

Poverty Exposes People to Greater Risks

by Tom Skinner

Poverty isn't just struggling to get by in the present. It also means living so close to the edge that a single misfortune could spell disaster in the immediate future.

Sometimes this can mean homelessness, with factors such as [relationship breakdown](#), [a change in benefits](#), or [a redundancy](#) causing people to lose their homes. Because this happens to people one-by-one, the causes are often relatively hidden from the public eye.

On occasion this fragility of life hits home in a much more visible and shocking way. The fire in Grenfell Tower is one of the greatest tragedies to have hit the UK since World War II. The loss of life, the way people died, and the loss of hundreds of people's homes is overwhelming.

What's more, it looks like much of the devastation could have been avoided, and that this kind of avoidable tragedy disproportionately affects people in poverty.

Had building regulations been tightened up as experts had advised, had those regulations been well enforced, had fire-fighters been better resourced and positioned, had the local authority taken a more hands-on approach to social housing, or had the management company ensured better safety standards themselves, we might well have been looking at a much smaller-scale disaster, or even a near miss. People in poverty are evidently more vulnerable to leaders' mistakes or negligence than those who are better off.

It is of course difficult to tell from early media reports, and we do not wish to jump to conclusions about where the blame lies. We do however know that many residents had been [warning of the dangers](#), and felt they had not been listened to. We hope that the [government inquiry and other investigations](#) will be transparent, rigorous and unflinching, giving the victims a central role in the proceedings while dealing with the most urgent matters as quickly as possible.

Here in [Greater Manchester authorities are moving quickly](#) to ensure that buildings are in better, safer conditions than Grenfell Tower was, and cladding is being [removed from some towers](#). While cladding understandably dominates the headlines, fire safety particularly in high-rise, low-cost and social housing requires attention to many other factors such as alarms, sprinklers, exit routes and inspections, while fire services must be adequately resourced for prevention work as well as emergency responses. There have been indications that local authorities will be [reimbursed for any building work carried out to minimise fire risks in tower blocks](#), but the terms of this offer should be made clearer, as councils who quite rightly are acting quickly, are doing so [in the dark as to the ultimate financial implications](#).



Tom Skinner

Beyond that we must ensure that all public services serve people in poverty – not just adequately within the law, but generously and in such a way that ensures as much safety as is realistically possible. We must change our culture and our practises, as well as policy, so when vulnerable people raise concerns, they are heard – in fact they must be encouraged to play an active part in civil life, and spaces created for this to happen. We must ensure that all homes, and other places where people are vulnerable, are safely maintained. Ultimately we must work to minimise poverty and its effects – the tragic event in London highlights just how essential this is.

'Surplus food', what is it, how is it used and how can it help to solve food poverty?

Surplus food may occur for a myriad of reasons: changes in the weather, a packaging error or perhaps a supplier's contractual agreement with a retailer. Surplus food is simply food that is not sold. It is still perfectly edible. Approximately 4 million tons of food per year is wasted in the food manufacture, retail, and wholesale sectors ([WRAP 2015](#)). There is no requirement by the UK government for businesses to report the volume of surplus produced or how surplus food is redistributed or how much is redistributed. Our best estimates come from [FareShare](#), which is the largest surplus food business-to-community-organisation redistributor in the UK.



Surplus food is saved from becoming food waste when it is redistributed from the commercial supply chain to people who can eat it. The community support sector (e.g., voluntary organisations, social enterprises, community groups) are the most secure, safe, and organised way that food insecure people can access surplus food in the UK.

FareShare collects information about the organisations who use their service. Most of them (78%) indicate that food provision is their main remit, meaning for 22% food is not their main purpose, but instead food is used to 'get people in the door'. FareShare estimates approximately 412,000 meals are distributed through community organisations *each week, or more than 21 million meals in 2015*.



Photo by Myrabella

There is a widely held presumption that organisations who use surplus food to help those in need, do so through a foodbank but surplus food doesn't make up the core of the parcel, which generally comes from consumer donations or is purchased by the organisation. Many organisations offer other food programmes and activities to a wider segment of the population, beyond those who have an emergency need, but who may still be food insecure. Of the more than 6 thousand organisations using FareShare as their source of surplus food only 17% run food banks, while 40% run some form of community café project. The remainder includes other activities such as cooking, meals delivered to people's homes, community food tables and activities where a meal or snack may be offered.

Surplus food provides great value to the organisations who receive it as well as the people they serve. Research with FareShare's organisations indicates that the money they can save by not having to purchase food allows them to invest in other activities, staff and resources needed to support their communities ([see the NATCEN research report](#)). If surplus food was no longer available, approximately 20% said they would have to reduce the quality of the food they provided and almost as many said they would no longer be able to operate at all.

Those on the receiving end also benefit by having access to food that they would not be able to buy themselves, such as more fruits and vegetables. Clients also said they experienced improvements in physical and mental wellbeing with 92% saying it helped them 'face the day ahead' and 82% said that the meal made them feel part of a community. Finally, a significant number, 75%, are operating on tight household budgets and so access to surplus food means they can save some money. For some, 39%, the surplus food is all that stands between them and hunger or debt.

Community organisations also report that when this food gets people through the door, it then allows them to support people in their communities to find employment, health care, housing, benefit support, manage their finances, exercise, find the care that they need to support mental health issues, reduce dependency on drugs and alcohol, and so forth.

However, these benefits should not be interpreted as a free pass to our Government to ignore how its policies contribute to the causes of poverty or its role in creating divisions in communities. While surplus food will not solve the problems of food poverty, its use by community organisations enables wellbeing and community resilience in ways that extend beyond the meal that it provides. At present the balance between what is the responsibility of the government and what can be better achieved through community involvement needs greater untangling. As a nation, however, we must be careful not to reject the use of surplus food as a means for supporting community organisations who support vulnerable people.



Megan Blake

Written by Megan Blake, Director of the MA in Food Security and Food Justice at the University of Sheffield. Check out her blogs here: <https://geofoodie.org> or follow her on Twitter [@GeoFoodieOrg](#)

#GE2017 Greater Manchester Law Centre report

Prior to the 2017 election the [GM Law Centre](#) asked Greater Manchester parliamentary candidates and Party leaders about their views on free access to justice.

Of the Party leaders, only Jeremy Corbyn responded: *“For those in the legal profession, this change is urgently needed. Seven years of Tory Government has seen an assault on our justice system: with access to justice severely limited, the role of courts in scrutinising the decisions of the authorities deliberately curtailed and now human rights legislation a target.*

A fair accessible and effective justice system in a public good that benefits everyone. One of my first actions as Leader of the Party was to ask Lord Bach to conduct a commission of inquiry into access to justice. That critical work will inform future policy. In Government, Labour will restore legal aid to its rightful place as a fourth pillar of the welfare state and fulfil our Party’s longstanding commitment to abolishing the Tories unfair employment tribunal fees. . . . In solidarity. All the best, Jeremy”

Of the 96 candidates approached, only 15 responded from the Labour, Liberal Democrat, and Green parties*.

Asked if they would vote to restore legal aid, 14 candidates said that they would, one was undecided. Comments included *“The restriction of access to justice without the means to pay for it is wrong and means that justice is not served.”* *“Legal Aid is an absolute necessity for justice, as it helps to prevent wrongful convictions and empowers people to use the court system to protect themselves regardless of their economic situation. It is appalling that this has been cut.”*

Asked if they would be prepared to speak out against benefit sanctions and benefit restrictions on people with disabilities, 14 said yes, Kate Green MP for Stretford & Urmston replied more fully *“sanctions should be used only as a last resort. I am appalled by the shocking rise in the use of inappropriate sanctions, resulting in hardship and destitution, and the unnecessarily complex and lengthy Mandatory Review and appeals process.”* Another candidate commented *“people with disabilities have been amongst the hardest hit by benefit reforms over the last 7 years, especially by draconian work capability assessments.”*

Asked if they’d vote for improved and enforceable rights for tenants in social housing and private rented accommodation, 14 said yes, one undecided. Many commented on this, including campaigning on capping rent at 35% of take home pay, a compulsory register of landlords, a ban on letting agencies charging tenants fees, more secure tenancies, and housing benefits for the under 21s.

Asked about restoring immigration law under the scope of legal aid, for example for cases involved human rights and deportation, all 15 respondents said yes mentioning *“People from overseas living in the UK are often most in need of legal support and protection, as their rights come under repeated attack from governments seeking scapegoats. Full legal aid for all immigrations cases must be restored.”*

And finally, they were asked if they’d be willing to speak up to ensure the funding of free and accessible legal advice in their own constituency. All 15 said yes with comments added *“Access to justice is a right not a privilege”, “Greater Manchester Law Centre and other voluntary bodies are doing essential work trying to plug the gap, but legal support should be considered a core right that is guaranteed to all. Decent secure funding must be provided to support this.”*

In the 1980s, around 80% of household were eligible for civil legal aid, by 2008 that figure has dropped to 29.5%. The [LASPO Act 2012](#) worsened that by removing most cases involving housing, welfare, debt, immigration, employment, and medical negligence from the scope of [legal aid](#).

Halving the legal aid budget since 2010, closure of courts, employment tribunal fees implemented in 2013, lack of education about legal rights and a really difficult system to get legal aid means that thousands are now going without the [legal aid they require](#). For many, law centres provide the only means to free, high-quality legal advice and representation.

Quite simply, no representation means no access to justice.



*This article refers to candidates who responded during the election, but further responses are coming in from elected members now that the election is over.

Sanctions, support and Service leavers: welfare conditionality and transitions from military to civilian life



Welfare benefits increasingly require people to meet particular conditions and behave in certain ways or risk sanctions. Researchers from the University of Salford and the University of York are carrying out an investigation into the impact of benefit sanctions on those who have served in the army, navy or air force as part of a major national project, funded by the [Forces in Mind Trust](#) (FiMT).

They would like to speak anonymously with ex-service members living in Greater Manchester who are claiming Universal Credit, Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) or Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), twice in the next year. Interviews will explore the impact of welfare conditionality on the lives of Armed

Forces service leavers as they transition back into civilian life. The project will provide recommendations for better and more effective services in the future for Armed Forces Service leavers and their families.

The interviews will be carried out by trained researchers and participants will receive £20 worth of shopping vouchers for each session. For more information, or to take part please email [Katy Jones](#) or call 0161 295 7030.

Volunteer Trust and Foundations Officer – Volunteer Role description

GMIPA is seeking a Volunteer Trust and Foundations Officer to provide support to the organisation as it aims to grow and develop new income streams.

We have a number of projects that require funding and we are looking to identify and submit funding bids to trusts and foundations over the next six months. This role would suit a candidate with a good understanding of the not for profit sector who has experience of working in fundraising and ideally raising funds through trusts and foundations. The successful candidate will need to be able to identify appropriate fundraising opportunities and have the ability to write engaging bids.

Deadline for applications: July 21st 2017 Interview dates: Tuesday August 1st and Wednesday August 2nd, 2017.

Full details are available on the [website](#).



Programme Researcher

Oxfam are looking for an enthusiastic and motivated researcher who is highly capable of conducting qualitative and quantitative research, and has a critical and analytical eye for both detail and the bigger picture.

The Programme Researcher will lead on the design and delivery of high quality research and insights from Oxfam's domestic UK poverty programme to inform policy, practice and influencing strategy, working across internal and external policy and research teams and in partnership with women and communities across the UK.

Deadline for applications: July 5th, 2017 Interviews: July 14th, 2017 Full details are available on the [website](#)



BAME Organisational Development Worker

Macc are seeking applications for a BAME Organisational Development Worker, to work with a range of Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups and other local voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector groups to assess their need for capacity building support and deliver a range of support interventions to build the capacity and sustainability in contributing to improved outcomes for people in Manchester. They are looking for someone committed to delivering a quality service and who can work collaboratively, build trust and work positively with groups and partners. This is a varied role and will assist groups to achieve their charitable and social aims, for example, by working with groups to share and develop good practice, produce business / project plans, apply for funding / develop appropriate income streams.

Deadline for applications: July 14th 2017 12.00 Interviews: July 20th, 2017 Full details on the [website](#)

Forthcoming Events:

Voluntary Sector Assembly - State of the Sector

On Tuesday July 18th, 2017 from 1- 4.30pm at Halle St Peters, 40 Blossom St, Manchester M4 6BF

The current picture of the Manchester VCSE sector – and what this means for your organisation. The social and political landscape has changed significantly since the publication of the first State of the Sector report in 2013. The launch of the latest report took place on 1 June and the next Voluntary Sector Assembly will give everyone an opportunity to study the findings and discuss the current strength of the Manchester voluntary, community and social enterprise sector. How has the number of voluntary sector organisations changed and how healthy are their finances currently? How many people are volunteering in Manchester compared to four years ago?

Mike Wild, Macc Chief Executive, will be presenting facts and figures from the report and explaining what this means for VCSE organisations in the city

You will also have an opportunity to choose from three practical workshops which will discuss the implications of Brexit for the VCSE, take a look at the future of volunteering and give the opportunity to ask those all important social media questions in an interactive Q&A session.

[Book your place at this free event.](#)

Greater Manchester Social Value Network Conference

On Thursday July 20th, 2017 from 9.30am - 12.45pm at Bolton Town Hall, Victoria Square, Bolton BL1 1RU

A free event providing an overview of development in strategy, policy and practice in 'Social Value' in GM; showcasing examples of good practice, plus discussion, learning, networking and three workshops. [More information and to book.](#)



Booth Centre's 'ME' Portrait Exhibition

From July 3rd 2017 at Manchester Central Library

The portraits featured are inspired by the invisibility and isolation that the artists experienced while homeless. It promises to be a really special experience. To attend the special launch event on July 3rd, and to meet the artists themselves, register [here](#).

The Clatter of Clogs

On Wednesday September 6th, 2017 starting at Salford Museum and Art Gallery, The Crescent, Peel Park, Salford M5 4WU followed by a walking tour and visiting Wood Street Mission

Meandering tales of Salford slums, literary genius, temperance, gangland violence, and a fight for human rights. A look at the museum archives followed by a walking tour concluding at Wood Street where the mission, moved to this site in 1873, is still based. A tour of the mission and refreshments complete the event. [More information and to book.](#)



Any events you'd like GMPA to publicise? [Email us with the details](#)

Why GM Poverty Action?

In the Recommendations Report of the Greater Manchester Poverty Commission, 2.4 *Maintaining Momentum on Poverty* called for the formation of a Poverty Action Group to help take forward the work of the Commission.

A small number of public, private and civic sector individuals came together to form GMPA. This group has since grown to over 700 individuals from more than 200 organisations plus Local Authorities and MPs and an increasing number of members of the public.

GMPA is based upon principles of cooperation between organisations.

For more information about Greater Manchester Poverty Action

please visit our [website](#), follow us on [Twitter](#) or visit our [Facebook](#) page. You can also visit our YouTube channel [Community Voices](#)

All these platforms are there to share news and opinion from our readers, from GM Poverty Action and from the community.

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

For more information or to share your news please contact [Chris](#)

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

If you would like to contact us or submit an article for inclusion in a newsletter please get in touch in one of the following ways:

Post: c/o 5th Floor Church House, 90 Deansgate, Manchester M3 2GH

Or contact our Communications Manager: Chris Bagley
T: 07419 774537 [Email](#)
and we will reply as soon as possible.

NB GMPA does not have full-time dedicated administrative support so please do not expect an immediate response.

