The Food Glorious Food project looked at how food is used in groups and activities that support people living with dementia. Food is important in how we live our lives and can be at the heart of opportunities to socialise, maintain skills, celebrate culture and share memories. Because of this, community groups often offer food, or involve food in their activities.

However, there are significant challenges to working with food and it can be hard to get this right. As such, the Food Glorious Food project aimed to create evidence-based advice to help guide and improve community support for people with dementia after diagnosis. It learnt about the benefits, and the difficulties, of involving food in community group support, to help such groups with their decision-making.

This included looking at what works or doesn't work for different people, from different backgrounds and in different circumstances. We went along to six community groups in the UK to see how they used food in what they did. These included Meeting Centres and Dementia Cafes in rural counties, serving people from a mainly White British background; an inner-city support group serving people of mainly Black Caribbean heritage; and support groups serving an urban South Asian community.

Each of these groups involved food in a different way. Some offered a full meal, some only refreshments; at some groups people brought their own food to eat themselves, at others people brought food share. We carried out observations of what they did, how they did it and how people responded, and interviewed people running the groups, those attending the groups and people supporting those attending, such as family and carers. We also talked to people attending about their experiences with food and eating at home, to understand the challenges of people attending the groups.

We found that food has lots of benefits for people attending community groups, whether offering simple refreshments, a cooked meal or bringing food to share. Food can encourage people to come along and help them feel welcome and relaxed, combatting stigma and social isolation, especially for underserved communities. Communal eating can encourage people with dementia to eat better, connect and share. It can be used to give people choice, do meaningful activities and celebrate culture or significant events. It also provides a way for people with dementia to orient themselves, giving routine and structure to their understanding of the day, week or season.

However, key challenges were also highlighted. Working with food can be costly, and the complexity of meeting people's dietary and support needs can be underestimated by organisers or commissioners. Careful planning and skilled practice is needed to use food effectively and safely.

People from a variety of backgrounds, living with dementia or supporting people who are, oversaw the project. They helped create booklets and a website with tips and guidance on the different ways in which you can work with food in community groups to best support people living with dementia, and what needs to be involved in this.