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Low income and welfare problems see foodbank numbers rise by 38% despite economic recovery

- Almost 500,000 people given three days' food in six months; 38% higher than same period last year.
- Issues with social security remain top cause of foodbank use, but increasingly 'low income' is emerging as a growing problem
- Findings reinforce newly released foodbank research *Emergency Use Only*

Numbers turning to foodbanks are continuing to rise despite economic recovery, and more people are struggling to get by because their incomes are too low, says leading foodbank charity The Trussell Trust.

The charity, which runs a network of over 400 UK foodbanks, says that the number of people helped by their foodbanks in the first half of the 2014-15 financial year is 38% higher than numbers helped during the same period last year. **492,641** people were given three days' food and support, including **176,565** children, between April and September 2014, compared to **355,982** during same period in previous year.

Problems with the social security system continue to be the biggest overall trigger for foodbank use (45%), of which 'benefit delays' accounted for 30% of referrals, and 'benefit changes' 15%. However, a new emerging trend is that 22% of those helped were referred because of 'low income' compared to 16% of referrals in the same period last year – in real terms, this means that 51,000 more people were referred to a foodbank due to low income.

Trussell Trust Chief Executive, David McAuley says:

'Whilst the rate of new foodbanks opening has slowed dramatically, we're continuing to see a significant increase in numbers helped by foodbanks. Substantial numbers are needing help because of problems with the social security system but what's new is that we're also seeing a marked rise in numbers of people coming to us with 'low income' as the primary cause of their crisis. Incomes for

the poorest have not been increasing in line with inflation and many, whether in low paid work or on welfare, are not yet seeing the benefits of economic recovery. Instead, they are living on a financial knife edge where one small change in circumstances or a 'life shock' can force them into a crisis where they cannot afford to eat."

The Trussell Trust is developing a 'More Than Food' approach at its foodbanks to help people break out of crisis long term. The charity is working with Money Saving Expert Martin Lewis to pilot placing financial advisers in foodbanks to help people managing extremely low incomes but the charity warns that stopping UK hunger cannot rest solely with the charity sector and the armies of foodbank volunteers:

McAuley adds

'To reduce food poverty in the UK long term, we need policy makers across the political spectrum to truly understand what life on the breadline is like. Last week we, alongside three other major anti-poverty organisations, urged the government to consider some simple fixes to the social security system that would help dramatically reduce numbers needing foodbanks.

'The Trussell Trust is keen for politicians across all parties to engage with us, to visit our foodbanks and to find out more about the experiences of foodbank users.'

Latest Trussell Trust statistics on foodbank use follow on from the newly released *Emergency Use Only* report published by Oxfam, Trussell Trust, Church of England and CPAG. The report, which is the first in-depth, qualitative research into why people are turning to foodbanks in the UK, gives a revealing insight into how quickly a crisis or 'life shock' can escalate into hunger, housing loss and debt, when you are on a low income. It corroborates Trussell Trust data showing that problems with social security are the highest single cause of foodbank use, saying that:

'The research showed that the(se) very real challenges people face are too often being compounded - rather than assisted - by their experience of the social security system'.

The research also highlights the fact that people turn to foodbanks out of real and desperate need, as well as proving foodbanks to be a vital lifeline to many.

Trussell Trust Chairman, Chris Mould says:

'Foodbank use is not rising because people are taking advantage of free food, it's rising because more people are facing situations where they cannot afford to eat. Foodbank use is a last resort when other coping strategies have been exhausted. People speak of the shame and embarrassment

that they feel before visiting a foodbank, and the courage it took to walk through the door. The fact that almost 500,000 people have found themselves in this situation in just six months should be deeply concerning to our nation. The qualitative evidence and personal stories in Emergency Use Only combined with the Trussell Trust's latest figures should leave no one in any doubt that UK hunger is real, distressing and a problem that continues to demand urgent attention.' ENDS

Notes to Editor:

- On Wednesday 19th November The Trussell Trust, Oxfam, Church of England and Child Poverty Action group launched a new piece of research that provides important new evidence on why people need help from foodbanks. [Read full report here.](#)
- The 38 percent increase in numbers helped by foodbanks is particularly significant because numbers of new foodbanks opening have declined from three per week in 2013 to one per month in 2014, as many UK towns now have a foodbank.
- Numbers helped by foodbanks are likely to rise further as cold weather starts to bite and more people are forced to choose between eating and heating. Last year over 100,000 people were helped by Trussell Trust foodbanks in December alone, this year that figure is likely to be even higher.
- 'Benefit delays' refer to people not receiving benefits to which they are entitled on time, this category can also including problems with processing new claims, or any other time lags in people receiving their welfare payments. For more on this contact our press office.
- 'Benefit changes' refers to the problems resulting from a change in people's welfare payments, for example, people having their benefits stopped whilst they are reassessed. This can also include a sanction. Trussell Trust foodbanks have found more people are being sanctioned, and that often these sanctions are seemingly unfair. **[Emergency Use Only](#) has valuable further evidence of problems with the social security system.** It explains, for example, the problems that disabled people related to ESA payments.
- 'Low income' refers to anyone who is struggling to get by on a low income and hits a small financial crisis. This could be people in work, or people on benefits, for whom a small crisis eg boiler breaking down, having to buy school uniform etc, can be enough to mean that they cannot afford food.
- [Find out more](#) about new financial triage programme in foodbanks in partnership with Martin Lewis

How Trussell Trust foodbanks work:

- Trussell Trust foodbanks provide three days' nutritionally balanced food and support to people in crisis in the UK. We also signpost people to other agencies and services able to help resolve the underlying cause of the crisis.
 - Everyone who comes to a Trussell Trust foodbank is referred by a professional such as a social worker, health visitor or schools liaison officer. Over 27,000 professionals referred people to Trussell Trust foodbanks in 2013-14, and 50 percent are statutory agencies.
 - Over 90 percent of food given out by Trussell Trust foodbanks is donated by the public.
 - An estimated 30,000 people volunteered with a Trussell Trust foodbank in 2013-14.
 - The Trussell Trust is a Christian charity that runs the biggest network of foodbanks in the UK.
- For more on The Trussell Trust visit www.trusselltrust.org

Trussell Trust statistics:

Trussell Trust statistics are collected using an online data collection system into which foodbanks enter the data from each foodbank voucher. The system records the number of adults and children given three days' emergency food. Trussell Trust figures have always been reported in this way. We cannot measure unique users on a national scale, but recent evidence collected from a sample of foodbanks indicates that over 65 percent of foodbank users were only helped once over a six month period, and that only 7.5 percent needed four or more vouchers.

In 2013/14 financial year, 913,138 received three days' emergency food from Trussell Trust foodbanks (582,933 adults and 330,205 children). Numbers turning to Trussell Trust foodbanks have increased dramatically in recent years, in 2011-12 128,697 people received three days' food.

SPOKESPEOPLE, FOODBANK VISITS AND, WHERE POSSIBLE, CLIENT CASE STUDIES ON REQUEST.

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