

# KYLE OF SUTHERLAND DEVELOPMENT TRUST COMMUNITY FOOD STOP CAFÉ

## Impact Evaluation



Funded by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations  
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## Acknowledgements

I would like to give my sincerest gratitude to ‘Ms A’ for sharing her home with me and for all the meals we shared. I would also like to extend my thanks to the staff at the Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust.

## Overview

This report, commissioned by the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, explores the Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust’s initiative to address food poverty and social isolation in the region through providing nutritious meals at its Monday Community Food Stop Café in Bonar Bridge. An ethnographic approach was used to ascertain the impact of the initiative on the lives of those who use it and therefore broadened in scope to consider the everyday lives of the café attendees and how they interact with the Trust more generally. This report uses a case study approach, focusing on the stories of some of those who attend the café. Though every person’s experience is different, this report will highlight aspects of each story that resonate throughout the community and which speak to the positive impact of the Community Food Stop Café.

*“The trust came in and has tried to bridge the communities together”*

## Introduction

### The Kyle of Sutherland Trust

The population area actually covered by the Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust (KoSDT or the Trust) expands beyond this geographical boundary, with many people from Caithness, Ross and Cromarty coming to access the Trust’s services. The subject of this research was the impact of the Community Food Stop Café project, operated by the KoSDT each Monday in the Bonar Bridge Community Hall, on food poverty, loneliness and social isolation.

A substantial portion of the work the KoSDT does not fall strictly within any given project. For example, when approached by a social worker who had identified numerous families in the area experiencing ‘holiday hunger’ – food insecurity during the school holidays – the Trust was able to supply them with food parcels that included a Christmas dinner. Not only did this give them the food they needed but it alleviated the stress and anxiety of the parents who could enjoy Christmas with their children and not worry about where their next meal would come from. Stories like these were frequently shared by participants and demonstrate the extent to which these concerns – food poverty and social isolation – are entrenched in the area, the Trust’s commitment to their mission of strengthening and uniting the community is the real impact of the KoSDT on the lives of those who live there.

Below I focus on the stories of a few individuals that use the Community Food Stop Café as they present accurate representations of those I conducted research among. Alongside these stories, I have paid particular interest to the volunteers that make the successful operation of the community café. This decision was made as the volunteers themselves have direct experience of food poverty, social isolation and loneliness and became involve in the KoSDT as strategies to elevate these issues. The KoSDT have also made the development of their volunteers a principle of the work they conduct in the area.

## Research

### Methods

An ethnographic approach was used to ascertain the impact of the Community Food Stop Café on the lives of those who use it. Due to both the complex and subjective nature of how food poverty, loneliness and social isolation are experienced in the Highlands, the scope of the project necessarily widened to consider the individuals’ interactions with the whole of the KoSDT operation and to understand life in general for the residents that call the Kyle of Sutherland their home.

#### *Participant Observation*

Participant observation was a foundational method and allowed me to quickly immerse myself in community life, the role of the Trust’s many projects and, among those, the role of the café. I attended three Monday Community Food Stop Cafés as both a volunteer and a patron. On Tuesdays I would go to the Tea and Chat that coincided with the mobile bank and attended various classes hosted by the KoSDT like yoga, Latin cardio, and dance. I occasionally had lunch at the Caley Café or the Hub as this is where participants in the study would normally go. I ate many meals with participants, took day trips and went food shopping with them to gain deeper insight into their lived experiences.

Through participant observation, I was able to foster trusting relationships and mutual respect with participants who felt comfortable discussing sensitive issues. They talked to me about their experiences with loneliness, social isolation and food insecurity; about both what has helped them and what they would like to see done to address these issues.

Vital to this was that I lived with a café attendee during my time in Bonar Bridge. The opportunity to live with someone who relies on KoSDT services allowed further insight into the experience of living in the Kyle of Sutherland and the impact of the Trust.

### Interviews

Over the course of one month 62 casual conversations were had with 28 residents of the Kyle of Sutherland and nearby areas. From these conversations, six people were identified for further interviews.

During the three Monday Community Food Stop Café's attended, 27 casual conversations were had with attendees and volunteers. Five semi-structured interviews were subsequently arranged with volunteers and eight with café attendees.

Interviewees ranged in age from 21 years old to in their mid-eighties. Of those interviewed, 42 (76%) of participants were women owing to both slightly higher female attendance at the café and several men not wanting to participate. This study was unable to investigate this discrepancy, but it may merit further exploration.

### Ethics

The research conformed to the University of Edinburgh's ethical guidelines and obtained written and/or verbal consent from all participants. Efforts were made to explain the project, the parties involved, my connections to them and how the information would be used. Participants were welcome to withdraw their consent at any time.

Anonymity was offered to everyone. Several names and identifying factors have been changed in this report to maintain anonymity where requested and where otherwise appropriate for working with individuals living in a close community.

### Policy Context

Through its Good Food Nation Policy, the Scottish Government is committed to ensuring that 'people from every walk of life take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from, the food they produce, buy, cook, serve, and eat each day'.<sup>1</sup> The *Dignity: Ending Hunger Together in Scotland* report of the Independent Working Group on Food Poverty argues for food to be a legal right in Scotland.<sup>2</sup>

### Terms and Meanings

The research was guided by the following definitions of the three central themes of food poverty, social isolation and loneliness:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/policies/food-and-drink/good-food-nation/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/dignity-ending-hunger-together-scotland-report-independent-working-group-food/>

**Food Poverty** is defined by the NHS as ‘the inability to acquire or consume an adequate or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so’.<sup>3</sup>

**Social Isolation** is defined by the Scottish Government as an *objective* lack of social relationships in terms of both quality and quantity of interactions at an individual, group, community or societal level.<sup>4</sup>

**Loneliness** and isolation are connected but distinct concepts.<sup>5</sup> Loneliness can be understood as a fracture between desired and actual relationships, i.e., the emotive quality of relationships and perceived lack of intimacy attached to those relationships.

## Stories

What follows are individual and collective stories of participants in the study. They highlight recurrent feelings and experiences and cover a diverse range of perspectives.

### ‘Ms A’

Ms A and I sit across from each other at a small round table in the front room of her home, which holds memories of its past function as the shopfront of the leather bag workshop that she and her husband ran. The TV in the background is on but the volume is muted. It is late in the day; the sun is coming through the window and the front door is open. Ms A opens it as soon as she is up and closes it last thing before settling in for the night in front of the TV. She is proud of this room and she gestures to different parts of it while telling me stories from her life here in Bonar Bridge.

Ms A spends most of her day in the front room, taking her meals from the upstairs kitchen down to enjoy. During my time living with Ms A, I only saw her leave the house for the Community Food Stop Café on Mondays, to go to church on Sundays and the couple of times she had popped to the corner shop to get a few basics. In my last week, Ms A delightfully announced that she was going out on Thursday for a poetry reading at a friend’s house. These poetry nights had been held at Ms A’s house as her mobility is not great and she does not have a car but one of the gentlemen had fallen rather ill and he was housebound.

Many of the stories Ms A told had a happy nature to them but she spoke seriously when discussing the café, her struggles with money and food, and times she feels alone.:

“when the café first opened, personally, they were a lifesaver. I had gotten myself in to a very awkward place... I didn’t always have money for food... everything seemed to want money at once and it wasn’t there. Being able to go and have a hot meal, even if it was just once a week was a lifesaver. To not have to pay for it if I couldn’t... to get out, and to speak to someone. I don’t mind being on my own, I’m not lonely but I do admit to being alone. So, I like to get out when I can, if I can.”

Ms A receives a weekly package from the KoSDT which provides enough food for two meals. She wanted me to know that she is very grateful for this gift of food and the hot lunch that she receives each Monday. When food shopping, she avoided fresh produce and looked instead for

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.healthscotland.scot/health-inequalities/fundamental-causes/poverty/food-poverty>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/connected-scotland-strategy-tackling-social-isolation-loneliness-building-stronger-social-connections/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://vhscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Key-messages-Loneliness-a-Threat-to-Health-6.pdf>

discounted ready meals. She saw a container of fresh cherries but was apprehensive about spending the £4 on what she considered a luxury. I encouraged her to treat herself. Ms A was reluctant to discuss cooking or the quality of what she eats, but I got the impression that standing in front of the cooker was a challenge as she would have to take a seat regularly when heating food up. Her health and limited mobility prevent her from doing much cooking on her own, but the assistance that would enable her to do so is not available.

The Community Food Stop Café and the weekly food package has allowed Ms A the dignity of not having to worry about her next meal and she now sees herself attending the café for the purpose of socialising and a chance to leave the house. Aside from a few people that occasionally drop by to check on her, the Community Food Stop Café is seen by Ms A to be the only social setting with the sole purpose of socialising that she gets to enjoy other than the church.

The KoSDT has had a major impact on the quality of Ms A's life. From aid and advice to address fuel poverty, to making sure that she never goes hungry. The Community Food Stop Café has become a vital part of Ms A's weekly routine and is an important moment in her social calendar. As for the rest of the activities that the KoSDT puts on to combat social isolation, Ms A states:

“The trust [KoSDT] has brought in crossing points for the communities to interact through these activities... some of which are of no interest to me, others, I'm curious. I may be lazy but I'm curious. I may not use it all, but I like to know what's there.”

Even though Ms A did not attend all of the activities it was important to her to know that there are things to do around the Kyle of Sutherland. The simple fact that things are happening in the area lends to a general sense of being part of a wider community.

## Young Mothers

### *At the Café*

The literature on social isolation and loneliness highlights young mothers and new parents as particularly vulnerable<sup>6</sup>. Having a child can create social fractures for new parents, with access to services becoming more challenging:

- Public transport not fully accessible with a pram
- Tiredness
- Lack of, or perceived lack of, child-friendly spaces
- Lack of suitable areas for breastfeeding and baby-changing facilities
- Feelings of inadequacy if they appear to be struggling

These are some of the issues that were raised from conversations I had with young mothers. Many explained that they often felt they isolated themselves as going out was too stressful, while anticipation of being in a public space and not being able to stop their child from crying and potentially being judged created anxiety.

Of the 55 participants in this study, seven were under the age of 35 years. These seven interlocutors were all women with small children. All but one was out of work while their partners worked full-time and often outwith the communities that make up the Kyle of

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<sup>6</sup> <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Childrens-Future-Food-Inquiry-report.pdf>

Sutherland. These young women explained that most days the only human contact they have is that of their young children until their partner comes home in the evening. One woman's situation is exacerbated by the fact her husband sometimes spends days, up to a week away, from home due to work.

I met four of the women at the Community Food Stop Café, two of whom were already there together. They all told me that the Community Food Stop Café acts as a vital space for them. None alluded to the Community Food Stop Café as a necessary service for financial reasons or to provide hot and healthy meal for their children, but they did express that having a place to go with their children that 'doesn't break the bank' was highly desirable.

The main reason they said they go to the Community Food Stop Café was the atmosphere of communal engagement. They could let their children play in the hall with the toys that are kept underneath the stage while socialising with other members of the community. Having the chance to 'take your eyes off the bairns and relax' while catching up on local goings-on, finding out how other members of the community are doing and learning of other events that are taking place were highlighted as key aspects of their use of the Community Food Stop Café. One of the mums said,

"I come when I can... it's nice, I don't have to think too much about leaving the house, don't have to make plans, I can just come along. Sometimes I'll bump into people here that I know, other times I just talk to whoever is at the table. It's good for this one [nodding at her daughter] there are other kids here and they can play together. I don't have to watch her every second... the folk through there [referring to the KoSDT staff and volunteers] are really nice and supportive, they let you relax, you know, I can breathe."

The young mothers noted that they felt the space was open to them, that they could let their children play and not worry that the noise was disturbing people. They knew many members of the community that attended the Community Food Stop Café, and one of their partner's mothers was even a volunteer there. These social relationships helped alleviate some of their anxieties.

#### *Outside the Café*

The other three mothers I spoke with were met in the Hub outwith the Community Food Stop Café hours. A small child approached me one morning curious about the laptop I was working on. This led to me talking with the mother while the child ran in and out of the soft-play area. The mother of the child was there with two friends, also mothers and their children were also in the soft play area. Like the mums at the Community Food Stop Café, they told me they were at the hall because they try to meet up at least once a week to socialise, to 'talk to another adult that isn't a shop assistant'.

After explaining to them why I was up in Bonar Bridge from Edinburgh, we discussed the Community Food Stop Café and why they do not use it.

One woman explained that she is busy on Mondays but also stated that she thought it was for older people and people on benefits. The other two agreed, saying they thought it was a 'charity thing' to help poor people. When asked why they felt that way about the Community Food Stop Café they were not certain but that they had the impression that it was not for them.



## Volunteers

The above two accounts cover a section of those that use the Community Food Stop Café. These stories are representative of a wider community experience and relationship to the Community Food Stop Café that I heard repeatedly during my time in Bonar Bridge. Below I will discuss the importance the Community Food Stop Café holds to those that volunteer there and make the whole operation feasible.

The team of volunteers, with the aid of the KoSDT team of three staff, set up the café each Monday. They get the tables out, arranged and set; unload the food brought over from 'the barn' (the KoSDT Office); prepare, cook and serve food to an average of 50 customers. The work is challenging both physically and mentally.

'Mr B' has been volunteering with the KoSDT for roughly two years. He moved to the area with his mother after challenging times in Inverness. During my time in Bonar Bridge, I had developed a friendship with Mr B, he was aware of my interest in the Pictish stones in the area and told me of his volunteering at the Tarbat Discovery Centre. We arranged a day trip to visit the centre and to drive around seeing all the stones in the area.

Mr B's life in the Kyle of Sutherland marks a transition in his life. He has learning difficulties and is now unemployed. Before coming to Bonar Bridge:

"I used to work 60 hours a week... I lost my job, I lost my accommodation, I was homeless... I moved to Inverness, then I went downhill. My mum came over, we got jobs in the hostel in Bonar Bridge. But that closed and we were in trouble. The Trust helped us, and now I'm alright"

Mr B cares for his mother, and she cares for him. He told of how the Trust has been good for the both of them, and that he likes how his mum goes to the Community Food Stop Café. His mother is having health issues at present, needing to go in and out of the hospital. I asked him what the Community Food Stop Café means to her, he responded, 'I used to take her to the golf club, but then she got sick... and hay fever'. The Community Food Stop Café presents an opportunity for his mother to socialise even during her illness as it is easily accessible and does not irritate her hay fever. As for Mr B, he understands the Trust to be important to his own self-improvement.

Mr B would often tell of the certificates he has earned and sees these as markers towards overcoming his learning difficulties, 'I got help from the Trust, you know, the cooking course'. It became clear over time spent with Mr B that despite learning how to cook, receiving his certificate that he is proud of, he does not cook at home. Mr B's engagement with the Trust, while on the one hand is to improve himself through ascertaining certificates, is also very much about giving back to his new community, 'I just like helping the community, I get to meet people... socialise with them'.

The Trust is meeting its goals of addressing social isolation, loneliness and food poverty through the café. The impact of the café both makes possible and is made possible by the close relationships the Trust has with members of the community which is in part due to how it has stepped up to help these people in whatever way it can. Like Mr B, most of the other volunteers I spoke with had a story of how the KoSDT had been there in times of great distress, upheaval or despair. And that was a strong motivation for volunteering at the café.

The KoSDT from personal accounts have given financial support, emotional support and physical support to alleviate stress, remove barriers and give guidance to those struggling to get through one day to the next. These actions by the KoSDT were beyond the remit of their action plan and shows the human element that is so prevalent and necessary for the successful operation of a third sector organisation in small rural communities. Many of the volunteers, like Mr B, don't see themselves as giving up their time but giving back to their community to help the Trust help others.

## Findings

The stories above highlight several of, but not all, of the major themes that emerged during the research.

### 'I'm not lonely, but I do admit to being alone': Loneliness and Social Isolation

People's experiences of food poverty, social isolation and loneliness are varied and subjective. While literature on these subjects have attempted to define these, people I spoke with were overtly keen to take ownership of their experiences and define aspects of their lives as they saw fit. Ms A's statement eloquently summarised a sentiment I heard many times from participants. People resisted the status of 'being lonely' and many argued that it should be up to themselves to state the quantity and quality of their social interactions.

While people felt that the activities the KoSDT organised were great opportunities for getting out the house and seeing other members of the community, a feeling of disconnect was still present. Participants would often refer of having to leave the house to get social contact, and that while they were in their home, feeling invisible from the outside world. Research shows that the home is a vital part of people's identity and one of the fundamental building blocks of communal life<sup>7</sup>. There was a strong desire among some people to receive more visitors in their homes. As noted in Ms A's story above, she opens the front door as soon as she wakes and does not close until she calls it a night, in the hope someone might stop by. There is a desire to bring the public space in to the private space. This speaks to the emotive and intimate components of relationships necessary to tackling loneliness. Programmes to encourage visiting people in their homes, especially among the elderly, as well as improved transportation to facilitate this, may prove beneficial.

To fully grasp the extent to which loneliness is an issue in the Kyle of Sutherland Region requires further examination that was not possible in this study. However, though my time in the area was limited, I managed to build good, trusting relationships with many residents who opened up about sensitive topics like loneliness. Loneliness was present but expressed as less of an immediate concern than social isolation but risks becoming a major concern if social isolation is not adequately addressed.

Among residents, services that promote them to engage with the community are highly desirable. This is not that the services may increase the quantity or quality of any given social interaction but increases their perception of being valued and thought about as part of the wider community. This spoke to another of Ms A's remarks: that she may not attend every activity, but she likes to know what is going on. The programme of activities hosted by the Trust is more than the sum of its parts and is regarded as a positive aspect of the revitalisation of the

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<sup>7</sup> [https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Beyond4Walls\\_Report.pdf](https://childreninscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Beyond4Walls_Report.pdf)

region, something that might attract newcomers. Knowing that things are happening – even if some activities are more popular than others – had a profound effect on residents and invoked a sense of pride for the KoSDT and its work. This effect of creating a positive environment allows individuals to feel that they live within a community and that theirs is ‘doing well’. It gives people a sense that their community, and from that themselves, is active and resilient.

The Community Food Stop Café plays a vital role in this. As the stories of Ms A and the young mums demonstrate, the café is a place residents go to socialise and maintain connections with the community. When comparisons were made with private business cafés, the element of engagement promoted by the Community Food Stop Café was raised as a key factor in people’s decision to go there. While people may go to a private café to socialise, it was stated that the kind of socialisation was individualised, limited to who you go with. The Community Food Stop Café is a space where people trust they can go to socialise and build connections with the community without having to make additional arrangements that may be stressful for people in diverse situations.

### Stigma

A main reason people do not use services that are available to them is because they are often perceived to be stigmatising. It is crucial that the Community Food Stop Café is a welcoming environment that is open to all. One of the key elements to this is making sure it continues to allow people to pay what they want or can, in a discrete manner, regardless of the patron’s level of need or perceived level of need. Despite this, some – like the young mums in the Hub – still feel the Community Food Stop Café is ‘not for them’. Some said that it was because ‘its in the community hall’. This was interesting because the hall was normally considered positively or neutrally and when asked if they felt the hall itself was seen as a sign of poverty or appeared rundown, people would become defensive of it. Deeper examination as to why that is was outwith the scope of this research but warrants further study.

Many small business owners in the area were ambivalent about the work of the Trust. While they were careful not to disparage charitable work, they were sometimes resentful of the fact that people were benefiting from what they saw as ‘hand-outs’ in a way, while they themselves were struggling financially due to wider economic problems in the area that will be discussed below. This tension needs to be understood and addressed to reduce notions of stigma and ensure that everyone in the area feels welcome and wants to participate in the Trust’s activities.

### Food Poverty

Many people I spoke with who attended the Community Food Stop Café suffer from food poverty. The KoSDT plays a critical role in alleviating food poverty in the area through the Community Food Stop Café, food parcels and sharing of leftovers. These go a long way to addressing not just hunger but the anxieties associated with food insecurity as demonstrated throughout this report already.

While this work is crucial it is not enough to fully address the problem. Of the 55 people I spoke with, 36 stated that they eat only two meals per day, usually a microwaved meal followed by a sandwich of some sort later in the day. They would often tell me, ‘I’m no a big eater’ or ‘You only really need two meals’. The KoSDT is providing a lifeline for many people, but the scale of the issue is beyond their ability to address it.

## Technological Infrastructure

Everyone I spoke with felt the telecommunications network was woeful and the suppliers neglectful. Phone and internet signal took up large parts of conversation. A report by the KoSDT's community engagement team shows support for more technology and greater integration of digital solutions, but the greatest barrier that was expressed in my conversations was people's lack of knowledge of what was available, and the uncertainty that they may be taken advantage of.

Several individuals indicated their fear at the use of digital solutions exasperating their isolation. Research has shown that using digital solutions can compound vulnerable groups social isolation<sup>8</sup>. This is not to say that the digital should be avoided but to highlight the limitations that digital solutions may have.

## Transportation

Transport was highlighted as the major concern by most people I spoke with. Being able to travel to nearby communities was spoken about as crucial for maintaining relationships with friends and family, accessing services and going shopping. What my research highlighted as equally concerning for many individuals was internal transport. Getting to the hairdressers in Ardgay from Bonar Bridge was stressful for a few people, 'I've got an appointment, but it doesn't fit with the bus schedule. Some people might be able to walk (roughly 1 mile) but I can't, it's too hard and that wee hill at the end is too hard'. Statements like this highlight the mundaneness of people's life that is affected by inadequate transport while also the effect it has on their self-esteem. Getting a haircut is important to how people feel as well as how they see themselves fitting in to the community. Other stories express the difficulty people have getting to the chemist or up the hill to the church or golf club. These signal the challenge individuals have of accessing community life. The lack of internal transport alongside intercommunity transport is influencing how people engage with their community and has negatively affected relationships. For some, public transport is difficult to use, and the reality of getting the bus to Tain for shopping presents to great a challenge when travelling alone.

## Dornoch Bridge

Every account of the community's struggles started with the Dornoch Bridge:

“[It was] a bustling place. The traffic used to come over the [Bonar] Bridge to go up north, a lot of visitors and a lot going on. Then the Dornoch Bridge was built.”

It is interesting, ironic even, that the building of the Dornoch Bridge in the late 1990s was seen as the catalyst for the deep, systemic issues like food poverty, loneliness and isolation faced by the communities of the Kyle of Sutherland today. People recounted the steady decline of the communities that make up the Kyle of Sutherland following the bridge's construction. Businesses closed, people had to travel outwith the communities to find work or just moved away. The decline was described as a knock-on effect: as people and jobs left the area, services started to go with them. The closure of the police station was frequently cited as evidence of this. They were distressed by seeing the State 'abandon' the community. This corroborates the KoSDT's Community Engagement Report, of which one of the findings was a desire to see more of a police presence in the community.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://vhscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Key-messages-Loneliness-a-Threat-to-Health-6.pdf>

It was beyond the scope of this research to fully investigate the history of the area and the roots of these issues. But taking into account residents' understandings of local history and perceptions of their community will be critical to building lasting solutions to the issues outlined herein. The story is one of investment in one area at the expense of another, of abandonment and an even an absence of the State. It was clear that residents understand the systemic nature of the problems their communities face and that these cannot be tackled solely by the Trust, despite the necessary and vital work they currently do.

### Community Engagement

The KoSDT was presented in these stories like a counterbalance to the damage of the Dornoch Bridge. People talked about the positive impact of the Trust in rebuilding the communities:

“...they're [the KoSDT] fairies over the [Bonar] Bridge there, genuine fairies. They have built bridges between us all and brought us together. If it wasn't for them, I don't think this place would last.”

Beyond flattering, this statement speaks to the holistic nature of the work undertaken by the Trust. In their accounts, the Trust is often represented as the centre of the community the way 'official' bodies like the Highland Council or Scottish Government would elsewhere.

It is from this perspective tensions sometimes arose. When pressed for their thoughts on what the KoSDT could do better or what it is failing at, the main concern that was raised in response was engagement and consultation. For example, many were aware there was a new director but were annoyed that they had not met him yet.

Community engagement was very much valued and desired by participants. Many people were frustrated that the Community Council, the Highland Council and the Scottish Government would not seek to involve them. When I pointed out that there are meetings and events held to engage the community, this was dismissed. Many explained that they sometime never find out about these meeting and events or when they do, it is inconvenient or too difficult to get involved.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research into the impact of the Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust Community Food Stop Café on food poverty, social isolation and loneliness, the following recommendations are made.

1. The Community Food Stop Café should continue to be operated. It plays a vital role in both alleviating food poverty and building community resilience in the Kyle of Sutherland area.
2. The Community Food Stop Café should lay soft play mats near the toys and take the toys out from under the stage at the start of the café session. This will designate an area for children without cordoning them and their families off from the rest of the café, will dampen some noise and will signal a welcoming atmosphere for children and families.
3. Home and community should be complimentary. Many individuals are at risk of social isolation and are also likely to face mobility issues, including young parents, the elderly and those experiencing disability. Bringing the community into the home will improve

the subjective qualities of relationships necessary to address loneliness. A befriending scheme, perhaps involving local high school students, whereby befrienders visit people in their homes can create social interactions and strengthen connections with the community. It could also aid young people who volunteer with building their CV's, increase employment opportunities or contribute to university applications. This will need to be supported by better transport links.

4. A volunteer drivers' club could allow those that are looking for a way to help their local community while providing a vital service for residents who struggle to get around. This should be regarded as a good first measure but not a replacement for improved public transport.
5. Outreach work should be increased through door-knocking campaigns. Posters, leaflets and social media will reach some people, but not everyone in the community. This recommendation also compliments the first, as it may contribute to fostering a culture of home visitation. It is the best way to make sure that as many people are reached as can be, demonstrates an effort to engage members of the community personally and may help to address the issue of some people feeling that services like the Community Food Stop Café are 'not for them'. It can be labour intensive but creating a pamphlet and making sure one is put through every door could act as an initial step. The Bridgend Farmhouse's community outreach work is an excellent example of a successful door-knocking campaign that can be looked to.
6. Team introductions at events could help build connections between the Trust and the communities they work with. Having a semi-formal introduction of the team and management could also be used as an opportunity to raise awareness of other work or activities hosted by the Trust.
7. The Scottish Government is keenly aware of the role that the private sector can play in tackling food poverty, social isolation and loneliness. Great successes have already been made across the country with social enterprises. The KoSDT could consult with local businesses to transition into social enterprises with the aim of building stronger links and reduce tensions with local business owners while contributing to the sustainable economic revitalisation of the area.
8. Inequality of access to online service needs to be addressed. Holding an informational session to provide impartial advice around mobile phone and internet suppliers as well as changing suppliers could be a launch off point to address these issues. This will help empower residents who are concerned they lack the knowledge to do so or will be taken advantage of. This could also serve as an opportunity to identify members of the community who could benefit from a class on using the internet for daily tasks like banking and email.

## Conclusion

While the Community Food Stop Café has acted as a lifeline for many that use it, guaranteeing them a hot meal, the strongest impact it has had is in the social relationships it fosters. Food

poverty looms over the region at such an extent that the KoSDT have a Sisyphean challenge facing them. The impossible doesn't mean pointless; the social relationships created by sharing a meal have fostered a sense of care and responsibility and this work should undoubtedly continue. It was common for people to inform their neighbours about the Community Food Stop Café who they felt might benefit from it. If they could not get them along to the Community Food Stop Café, they would take food back for them, popping in to see how they were doing.

Friendship is highly valued among those I spoke with, telling accounts of meeting people at the café and inviting them to other events. From this they formed friendships with each other which strengthened the social fabric of the community. While these friendships were formed in the Community Food Stop Café, they expanded outwards into the wider community, with people visiting each other, checking if they are ok over a cup of tea and a chat.

The success of the Community Food Stop Café in addressing food poverty, social isolation and loneliness speaks to and is because of its role in the wider programme of activities and projects undertaken by the Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust. As the recommendations allude to, the KoSDT has created a solid foundation to work out from and build upon. Extending into activities that have already been taken up by some members of the community, such as a befriending, these issues will continue to be reduced.