

## **S2 Food Poverty Network- Newsletter No 9, September 2024**



Welcome to the ninth 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-September. 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 first eight months of this year, which we examined in our meeting.

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

**2024:** 8391 kg donated: 10669 kg sourced from Fareshare: 18691 kg purchased: Total 37752 kg.

**2023:** 11320 kg donated; 11562 kg from Fareshare: 23382 kg purchased: Total: 46264

The somewhat worrying figures here are the reduction in food donations for which we had to compensate by increased purchasing.

#### **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".

From January to August this year 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>Totals</b>	1799	4607	6406

For the same period in 2023, the “Total fed” was 6657.

Another factor makes straight comparison of 2023 and 2024 figures more complicated. During 2023 we decided, given the increased support from the Community Food Shop, to cut the normal period someone stays in the Food Bank from 6 to 4 weeks. We have, therefore, been slightly less busy this year than in 2023.

We are very pleased with the changed balance:-

- In 2023 Food Bank fed 3875 and the Shop fed 2782. This gives a balance of roughly 13/9 of Bank over Shop.
- For the same months in 2024 the balance is reversed (6/15).

This balance reflects the briefer use of Food Bank (which meets emergency need) and the resulting greater use of Food Club (where underlying issues are surfaced and addressed).

## **2. Reviewing numbers and reasons for referral**

We looked closely at the data for January to August 2024. We noted that self-referrals (185) significantly exceeded referrals (136) by a professional.

We noted the reasons for referral: 122 in debt, 114 with money issues, 9 affected by domestic violence, 12 homeless, 11 recently unemployed, 11 facing delay in benefits, 7 seeking asylum.

We asked about health. 118 declared a mental health issue and 75 declared a physical health issue.

We discussed a concern: a few potential clients referred by a professional person do not subsequently appear at Food Bank. We shall contact referrers should this continue.

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

We reviewed our developed strategies. A condition of Community Food 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.

#### **a. Debt Advice:**

We are currently working with 56 clients using the Community Money Advice systems. 13 Debt Relief Orders (DRO) have now been completed.

The CMA model is working well. We have volunteers now trained by CMA as debt mentors. Their findings in each case are uploaded to CMA's website by our specialist in-putter. CMA's experts oversee and direct our actions.

The 56 live cases show, collectively, a staggering £309,013 of debt. Of that figure we classify £117,677 as "priority debts". These are debts (gas, electric, rent) which, if left unpaid, carry risk of eviction or disconnection. These must be addressed first.

So far this year, including the cases where DROs have been given, 24 cases have been closed. A case closes when a realistic plan to manage remaining debts is agreed.

#### **b. 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, Disability Living Allowance, and Housing Support Fund.

By June he had secured £25,489 in additional benefits. In the cases of five clients moving from Food Bank to Community Food Shop, our benefit worker has secured an average £450 uplift to their entitlements.

Steve, the Benefit Worker, has been affected by a now resolved IT connection issue in the shop premises. Numerical data for July-August were not available for our September meeting.

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

The Shop is open two days per week. Currently it caters for 71 households. 10 clients have ceased to use the Community Shop for good reasons. 5 have managed to find additional working hours. 1 is now too ill. 3 now have, thanks to benefit worker, accessed Disability Living Allowance or have agreed a realistic debt repayment plan. Sadly, due to threatening our staff, one client has been taken off our lists.

We have an interesting initiative which we call “premium offers”. A shop client makes a £4 weekly contribution. They then make a guided choice of fresh foods and other supplies, usually to a value (depending on family size) of around £45. If we have suitable “extras” from Fareshare we now offer additional items e.g. breakfast packs for £2.50.

## 5. Overview of finances

As explained in section 1 above, (a) donations of food are lower now than last year and (b) the number of clients we help is fairly stable. Regular readers of these Newsletters will know that our financial position is good. We hold reserves and would be able to cope should there be a renewed cost-of-living crisis.

We have set deficit budgets in 2023 and 2024. At our next (November) meeting we shall again set a deficit budget. These will reduce our reserves by (a) spending additionally on targeted supports such as winter fuel top-ups, (b) enhancing the range of foods offered in the Food Bank and in the Community Food Shop, and (c) “extending our reach”.

There are numerous, smaller food-related charities operating within, and close to, S2. We aim to help them. We offer support (a) to improve/widen their food offer and (b) to address underlying causes of food poverty.

We are supporting by giving advice and funding **Park Community Action (PCA)**. We have made for, initially one year, an agreement to offer fundings. Every three months we review, against agreed success criteria (numbers fed, varieties of food) PCA’s progress.

We know of unmet need in the **Tinsley area**. Jim Steinke, one of our Trustees, has made promising contacts. Tinsley activists have visited S2 to see our practices. We plan to offer advice and support as they are currently pursuing some promising funding lines.

## 6. MP visits

Our catchment area (S1, S2 and a contiguous bit of S12) is now served by two newly elected Members of Parliament. **Louise Haigh** (Heeley), now a Cabinet member, had visited us on several prior occasions. **Abtisam Mohamed** (Central) is newly elected. She replaces the retiring Paul Blomfield who has been a long-term friend of S2 Food Bank.

Both Louise and Abtisam have recently visited to look at both Food Bank and Community Food Shop. They were interested and supportive. They were keen to understand our work in the context of their constituencies. Both agreed to

help and support our appeals for financial and donor support which I shall explain next.

## **7. Simple appeals**

We have adequate reserves. We want to use these resources promptly and effectively to meet emergency need and to address underlying causes of food poverty. That is why, for three financial years in succession, we have set deficit budgets using these additional resources to fund the new Community Food Shop premises and systems, to “extend our reach” and to improve our “food offers” in the Food Bank and Community Food Shop.

On the other hand, we are aware that both current financial donations and, more significantly, donations of food, have fallen of late.

In our September meeting we agreed to make appeal, particularly, to enlist more long-term and frequent donors. As a result, we have posted on our Website the appeal you can read below.

Our Food Bank and Community Food Shop are doing great work. We keep simple, but robust, data recording the number of people receiving food for a week as “total fed”. These numbers are rising. Total number of people fed this year (Jan-Aug): Food Bank 1799 and Community Food Shop 4607.

The Food Bank addresses emergency need while the Food Shop involves membership which is conditional on accepting support to address underlying issues (usually debt or insufficient income).

At present we have adequate financial reserves and are managing. As demand, sadly, increases we worry that these reserves will not last long. Donations of food have reduced significantly. We depend heavily on longstanding donors who have set up regular donations of money and we greatly appreciate this reliable support.

I post a Newsletter on our website every two months informing donors, and interested readers, about our work and progress and keep reminding them how much we value their continuing support.

- If you are not already a donor, please follow the link to [Newsletters](#) on this website
- If you wish to donate, ideally through regular donations, please go to our [Donate](#) page and complete and return the [donation form](#).

Thanks.

John Hull, Chair of Trustees S2 Food Poverty Network

September 2024

JTRH, 21<sup>st</sup> September 2024