

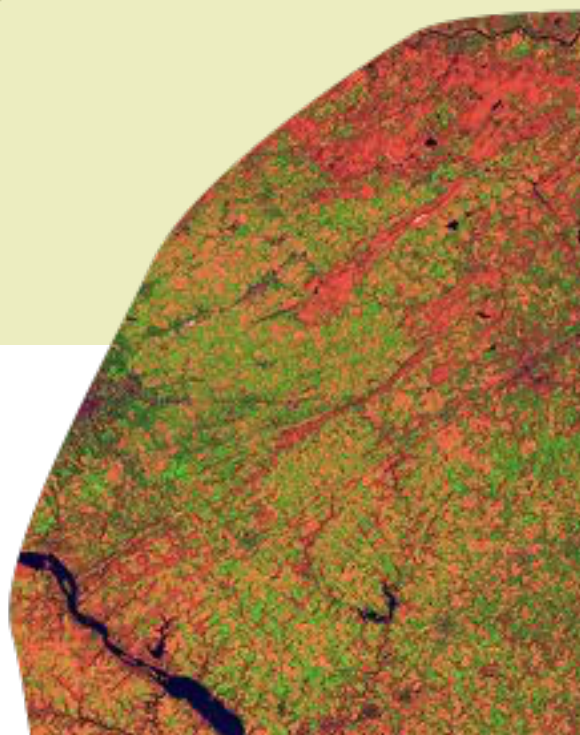
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**Occupy Climate
Change (OCC!)**
*Grassroots initiatives
entry*



FORMAS



Community Fridge and Gleaning Project – Transition Dundee

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Queueing neatly seems to be a sort of prerequisite of British life, which is why I was not surprised to see a group of people in a line by Perth Road, in Dundee, Scotland. But my curiosity piqued as I noticed two people at the front of the queue, chatting and distributing food from what looked like a small woodshed.

This encounter was my introduction to Transition Dundee and their Community Fridge project.

Eager to learn more, I looked up the organization, eventually joining as a volunteer. I discovered a thriving social enterprise led by dedicated staff and fueled by enthusiastic volunteers, all deeply embedded within the Dundee community.

For this entry, I had the pleasure of meeting with Transition Dundee's team at their headquarters, located in the heart of Dundee's city center. I sat down with their managing director, as well as coordinators Taylor Flynn and Alex Daniels, who oversee the Community Fridge and Gleaning projects respectively.



The Wardrobe, Dundee - Headquarters of Transition Dundee - by Laura Albertini

Transition Dundee (TD) managing director had arranged to meet me at *The Wardrobe*. As I stepped inside to meet with them, I took in the scene: a woman was discussing with a volunteer how to upcycle a pair of trousers, while someone else was going through a rack of free clothes. We headed downstairs together and settled onto some sofas near a small kitchenette. Alex was already there and stood up to greet me, and soon after, Taylor joined us. With steaming cups of tea in hand, our conversation began...

Where is this grassroots initiative implemented? Who are the promoters? Who are the beneficiaries?

The Community Fridge and Gleaning projects are excellent examples of the network TD has built across Dundee and into the surrounding Angus council area.

The Community Fridge, situated on Perth Road in Dundee's bustling West End, serves as a hub for food waste reduction by collecting surplus goods from supermarkets and local food shops. As Taylor and the managing director mentioned during our conversation, the project's goal is inclusivity in tackling food waste - ensuring that anyone, regardless of background, feels welcome to take food as needed.



The Community Fridge, located in Millers Wynd Park on Perth Road, Dundee

- by Laura Albertini

The diversity of people who rely on the community fridge became evident to me during my very first shift. After the initial hectic hour and a half following the fridge's opening, when



the queue began to thin out, conversations started to flow. These went beyond small talk and often involved a spontaneous sharing of experiences. Some people had just moved to the area, others lived there because they were attending the University of Dundee. Some were visiting for the first time, while others come regularly - the latter exchanged updates about their lives with the volunteer who was guiding me through the experience and who has been volunteering with TD for two years. Fellow volunteers also stopped by, and we chatted about updates from *The Wardrobe* or when the next Gleaning was going to take place.

'Today's menu' and information on the Community Fridge window - by Laura Albertini

The Gleaning initiative, closely linked with the Community Fridge's mission, operates on a similar principle of reducing food waste. Following a national model of Gleaning initiatives (The Gleaning Network, n.d.), the Gleaning project collaborates with local farmers and growers to collect surplus or unsellable produce. This fresh food is then distributed to the Community Fridge and other initiatives within the Dundee Community Food Network, strengthening the collaboration between local projects in implementing food resilience in the area.

For my first gleaning, I was so excited that I brought some friends along. We arrived at a field in the Angus area, easily recognizable by the dense red foliage of the blueberry plants - already a sign of the approaching autumn. Alex had set up a welcoming table with coffee, tea, and sweets. The berries were perfect, of various kinds, and incredibly juicy. We started picking the blueberries, chatting as we worked. Robins watched us curiously, hopping

nearby, the supervisors of our work for the day. The blueberries we picked were taken to the Community Fridge that evening and redistributed to other projects.



*Pictures from a blueberry gleaned day. The field, the berries, the harvest –
by Laura Albertini*

How does this initiative engage with climate? Does it tackle mitigation, adaptation, both or other dimensions of climate change?

TD's projects promote climate awareness through practical, accessible initiatives like the Community Fridge and Gleaning projects. Although climate action is central to TD's mission, discussions with the managing director, Taylor, and Alex highlighted how their focus is much more intersectional and intends to integrate sustainability with community-building and a response to the specific needs of the community. TD aims to connect climate action with broader social benefits, such as mental well-being. Alex, for example, emphasized how the focus on green spaces and environmental health in the Gleaning project is also enhancing community mental health.

Taylor further noted that individuals facing personal difficulties may not always prioritize climate issues when their immediate needs take precedence. Hence, TD's approach is intentionally supportive rather than prescriptive. By framing TD's initiatives as steps toward sustainability, this social enterprise fosters a hopeful, inclusive approach: encouraging people to realize the impact of small actions like harvesting and taking surplus food - or using second-hand items from their shop The Wardrobe. This approach encourages people to

participate in ways that align with their circumstances, planting seeds of environmental awareness and creating a supportive pathway toward collective impact.

What are the main objectives? What are the main values?

Objectives and values are stated very clearly on the main webpage of Transition Dundee.

‘Transition Dundee is a community-led social enterprise on a mission to help make Dundee a more sustainable, healthy and happy place to live, enabling future generations and the environment to flourish. Our people and our planet need action, now.

We do this through various climate-focused projects, building knowledge, awareness & community. Most importantly, the climate discussion and what we do about it, should include EVERYONE.

Our values:

- Community-led
- Climate and Social Justice
- Inclusivity
- Leading by example’

(Transition Dundee, n.d.)

From the conversation I had with the members of staff, it is clear how at the heart of TD’s projects is the value of community-led action. Observing their activities it is clear how TD considers local, grassroots efforts as essential in leading by example and inspiring meaningful changes. By focusing on projects like the Community Fridge and Gleaning, which directly impact local food security and reduce waste, TD showcases how practical, hands-on activities can make a tangible difference. They aim to demonstrate the feasibility and benefits of sustainable living, empowering residents to contribute to climate solutions in ways that resonate with their daily lives. This community-focused approach fosters a sense of shared purpose and equips people with the resources and knowledge they need to embrace sustainable choices, all while building a supportive network.

What is the timeline? Are there already visible effects?

Since the beginning, the Community Fridge and the Gleaning projects have contributed substantially to both environmental sustainability and social cohesion within Dundee. According to TD's 2023-2024 Impact Report, the Community Fridge has saved 73.5 tonnes of surplus food in the past year alone and redistributed a cumulative 334 tonnes since 2019, welcoming over 29,000 visitors. The Gleaning project, still in its first year, gathered 4,088 kg of fresh produce, which supported around 41 food and community initiatives throughout Dundee. (Transition Dundee, 2024)

Beyond these impactful statistics, conversations with Taylor, Alex and the managing director underscored how these projects foster trust and solidarity within the community, with an increasing number of people using the services and joining as volunteers. The projects are reducing food waste, and they are also cultivating a supportive network of citizens and initiatives as well as inspiring local participation.

Who are the actors involved? What are their backgrounds?

From exploring their website to speaking with volunteers and staff, it became clear to me that the Community Fridge and the Gleaning project thrive thanks to a broad network of collaborators. Transition Dundee has strategically used funding to expand its team, ensuring proper recognition and remuneration for those responsible for coordinating its projects. From my understanding, some staff members were hired specifically for their roles, while others transitioned into staff positions after volunteering on various initiatives.

Volunteers also play a crucial role in sustaining these projects. Transition Dundee excels at fostering community involvement, encouraging people not only to contribute their time but also to share their skills and expertise. As a volunteer, I was encouraged from the start to share ideas for future projects as well as community workshops based on my expertise. This approach has led to a rich diversity of input, with volunteers from different backgrounds bringing unique talents to workshops and supplementary initiatives. This collaborative model ensures the projects remain dynamic, innovative, and deeply connected to the community they serve.

Which limits (institutional, physical, social, etc.) does it encounter?

Discussing the current issues for the continuity and expansion of the projects with the coordinators and managing director, the primary challenge is the need for long-term funding, which is essential to sustain and grow TD's initiatives. Without consistent financial support, even well-received projects risk a loss of progress and momentum, directly affecting the possibility of maintaining the projects' objectives. Dedicated and secure resources would help to support current projects and explore responses to address additional environmental and community needs in Dundee and Angus.

Despite the cozy and familiar environment in which we conducted our conversation, the managing director, Alex and Taylor suggested that the project is encountering some physical limitations. With the increasing positive response to TD initiatives, the social enterprise seeks new, centralized spaces to better accommodate its growing activities. A consolidated location would not only support TD's operations but also serve as a hub for other community projects, amplifying the social benefits for the Dundee area.

Are any shortcomings or critical points visible? What other problematic issues can arise from its implementation?

When considering critical points related to the projects, I believe that the issues extend beyond the responsibilities of the Community Fridge, the Gleaning project, or Transition Dundee as a social enterprise. Reflecting on critical points linked with food waste emphasises systemic issues in food production, waste, and accessibility. Food waste occurs not just at the consumption stage but across multiple stages. The Gleaning project addresses the discussion around production, but additional stages are involved, such as processing and manufacturing, distribution, and retail - and addressing food waste within the discussion on climate change requires action at every level, including an intersectional consideration on social justice.

It is also topical to situate these projects within the wider UK context. A green transition in agriculture remains a contentious topic, raising questions about how changes will impact the sector. Additionally, Brexit has had profound effects on UK agriculture, workers availability, altering produce supply chains, and increasing prices. (The Scottish Government, 2020)

It is critical to recognize that addressing food waste should not rest solely on individuals but also demand accountability from large corporations. In August 2024 the Scottish Government published the results of the consultation on Circular Economy and Waste Route Map, which 'sets out strategic direction and actions for delivering more

sustainable use of our resources and our vision for Scotland's circular economy to 2030'. (The Scottish Government, 2024) Notably, Section 2.1.4, *Suggestions for Additional Priority Actions*, highlights a significant gap in holding supermarkets and retailers accountable for their contributions to food waste, emphasizing the need for broader systemic responsibility. (The Scottish Government, 2024)

How would it be potentially replicable in other settings?

Replicating TD's model in other settings would require several key elements to be carefully established from the outset. First, long-term funding is crucial to sustain projects beyond initial pilot phases and to allow new initiatives the time they need to become established and impactful. Beyond funding, active community involvement is essential—not only through volunteer support but with a core team dedicated to pursuing a model aligned with the initiative's non-profit values.

Securing a stable, accessible location is another pivotal factor. For instance, the Community Fridge's consistent location on Perth Road has been fundamental to its visibility and reliability in Dundee, and its recognizable presence helped to build community trust and engagement over time. Lastly, cultivating a network of dependable partners is critical. Trust among volunteers, beneficiaries, and local contributors, such as growers in the case of the Gleaning project, strengthens the project's foundation, creating a participatory system essential for long-term success.

Is this initiative conducive to broader changes? If yes, which?

The success of TD's projects has attracted interest from the Scottish government, signaling their potential to contribute meaningfully to national sustainability and community support strategies as participating in the National Community Climate nation hub.

Both the Community Fridge and Gleaning project address real needs within the community, as evidenced by increasing public participation and a steady rise in volunteers. This growing involvement highlights the resonance of these initiatives with local values, fostering a shared sense of purpose around reducing waste and supporting one another. The projects have catalysed a horizontal network of solidarity, uniting diverse community members and projects in practical, collaborative responses to sustainability challenges. Through these efforts, TD is

not only meeting immediate needs but also influencing broader policy conversations on sustainable community-building.

In this sense, I would like to conclude with the words of TD managing director:

‘We had a few visits from the Scottish government [...] the climate change commissions are coming to Dundee because there’s quite a lot of interest going on in Dundee [...] and I said to them repeatedly - projects like us, and there’s hundreds all over the country - maybe are a really small part of this big climate change pie [...] but the policy makers, and the people who are going to have to implement really big changes, they going to need us to help them persuade the community that this is the good thing to do. [...] We are here helping to explain [...] that we have some big changes to make and it’s going to be hard doing it; here’s how we can work together to mitigate the impacts.’

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