



Pathways from Poverty Project

Year 2 Impact Report – October 2020



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About the Project

1. The Pathways from Poverty Project (referred to in this report as ‘Pathways’) was established to ensure that people in food crisis have immediate access to quality advice and case advocacy to tackle the issues that made them vulnerable to hunger. The project is managed by Feeding Britain, a charity established in 2015 by a group of cross-party MPs and peers concerned about rising levels of hunger in the UK.
2. Activity commenced in early 2019 and is delivered in three of Feeding Britain’s regional partnership areas (Derbyshire, Leicester and Bradford) covering 13 community food hubs. The main element of delivery is the location of experienced Advice Workers in food hubs to build relationships with local people in need and provide advice and support.

About this Report

3. This is the second evaluation report that focusses upon activity undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic, what has worked and the impact generated from the neighbourhood approach adopted. The report also considers the future demand for the Pathways project in light of evolving government support for employers via the furlough scheme; restrictions on the threat of evictions being lifted; and the job search requirement of benefits being reintroduced.
4. The report has been informed by interviews with beneficiaries, frontline workers, their senior managers and community food venue hosts.



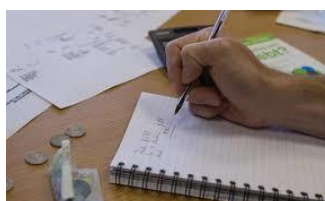
Project Design

5. The reasons why people require food aid are intrinsically linked to broader issues of poverty: benefits delays, debt, insecure housing or jobs, difficulty in accessing online services and more. Despite this, most people seeking help at emergency food projects do not have access to the advice they need to overcome these issues, and can face barriers which make it difficult for them to access advice elsewhere.
6. The rationale for the investment in additional, local advice work was clear. Locating Advice Workers in food hubs at a set time each week removes barriers to access. Having a familiar face at a regular weekly time slot has encouraged people in very vulnerable and desperate situations to seek support. People know where they are, and how they can help. The advantage of the neighbourhood-based Pathways approach is that it delivers advice on the doorstep of those people who really need it, but are less likely to travel into city centre locations to seek help.

7. Different community food venues were attended by people with different issues. For example, community cafes provided a place to dwell and meet others, so it was less about responding to emergencies, instead tackling social isolation. Regardless of the nature of the problem, the prevailing view is that clients benefit from sharing and unburdening their problems. Simply having someone to listen helps.

The Advice Worker Role

8. The expertise and capacity to provide sound advice across a diverse range of areas underpins the role. The variation in issues people have presented with over the previous 18 months demonstrates the need for experienced Advice Workers. This covered Universal Credit and benefit issues; employment insecurity and wage delays; relationship and family issues, including domestic violence; debt and other consumer issues; housing and homelessness; health and wellbeing; and applying for services covering blue badge parking and school admissions. Simply put, the support increases people's freedom and independence from root causes of poverty.
9. In some locations the Pathways Project approach provides a complete case management approach, working intensively with those in need for a long enough period of time to reach a resolution. The capacity to provide longer term case work and advocacy support by the same worker differentiates the Pathways Project support from other advice services. In another pilot area, an Advice Worker undertakes an initial diagnostic before signposting people to relevant support elsewhere. The Pathways Project approach has therefore been flexible to the circumstances in each local area.
10. The Advice Workers received training and capacity building from CPAG, benefitting from their vast experience in technical advice services around Universal Credit, etc. especially for complex cases.
11. Our research has identified that the success of the approach depends on more than just technical expertise. Advice Workers have established a good reputation on their local patch and this assists in attracting people seeking support. Advice Workers recognise the value of the community-based approach i.e. to build up relationships to encourage people to identify their issues.



Responding of Covid-19

12. Our research has identified that the 'working poor' who have some earned income were significantly outnumbered at foodbanks by those totally reliant upon welfare benefits. However, we know that since April 2020 the economic impact of Covid-19 has meant a new cohort of people – the recently unemployed – are susceptible to food insecurity and are therefore utilising foodbanks.

13. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that from late March 2020 the service had to be delivered differently. There was a significant spike in activity in early April as people impacted by changes in employment circumstances approached Advice Workers for guidance. Many had not previously engaged with the benefit system and were anxious about their immediate income. Alongside the increased demand arising from unstable employment, we have heard about increased referrals from victims of domestic violence and people in insecure housing, despite the restrictions on evictions.
14. Whilst the front-facing approach ceased, referrals were driven from alternative sources. This included leaflets in food parcels and links established with different community food venues, schools, health services and police officers who refer people in need.
15. Whilst many people are confident enough to engage over the telephone, some people will only engage on a face to face basis. Many people simply don't possess the digital skills, kit or internet access to engage online. We were informed of Advice Workers trying to combat this by engaging people face to face as they collected food parcels.

Project Management

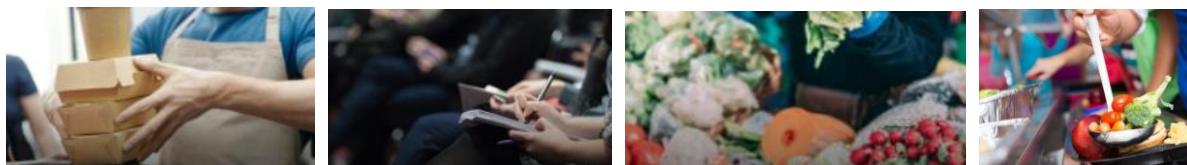
16. Effective management from Feeding Britain has ensured that the intervention continues to flex to emerging needs. Local delivery leads are empowered to continually reflect on how the project is delivering. They know their patch and understand how impact can be maximised. This is evidenced through real time changes to delivery, and ideas for how the project can evolve.

Impact on Beneficiaries

17. The evidence is clear. Advice Workers support and empower clients, and wider family members, who are often facing difficult circumstances. Those accessing support benefitted from sharing and unburdening their problems. Having someone to listen helps. There have been some notable successes in terms of clients being supported to claim their full benefit entitlement. Each case is different. Some quick wins can be achieved, whereas other complex cases have taken months to resolve.
18. In total 2,629 people have sought support through the Pathways project. The Advice Workers have supported people to increase income to an overall combined value of £485,039. The data demonstrates that as a consequence of project support a total of 236 long-term foodbank users now have a reduced need for emergency food.
19. The project has served to reduce the burden on other advice services locally, enabling a greater number of people to be seen quicker than otherwise, although in some areas this still means a two week wait to meet an advisor. The Pathways project enables people to be seen much sooner than this, important given that often their situation is at a critical point.
20. There is clear evidence that the approach works and that the model is transferable to other parts of the country.

Benefit to Participating Delivery Partners and Wider Partners

21. There has been a wider benefit to those organisations leading delivery across each pilot area. One partner cited that they now have a much greater awareness about support services that are available and the gaps that exist. This has benefitted the organisation in how it delivers wider services in its community.
22. The Pathways project had a clear emphasis upon encouraging conversations and learning across the project. There is a clear legacy in that relationships that have been established across localities will outlast this round of funding.



23. There is a need to share good practice on how the Pathways project has assisted people. A number of community food venues we have interviewed see the real value in bringing additional services, such as Pathways, into their facility. However, we understand that there is a reluctance from other community food hubs to consider hosting an Advice Worker, despite these being venues where significant added value could be achieved. There is a need therefore to improve marketing and publicity to more comprehensively communicate the advantages.

The Benefit of Extended Delivery

24. The expectation is that demand for Pathways will continue to increase from this point forward given:
 - The second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic and the impending impact upon the economy and the health and wellbeing of people across the country;
 - Gap in eligibility for employment support schemes which leave certain groups of workers and self-employed people exposed to hardship;
 - The commencement of 'normal' DWP operations in relation to Universal Credit job search, sanctions, PIP assessments, etc; and
 - The lifting of restrictions stopping people from being evicted.
25. Pathways is a project that benefits from a long lead in time. People often need time to feel confident to approach for help, and a track record shared by word of mouth is important in triggering engagement across many of the participating venues. It will be much more efficient and effective for the current Advice Workers to achieve this.
26. The value of a longer-term project, rather than 'here today, gone tomorrow' is clearly beneficial to those current pilot areas, given the known demand and the clear foothold the project has worked hard to establish over the previous 18 months.