

Existence of foodbanks tells us all we need to know

By Graham Whitham

Last week it was reported that government ministers have drawn up plans to investigate how many people are being forced to seek [emergency food support](#) and the reasons why .

For many people this will feel several years too late, as the huge growth in foodbanks since 2010 has provided ample evidence that the social security system is broken and that many households are unable to make ends meet.

The number of foodbanks in operation, and the number of people accessing them, has increased over a prolonged period during which wages have stagnated, people have felt less secure in work, local authority budgets have been slashed, benefits have been cut, living costs have risen and the use of benefit sanctions has increased.

The response of society to these problems and the resultant increase in hardship has been nothing short of incredible. Groups of people, often led by volunteers, have come together to find ways to meet people's basic food needs. In 2012 there were 200 Trussell Trust foodbanks in operation across the UK, they now operate over 400. In 2013, one estimate suggested there were 60 emergency food providers in Greater Manchester. [GMPA's Emergency Food Providers Map](#) shows there are now at least 171 (most of which are independent providers run by local community groups).

This is an incredible societal response. However, it is not a substitute for an effective social security system that prevents people from falling into hardship in the first place. A proper policy response is required from government, one that acknowledges the consequences of a stripped back and punitive benefits system and starts to heed concerns about the rollout of Universal Credit.

Government plans to investigate the causes of increased foodbank use represents an important step towards recognising the need for fundamental reforms to the social security system that can help fix the broken safety net and provide a platform on which we can drive down poverty.

There are things the government could do today to help address the hardship people are facing.

A [Child Poverty Action Group report](#) out this week shows how simply design flaws with the monthly assessment of pay and circumstances (flaws the government were warned about back in 2012) in Universal Credit are pushing people into debt and hardship. Design flaws the government could address now.

Reinstating the scrapped discretionary Social Fund, ending the two child limit on benefits, introducing the yellow card system for benefit sanctions and making sure people on Universal Credit keep much more of their earnings are all measures that would help alleviate financial hardship.



Graham Whitham

In a week when the Trussell Trust have been [calling for extra donations](#) to help them meet increased need during the summer holidays, it is clear that many households in the UK are being pushed into unnecessary hardship and that we need a swift response from government.

Reflections on the Food Power conference

Charlie Spring, chair of the "Measuring and Monitoring" sub-group of the Greater Manchester Food Poverty Alliance, represented us at the first ever conference of [Food Power](#), the national body of food poverty alliances.



As the work of the Greater Manchester Food Poverty Alliance gets underway, it's a great time to learn from the challenges and successes of alliances around the country. Food Power is part of Sustain's long-term work building fairer and more sustainable food systems, and has helped to fund the formation of over 50 alliances, from Aberdeen to Kernow (Cornwall), and ranging in size from Lockleaze ward in Bristol to an alliance covering the whole of South Wales.



Charlie Spring

A blistering day in Cardiff City Hall held an intense day of talks, workshops and discussions about how collective work can add value to existing efforts to tackle inequality and poverty. To open a workshop on developing action plans, I presented the structure we've adopted to organise ourselves in Greater Manchester, as themed sub-groups working to develop specific aims and actions within the coordinating fold of the Driver Group, the influence and barrier-busting work of the Reference Group and the scrutiny of the Diversity Group to ensure our processes and aims address multiple dimensions of food poverty for different groups.

We heard from cities further along the action planning and delivery process, such as Brighton whose action plan progress report has [just been published](#). Some have conducted action research, some have worked to embed food poverty into council strategies and others have acted to galvanise the work of diverse organisations from holiday hunger programmes to community cafes.

A key concern was around the value and challenges of involving people with lived experience in building the movement. We were shown a powerful film of school students in Blackburn/Darwen who demonstrated the value of such involvement in shifting their sense that poverty is something that happens abroad, or that only affects homeless people. Memories of the shame one girl experienced receiving free school meals were transformed into gratitude for such entitlement and, with it, anger that such entitlement could be taken away. Learning to see their own 'food poverty' in the context of Food Power had empowered them to understand their own experiences as a form of expertise that could be used to create systemic change. However, others questioned the language of 'food poverty' - do people have to define themselves in terms of a lack, or should we instead use the term food *inequality*? Or, is food/fuel/period poverty simply poverty, with food a useful lens to create community and collective activism? Or, as Kath Dalmeny powerfully argued, should we centre our work on the Right to Food, a right which the UK government has signed up to protect and fulfil? Maybe it's lawyers who should be calling leaders to account on poor hospital food, or mushrooming emergency food demand in the wake of Universal Credit rollout. People-powered, food-powered change: about maximising family income, defending services and, given that environmental and social injustice are closely related, protecting the soil to ensure future food supplies.

I left with new ideas on evaluating the added value of working in partnership (new jargon e.g. 'collective impact', and a new task of making sure everyone understands it!). I learned about the work of organisations and projects I was unfamiliar with – [Alexandra Rose](#) (vouchers for fresh food), [Leapfrog](#) (tools for engagement) and a story of how Luton's Community Food Hub enabled segregated communities to challenge their stereotypes and resentments by sharing strawberry-growing skills.

At a time of Brexit and migration debates, food and meal sharing can be a way to transform narratives about the real causes of poverty and bring oppressed communities together rather than blaming each other. But I'll give the final word to Welsh Government Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Mark Drakeford. He described the mixture of rage and gratitude he feels for community organisations providing free food and clothes for families who otherwise would be unable to send their kids to school for lack of uniforms. He described the powerful work of [Food And Fun](#), the Welsh Government-supported holiday hunger programme providing healthy meals, nutrition skills and sports at ever-growing numbers of schools. He concluded with a reminder that devolved administrations' hands are tied – they, and we, do not control the benefits system and ultimate responsibility lies with Westminster. However, we can ensure we best use our services to "mitigate the roughest edges of growing up in poverty". We can only do what we can.

You can read more about the Food Power conference, and download presentations, [here](#).

Hidden young people in Salford – a new research project

Since the mid-2000s, increasing numbers of young people have been struggling to make a successful transition from full-time education into work or further training opportunities. Whilst in recent years the numbers of young people who are not in employment, education or training (NEETs) has been decreasing following a peak in the aftermath of the financial crisis, the number of young people impacted remains a major concern.

But whilst there is a growing body of research focusing on NEETs, there is increasing concern about so-called 'Hidden NEETs' – those young people who are neither in employment, education or training nor in contact with mainstream welfare services. Suggested possible reasons for being 'hidden' include the stigma associated with benefit receipt, experience of benefit 'sanctions', being able to rely on financial support from family, engagement in crime and participating in the informal economy. However the evidence base on this is incredibly weak.



SHUSU
Sustainable Housing &
Urban Studies Unit

Salford City Council

To address this evidence gap, the University of Salford, as part of the Salford Anti-Poverty Taskforce, has been commissioned by Salford City Council to explore this issue.

We are currently trying to find young people (aged 18 - 24) who are living in Salford, not in employment, education or training (NEET), **and** not claiming the benefits they are entitled to. They will be invited to take part in a short, confidential interview about their experiences and all will receive a £10 shopping voucher as a thank you for their time. If you or your organisation are aware of any such individuals, or might be able to help us to find them, please contact Katy Jones by [email](#) or call 0161 295 7030.

The BBC Children in Need Emergency Essentials Programme

Family Fund Business Services are working in collaboration with BBC Children in Need to deliver the Emergency Essentials programme supporting children and young people living with severe poverty as well as additional pressures and crisis which are outside of the child's control.

How we help: We can deliver or fund critical items such as:

- Cookers
- Essential household items
- Furniture and kitchen equipment
- Children's beds and bedding
- Washing machines
- Fridges and freezers
- Baby equipment
- Clothing in exceptional or emergency situations

Eligibility: Who can we help?

- Children up to the age of 18
- UK or EU citizens who are normally resident in the UK
- Vulnerable children and young people who are experiencing a crisis or emergency.

You can find more information about the grant programme on our [website](#).

How to apply: Applications must be completed by a registered referrer who is part of an organisation that is supporting the family or young person and capable of assessing their needs. The referrer's organisation should also be able to administer and supervise the grant on our behalf.

Registering as a Referrer: You can find out more information about what being a referrer for the fund means in [these guidelines](#)

Advice or Support: If you would like to discuss the programme criteria or explore the referrer registration process further, please get in contact with one of our team, by phone on **01904 550011** or [email](#)



Positive News: Someone who received help from the Booth Centre in 2016 dropped in recently to say hello.

When Mr B was living on the streets the Booth Centre supported him to move into a shelter. He took part in many of their activities and became a regular volunteer in their kitchen and for eight months helped to prepare fresh, healthy meals for over 250 people a week. Through their job club, Mr B found work in a hospital in Manchester. He's been there for one year and four months now and really enjoys it. He's currently training to become a healthcare assistant and hopes to continue working within the NHS.

Now that Mr B has a stable job and his own flat he wanted to come back to make a donation, 'to give a little back for the help I got'. The Booth Centre never expect this of anybody, but they really appreciate the gesture and are so grateful for his support. They wanted to share this story with everyone because it made them smile. They hope it makes you smile too.



Have you approached Manchester City Council for housing and been offered something outside the city? Could you help with a new research study?



The University of Manchester are carrying out a research study into this situation. It will enable them to capture the stories of people facing housing problems and will inform the work of the Greater Manchester Housing Action (GMHA) campaign so that they are better able to support people experiencing housing insecurity.

If you can help with this project, you will be asked to participate in an interview with a community organiser from GMHA and a clinical and community psychologist who will be present to support you, as housing issues can have an impact on people's health. You will be asked a series of questions about your housing history, how recent housing issues have impacted on you and those you live with, and the kind of support offered by the Council.

If you would like to take part or find out more please contact Sophie Bullock, on 07578 070708 or by [email](#).

Call for evidence on offender employment

The Cabinet Office has published a Call for Evidence on offender employment. They would like to get responses from as many public, private and voluntary sector employers, organisations and professionals who:

- proactively hire people with a criminal conviction and/or offer fair opportunities for people with a criminal conviction to apply for vacancies;
- impose restrictions and/or bans on the hiring of ex-offenders for some or all jobs depending on the offence(s) committed;
- work directly with ex-offenders to improve their employability for example, through the provision of skills training, outreach, mentoring, work placements, etc;
- work with or advise other organisations on creating fair recruitment practices and supporting ex-offenders in the labour market;
- campaign to reduce the stigma associated with having, or hiring someone with, a criminal conviction.

If this is relevant to you can you please respond and share this amongst your networks as the government want to ensure sure they get as many responses as possible. This data will help to inform their understanding of employer attitudes, best practice and future policy work in this area.

[More information and how to respond](#)

Forthcoming events

Child Poverty Action Group: Welfare Rights Conference 2018

Universally discredited – How can we make the failing universal credit work for families?

September 13th 2018 from 9.15am - 4pm at the University of Manchester Innovation Centre, 48 Grafton Street, Manchester M13 9XX.

The conference will focus on Universal Credit, providing an opportunity for welfare rights advisers to discuss the latest developments and hear from political leaders, policy makers and experts in the field on how best to support and advise UC claimants in a hostile and challenging environment.

Confirmed speakers: Kate Green MP, Labour MP for Stretford and Urmston; Graham Whitham, Director of Greater Manchester Poverty Action and Dr Lisa Scullion, Reader in Social Policy, University of Salford

[More details on the workshops and programme, and to book your place](#)



TRAINING

Courses in September and October

Greater Manchester Poverty Action provides training to organisations working to address poverty across the city region and the rest of the UK. We aim to support organisations to better understand some of the complexities around poverty. This includes training in how poverty is measured and how to identify data, to understanding the recent history of welfare reform and how it affects different groups of people.

Two courses are currently open for booking: Understanding poverty data, a full day course on September 25th (just a few places left) and Exploring the poverty premium, a half day course on October 18th. [More information and booking](#)



The Many Faces of Fuel Poverty

September 17 - 19th, 2018. Early booking discounts end August 31st

NEA's annual conference and exhibition provides a national forum to debate key issues relating to domestic energy efficiency and fuel poverty to inform future policy and practice. Approximately 300 participants from across government, the energy industry, health sector, local authorities, housing associations and other non-profit agencies attend. This year's themes are: helping the worst first and ensuring consistent outcomes for the most vulnerable; enhancing preventative health action; clean growth and innovation; and enhancing co-operation across the nations. [More info and book.](#)



At Manchester Cathedral on November 9th, 2018 to raise funds and awareness to support people experiencing homelessness in Manchester.

Last year, 400 people braved the cold and rain to raise a stunning **£120,000!** This year, they are asking you to help them smash that figure. Sleep out for one night so others don't have to every night.

[Register now](#) The money we raise allows us to provide fresh, healthy meals every week, offer expert advice and a huge range of arts and activities to improve wellbeing and self-esteem

Do you have any events that you'd like GMPA to publicise? Please [Email us](#) with the details.

For more information about Greater Manchester Poverty Action

please visit our [website](#), follow us on [Twitter](#) or visit our [Facebook](#) page.

We want to find new ways of working together, share the network's successes and provide a voice for the people living in poverty in our region but we can only do this with your help and support.

Copies of previous newsletters are available on our [website](#)

If you would like to submit an article for inclusion in a newsletter please [get in touch](#)

For more information please contact us by [email](#) or call 07419 774537 and we will reply as soon as possible.

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