



Briefing for debate on foodbanks

Trussell Trust foodbanks provide three days' nutritionally-balanced emergency food and support to people in crisis. Over 90% of the food given out by foodbanks is donated by the public. Every foodbank recipient is referred by a frontline professional such as a doctor, social worker or school liaison officer. Foodbanks also refer recipients to other agencies to help resolve the underlying cause of the crisis.

Key facts

- Over 500,000 people have received three days' emergency food assistance from a Trussell Trust foodbank since April 2013. This is significantly more than the total number helped in the entire 2012-13 financial year (346,992 people).
- One third of those helped are children.
- Two new Trussell Trust foodbanks are currently launching every week, compared to three a week in 2012-13 financial year.
- The Trussell Trust has launched over 400 foodbanks which operate over 1,000 food distribution centres in the UK. The Trussell Trust runs a social franchise that partners with churches and communities to open foodbanks.
- Less than 5% of foodbank clients are homeless. Many are working families struggling to make ends meet.
- Foodbanks prevent housing loss, crime, debt, mental health issues, family breakdown, suicide and children being taken into care.

What is The Trussell Trust calling for?

Recently, numbers referred to Trussell Trust foodbanks have increased significantly. Reasons for this include rising food and fuel prices combined with static incomes, insecure work and changes to benefits. The Trussell Trust is pressing for an official inquiry into the in-depth causes of food poverty and the rise in usage of foodbanks.

The Trussell Trust supports the call of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger and Food Poverty to publish the official report into the growth of foodbanks in the UK which was delivered to the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs in June 2013.

Why do people come to the foodbanks?

Over 23,000 frontline professionals such as doctors, social workers and school liaison officers are now referring their clients. Between April - December 2013 reasons for referrals included the following:

- Homelessness - 4%;
- Benefit delay - 34%;
- Low income - 18%;
- Benefit changes - 19%

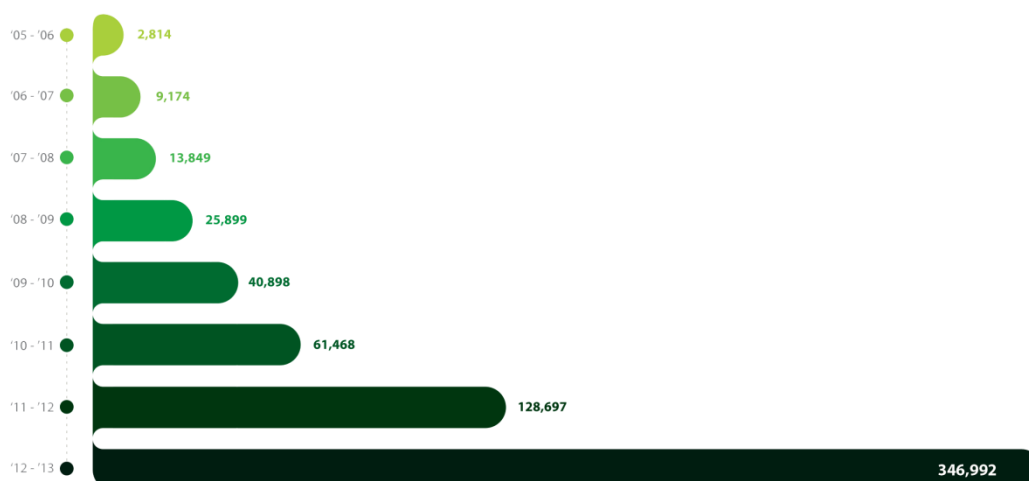
Other reasons included domestic violence, sickness, refused short term benefit advance, debt and unemployment. The majority of people were working age families.

Since April's welfare reforms we've seen proportionately more people referred to foodbanks because of benefit delays or changes. We've also seen more people turning to us who have been sanctioned for seemingly illogical reasons and we're helping people who cannot afford the spare room subsidy but are unable to move house.

- 1 in 5 mums in the UK regularly skip meals to feed their children.
- Over 50% of children living in poverty in the UK are from working households and many of the people helped by foodbanks are in work.
- 13 million people are living below the poverty line in the UK.

How is Trussell Trust data collected?

Trussell Trust foodbanks operate a voucher system, which means every client is given a voucher by the referral agency that includes data such as the number of adults and children in need of emergency food, the main reason for the referral e.g. benefit delay, and optional demographic data such as ethnicity and age. Each foodbank inputs this data into an online data collection system. The Trussell Trust is therefore able to generate nationwide statistics.



Is the growth in foodbank use simply a question of 'supply and demand'?

Everyone who comes to a Trussell Trust foodbank is referred by a frontline organisation: people cannot just arrive asking for free food. Over 50% of referral agents are statutory agencies and referrers include doctors, social workers, school liaison officers and Citizen Advice Bureau advisers, amongst others. These professionals assess the need and make sure that people turning to foodbanks are in genuine crisis.

Are numbers of people helped by foodbanks only growing because more foodbanks are opening?

The number of people receiving emergency food is disproportionately higher than the number of new foodbanks opening: in 2012-13 numbers helped by foodbanks increased by 170% whilst there was only a 76% increase in new foodbanks opening. Currently, numbers of people helped by foodbanks is still increasing rapidly whilst the rate of new foodbanks opening has slowed from three per week to two per week since April.

How many times can people be helped?

Trussell Trust foodbanks are designed to address short term hunger and help people out of crisis. Trussell Trust foodbanks are structured to avoid long term dependency: no self-referral; no drop in service; time-limited support. Trussell Trust foodbank clients may redeem three foodbank vouchers in a row at which point the foodbank manager will contact the referral agent about putting together a support plan to help the client break out of poverty. Longer term support from the foodbank is available in exceptional circumstances as agreed between the foodbank manager and referral agent.

What's in a food parcel?

Food parcels contain at least three days' supply of non-perishable foods such as tinned fruit, vegetables, meat and fish as well as pasta, cereal, UHT milk, sauces, tea, and long-life juice. The Trussell Trust works with dieticians to ensure that food parcels are nutritionally balanced. Over 90% of the food given out by foodbanks is donated directly by the public. In 2012-13, 3,492.44 tonnes of non-perishable food were donated.

Case studies:

Case study: Leanne*, Tower Hamlets Foodbank

Leanne is a single mother who works part time. Her housing benefits were suspended due to a 'change in circumstance' when she notified the benefits office that she had just had a baby. A school liaison officer paid a home visit and found there was barely any food in the house and that Leanne was not eating and was struggling to feed her children. She referred Leanne to Tower Hamlets Foodbank who, after hearing about her problem during a visit, spoke to the Council on her behalf. It became clear that an error had been made, which was then resolved. The Trussell Trust foodbank model aims to help people break out of poverty rather than create dependency on a foodbank.

Case study: Sarah*, Scotland.

Sarah was made redundant whilst pregnant, her husband then had a nervous breakdown and could no longer work. They hit crisis point and lost their home. She became too malnourished to breast feed her baby. The family was made homeless and was living on ESA.

They were sent two letters for the same ESA appointment which gave different dates, so they rang to ask whether they should attend both and were told to go to one and ignore the other. They did as advised and were then sanctioned, leaving the family of four with £50 per week to live on. The family questioned the decision without success and struggled to afford food for three months, until they threatened to involve solicitors, at which point the office admitted that a mistake had been made and they backdated the family's payments.

**Names changed to protect identity*

For more information:

The Trussell Trust is an a-political charity that is keen to engage with politicians from all parties. We are happy to supply further information.

Please visit www.trusselltrust.org/foodbank-projects for more on how Trussell Trust foodbanks work.

For regional data please contact: foodbanknetwork@trusselltrust.org

For additional information about your area please contact:

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