

Great Food Debates II: Food Poverty Toolkit



Foreword

In communities across the UK people are going hungry. Some have to rely on emergency food parcels from food banks to feed themselves and their families. GPs are seeing children with rickets in their surgeries, and young people are losing weight over summer holidays, causing them to fall backwards in educational attainment. From Poole to Newcastle, people are choosing whether they skip a meal or turn the heating off.

Since its earliest days, the Women's Institute movement has been at the forefront of debate around our food system. The supply of food to the war-torn nation was central to the early activities of the growing WI movement in Britain. Since then the challenges of ensuring a sustainable food supply, tackling poverty and protecting our environment have remained key to our heritage and close to members' hearts.

I know that the Women's Institute movement has the power to make positive change. From standing up for dairy farmers to ensure they get a fair price for their milk, to pushing the Government to launch a national pollinator strategy to protect the health of our bees, WIs know how to get things done. So by setting our sights on food poverty – I know we can make a difference.

This work follows on from our pioneering Great Food Debates project, which saw WIs and county and island federations organise over a hundred food discussion events to consider the issue of the country's food security. We also have a strong history of promoting the importance of nutrition and cookery education in schools. I firmly believe that greater public engagement in these issues is key, and as an organisation with roots in education, WIs have a big role helping to promote public engagement with the challenges and opportunities we face in securing sustainable food for all.

With deep roots in our communities, WIs are well placed to learn about the issue of food poverty in our areas. So please organise a debate in your community, and then take action to tackle this issue. If WI members all spend some time volunteering, or writing to our MPs about the things we've learnt; we will be closer to halting food poverty.



Lynne Stubbings

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Chair, NFWI



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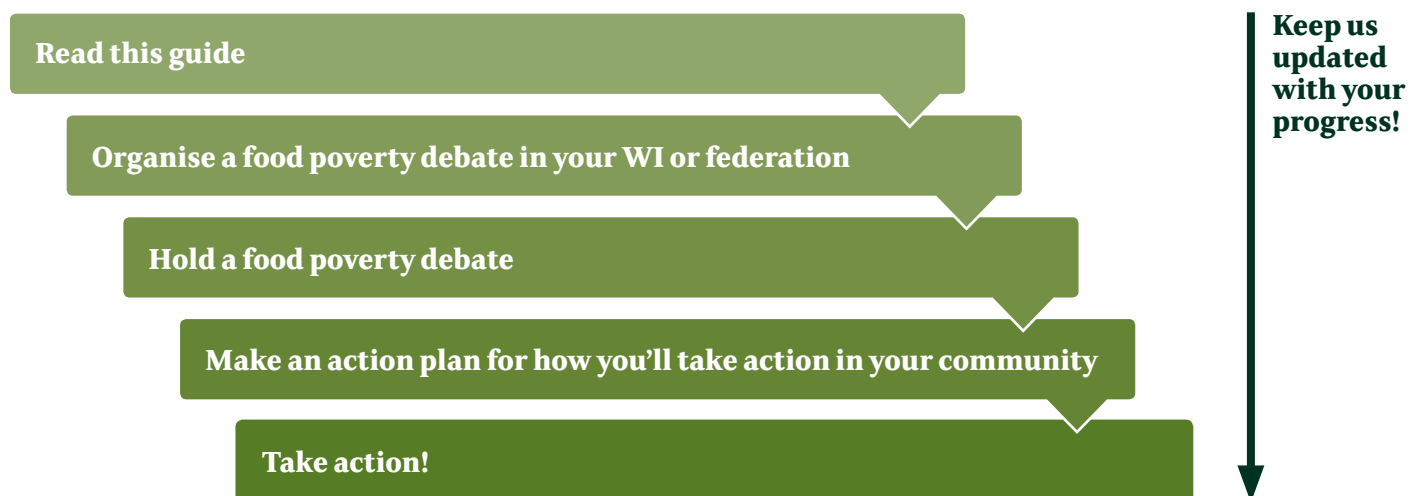
As part of the Food Matters campaign, the NFWI is encouraging WIs and federations to organise debates on the topic of food poverty so that we can consider what steps need to be taken to ensure everyone has access to affordable, healthy food.

Holding a debate will allow you to learn about the issue of food poverty; particularly how it affects your local community, and to discuss the solutions to this problem. The guide will act as an aid to organising your debate, and it includes background information, discussion points and actions your WI or federation can take to help tackle the issue in your local area.

The Food Matters campaign

This toolkit is part of the Food Matters campaign. The campaign was launched in 2016 in response to that year's successful resolution which called on the NFWI to work to address the issues of both food waste and food poverty. The campaign has a first phase focussing on food waste and a second on food poverty. We are close to completing work on the food waste phase, and have secured some very positive changes to policy and practice from supermarkets in order to reduce food waste.

What are we asking you to do?



About the issue

Food poverty overview

This section provides an overview of food poverty, and also outlines some possible solutions. It explains the two main definitions that can be used to discuss the issue of hunger and lack of good food: food poverty and food insecurity. It explains the scale of the problem, looking at data from government surveys, the United Nations, and food banks. It also explains the specific issue of holiday hunger, which means up to 3 million children are at risk of going hungry in the school holidays across the UK.

How do we define food poverty?

The problem of people going hungry and not having access to enough good food has been described in a number of different ways. This guide uses the term “food poverty”, as this is the most commonly used and best understood term in the UK. Another definition that is used is “(household) food insecurity”.

Food insecurity has been defined as “Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (e.g. without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing or other coping strategies)”. This term has been used internationally and by the UK’s Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), but is not as well known in the UK.

Food poverty is the most commonly used and best understood term in the UK. It has been defined by some academics as “the inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so”. Alternatively it has been described as “a worse diet, worse access, worse health, higher percentage of income on food, and less choice from a restricted range of foods.”

Simply put, we can understand food poverty as the inability of people to obtain an adequate and nutritious diet. Food poverty is not just about being hungry; it is also about having access to high quality nutritious food.

Discussion points

- Do you think these definitions capture the complexity of the issue?
 - Had you considered that food poverty was more complex than just ‘being hungry’ before?
-

How many people are affected in the UK?

Unfortunately the Government does not regularly collect statistics on how many people are living in, or have been affected by, food poverty in the UK, making it hard to reliably quantify the number of people who are going hungry or lacking access to good food each year. However, data from other sources show that there are many people going hungry in communities across the country. For example:

11% OF HOUSEHOLDS REPORTED LIVING IN MARGINALLY FOOD SECURE HOUSEHOLDS, WHILST 8% LIVED IN LOW OR VERY LOW FOOD SECURE HOUSEHOLDS

- **The Food Standards Agency’s** “Food & You Survey” in 2016 looked at “household food security”, and used a metric to rank households on a scale from highly food secure to very low food secure households. This survey found that 11% of households reported living in marginally food secure households, whilst 8% lived in low or very low food secure households.

- Data from the **United Nations** show that in 2014 8.4 million people in the UK faced not having enough food to eat, and that the UK ranks in the bottom half of EU countries for food insecurity.

Food bank use

The increasing use of food banks is another key indicator of the increasing issue of food poverty in the UK. Food banks are organisations run by charities and churches where people can access free emergency food assistance for a limited period, and since 2005 food bank use has been steadily increasing.

The Trussell Trust is the biggest network of food banks in the UK. In 2009 the charity operated 30 food banks, but by 2017 over 420 were in operation. There are also many independent food banks; some of which are affiliated with the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN). In 2017 IFAN research identified 714 independent food banks operating in the UK.

It is important to remember that people only access food banks as a last resort; so information about foodbank use only represents the tip of the food poverty iceberg. Indeed, UN data collected from 2014 suggest that as many as seventeen times the number of people using the Trussell Trusts food banks are food insecure.

Between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017 the Trussell Trust provided 1,183,000 three-day emergency food parcels - 436,000 of which went to children. This figure outlines volume rather than unique users; on average people needed two foodbank referrals in the year. The Trussell Trust estimates that approximately 591,477 people are likely to have been unique users in that year. The reasons behind people accessing food banks will be addressed in the next section.

8.4 MILLION PEOPLE IN THE UK FACED NOT HAVING ENOUGH FOOD TO EAT

1,183,000 THREE-DAY EMERGENCY FOOD PARCELS

Holiday hunger

One important element of food poverty in the UK is holiday hunger in school children. Three million children are at risk of going hungry in the school holidays. While free school meals for children from less well-off families are provided during term time, there is no statutory provision for those children in the holidays.

This means that families who are in receipt of free school meals often struggle to afford good food for their children over the holidays, and there are many stories of adults going hungry to ensure their children can eat. Holiday hunger has been shown to affect children's attainment in school.

In January the Government pledged to launch targeted pilot projects to address how best to tackle holiday hunger, which campaigners have welcomed as good first step in moving towards national roll out of holiday provision.

THREE MILLION CHILDREN ARE AT RISK OF GOING HUNGRY IN THE SCHOOL HOLIDAYS.

Discussion points

- How many food banks are there in your community? Have you noticed new ones opening?
- Do you think it's important to measure food poverty?

What causes people to experience food poverty?

Food poverty is a complex issue and has many underlying causes, including **low pay, insecure work, ill-health, and shortfalls in welfare support**. High costs in household budget areas such as **housing** often also result in a squeeze on food spending.

The reasons for food poverty can be grouped into three areas: economic and financial, social and environmental and physical.

- **Economic & financial**

- Low income
- Unpredictable working hours
- The price of (locally available & healthy) food
- Problems with benefits
- Changes in family income due to bereavement

- **Social**

- Not having access to supportive social networks to help, especially in times of crisis

- **Environmental & physical**

- Lacking access to shops and cafes selling affordable healthy food, to cooking facilities, or to transport.
- Ill health

In a recent report the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger argued that social isolation caused by bereavement, illness, immobility or confinement – such as through the loss of a driving licence – are the main causes of a largely “hidden” problem of hunger amongst older people in the UK.

Crisis has a significant role in pushing people into food poverty. People living near to the edge of food poverty can easily be pushed into it by a small crisis, such as a partner dying or a loss of income.

Food bank use

Research undertaken with people who use food banks also provides an insight into why people experience food poverty. Looking at data from the Trussell Trust, researchers have provided in depth analysis on the reasons for people accessing emergency food aid from a food bank.

A 2014 report groups the main reasons behind food bank access into:

- The result of an immediate income crisis; such as a loss of earnings from employment, or a change in family circumstances
- Problems with benefits; such as administrative issues causing a delay in payment
- Specific vulnerabilities; a physical or mental illness, housing issues, lack of family support

By discussing the case studies later in the guide, and inviting people will relevant experience to your debate, you will be able to learn more about the causes of food poverty.

What are the potential solutions?

As outlined in the previous section, food poverty is a complex issue. However; it is entirely possible to tackle. Some action is already being taken across the country to directly help people, such as through food banks, the redistribution of surplus food, and community action. But many argue that to truly tackle food poverty, we need systemic changes to how our country functions.

This section provides ideas for how we might work to tackle food poverty; from helping people who are directly in need in communities across the UK, to pushing for systemic change to stop people from ever experiencing food poverty.

Help during times of crisis

Food banks

Food banks exist to provide emergency food supplies to people who otherwise would not be able to feed themselves and their family. They are a relatively new development in the UK, having only become prevalent since the turn of the century.

The biggest network of food banks are those affiliated to the Trussell Trust, but there are also many who operate independently. The Trussell Trust explains how its food banks operate below:

How do food banks work?

Food donations: Non-perishable in-date food is donated by the public and businesses at a range of places, such as schools, churches and businesses, as well as supermarket collection points. It is then sorted into emergency food parcels by over 40,000 volunteers, to be given to people in need.

Food vouchers: Care professionals such as health visitors, schools and social workers identify people in crisis and issue them with a foodbank voucher. This entitles them to receive a foodbank parcel of three days' nutritionally balanced, non-perishable food.

More than food: Foodbanks also offer a lot more than food. Volunteers provide a listening ear to clients over a warm drink, and signpost people to other charities and agencies who can help resolve the underlying cause of the crisis.

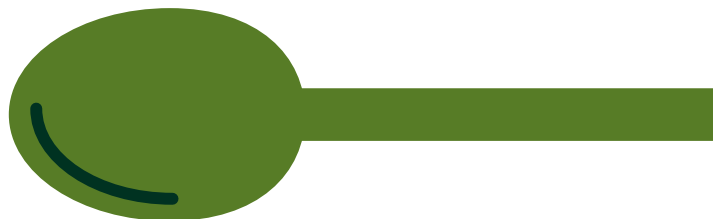
Information from the Trussell Trust

Food banks stress that they only ever want to be seen as a temporary solution to the problem of food poverty. They help people in a moment of crisis, before they are able to access help from their family, local authority or the state to get back on their feet. However they are becoming an increasingly institutionalised part of the welfare system, something which worries many campaigners.

Other forms of food aid

Food banks are not the only form of food aid available to those in, or at risk of, food poverty. There are a variety of organisations, supported by thousands of volunteers, who help to distribute food to those in need. For example:

FareShare is an organisation which take fresh in date and good to eat surplus food from the food industry, which would otherwise go to waste, and distribute it to frontline charities and community groups who then turn it into meals for a variety of people – many of whom are vulnerable and at risk of food poverty.



FoodCycle support people who are hungry and lonely by serving tasty lunches and dinners every single day in towns and cities across the country. It says that many of its guests struggle to afford the basics to eat and many will eat alone without company or conversation. It serves over 850 meals a week using surplus food (cooked in spare kitchen space).

Pantries exist in some places as community food stores run by volunteers for the benefit of their local communities. This helps people reduce their food bills, and helps tackle food waste. These are very similar to **social supermarkets**, the first of which was opened in South Yorkshire in 2013, which supply food at prices up to 70% below the Recommended Retail Price (RRP).

Community cafes, which operate on a pay as you feel basis and which offer a welcoming environment where people can enjoy an affordable meal without any sense of stigma.

Holiday clubs for children exist in many communities across the UK. Here volunteers have set up holiday clubs to provide free meals and activities during the school holidays for children who otherwise would go without. These are organised by volunteers and only available in some parts of the country.

Discussion points

- What food aid providers do you know of in your local community?
 - Does anyone at the debate volunteer for any food aid organisations?
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Preventing food poverty

While emergency food aid helps people in moments of need, it does not present a systemic long term solution to the issue of food poverty. There are a number of actions that could be taken to work towards a country in which no one has to experience food poverty.

Measuring food poverty

At present the Government does not have an annual measure of food poverty in the UK. Measuring the problem could be the first step to recognising the issue and developing solutions. This is why a campaign coalition called “End Hunger UK” is arguing that there should be “an annual government-led measurement, and ongoing monitoring of household food insecurity, across the UK.” This would ensure that people knew the true scale of food poverty in the UK, and progress on tackling it could be monitored.

A dedicated Food Poverty Minister

Currently it is not immediately clear where the responsibility for fixing food poverty sits in Government. Different departments, including the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Department of Health and the Department of Education all have some stake in food poverty. Without a clear lead, the way that decisions are made in government means that the issue of food poverty can often fall between the gaps.

By appointing a dedicated cross-departmental ‘Food Poverty Minister’, many campaigners argue that the Government will be much better able to tackle food poverty.

Fixing welfare reforms

Data previously outlined on the reasons people are accessing food banks show that one major cause is the poor administration of welfare, especially through current reforms. The Government is currently rolling out a new system for administering entitlements across the country called Universal Credit. This system is resulting in many seeing a reduction in their entitlements and has resulted in many administrative errors, leaving people with reductions in household income or delays receiving their payments. These problems can leave people in debt, rent arrears and with little or no income with which to buy food.

Better wages and more reliable work

Some campaigners argue that all companies should be paying a living wage; a wage rate calculated to ensure people have enough money to live on. This would ensure that no one in work has to experience food poverty. (The current Living wage rate in London is £10.20, and £8.75 in the rest of the country – compared to the minimum wage for over 25s of £7.50)

There has also been an increase in the amount of informal work, such as zero hours contracts, through which people have no guaranteed hours, and can stop getting work for no reason which makes it very hard for some people to plan a stable household budget. By ensuring that people receive a living wage and regular, predictable hours of work fewer people would experience food poverty.

What could local authorities do?

There are a number of things that local authorities could do to improve the situation for people in their local area, these include:

- Improving the uptake of Healthy Start vouchers, which is a food welfare scheme for pregnant women and infants and young children in low-income families, who are amongst the groups most at risk of being in food poverty.
- Supporting and enhancing meals on wheels provision, which can provide a lifeline to people struggling to feed themselves in their own homes.
- Developing an action plan with their partners to tackle food poverty.
- Ensuring all residents have physical access to good food.

For a more in depth look at what local authorities can do, take a look at Sustain's great webpage:

<https://www.sustainweb.org/foodpoverty/measures/>

For a more extensive list of ways to systemically solve food poverty, check out End Hunger UK's "menu to end hunger in the UK": endhungeruk.org/menu

Discussion points

- Which of these changes do you think would be most effective at tackling the problem of food poverty?
 - What else do you think needs to change to tackle the issue?
-

Holding a food poverty debate

Now that you have learnt about some of the issues and problems of food poverty, hopefully you're inspired to organise a food poverty debate in one of your upcoming WI meetings or within your federation. The debate should allow all members of your WI (and the public if you choose to make the event open to all) to learn more about the issue; and consider what actions need to be taken locally and nationally to address it.

This section of the toolkit outlines guidance on hosting a successful WI food poverty debate. This guide is not exhaustive, but covers some of the key considerations to ensure you have a productive event. This toolkit also provides five case studies to guide your discussion, allowing you to understand the real world issues of food poverty beyond the statistics.

It is up to you if you hold your debate in one of your meetings, or if you hold a public event open to your community. If you hold a public event, you will want to think about how to invite local people and possibly your local media.

Event structure

We would encourage you to follow this structure for the debate to allow for maximum discussion and exploration of the issue of food poverty.

1. Introductory presentation – 10 mins

- A presentation outlining food poverty and the food poverty debates is available on the NFWI website.
- At the start of the event, one member can give this talk to ensure everyone understands the main points of food poverty, and what the debate hopes to achieve.

2. Introductory remarks – Up to 20 mins

- Invite up to 3 speakers to give brief remarks, around 5 minutes each, about their understanding and experience of food poverty.
- There is a list of ideas for speakers below.
- Invite the speakers to be a part of the whole session.

3. If your group is a suitable size, break into smaller groups to discuss the different case studies, one per group, guided by the questions below. – **30 mins**

4. Feedback to the whole group: Someone from each group outlines their case study to the whole meeting, focusing on answers to the questions, for a few minutes. – **15 mins**

5. Discussion of the common themes between each case study, and the discussion points throughout the toolkit. – **30 mins**

6. Make a plan for what your WI or federation will do. – **15 mins**

Indicative timings have been given assuming a two hour timeslot.

Speaker ideas

There are a number of different groups of people with close experience of food poverty who would be able to help you understand the issue. This list is not exhaustive and as WIs and federations you know your community best, but this list may give you some ideas about where to start.

- People with **lived experience** of food poverty
 - It is always important, where possible, to include the voices of those who have first-hand experience of issues when they are being discussed. You will of course want to be sensitive and supportive to anyone who speaks.
- Someone involved with a **food bank**
 - The Trussell Trust have hundreds of food banks across the country.
 - Some independent food banks are listed on IFAN's website, but you may already know of some in your area
- **Fareshare**
 - Fareshare have a number of regional hubs from which they distribute surplus food to local charities and community groups.
- **Food Power Coalition**
 - There are various food power coalitions across the UK. Each coalition has a variety of groups all working to tackle food poverty, so if there is one in your local area it should be a good source of speakers!
 - You can see all of the coalitions on the website.
- **Supper clubs/community cafes**
- **Holiday clubs for children**
- **Feeding Britain local groups**
- **Academics** – you may wish to see if your local university has a department looking at food policy – try the sociology department as a starting point.
- **Local politicians** – You could invite your local MP or councillor to give their perspective on the issue.
- **Citizens Advice Bureau** – these services provide help and support to people struggling with problems with unemployment or benefits changes and may be able to give you an overview of the causes of food poverty.

Websites for all of the specific groups mentioned are included in a *useful contacts* section on page 20.

Real stories

Food poverty affects many people across the UK. The stories below reflect the real experiences of people from all walks of life who have found themselves facing food poverty. Discussing them in your group will allow you to understand the reality of the complex issue of food poverty. (You may want to photocopy these for the meeting.)

Guiding questions:

- What are the reasons behind this person/family experiencing food poverty?
 - How could their issues be immediately tackled?
 - How could things change in the long term to prevent others experiencing the same?
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Kath's story

Kath lives with her three teenage sons. Her youngest son has several serious medical conditions and requires intensive support. After her partner left 4 years ago, Kath gave up work to become his full-time carer.

This left the family finances in precarious financial position: 'We live very close to the edge... we don't have many things. My 17-year-old needed a passport to get a part-time job and I had to say no. My youngest, who's 14, has never been on a school trip, and I can't afford the art supplies my other son needs for his course.'

The family were just about managing when their Child Tax Credits (an entitlement that those with children are able to receive) were halved without notice. Kath had arranged her finances so that she relied on her tax credits to pay for food and other daily necessities, so the effect was catastrophic. When Kath contacted HMRC, she was told her credits had been cut because she had failed to tell them that her two older sons were staying in education. Kath says she did update them.

She was assigned a case worker and given a number to call, 'and that's where the problem started'. 'I called them every day all day and couldn't get through. And every time I got put through to the answer machine we got charged. It was awful. I'd go back to the helpline and say "I can't get through", and they said "Well, that's the number".'

They didn't help at all. It went on for eight weeks.' Kath was horrified by how she was treated. 'When our money was stopped, there was no compassion, there was no way to get support.'

Meanwhile, she was getting into more and more debt: 'We got behind on all our bills; everything just got swallowed up, and my direct debits were bouncing.' She became unable to meet the family's basic needs. 'It was freezing cold, there was no wood for the fire, I was on the emergency on the meter and I knew the lights were about to go out, and I had no food.'

To attempt to make ends meet, Kath had to rehouse a much-loved family pet, a decision which she described as 'heart-breaking'. But this was still not enough: 'I had no money to get my children to school... I was desperate.' To compound their problems, her youngest son's conditions mean he needs to eat healthily, which Kath found challenging on a small budget. 'He can't eat fast food; he would have ended up in hospital.'

Kath and her family survived with the help of donations from her local Citizens Advice Bureau and food bank. It took eight weeks for the decision to cut her Child Tax Credits to be overturned. She said of her experience: 'I thought the system would protect me. I never thought I would be completely ignored. I feel I was let down hugely. My benefits are my safety net – if they're removed, how are families like ours meant to survive?'



Christie's story

Christie is married and lives with her husband: '...The kids have all grown up and moved away, I lost my job so I am on a low income.'

Christie has arthritis in her hips, shoulder and knees. Until January 2014, she had been employed as a care assistant, which she enjoyed and which provided take-home pay of around £800 per month. However, as her health deteriorated, work became more difficult for Christie. 'I was still working, I had been taking [painkillers] for relief and I went up and I just leaned over the dog to shut the curtains and down I went like a ton of bricks, so I was off sick with that and I had to get X-rays and that but there was nothing broken. They [her work] sent me for a medical and they deemed me unfit for the job.'

As a result, she was transferred to a desk-based role. After covering the job for some time, Christie had expected to be given a permanent post and was surprised when, after being interviewed, she did not get it. She was told that she was "not confident enough", though she feels her health condition was relevant to the decision. She described the whole thing as being a 'horrible experience'.

'I was used to going out working and bringing in £800 a month, everything was kind of tickety-boo and then go you from that to having to I wouldn't call it begging like but having to ask for money from the government to keep you, it's quite a stoop.'

Christie would like to return to employment, but worries that her arthritis might make this difficult. She already takes quite a lot of painkillers and doesn't want to have to take any more as she worries about the impact this will have on her health. She described her main barrier as a lack of suitable jobs. At the time she accessed the food bank Christie was receiving the 'assessment phase rate' of ESA (Employment and Support Allowance is an entitlement for people who aren't able to work due to illness or disability) having been waiting two months for an appointment about her claim for contributory ESA. She had also applied for Personal Independence Payment (an entitlement designed to help people with everyday life if they've got an illness, disability or mental health condition) and was waiting to hear about that too.

'I am still waiting on that [an Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) assessment]. I am still waiting on the appointment coming through for that. I am not quite sure, I have been on it from February [2 months previously] so I don't know how long, but I filled out the form and I have sent it back so I am not quite sure how long it takes.'





Matthew's story

Matthew was recently referred to a foodbank by a job centre adviser after a life-threatening illness and emergency surgery meant he was unable to work.

A former Special Forces soldier, Matthew (not his real name) was working full-time as a self-employed carpenter and joiner before becoming unwell. After a Work Capability Assessment, Matthew was told he was not ill enough to receive out-of-work sickness benefit, Employment Support Allowance, despite severe ongoing mobility problems and recently diagnosed PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). This had a knock-on effect on his Housing Benefit, payment of which stopped, and he began receiving notices of eviction.

Matthew says:

'Until it happens to you, you don't realise how bad life can be. I had to stop work. It was devastating, because the funds I'd put to one side, they were soon gone. I even sold my tools just to make ends meet. I was being threatened that I was going to lose my place. My world was just coming round my ears.

'I've paid my taxes since 1980, but it was still a pride thing for me to actually go and put my hand out and say I need help. It's the stigma from society, from the media, of being categorised as a 'worthless layabout'. It sounds stupid but when I eventually did go and sign on I used to walk past the job centre as if I was lost, and go back in there as if I was asking for directions. I used to hate it. I didn't want to be there.

'The DWP [the Department of Work and Pensions] can be very abrupt and you have to chase them, and you have to be a thorn in their side because otherwise you will be disregarded. You have to fight. But every time I seemed to turn a corner, there'd be a wall. It was so frustrating, worse than frustrating.

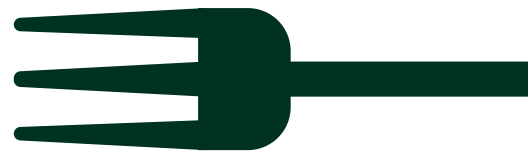
'I had to borrow money to pay bills – to try to pay some rent – and I got into debt, and I didn't have anything in the cupboard. The world just becomes a dark place, a really horrible place. I've stayed in bed for days, because you don't get hungry in bed, when there's nothing in the cupboards.

'I'd gone to sign on at the job centre and I asked if there was an emergency payment available for food, and they said 'No'. I explained I had nothing, I literally had nothing, and they said 'We can give you a food voucher. Go to a foodbank.'

'I thought how low can you go? I just wanted the ground to open up and swallow me. I was told where the foodbank was and I had to walk, because I didn't have any money at all. I eventually came through the doors and it's the best thing I ever did in my life. The volunteers were so welcoming, so understanding. I wasn't judged. It restored a lot of faith in me of seeing there was actually something in place for this situation, for me. I was going to go home and eat.

'I was given an appointment with the Foodbank Adviser, and she got on the phone to the DWP straight away and eventually everything got sorted out.

'People and the government and the DWP need to know the work that foodbanks do, and need to know the position that people are put in. People have to realise that foodbanks are here for a reason now, because of what's happening; because of the situations people face through no choice of their own, like me.'



James' story

James, an 82-year-old man described how following his wife's death he became socially isolated.

Two years after this the local shop closed and he needed to get into town – just seven miles away – but the bus service was reduced to just one per day, five days per week. He became anxious about being able to go to the shops, complete his shopping and get home due to reduced mobility.

James walks with a stick and cannot rush for a bus. He became reliant on his closest neighbour, also of advanced age, but with some family support to obtain basic groceries for him.

His neighbour moved to live with his family and James had no access to food until The Food Train, a local support group offering grocery shopping home deliveries, household support services and befriending services became his only visitor, delivering groceries.



Claire's story

Claire was a district nurse until retirement. She was well educated about healthy eating and enjoyed cooking. When she was 79 she became depressed after her best friend died. She had lost her partner at 70 and regularly met with her friend for lunch and outings.

Claire had sarcopenia, an age related, involuntary loss of skeletal muscle mass and strength, she fell at home and was briefly admitted to hospital. Whilst there she had no visitors and this further impacted upon her mental health.

As well as feeling unwell, she ate very little while she was there. When she returned home she had lost so much weight she needed care. Claire was referred to The Food Train for grocery deliveries but her reduced mobility meant she had difficulty cooking and her health deteriorated rapidly. She became a long term in-patient in hospital and subsequently moved into a residential home. There was no other service available for Claire, no meals on wheels, insufficient home care, no community lunch clubs or transport options available.

Case studies reproduced with permission. James and Claire's stories sourced from evidence submitted by The Food Train to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger, published in *Hidden hunger and malnutrition in the elderly* (January 2018). Kath, Christie and Matthew's stories' reproduced from a report by The Child Poverty Action Group.

Taking action

Once you have learnt more about the issues of food poverty by hosting a WI food poverty debate, we hope that you will be inspired to take action in your community. There are a number of things you can do to help tackle food poverty, some of which might have come up in your debates. The previous solutions section should give you a good overview of the various ways food poverty could be tackled.

Taking action to directly help people in your community

WIs and federations are amazing at taking action in their communities, and they know how to get things done. We already know that many WIs collect for their local food bank(s), volunteer in community cafes, and do much more.

There are a number of opportunities for you to volunteer as individuals or as a WI to help people in food poverty.

Websites for all of the groups mentioned are included in a *useful contacts* section on page 20.

Food banks: You could volunteer to help out at a food bank, such as those run by the Trussell Trust, or those linked with IFAN. You could also collect for your local food bank at your meetings.

Other food aid groups: You could volunteer at a food aid organisation, such as one of those listed previously on page 10.

For example **Fareshare** have a number of regional centres across the country from which they distribute surplus food to charities and community groups. You could volunteer to help in the distribution centres, as a driver, or on their phones.

Set up, or get involved with, a community project:

You could set up a new community project to help people in need, such as a community gardening programme, or a social supermarket. Or you could help out with an existing project.

Join or start a food power alliance

Food Power Alliances are alliances between local stakeholders in a number of areas.

If there is one in your area, you could get involved with them. If there isn't one, you could work with other local groups to set one up.



Taking action to tackle the root causes

Write to your local MP

You could write to your local MP as individuals, or as a WI/federation. Letters to MPs work best when they are personal, and contain local stories about things happening in that MP's constituency. You could also ask to see your MP in their surgery on a Friday so that you can present the findings from your debate, and ask what they will do to help tackle food poverty. Whether you just write, or if you also meet up with your MP, it is important to give them an action to take.

Points to include:

- [Insert Name] WI/Federation, in your constituency, recently held an event to learn more about the problem of food poverty, as part of a national programme of work from WI members across England, Wales and the Islands.
- We welcomed speakers from [insert details] who spoke about their experience. [Include details of your speaker's input].
- We learnt that people in communities right across the UK are affected by food poverty. Some have to rely on emergency food parcels from food banks to feed themselves and their families. At present, far too many people have to choose whether to skip a meal or turn off the heating. We also learnt that children and young people aren't eating enough good food during the school summer holidays, causing them to fall back in educational attainment.
- The WI has a long relationship with food, and has always worked to reduce hunger in the UK. For example, WI women helped to grow and preserve food to help increase the supply of food during both world wars. Since then the WI has been working hard to promote secure and sustainable food for everyone.
- The WI has 225,000 members across England and Wales who, through our democratic resolutions process, are calling for moves toward an end to hunger. As a WI member, I want to see action at all levels to address both the causes and impacts of food poverty.
- We believe that the government should commit to an annual measurement of the problem of food poverty. Further, we feel that a ministerial lead needs to be appointed to ensure concrete action across government.
- [Insert other solutions to food poverty you feel passionate about!]

You could ask them to:

- Commit to writing to the Government on your behalf to raise your concerns.
- Join you in any volunteering activities you plan (MPs tend to be in Westminster Monday-Thursday, so try to invite them to things on Fridays and the weekend.)

Let us know how it went!

We'd love to hear and see what you've done, and to share the photographs and feedback from your event with a wider audience. Your great work in organising a food poverty debate and taking action can inspire other WIs and federations to take action.

If you take pictures, please do try and get action shots of members discussing the issue, as this can often work better than group shots.

If you chose to write to or meet with your local MP or council we would love to know. Do let us know about replies they send, and if they commit to anything you ask.

If you take up any new volunteering – we'd love to hear a report about it!

Please send everything to the public affairs team on: pa@nfwf.org.uk

Useful contacts

Trussell Trust - www.trusselltrust.org

The Trussell Trust is the biggest network of food banks, with over 400 across the country.

IFAN - www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/

The Independent Food Aid Network is a network of independent, grassroots food aid providers who work together to try to secure food security for all.

Fareshare - www.fareshare.org.uk

Fareshare have a number of regional hubs from which they distribute surplus food to local charities and community groups.

Food Power Alliances - www.sustainweb.org/foodpower/map

Food power alliances bring together various local actors who tackle food poverty. You can find a map of them all on the website.

Food Cycle - www.foodcycle.org.uk

Food Cycle help people in food poverty by serving tasty lunches and dinners every single day in towns and cities across the country.

Feeding Britain - www.feedingbritain.org

Feeding Britain have a number of local groups across the country working to tackle food poverty. You can find out where these groups are and how to contact them on the website

Citizens Advice Bureau - www.citizensadvice.org.uk



Contact us

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