



**Community
Foundation**
Tyne & Wear and Northumberland

VitalSigns®



**Food poverty:
how philanthropy can
make a difference**

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"You get those hunger pains. 'I am so hungry. We don't have any food. What are we going to eat?' Your stomach hurts. Then you get so upset and mad, like, no food. You start having tantrums and don't want to do anything. You get mad at everybody because you don't have any food. That's what happens when you don't eat. You are so sluggish."

Ben McLemore, professional basketball player on living with hunger

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Introduction

Our *Vital Signs* reports take the pulse of our region and set out how philanthropy can tackle important issues in our communities. *Vital Signs* rightly provides a broad picture across everything from housing to the arts, reflecting all that matters for community wellbeing. But sometimes there is a need to concentrate attention on an acute concern which cuts across several areas. So, for this first thematic *Vital Signs* report, we are focusing on the serious issue of food poverty, and what philanthropy can do to help address it.

It seems unthinkable that a wealthy nation such as the UK should be facing an unprecedented rise in food poverty. However, the figures are stark – an estimated 8.4 million people now struggle to get enough to eat, including households with people in work, families with children, and older and disabled people.

The Department of Health definition of food poverty focuses on the problems people may have with availability and affordability of food. However, there is still no official measure of food poverty in the UK. The problems we can quantify, such as the 30% increase in malnutrition-related deaths in hospital between 2007 and 2016, may represent the tip of an iceberg.

Despite the difficulties we face in quantifying the scale of the problem, the impact of food poverty on individuals and families is well understood. They may spend a greater percentage of their income on food, but will experience a less varied diet, limited access to nutritional

food, less choice about what to eat, and limited consumption of fruit or vegetables. In the long-term their health and wellbeing suffer.

In North East England, people living in our disadvantaged communities are most vulnerable to food poverty. It is both a cause and effect of the social problems they face. There is increasing evidence that many of the 132,000 children living in poverty in the region will go to school hungry. This affects their ability to concentrate, undermining their potential to attain the qualifications needed to escape the “poverty trap” of life on benefits or low-paid, insecure employment.

With foodbanks now so visible, there is growing awareness of the existence of food poverty. However, the reasons why people end up in this situation are less well understood by the public. This can lead to those in food poverty being stigmatised, exacerbating isolation and low self-esteem and limiting take-up of services.

We hope this *Vital Signs* report will promote a better understanding of food poverty by setting out what is known about its causes and effects and describing some of the work that is being done in communities to tackle the problem. We also want it to be a call to action for more philanthropic efforts to help people experiencing food poverty and to better address its causes.

Rob Williamson,
Chief Executive

Executive summary

People in food poverty are unable to afford to eat properly. Food poverty is increasing in the UK, and as many as 4m children now live in households that cannot afford a healthy diet. A major cause of this is that income from low-paid work or benefits is not keeping up with the cost of food and fuel.

In many poorer or more isolated areas – termed “food deserts” – the problem is compounded by problems with the local availability of good quality, affordable food.

The North East is particularly vulnerable to a rise in food poverty. It has a relatively weak regional economy characterised by a predominance of low paid employment. Levels of benefit dependency are high, partially as a result of high unemployment but also reflecting an ageing population and high rates of disability. The prevalence of deprived urban communities, and isolated rural settlements, suggest restricted access to affordable, good quality food will exacerbate the problem. It is perhaps unsurprising, against this backdrop, that the number of food parcels distributed by Trussell Trust foodbanks in the North East is on the rise.

For the 132,000 children living in poverty in the North East and their families the school holidays can be a time when the amount and quality of food is dramatically reduced due to the loss of free school meals. This exacerbates the educational attainment gap between poor children and their more affluent peers and has long term effects on life chances. Older,

vulnerable and disabled people are also at particular risk from food poverty.

Community and voluntary organisations – often working in partnership with local government and the food industry - are mobilising to tackle the problem of food poverty. The growing visibility of foodbanks is symptomatic of this, but there are also many other types of service here in the North East that are working to address the problem.

We have identified 3 areas where philanthropy can make a real contribution to this work:

- supporting the costs of service delivery, notably those associated with coordinating provision and covering projects’ core expenditure;
- funding provision to help children at risk of “holiday hunger”, particularly over the Summer;
- supporting work to address the causes of the problem; promote good practice and develop partnerships between agencies so that food poverty does not become entrenched in our region.

The rise of food poverty

There is growing evidence to show that food poverty is increasing in the UK, impacting significantly on some of the most vulnerable members of our society.

Professor Philip Alston, the special rapporteur on extreme poverty for the United Nations, spent 12 days visiting parts of the UK in November 2018. He stated that despite ours being one of the world's richest countries, he had encountered "misery" and "staggering" levels of child poverty here.¹

According to the Food Foundation think-tank, almost 4 million children in the UK are now estimated to live in households that would struggle to afford to buy enough fruit, vegetables and other healthy foods to meet official nutritional guidelines². Recent reports have highlighted parents going without food, so their children can eat, and how individuals are having to choose between heating their home or eating. Single parents – often working part-time with childcare costs to meet or dependent on benefits - are a group at particular risk.

There is a range of evidence to show that people are spending more on food but eating less, and lower amounts of nutritional food. This is perhaps unsurprising given that the poorest 20%

of households have to spend a much greater proportion (42%) of their disposable income, after housing costs, to afford the Government's recommended diet³

The causes of food poverty are complex and multifaceted. However, at their heart is a growing gap between income from work or benefits and the rising cost of living (e.g. food, fuel and housing costs).

One of the most vulnerable groups are those in poorly paid, part-time and seasonal employment or on zero hours contracts. This includes many working in the private sector, including food production and retail. However, there is evidence that some public sector workers, including benefit advisers, teachers and NHS staff are also accessing services like foodbanks.

For those unable to work, benefit levels have not kept pace with the cost of living. There is also considerable evidence that the problems of some individuals and families have been made worse by recent changes to the benefits system. Universal Credit, which for people of working-age merges six different benefits into one payment, is received by 1 in 33 people in North East England. This is one of the highest levels in the UK. An analysis of the overall impact of the new benefit found that it resulted in an average loss of £12⁵. Key aspects of the benefit's administration

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-46236642>
² <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/sep/05/four-million-uk-children-too-poor-to-have-a-healthy-diet-study-finds>

³ See for example <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/07/YouGov-poll-on->

[Holiday-Hunger.pdf](#) and <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/SPERI-Brief-19-Heating-or-Eating-and-the-impact-of-austerity.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/>

⁵ http://policyinpractice.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Autumn-Budget-report_0811.pdf

have also been problematic for those dependent on it. Built-in payment delays, along with a significant increase in the number of claimants having benefits sanctioned⁶, have the potential to plunge households into extreme crisis. Benefit delays and changes account for over 40% of the referrals to foodbanks recorded by the Trussell Trust in 2018.

Finally mention should be made of the substantial number of people seeking asylum seeker status who, whilst forbidden to work, have no entitlement to benefits.

People on low incomes can be very resourceful in coping with the challenges of feeding themselves and their families. They may be able to just about manage with help from family, friends or by accruing debt often at high levels of interest. However, the simplest of life events – a day's lost work, a benefit sanction or replacing a broken washing machine – can be disastrous and lead to serious problems with keeping themselves fed.

Some sense of the scale of the growth of food poverty in the UK is indicated by the increase in foodbank use. The Trussell Trust is a national charity supporting foodbanks across the UK. In 2017-2018, 1.3 million packages of emergency food supplies were given out in the UK through its foodbank network, up from 41,000 in 2009. Data from the Trust also gives some indication of the factors fueling the rise. Half of the Trust's emergency packages went to households including a disabled

person, three quarters to people experiencing ill-health and associated financial insecurity, a third to households experiencing problems repaying debt, and a quarter to households reporting that rising costs – such as housing – meant they had simply run out of money to buy food.

The very availability of food is also an issue. The number and variety of food retailers in poorer areas and isolated rural communities has declined. The effect is the creation of so-called "food deserts" where residents must either spend more to travel to access food, or rely on the limited, less nutritious and relatively expensive foods available locally. It is estimated that more than a million people in the UK now live in such areas.⁷

It should be said, in conclusion, that the problem is not an overall shortage of food. Ironically, given all the above issues, there is a mountain of perfectly useable produce put into landfill every day in the UK.⁸

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<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2018/august/universal-credit-sanctions-more-double-esa-and-isa>

⁷<http://www.smf.co.uk/publications/barriers-eating-healthily-uk/>

⁸<https://fareshare.org.uk/what-we-do/hunger-food-waste/>

The North East picture

North East England is likely to face an increasing problem with food poverty.

Our region has some long-term economic weaknesses and it is unlikely that this situation will improve in the medium term, with government estimating that our productivity will fall further than that of any other UK region in the 15 years following Brexit. The current prevalence of low paid employment, and high rates of unemployment and benefit dependence, are therefore likely to endure. Levels of consumer debt may also remain relatively high in the North East. These factors, as we have seen above, underpin individuals' and families' vulnerability to food poverty.

Our *Vital Signs* 2017 research for North East England further shows that there are heavy concentrations of poverty and disadvantage in urban communities across the region, whilst in rural Northumberland, County Durham and Tees Valley access to food retailers is limited⁹. We have seen how these factors may fuel the growth of food deserts.

The current scale of the problem cannot be exactly quantified in the absence of a recognised measure of food poverty. But it is worth setting out what is currently known about general levels of deprivation in our region, and the extent of food poverty in particular.

The ranking for income deprivation in the North East is high, with the whole of Tyne & Wear in the top 30% for deprivation.

⁹

<https://www.communityfoundation.org.uk/vitalsigns/>

Newcastle, Sunderland and South Tyneside have particularly heavy concentrations, reflected in a higher rank for neighbourhoods in the most deprived 10% nationally.

According to the North East Child Poverty Commission, 1 in 4 children are living in poverty across the region. There are even higher levels locally. All parts of the North East have wards with child poverty rates of 40%, but in Newcastle and Middlesbrough over half of local children may be in this position.¹⁰

"In those months... it was just about surviving, for the kids, making sure there was enough gas and electric for the girls. When they were not here, when they were with their dad, I was not bothering about me. I was cutting back on heating and food. There have been days when I have not eaten. It's been really hard."

North East mother-of-two on losing her benefits, quoted by End Hunger UK

Poverty is perhaps most readily identifiable in urban areas, but in rural areas of the North East it can be hidden within communities and is often found in close proximity to relative prosperity. Access to transport, paying the 'rural premium' – higher fuel, heating, travel costs and costs of items in local shops – the lack of services, and lack of access to

¹⁰ <https://www.nechildpoverty.org.uk/about-child-poverty>

good quality digital services, all compound the issue of poverty in rural areas.

The region's continuing economic difficulties, combined with recent reductions in funding for public services and changes to the benefits system, have made life ever harder for those in poverty in the North East. The challenges are amplified for people socially isolated through age, family breakdown, gender, ethnicity, disability or sexuality.

Against this backdrop of widespread deprivation, there are clear signs that food poverty in particular is on the increase. Data on foodbank use is a useful indicator, although it tends to underestimate the scale of the problem due to access issues. Trussell Trust figures for the North East indicate that in 2017-18, 64,209 emergency three-day food supply parcels were given out at Trussell Trust foodbanks.¹¹

Sub-regionally there is also evidence of growing demand. In Northumberland, the **Wansbeck Valley Foodbank**¹² now provides 45,000 meals a year, whilst West Northumberland Foodbank had over 2,000 requests for support in 2016-17.

Newcastle West End Foodbank¹³ is reportedly the UK's biggest. In South Tyneside local groups report that the need for food parcels has increased steadily for the past 10 years. In County Durham, **Durham Christian Partnership**¹⁵ now runs 28 foodbanks. It reports that 16,000 people were fed with their food parcels in 2016-17. And the problem is not restricted

to the poorest urban areas. According to data from Northumberland County Council's Poverty lead, for example, rural foodbanks are providing approximately 440 emergency food parcels per month compared to 340 emergency food parcels from urban foodbanks. In Tees Valley, **Hartlepool Foodbank**¹⁶ opened in 2012, and by the end of 2015 was providing 2,068 3-day emergency food packs. It now regularly supports around 150 people every week with emergency food and signposting to other agencies in the town to help them through their crisis.

We have found it harder to find firm evidence on the growth of "food deserts" in the North East. A study of residents' access to food retail outlets in County Durham in 2015, however, did find that *"financial constraints and transport inconvenience were identified as barriers. Difficulties with food shopping were more widely described in focus groups, and many individuals felt that local shopping provision had declined, with an emergent excess of takeaway outlets. Food retail access was reduced for the disabled, full-time workers, elderly people, and people with children"*. It paints a picture that any informed observer visiting inner city Sunderland or Middlesbrough, or the villages of County Durham and Northumberland is likely to recognise¹⁷.

Food poverty and poor health are of course inextricably linked. There is data to show that the North East has some of the worst rates of childhood and adult obesity

¹¹ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/>

¹² <https://wansbeckvalleyfoodbank.org/>

¹³ <https://newcastlewestend.foodbank.org.uk/>

¹⁴ <https://gateshead.foodbank.org.uk/>

¹⁵ <http://www.durhamcp.org.uk/>

¹⁶ <https://hartlepool.foodbank.org.uk/>

¹⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26312892>

levels in England: 27% of its population are classed as obese, and a further 41.5% overweight.

The link between obesity and food poverty may appear counter-intuitive. But there is a clear mechanism whereby, for children, the effects of poor diet are compounded by lower levels of physical activity. For a child whose diet may be determined by what is available cheaply in the local

"...in the face of having little to spend, households prioritise purchasing foods that will not go to waste and that are most filling. Often this means a reliance on cheap foods that are nutrient-poor but calorie-rich."

End Hunger UK

convenience store, and who may be deterred from outdoor play by traffic or a lack of safe public spaces, there is clearly a greater risk of becoming overweight.

Paradoxically, alongside the obesity epidemic, there is also evidence of a rise in malnutrition both nationally and regionally since 2007. Malnutrition due to food poverty amongst older and disabled people may be something of a hidden problem. Estimates suggest 1.3 million people over 65 suffer from malnutrition, and the vast majority (93%) live in the community, whilst families with a disabled member are heavily over represented

amongst foodbank users¹⁸. In 2015, 37% of older people admitted to hospital in Gateshead were malnourished. The problem is compounded by cuts in social services. For example, whereas the Meals on Wheels service once provided a vital daily nutritious meal as well as social contact for individuals, few councils in North East England now provide it.

Another area where we have compelling evidence on food poverty in the North East relates to its impact on children and their families. Northumbria University research, commissioned by the North East Child Poverty Trust and Children North East, examined "holiday hunger": the impact on children and their families of the loss of free school meals during the school holidays. It suggests that this extends far beyond the lifelong impact of an insufficient diet in childhood which include growth failure and delayed physical, intellectual and behavioural development. School holidays, for a child in food poverty, may well be a time when:

- food becomes less varied and nutritious;
- stresses within the family increase;
- contact with peers and other social and educational opportunities diminish and
- physical health declines.

The report cites anecdotal evidence from North East schools of children returning malnourished after the holidays. They also note that, as well as being a time of diminished quality of life, the holidays are

¹⁸ See <http://www.malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk> and Rachel Loopstra & Doireann Lalor (2017) Financial insecurity, food insecurity, and disability: the profile of people

receiving emergency food assistance from The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network in Britain

typically a time when poorer children fall further behind their more affluent and well-nourished peers. The report highlights the potential of summer activity schemes - which combine educational

and friendship. People living on restricted and limited budgets have learned how simple and nutritious one pot cooking can be.'

"When my mum's got the money then we can get snacks. Its 25 pence per item. We don't get snacks if it's a bad week. Sometimes we're hungry."

Young person interviewed by the Children's Commission on Poverty

opportunities, physical activities and food provision – to prevent what has been termed "holiday learning loss". This is the loss of educational attainment among poorer children over the holidays.¹⁹

We also have evidence that activity programmes for vulnerable adults and older people can also help lessen the impact of food poverty. For example, with support from the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation, **Full Circle Food Project**²⁰ were funded to run their 'Cook Well, Eat Well' project for 31 elderly and vulnerable adults in Ashington. The project specifically aimed at teaching participants how to grow, cook and eat healthily on a budget. By the end of the project, a wide range of benefits were identified: *'people living with dementia who attended the sessions regained kitchen confidence. Isolated individuals discovered community*

¹⁹ Defeyter, Stretesky, Sattar & Crilley (2018) Evaluation of 'A Day Out, Not a Handout' Holiday Provision Programme

²⁰ <http://www.fullcirclefoodproject.org.uk/>



Tackling food poverty

Across the UK, and here in the North East, a raft of emergency food aid schemes have sprung up to provide for those experiencing food poverty. Community and voluntary groups are often at the heart of efforts to help those who face a shortage of food, frequently working in close partnership with private businesses and local authority services.

Against the background of welfare benefit reform and reductions in public expenditure, it is argued by many that such initiatives are unfairly being relied upon to respond to people in crisis whilst the root causes of food poverty are not addressed. Others see developments simply as a laudable example of

communities mobilizing to address the needs of local people in distress.

To many of those experiencing hunger, however, such arguments may not be a primary concern. As the broader debate about the balance of responsibilities between the state and civil society is played out, there is clearly a need to address the problem in practical ways. Philanthropy has a key supportive role to play here, and already civil society organisations are mobilising with the support of charitable funders.

Foodbanks, linked to the Trussell Trust²¹ or independent local charities, have now become a common and established feature of communities. Foodbanks

²¹ <https://www.trusselltrust.org/>

²² <http://www.durhamcp.org.uk/>

provide a three-day emergency food package, often with a limit to how many times you can go, or how often you need to be referred by a relevant agency. The result is that many foodbanks act as sources of short-term emergency relief, rather than meeting the needs of people in long-term difficulties.

The challenge of managing fresh foods is beyond the capacity of many foodbanks, so they tend to focus on non-perishable goods like canned foods, rice, pasta and UHT fruit juice or milk. As such they provide the basics, rather than the range and variety of foods that many of us may regard as central to a varied or appetising diet. They also require some ability to plan and cook meals, as well as a fuel supply for cooking: the absence of which may necessitate further support. In addition there are issues around providing for the dietary requirements of those with health conditions (e.g. Coeliac disease) and minorities such as the Jewish and Muslim communities.

There are also emotional barriers to using foodbanks, due to the stigma associated with this type of service, and not everyone who is food insecure will use them. In addition, there can be accessibility issues for those with limited mobility. This creates a group of 'hidden hungry', whose existence may go unrecorded, that may turn to family, neighbours or friends for meals, or simply go without.

Small amounts of philanthropic funding can be a big help in supporting the voluntary efforts of people involved in foodbanks. **Gateshead Foodbank**²⁴, for example, relies on a team of volunteers to



run drop-in sessions and a delivery service to housebound, elderly and hard-to-reach beneficiaries. A grant of just £5,000 from the North 150 Fund at the Community Foundation allowed them to purchase a delivery vehicle, enabling the group to collect and distribute more food to those in need.

Foodbanks often act as hubs for advice, support and signposting, and training. Volunteers or advisors from other organisations may use them as a base for providing debt and energy advice, encouraging greater uptake of what is already available in terms of entitlements, courses around cooking on a budget and with volunteers trained in debt advice and welfare support. In this way they do have at least some potential to enable the root causes of food poverty to be addressed.

As we have seen, the life chances of children are severely affected by food poverty. **Free school meals** are an important form of provision, but not all of those in food poverty access them. Many children in food poverty are not eligible, whilst those who are entitled do not always access them. It is also worth remembering that with most contractors paid £1.90 a day, the quality of such meals

²³ <https://durham.foodbank.org.uk/>

²⁴ <https://gateshead.foodbank.org.uk/>

is highly constrained. Yet they may be the only proper meal a child will get. There is ample evidence of children arriving at school hungry, having not eaten since lunchtime the previous day. **Breakfast Clubs** – most notably in the North East through the Greggs Foundation Breakfast Club scheme²⁵ – and after school clubs are an important additional form of provision that can help ensure children receive more than just one hot meal a day.

Of course, free school meals are only provided in term-time. **Holiday programmes** for young people offer a huge range of benefits, but one of the most important is to address the needs of children who suffer “holiday hunger” when they are unavailable.

For some older, disabled and vulnerable adults in food poverty **meals on wheels** is an important if increasingly rare source of support. A range of alternative provision has gone some way to fill the gap as provision has been cut, ranging from neighbourhood-based **luncheon clubs for elderly residents** to **food delivery schemes** run by foodbanks. All help to provide food, as well as human contact for those who are in or risk facing, food crisis.

A good urban example is the **Cedarwood Trust**,²⁶ based in the Meadow Well, North Tyneside an area of high disadvantage. Its ‘Elders, Exercise and Eat!’ project, supported by the Community Foundation, reaches out to residents aged over 55 offering both meals and support with

healthy eating. In rural Northumberland, **Northumberland CAN**²⁷ are supporting the development of **Warm Hubs**²⁸ which are places within the local community where people can be assured of finding a safe, warm and friendly environment in which to enjoy refreshments, social activity, information and advice as well as the company of other people.

As a result of partnership working between the food industry and civil society organisations, there has also been a surge in **food redistribution** to tackle both food waste and hunger. Collecting good surplus food from major supermarkets and redistributing this across community settings has helped to reduce the amount of perfectly useable food going to landfill. Indeed, it has been described as the most environmentally friendly way of disposing of waste food.²⁹ North East business Greggs reports having increased their donations of unsold food sixteen-fold since 2013.

Organisations such as **FareShare**, help to collect and redistribute items. Produce varies across different retailers, but can include bakery items, fruit and vegetables and dairy products. These items often help to provide fresh items for Foodbanks to supplement the non-perishable food parcels, where they have adequate storage facilities to take the items. However, collection of the end-of-day products requires a lot of coordination, often relying on volunteers to collect items at an unsociable hour. The willingness and

²⁵ <https://www.greggsfoundation.org.uk/breakfast-clubs>

²⁶ <https://www.cedarwoodtrust.co.uk/>

²⁷ <http://www.ca-north.org.uk/>

²⁸ <http://www.ca-north.org.uk/supporting-individuals/warm-hub-project>

²⁹ For a discussion of the food industries role see Food Ethics Council (2014) *Below the Breadline? Beyond Reach?*

³⁰ <http://www.fullcirclefoodproject.org.uk/>

ability of retailers to be involved, and what they can supply, varies greatly in different areas. Nevertheless, **FareShare North East**³¹ provides food for over 650,000 meals in the region, saving a staggering 270 tonnes of food from going to waste.



A number of community initiatives operate as social enterprises, combining a commitment to social goals around food poverty with commercial acumen to create sustainable solutions. **Community cafés and restaurants** for example, may operate commercially whilst either subsidising the cost of the food they serve or providing separate services around improving people's awareness of healthy eating and ability to cook. Newcastle's Harissa Mediterranean Kitchen, for example, is a quality restaurant and takeaway linked to **Food Nation**³², providing food education for individuals, schools and businesses in

Newcastle, Gateshead and the surrounding area. In Gateshead the Cosy Crow café is operated by **Gateshead Older People's Assembly**³³ on a "pay-as-you-can" basis. Similarly, **community shops and supermarkets** can help both to address the problem of food deserts whilst providing affordable food for those in food poverty. The **Magic Hat Café**³⁴ for example operates a supermarket in Byker, Newcastle redistributing surplus food on a 'pay-as-you-feel' basis.

A commitment to increasing local people's awareness of food, and how it can be produced locally, has fueled a surge in local food growing projects. **Community allotments and food growing projects** can provide local people with the means, skills and confidence to grow their own food, and benefit from fresh nutritious produce. These are also a great way to engage young people. 1st Wallsend Girls Brigade for example used a grant of £1,900 from the Community Foundation Local Environmental Action Fund to help it take on a disused allotment to support badge-work on healthy eating.

Finally, there is work around **increasing the take up of entitlements**. Foodbanks often provide this type of service. **West Northumberland Foodbank**³⁵ for example uses charitable funding for its Welfare Advice Advocacy service whilst **Hartlepool Foodbank** offers a Community Money Advice scheme. It is also undertaken by many community and voluntary organisations, as well as by specialist agencies such as the Citizens'

³¹ <https://fareshare.org.uk/fareshare-centres/north-east/>

³² <https://www.foodnation.org/>

³³ <http://www.gatesheadopa.org.uk/>

³⁴ <https://www.themagichatcafe.co.uk/>

³⁵

<https://www.westnorthumberlandfoodbank.org.uk/>

Advice Bureau. The work involves supporting claimants in difficulty, maximising benefits, improving access to free school meals and Healthy Start Vouchers, and encouraging the use of local Children's Centres.

All this good work notwithstanding, tackling the problem of food poverty will require action at government level. This could involve both ensuring that social policies do not exacerbate the problem and being more proactive in addressing its root causes. Charities locally and nationally play an important and legitimate role in evidence gathering and campaigning in this area.

Inevitably some of the debate around food poverty is politically charged, but the engagement of charities helps anchor it to the practical challenge of keeping people fed. In a recent letter to the Guardian a group of academics and campaigners expressed concern about the normalisation of foodbanks as a means to *"benefit the reputations of Big Food and supermarket chains as good corporate citizens while distracting attention away from low wages paid to their workers"*. Whatever the merits of this argument, the response of **FareShare** chief executive, Lindsay Boswell was robust in its focus on the practical challenges of meeting need: *"The real scandal, and the academics and others would be more useful if they focused on this, is that only 6% of the food that is fit for human consumption and is surplus is diverted to organisations like FareShare."*

Campaigns against food poverty have had some notable practical successes. For example, **End Hunger UK**³⁶ has persuaded the Department for Work and Pensions to include household food insecurity measurement questions in its annual household survey from 2019 and continues to push for reforms of Universal Credit.

In 2013, Frank Field MP and the **All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Hunger** launched an investigation into the scale and causes of hunger in the UK, which led to the first **Feeding Britain** report.³⁷ Subsequently, in 2015, the charity Feeding Britain was set up to take action on the root causes of hunger in local communities, establishing local pilots of cross sector working. In South Shields this has included initiatives in conjunction with local churches to develop holiday food and fun clubs for young people, a community shop and support for foodbanks to enable the provision of fresh food. The learning from these pilots is helping to inform further action, particularly as local councils develop action plans to tackle food poverty in their localities, strategically mapping availability and developing referral systems. North East MPs have also been involved in the **Parliamentary Inquiry into Children's Future Food**, whose work is supported by the **Food Foundation**³⁸. As part of its work, in April 2019, a report on the experience of 300 children across the UK, including in Byker, Newcastle was published. This highlighted the pervasive nature of food poverty within communities.

³⁶ <http://endhungeruk.org/>

³⁷ <https://www.feedingbritain.org/>

³⁸ <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/childrens-future-food-inquiry/>

Other recent campaigns in Westminster have focused on lobbying for the use of the “sugar tax” – estimated to bring in £308m a year – to support local authorities to provide playschemes for children on free school meals. This would cover some, if not all, of the cost of such provision.

To this national work should be added the multi-agency networks that work regionally and locally to understand, combat and raise awareness of the issue of food poverty. Above we have discussed the work of **The North East Child Poverty Trust** which was set up in 2014, to drive fundraising activity in support of local and regional projects which address child poverty. This work has focused on research, work with young people and shaping services for families in poverty. The Trust is also a route for young people to engage with and influence policy makers within and beyond the North East.

At a more local level **Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service**³⁹ has produced a report on Food Poverty which outlines the situation on its patch, explains how local organisations are responding to food poverty and highlights the work of networks such as the **Newcastle Food Poverty Group** to support, encourage and develop innovative local policy responses to help people experiencing or at risk of food poverty. The latter includes practical work on holiday hunger, local food projects, income maximisation and ensuring the voices of those in food poverty are heard. Similar groups are contactable via **Middlesbrough Environment City, Hartlepool Food Network** and **Catalyst** in Stockton and all are supported by **Food Power** a project of

Sustain⁴⁰, the alliance for better food and farming.

³⁹ <https://www.cvsnewcastle.org.uk/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.sustainweb.org/foodpower/>



Three ways philanthropy can make a difference

1. Supporting community initiatives to combat food poverty

Philanthropy can go a long way to help ensure that the generosity of local people who give to foodbanks, or work tirelessly as volunteers, has maximum impact. Relatively modest contributions from donors and grant-makers can support running costs, volunteer training and the costs of storing and distributing food.

Philanthropy can also help ensure that local provision is as efficient as possible. Whilst the rapid growth of foodbanks can mean that provision is uncoordinated and patchy, charitable funding can help secure a more coordinated approach.

The **Durham Christian Partnership**⁴¹ supports a number of projects including the **County Durham Foodbank**⁴², which it has operated since 2011. The foodbank has 28 distribution points and provides enough food to feed over 16,500 people for three days.

"The grant enabled the project to get started and has been critical at this early stage..."

Durham Christian Partnership

In 2017 they were awarded a grant from The Guy Readman Endowment Fund at the Community Foundation, which was used as a contribution towards the salary of a Coordinator at the Sunderland Foodbank Network. This grant allowed them to establish nine distribution points with a further four being identified. They've also

⁴¹ <http://www.durhamcp.org.uk/>

⁴² <https://durham.foodbank.org.uk/>

brought on board fifty referrers to help support the flow of people to the foodbank. But the big success was the food store on Coronation Street opening in January 2018, a store which now holds ten tonnes of food, available to those in need. Food store supplies have become more reliable and they can cope with surges in demand and permanent food collection points have been established. For the first time, they have begun to build a more accurate picture of need and support and the **Sunderland Connect Network**⁴³ has facilitated relationship building towards future partnership working.

Although highly significant, foodbanks are not a panacea. In this report we have given just a few examples of the range of other initiatives that are springing up locally to help address food poverty. We think all are worthy of philanthropic support.

A big role for philanthropy can be to help with core costs. If an organisation is financially secure they have more time to focus on service delivery. It also makes it easier to recruit, retain and develop their paid and voluntary workforce. At the Community Foundation we are increasingly focusing on identifying groups who, if given this type of funding, can be trusted to get on with the job.

Funding the basics may lack the excitement of supporting the development of an innovative new project. But it can be hugely important. **Footprints in the Community**⁴⁴ based in Redcar and

East Cleveland provides a variety of great services under one umbrella to help address isolation and poverty in and around Redcar and East Cleveland. As well as managing Redcar Area Foodbank it provides a range of services including an affordable café; a food redistribution scheme and packed lunches for children during August. Whilst its trustees have secured a level of funding to enable them to plan and deliver these services, they recognise that funding insecurity is the biggest risk facing their charity.

2. Giving disadvantaged children a decent summer holiday

Children experiencing disadvantage and their families often struggle to make ends meet, to eat healthily and to take part in stimulating activities and trips during school holidays. The loss of free school meals and breakfast club provision has a major impact, particularly in the long summer holiday, with reports of children returning to school malnourished.

"When comparing food secure and insecure households, food insecure households benefited the most from sending their children to holiday clubs"

Long et al, Health and Social Care in the Community

There is much evidence to suggest that holiday schemes can make a huge difference, particularly those combining

⁴³ <https://www.facebook.com/sunderlandconnectnetwork/>

⁴⁴ <http://www.footprintsinthecommunity.co.uk/>

food with educational and physical activities.⁴⁵ However, funding for this type of youth work has dried up in response to reductions in local authority funding since 2010. A funding shortage seems also to have impacted on the duration and quality of schemes, with budgets for food activities a relatively easy target for cuts.

"There is a need for strategic approach to address food insecurity in the UK, which should include monitoring and addressing the root social and economic drivers of this problem."

Rachel Loopstra, British Medical Journal

The North East Child Poverty Trust have undertaken a survey of the holiday provision that ran in Summer 2018. The good news is that 117 schemes were due to take place across the North East, mainly run by charities, community organisations and faith groups. However, provision was patchy, and many schemes seem to have been fairly limited in duration, falling below the "4 hours a day, 4 days per week, 4 weeks over the Summer holidays" minimum that Northumbria University found impacts significantly on children's health, nutrition and wellbeing.

With many schemes running for under £5,000, and not providing a lunch for attendees, there is a case for philanthropic support to bring a wider range of more substantial provision into being. Our view

is that the focus should be on also enabling all schemes to meet the minimum standards for provision set out by the North East Child Poverty Trust and its partners⁴⁶.

3. Getting ahead of the problem

Donors and grant-makers should also consider how they might use their knowledge and philanthropic resources to better support work that tackles the causes of food poverty and its most detrimental effects.

Food poverty should not be a party-political issue, and so there is a strong case for supporting the campaigning work that is taking place nationally, regionally and locally.

Much of this is focused on encouraging government to increase food provision for the poorest children out of term time, so offering them a fighting chance of fulfilling their academic potential. The long-term consequences of failing to do so, in terms of the quality of life and prosperity of North East England, will impact on us all.

In relation to improving provision, we know that North East voluntary sector organisations in those areas where food poverty is rife, have faced the heaviest losses of funding. Philanthropy can help do something to address this growing funding gap.

Donors and grant-makers could also use their influence and resources to improve the quality of provision. Encouraging best

⁴⁵ Long, M., Stretesky, P., Graham, P., Palmer, K., Steinbock, E., & Defeyter, M. (2018). The impact of holiday clubs on household food insecurity—A

pilot study. *Health & social care in the community*, 26(2).

⁴⁶ NECPT (2018) Your Holiday Club Toolkit

practice, for example by raising the nutritional value of foodbank parcels in line with the dietary standards applied to the general population, or signposting applicants to the North East Child Poverty Trust guidelines on holiday clubs for children⁴⁷, is one option. Funding for capacity building activity, such as trustee, staff and volunteer training, is another. Also important is funding that can be used to expand provision to provide a more holistic approach, for example by developing the capacity of foodbanks to provide fresh foods or help with the benefits and debt problems that may underpin users' food poverty.

The degree of partnership between groups working on food poverty varies significantly across the region, and it is fair to say that everyone we have spoken to identified a need for improvement. Whilst examples of good practice we have cited such as the work of Food Power in Newcastle, provide evidence of the impact of such an approach, their success requires that community and voluntary sector partners invest staff time in planning and implementing joint initiatives. Our research highlighted that for many organisations, need is so immediate and great, and the imperative to secure funds so pressing, that there is very little time to really take stock, build networks and look at longer term planning. Dedicated philanthropic funding for partnership working and help with core costs to free up time from fundraising activity, could do much to address this problem.

⁴⁷ <https://www.children-ne.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=c0d4657a-de2a-4253-9e11-3d86773e8873>

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- Pg. 11 – photo courtesy of Ouseburn Farm.
- Pg. 14 – courtesy of Community Foundation Tyne & Wear and Northumberland.
- Pg. 17 – photo courtesy of Byker Aspire.

The views expressed in this report are, however, our own and not necessarily reflective of those held by the individuals or agencies we have consulted.

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