be associated with the initiative and to make sure people felt welcomed and appreciated when they came along, the approach was informed by the [dignity principles](#) developed by the Open Doors steering group in consultation with Dundee Fighting for Fairness.

Over £50,000 of Community Regeneration Funding was made available to be shared over fifty different venues and groups across the city to provide Open Doors provision with around 2,000 local people attending each week.

Open Doors was delivered and supported by an extensive range of partners, services and community groups. We acknowledge that the efforts of community groups and volunteers have been immense in the providing support on this scale.

This evaluation of the Open Doors Initiative was carried out by Dundee City Council's Community Learning and Development Service over March and April 2023. We are grateful to the Open Doors participants who agreed to take part in a short video about the impact of the initiative. You can watch the video [here](#).

Findings

Ten key findings emerged from this evaluation:

1. **Poverty is stigmatising:** Open doors was able to help people experiencing poverty in both practical ways and through the development of a sense of solidarity.
2. **Welcome is important:** Open doors participants reported the importance of welcome in alleviating a sense of stigma and removing barriers to attending.
3. **Open doors reduced social isolation:** Open doors helped younger people and older people alike to connect, make friendships and reduce social isolation.
4. **Local community-based activity is valued:** Open doors participants talked repeatedly about the role of local, community based provision in reducing isolation and the benefits of not having to travel
5. **Targeting responses worked best:** Open doors activities were most successful when the type of activity had been targeted to the needs of a specific group
6. **Communities need advice and signposting:** Open doors participants and providers alike talked about the importance of signposting and advice services at open doors provision to help people cope with the current cost of living crisis. The role of the community worker was key.
7. **There were gaps:** We identified a lack of activity in the evenings, at weekends, targeted at men and in some communities there were no activities for families.
8. **There was a lack of clarity about what it was:** We identified varying understandings about what OPEN DOORS was and what activities were called.
9. **There was a lack of data gathered about the impact of the initiative:** We were unable to gather data about the number of referrals made and the number of vouchers distributed. Even footfall data is unreliable.
10. **Sustainability is an issue:** while most providers and participants wanted open doors activities to continue, long term sustainability and funding was an issue.

Key Strengths

Successful open doors provision was:

- Welcoming and helped reduce social isolation
- Local
- Free or low cost and helped alleviate poverty
- Offered signposting or support with other things

Recommendations:

Building on this evaluation our recommendations are:

- **Differentiate between “warm spaces” and “open doors”**
 - “Warm Spaces” are spaces that are not targeted, don’t require additional funding but are open for people to sit and charge their phone and are welcoming.
 - Create Open Doors Hubs across the city that are accessible to people in their communities. Food provision and advice services and signposting should be offered as a minimum.
 - Create a directory of free activities, classes, and places to visit.
- **Establish key principles for OPEN doors provision:** we believe that successful open doors provision was underpinned by the following principles:
 - The primary focus of OPEN DOORS provision should be to alleviate the effects of poverty
 - OPEN DOORS should be accessible, recovery friendly, free or low cost, provide food, offer wraparound services such as welfare rights and operate weekly.
 - OPEN DOORS provision should support all age groups and people within the community and should therefore be planned to ensure activity is well spaced and open during the day and in the evening and at weekends. The timings of activities need to be responsive to the target group’s needs.
 - OPEN DOORS should increase the capacity of communities to respond to the cost of living crisis. Where existing provision has been re-badged as OPEN DOORS this must be widely promoted and new participants must be welcome.
- **Develop a city-wide response to the expressed desire for this initiative to continue**
- **Target promotion**
- **Gather Data about the impact of OPEN DOORS provision**

An online version of this executive summary can be accessed and shared via this [link](#) or the QR code below.

