

## **S2 Food Poverty Network- Newsletter No 11, January 2025**



Welcome to the eleventh newsletter. I make updates every couple of months following our Trustees'/ Managers' meeting.

I begin by repeating a plea made in each newsletter:-

- If you are a regular donor, please send your contact email address to me. Please also indicate whether you would like a personal invitation to see Food Bank at work. My email address is: [jtrhull@outlook.com](mailto:jtrhull@outlook.com)

This plea has already solicited supportive, interesting replies. Several long-standing donors have taken up my invitation to visit Food Bank and Shop and see them in operation. I now send a personal e-copy of this Newsletter to some 30 donors who have made contact.

The Trustees/Managers met in mid-January. I'd like to update you on discussions in our meeting.

### **1. Our rich data**

We keep very good, but simple, data. We use the data to monitor our impact. Here are the key numbers, covering the full year of 2024, which we examined in our meeting.

#### **1a. Incoming food and items to Food Bank and Shop (kilograms)**

**2024:** 14831 donated: 15946 sourced from Fareshare: 43939 purchased:  
Total 74717

There is a difficulty in comparing these 2024 figures with those for 2023. We moved in March 2023 from a norm of 6 weeks access to Food Bank succeeded by 26 weeks in Food Club. Our new model is 4 weeks in Food Bank succeeded by membership of Community Shop. This alters, for good reasons, our take-up of Fareshare and amount of food purchased.

The worrying statistic in comparing 2023 and 2024 is the amount of food donated. This dropped in 2024 to 14831 from 20124 in 2023.

## 1b. Numbers of clients being fed

The numbers below of children and adults “being fed” are calculated by the number of weeks a client comes to Food Bank or Shop and the number of people in their household. Thus a client with a family of 3 coming for 4 weeks counts as 12 “people fed”.

In 2024 we have “fed”:-

	<b>Foodbank</b>	<b>Community Shop</b>	<b>Total Fed</b>
<b>Jan</b>	193	468	661
<b>Feb</b>	229	484	713
<b>March</b>	224	535	759
<b>April</b>	259	699	958
<b>May</b>	255	530	785
<b>June</b>	221	578	799
<b>July</b>	264	702	966
<b>August</b>	154	612	765
<b>September</b>	126	633	759
<b>October</b>	212	741	953
<b>November</b>	204	620	824
<b>December</b>	207	479	686
<b>Xmas meals</b>			189
<b>Totals</b>	2548	7080	9817

Once again, we helped our clients enjoy Christmas in the best traditional ways. Regular clients from Bank and Shop were invited to select the ingredients for a Christmas meal to cook at home. Amounts given reflected family size. Clients collected these selected ingredients in the Christmas week and children met Father Christmas to receive suitable gifts. Older children’s parents were given a present to give later plus wrapping. We thank Irwin Mitchell for donating the present-wrappers and members of Sheffield Fire Cadets who helped sort all the present sets in readiness for collection.

## 2. Reviewing numbers and reasons for referral

We looked closely at the 2024 data. We noted that self-referrals (273) significantly exceeded referrals (194) by a (professional) third party.

We noted the reasons for referral: 168 in debt, 167 with money issues, 10 affected by domestic violence, 20 homeless, 22 recently unemployed, 21 facing delay in benefits, 8 seeking asylum, 2 victims of human trafficking.

We asked about health. 166 declared a mental health issue and 106 declared a physical health issue.

We note ethnicity. 285 identify as White British and 24 as Black British. Additionally, we helped 10 Iranians, 9 Polish, 19 Africans, 5 Russians, 5 Pakistanis, 3 Kurdish, 3 Portuguese, 2 Lithuanians, 2 Afghans, 4 Caribbean, 2 Albanian, 1 Slovak.

### **3. Monitoring our attempts to address causes of food poverty**

We reviewed our developed strategies. A condition of Community Shop membership is that each client explains clearly his/her reasons for food poverty and then agrees, if appropriate, to work with our debt mentors and/or with our benefit worker.

- **Debt Advice:**

We are currently working with 52 clients using the Community Money Advice systems. 15 Debt Relief Orders are now completed.

The 52 live cases show, collectively, a staggering £416,892 of debt. Of that figure we classify £131,588 as “priority debts”. These are debts (gas, electric, rent) which, if left unpaid, carry risk of eviction or disconnection. These must be addressed first.

Including the cases where Debt Relief Orders have been given, 30 cases were closed in 2024. A case closes when a realistic plan to manage remaining debts is agreed. £125,076 of debts from 15 cases were officially “written off”. We are still working on (£150,083) 10 cases.

- **Benefit Worker:**

So far this year, he has pursued the cases of 89 clients. He is looking into their eligibility for Discretionary Housing Payments, Personal Independence Payments, Limited capability for Work allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Council Tax Support and Housing Support Fund.

By end of October he had secured £42,188 in additional benefits.

### **4. Community Shop update**

The Shop is open two days per week. Currently it caters for 71 households.

13 clients left the Shop during 2024: 8 had found extra hours' work, 1 had become more seriously ill, 3 had, thanks to our Benefit Worker, gained improved benefits and had a payment plan agreed to manage remaining debts. Sadly one client was asked to leave after displays of aggression.

## 5. Overview of finances

We are currently in the process of setting the 2025 budget. Our budgeting year aligns with the calendar year. Donations of food are lower now than last year and the number of clients we help is fairly stable.

For the last two years (2023-4) we set deficit budgets. We did not want to “sit on” reserves we had built up during Covid. In 2024 we had spent additionally on equipping and refurbishing the new Community Shop, on expert staffing to secure benefit entitlements, and on supporting other food-related initiatives across our S2 area (“extending our reach”). In retrospect, we believe that we have delivered well on our strategic objectives of better addressing the underlying causes of food poverty in our area.

In the coming months, we know we shall face financial pressures. Food costs rise, National Insurance costs rise, utility costs for Shop and to the Church will rise. Trustees are, however, very clear: we want to safeguard the high quality food offers of Food Bank and Shop.

We have agreed a, more modest, deficit budget for 2025. The Trustees identified several areas for savings.

First, our very good Benefits Worker was employed indirectly from Manor and Castle Development Trust on a Service Level Agreement. We had always intended to learn from his expertise and use it to inform future practice. We have ended the SLA.

We are now training volunteers to cover this work and to make appropriate referrals to the specialist organisations which will help and advocate cases. One volunteer will link with Household Support Fund; two will pursue fuel vouchers. We have a new volunteer with legal background. He will help with Personal Independence Payment claims.

Second, we have discontinued our financial support to Park Community Action. This was always intended as short-term.

Third, we are reviewing our practice on Fuel (Gas/electric) top-up grants to clients in winter months. Instead, we shall carefully sign-post clients to the specialist resources available (Household Support Fund and National Energy Association).

Fourth, we have closely reviewed our (paid) staffing structure. Sadly, this has led to one redundancy. We have set up a trustees' working group to plan and develop the staffing structure.

Fifth, we are focussing now on the costs of running the Community Shop. We know it is key to our ambition of "addressing the underlying causes of S2 food poverty". We know that we have invested extensively and carefully in the Shop.

We have agreed to open dialogue with our (shop) landlords who are Sheffield City Council. We pay £6,000 annual rent. Will they, please, accept a "peppercorn" rent so we can continue our good work?

Further, we have agreed to submit specific funding requests to major, and/or locally based, charitable funds. Two of our trustees (John Le Corney and John Hull) have expertise here. John Hull has made application to the Sheffield Town Trust and to Graves Trust for contributions to our gas/electric (shop) costs. John Le Corney will pursue Lottery fundings and Sheffield Council targeted funds.

My next Newsletter will update you on progress in these areas.

JTRH, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2025.