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# Capturing the lived experience of foodbank clients and volunteers

## Communities and Culture Network+ Final Report:

October 2014

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## 1.0 Executive summary

We worked with three food banks in the London borough of Lambeth to capture the lived experience of food bank clients and volunteers. There were two parts to the project. First, through individual interviews and participatory mapping techniques we uncovered the formal and informal services and support clients and volunteers use and offer. Second, the information collected in these interviews was digitised and from this we have produced a number of maps using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) software. Analysis of the digital maps focuses on identifying spatial patterns - similarities and variations between aspects of geographical locations and social capital as represented by formal and informal resources and networks visited and used by foodbank clients and volunteers. In this way the maps help illustrate where support is found in the local area, and perhaps more importantly, where potential gaps exist.

## 1.1 Background

Since this project was commissioned in September 2013 there has been increasing interest in food poverty and foodbanks in the UK by academics, non-governmental organisations (NGO's), the media and parliament e.g. (McDermott 2014; Lyons 2014; Sanghani 2014; Daily Mail 2014; Cooper et al. 2014; Murphy & Manning 2014; Butler 2014; H. Lambie-Mumford et al. 2014; Hansard 2014; Downing et al. 2014). The website for the Trussell Trust, a charity co-ordinating a nationwide network of over four hundred foodbanks across the UK, notes sixty-two national and regional press articles on Trussell Trust foodbanks alone between February and August 2014 (Trussell Trust 2014a); foodbanks have been the subject of a programme by the BBC's investigative journalism series Panorama (BBC 2014); an All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger and Food Poverty (Field 2014b; Field 2014a) was set up in April 2014 and in academia, a special issue on foodbanks was published in the British Food Journal (Caraher & Cavicchi 2014). Alongside this, the Trussell Trust report a continuing rise in the number of people visiting their foodbanks with more than 900,000 visits in the year 2013-14 (Trussell Trust 2014b) and 8,788 people receiving food from Trussell Trust foodbanks in Lambeth - almost three times the amount of people than in any other London borough.

The cause of this rise in the number of people visiting foodbanks has been hotly debated in the media and by politicians during the past year (Gentleman 2014; Tebbit

2014; Green 2014). A number of research projects and media articles explore the relationship between the government's ongoing reforms to the welfare system, particularly the use of benefit sanctions, and increasing numbers of people visiting foodbanks (Lambie 2011; Hansard 2014; Cooper et al. 2014). We took the position that, regardless of the effect of welfare reform on the number of people visiting foodbanks, there was evidence that people had been in need of food aid prior to those changes coming into effect, with the first Trussell Trust foodbank opening in 2000. As a result, we chose to step aside from the political debate to study what we called the lived experience of foodbank clients and volunteers. We felt that this was an under-explored area and that increasing understanding about the everyday experience of those who visit foodbanks had the potential to elicit information about the relationship between welfare and foodbanks while also retaining the possibility of indicating other key issues that might trigger the need to turn to foodbanks for help. We took place as a key concept and set out to understand the lived experience of foodbank clients and volunteers through capturing information on the places they go in the local area. As a result, the work described here is not about food poverty or welfare specifically, rather it is about the issues, places and circumstances that make up the everyday experience of people who visit and volunteer at Trussell Trust foodbanks.

As far as we are aware, only a limited amount of work has been done exploring and articulating the experience of foodbank clients in the UK, e.g. (Cooper et al. 2014; Sanghani 2014), and we are not aware of any work that takes place as its focal point or that has compared the everyday experiences of both clients and volunteers. We believe our work contributes to investigations into food poverty by offering rich descriptions of the everyday lives of foodbank clients and the key issues they face. It also helps us understand how foodbanks are embedded in a local ecology of formal and informal services. We believe the findings indicate where possible interventions might be made in order to reach people who are suffering from, or at risk of, food poverty and who do not currently get help from foodbanks. It also indicates possible places for interventions that might address the triggers of food poverty and highlights areas that would benefit from further study.

In addition, we believe that our work exploring the lived experience of foodbank clients and volunteers in a single London borough can act as a lens onto hyperlocal geographies exploring how residents living in the same geographical area might be

socially disconnected with regard to the places they go and the issues they face. Informal networks, local knowledge and connections may play a significant role in supporting food bank volunteers or clients, yet conventional investigation of the food aid landscape is likely to miss these. Exploring social connectivity and the spread of information in a hyper-local geographical area contributes to understanding of issues around community involvement and potential gaps in knowledge and access and may benefit organisations other than foodbanks that seek to engage local communities either in person or via online tools.

## 1.2 Aims

The overarching aim of this project, as described in our original proposal, was to understand the social and spatial food aid landscape through a micro-scale study of a single London borough with the intention of providing a rich description of how food banks are embedded in a broader environment of community organisations, resources and networks.

We sought to achieve this aim through addressing the following questions:

- What informal services and support are used and offered by food bank clients and volunteers?
- What overlap and gaps exist in the community knowledge of food bank clients and volunteers?
- How does information spread about places where support can be found?
- How are food banks embedded in community ecologies of organisations, businesses and networks?
- Are places important because of the way people feel when they are there as well as because of the help that is offered?

We feel that the findings we outline in section 3 begin to address all of these questions to varying extent. In addition, in our proposal we stated that we wanted to understand the ways in which foodbank clients offer support to others in their local community and this is addressed in section 3.10

Looking across all of the findings we begin to see a picture of how food banks are embedded into community ecologies, and to identify the points at which they intersect with formal, and informal, local networks and organisations. This is discussed in section 4.3

## 2.0 Methods

The geographical scope for this research is the London borough of Lambeth. Lambeth has a population of approximately 304,000 people; it is the tenth most populous and seventh poorest borough in London (Vane 2012; Health and Environment Committee 2013). Lambeth has five Trussell Trust foodbanks as well as organisations offering different types of food aid such as cooked meals and soup kitchens. We chose to only interview clients and volunteers from Trussell Trust foodbanks as this provided a basis for comparison across the interviews. We worked with three Trussell Trust foodbanks in Lambeth, one in the north, one in the centre and one in the south of the borough to carry out this research.

## 2.1 Interviews

In total we carried out forty-nine semi-structured interviews - twenty-nine with foodbank clients, fourteen with foodbank volunteers and six with employees of advice agencies offering other forms of help to foodbank clients such as debt, housing and legal advice. The interviews were carried out between February and April 2014 either in the foodbank where the interviewee was recruited (clients and volunteers) or at their place of work or a nearby café (employees of help organisations). Foodbank clients and volunteers were asked the same set of ten questions about the places in their everyday experience, e.g. where do they go most often, where do they go to meet people, how do they get to these places. A separate list of questions was used to guide the interviews with employees of help organisations (see Appendix A for interview questions). On the recommendation of the foodbank managers, foodbank clients were offered a £10 supermarket gift card as an incentive to participate. No incentive was given to foodbank volunteers or employees of help organisations.

Foodbank clients and volunteers were interviewed immediately following their recruitment. This limited the possibility of participants dropping out between recruitment and interview. Interviewees were offered an information sheet describing the project and informed consent was obtained. We asked participants for permission to audio record the interview. Two foodbank clients and one volunteer preferred not to have the interview recorded. If permission to audio record the interview was refused the interview went ahead and notes were taken.

## 2.2 Participatory mapping

During the interviews with clients and volunteers we used participatory mapping to locate the places mentioned in response to our questions. We didn't use participatory mapping with employees of help organisations.

We initially envisaged taking walks around the neighbourhood with participants while they pointed out, and spoke about, the places they visited in their everyday life. However, practical considerations made this difficult to achieve and the idea was abandoned. Instead, we used three A-1 size paper maps (one for each foodbank) to map the places clients and volunteers referred to during their interview. During each interview we placed post-it notes on the paper map identifying the location of the places they mentioned. At the end of each interview the map and post-its were photographed then the post-its were removed and stored with the signed consent form so the next interview began with a clear map.

It was also our intention to use Google Streetview during the interviews to enable participants to accurately locate the places they visit that are outside of the area covered by the paper maps. As there is no Internet at any of the foodbank locations we bought a mobile Internet dongle to enable us to do so. However, we found that even accurately locating places on the paper map tended to distract from the rich conversation of the interviews. We believed this disruption would be more pronounced if we tried to use digital technologies and so we chose to prioritise the rich interview information over locational accuracy and didn't use Google Streetview.

## 2.3 Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and analysed using Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin 1998). A list of the places each interviewee mentioned was drawn up by the researcher. Places mentioned by clients or volunteers during the interviews where the location was unknown or ambiguous were identified via the Internet during coding. We were unable to identify only a few places mentioned by interviewees.

### *Secondment at Mapping for Change*

One of the aims of the project was to identify spatial patterns implicit in the places mentioned by all clients and volunteers. To enable us to do so Karen undertook a part-time secondment at Mapping for Change, a social enterprise based at UCL,

between March and June 2014. During the secondment Karen worked on the Mapping for Change project *Science in the City*<sup>1</sup> to learn the technical skills needed to create maps using GIS software. Another benefit of the secondment was the chance to understand conceptual issues involved in digital map-making through talking to people working at Mapping for Change<sup>2</sup> and the Extreme Citizen Science<sup>3</sup> (ExCiteS) interdisciplinary research group based at UCL with which Mapping for Change is connected. Thanks to the skills obtained during the secondment a series of digital maps were created from the information collected via the interviews and the participatory mapping that explore the spatial dimension of key themes that emerged from the interview coding.

Once the interviews with clients and volunteers were completed we entered the places they identified into a spreadsheet. This enabled us to use GIS software to create aggregate maps of the information and then to break down these maps further so that we were able to get an overview of, for example, all places mentioned by clients, all places mentioned by all volunteers, all places mentioned by clients and volunteers at each particular foodbank, all healthcare places mentioned by all clients – and so on. These maps enable us to visualize similarities and differences in the way that clients and volunteers inhabit the borough.

## 2.4 Scope and limitations

Working with the Trussell Trust foodbanks means we can feel confident comparing data however, this also means that there are some people who may not be represented in this study.

Before they can receive help from a Trussell Trust foodbank clients must obtain a foodbank voucher from an authorized referrer such as GP, advice agency or children's worker (see Appendix B for details on the process of obtaining a Trussell Trust foodbank voucher and redeeming it for a food package). By only interviewing clients and volunteers at Trussell Trust foodbanks this research may not be representative of those people who are in need of food aid who, for whatever reason, are not in receipt of a voucher. Furthermore, to receive a food package from the Trussell Trust foodbanks clients have to visit the foodbank, or have someone visit in

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mappingforchange.org.uk/portfolio/science-in-the-city/>

<sup>2</sup> For more information on Mapping for Change see <http://www.mappingforchange.org.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> For more information on ExCiteS see <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/excites>



their name. This may mean that people with limited mobility may not be accessing foodbanks and may be missing from this research.

In addition, Trussell Trust food packages are intended for cooking at home and therefore are only suitable for people with cooking facilities. As a result, the Trussell Trust tends not to have many clients who are homeless and this group of people may be missing from our interviews.

As the research progressed we chose not to interview clients with poor spoken English as it was difficult for them to understand the questions. It was also difficult to interview women who had very small children with them as it was hard for the women to hold a conversation for long if they needed to also keep an eye on the children.

Finally, the Trussell Trust foodbanks we worked with are all located in churches or community rooms connected to a church (See (Hannah Lambie-Mumford & Jarvis 2012) for a discussion of the implications of faith-based voluntary community organisations). Although members of different faiths, or no faith, are welcome it's possible the setting of the foodbank affects the demographic of those who use it.

The issue of the perceived trustworthiness of volunteered data has been discussed in citizen science (Elwood et al. 2012). In this work we made no attempt to validate the information provided by participants about their personal lives beyond checking the address of places they mentioned by searching on Google. People told stories about past crimes, drug and alcohol addictions and impoverished lives (both financially and socially) that we do not believe they invented. We were told the names of ex-wives, participants' addresses and the name of their GP. We have the impression that many people were happy to share their story.

### **3.0 Key findings**

Drawing on the information gathered through the interviews and participatory mapping sessions we developed an overview of the services and support in the local area used by foodbank clients and volunteers. The places mentioned were classified into fifteen categories:

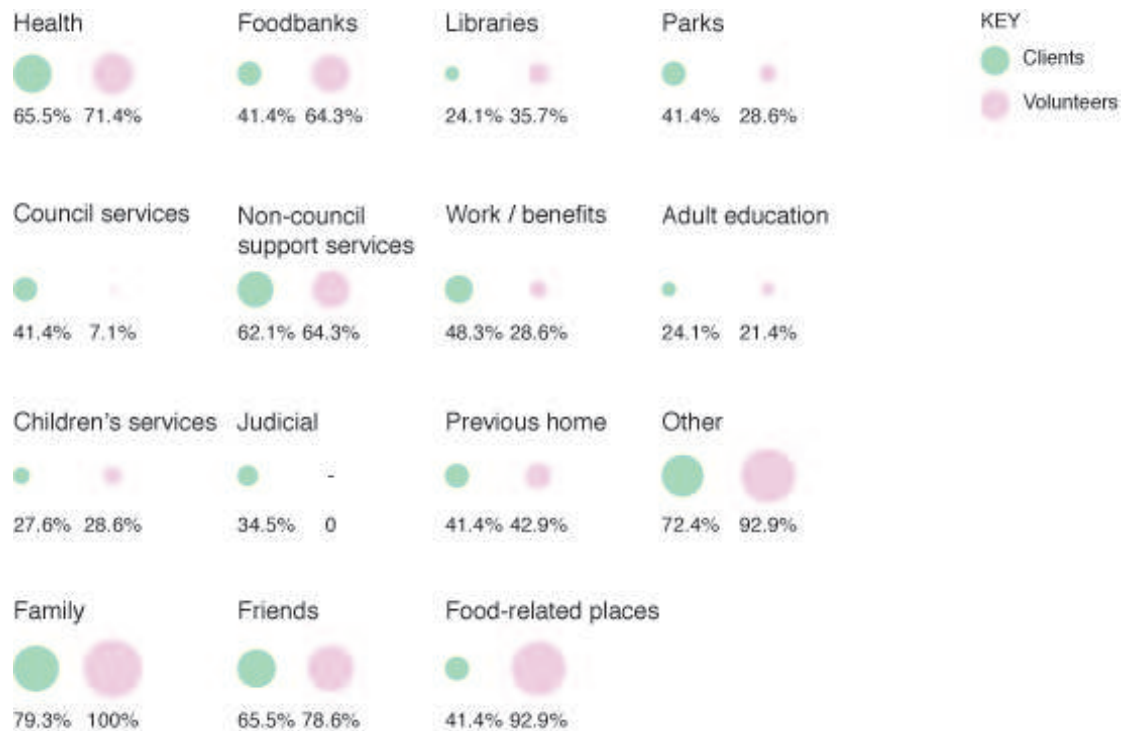


Figure 1: Percentage of foodbank clients and volunteers who mentioned each of the thirteen categories

From this classification we see that clients and volunteers mentioned many of the same types of place e.g. health, non-council support services, parks, family and friends. However, there are some notable differences, for example, clients were more likely to mention council services than volunteers while volunteers mentioned food-related places (places for food purchasing and consumption) more often than clients. The category of judicial places is particularly interesting as no volunteers mentioned visiting places in this category while 34.5% of foodbank clients did. Places included in this category were solicitors' offices, court, prison and the probation office.

Outside of family and friends, the two categories mentioned most often by clients and volunteers were healthcare and non-council support services.

### 3.1 Health care places

Foodbank clients and volunteers identified their GP's surgery as a place they would go to get help. For a number of foodbank clients, and for a smaller number of foodbank volunteers, dealing with their own chronic physical or mental health issue, or that of one of their family, resulted in a large amount of time being spent visiting healthcare providers.

*Q: Where do you go most often?*

*A: 80% of time is hospital, therapy. I had kidney problem and after that I was on dialysis so luckily they give me a new kidney so a year after that I had a stroke. I had two strokes. After that my diabetic started shooting up so I'm taking medication for that so then I have gout under my foot and my knees so it's very difficult. So I have a lot of places I have to go for appointment and this and that.*

*Foodbank client*

One aspect of healthcare that shows a clear division between the needs of foodbank clients and volunteers was support for overcoming alcohol or drug addiction. No volunteers mentioned seeking this type of support while it was explicitly mentioned by more than one foodbank client.

*I've been through a lot, I've been in Foundation, Foundation 66 that's another place as well in Camberwell. That's alcohol rehabilitation, I was there about 8 months*

*Foodbank client*

*I was a drug addict five years ago perhaps there was Lorraine Hewitt House, with the drink I used to go to Loughborough.*

*Foodbank client*

Through the interviews it became clear that clients visit healthcare providers for reasons other than accessing healthcare. One gentleman explained how his GP had written the letter to schedule his appointment with 'Every Penny Counts', a Lambeth Council initiative to ensure that people on benefits, particularly those aged over 65, are receiving all the benefits to which they are entitled. Another lady described visiting her GP to ask for a foodbank voucher while a gentlemen explained how, when he was living on the streets, he would visit the A&E department of the hospital to get some sleep.

*I was walking around of the nighttime because I can't sleep on the street, I'm not going to sleep, I can sleep in doorways and I can't do that so I just walk around, go to St Thomas hospital and sit in A&E and get 20 mins sleep here and half an hour here and in the morning*

*they'll come round and say, right, time to go now, so we'll go, next night go back about 11, 12 o'clock, after walking around, go back in there and try to get couple of hours sleep*

*Foodbank client*

### 3.2 Non-council support services

The second most-mentioned category of places visited by clients and volunteers was non-council support services. These places are non-profit services that are not organised by the local council or central government.

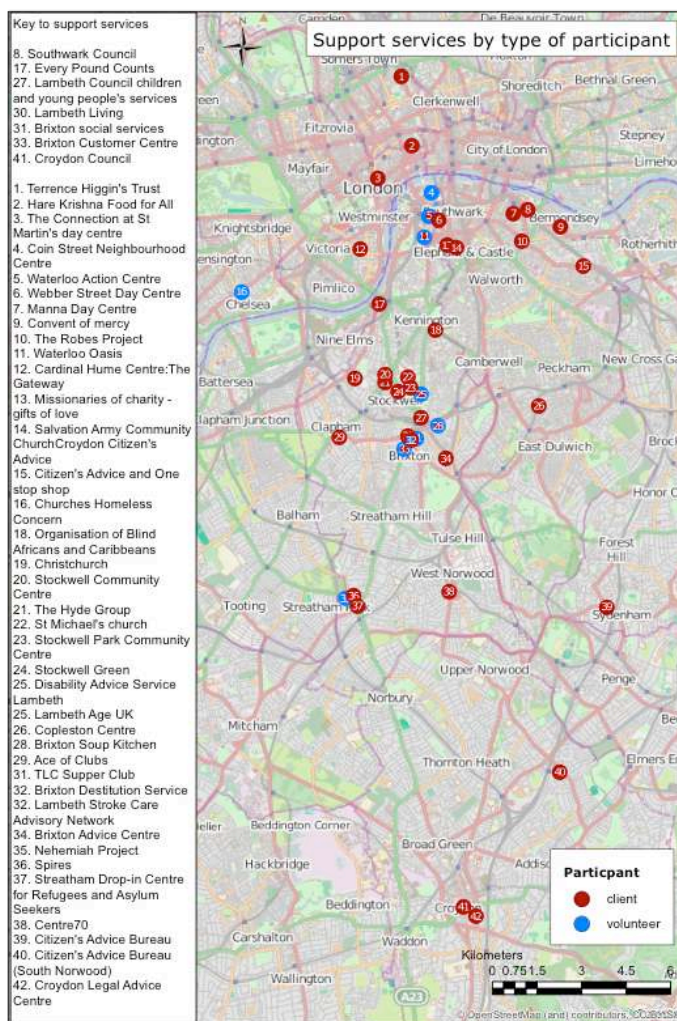


Figure 2: Council and non-council support services mentioned by foodbank clients and volunteers (for a larger version of this map see Appendix C)

The foodbank clients and volunteers identified thirty-five separate non-council

support services. There were places and services that interviewees currently use, have used in the past or, in the case of volunteers, are places where they do voluntary work. The only place that was mentioned by foodbank clients at all three of the foodbanks where we carried out interviews was the Ace of Clubs, a day centre for homeless or vulnerable people based in Lambeth. As with the other day centres that clients mentioned, the Ace of Clubs, provides a range of services for foodbank clients. Clients told us that they value the day centres because they can get free or low-cost food, free clothing, take a shower, use the internet, get advice from staff, especially on issues to do with benefits and housing, use the phone to call the benefits and housing offices, watch films, listen to music and socialise with others.

*I stay there 3 or 4 hours because I talk to social workers, they have computers there I use a little bit, and videos, films and music, they have drums and I can take shower there because I don't have shower, no heating nothing because there's no money, so that's why makes me happy, they give me some clothes.*

*Foodbank client*

In interviews, clients and volunteers talked about people and places interchangeably, for example 'GP' was mentioned as both a person and a place. For one foodbank client who talked about the importance of the Ace of Clubs, the place was synonymous with one of its employees.

*Q: Which of these places is most important to you?*

*A: I'd say Ace of Clubs. ... that woman [name removed], I don't know, she's been put on this world to, like next to God or something(?). She's really, you don't see no stress in the woman or anything and there's a lot of people are all awh, awh, awh, and she breaks them down and says listen, you're not here for that, you talk to me, it's kind of like, if you want help and that you talk to me. I dunno, she's something different, you know what I mean? She's a people's person. Only way to say it, because I ain't had my mother around, she's like a mother you know*

*Foodbank client*

Advice centres were another type of non-council support service that clients mentioned frequently as places to get help in the local area. Some clients had

spoken to advisors at Citizen's Advice Bureau, however, local independent advice centres were more commonly discussed<sup>4</sup>.

Foodbank clients also told us they got advice from staff at the day centres however the type of advice offered by day centre staff was more often signposting to further resources – including local advice centres. Independent advice centres differ from day centres as they employ specialist advisors on topics such as housing, legal aid, welfare and benefits and debt, who are able to advise and represent clients.

Within the category of non-council support services clients also named a number of services that support individuals with specific health needs, for example, HIV sufferers, stroke survivors, those with visual impairments and elderly people, and services that offer help to refugees and asylum seekers and the homeless.

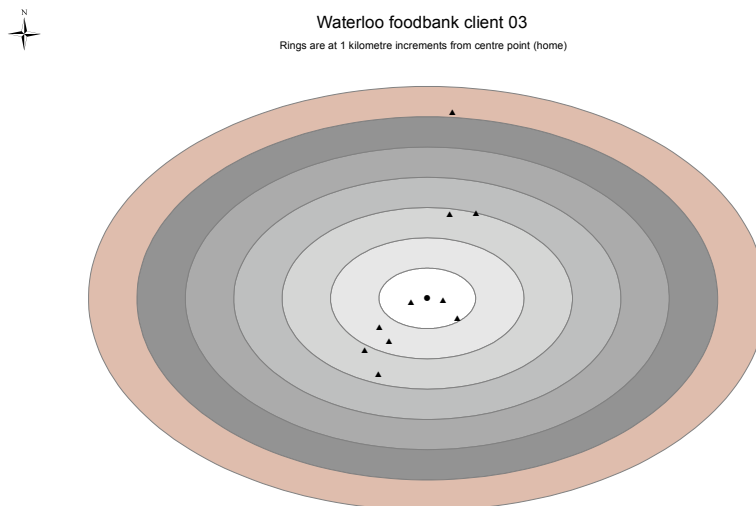
### 3.3 Social spaces

In some ways, the lived experiences of clients and volunteers were more similar than we anticipated. For example in talking about social relationships we were equally likely to hear from a volunteer who preferred to keep themselves to themselves as to hear similar thoughts expressed by a client. Similarly, the affection felt towards their families and friends was consistent across volunteers and clients with children being highly valued and the loss of a parent being felt acutely by all.

Looking across an aggregate of places where clients and volunteers go, for example the map in figure 2, can be somewhat misleading because it may give the impression that clients and volunteers have roughly equal numbers of places where they go in the local area. Figures 3 and 4 indicate the number of places mentioned (not including visits to family and friends) by individual foodbank clients and highlight the difference that existed between clients with regard to the number of places they mentioned visiting.

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<sup>4</sup> During our data collection phase we interviewed two advisors from local advice centres who regularly run sessions in the foodbanks. However, due to time constraints, there remains work to be done to analyse these interviews.



Figures 3 & 4: Number of places visited and distance from home

Sometimes social isolation was a personal preference of the interviewee, for example because they preferred to “keep myself to myself” (client) or because “I’ve got very peculiar about meeting people” (volunteer). Those who had small children to care for were likely to say they didn’t go to many places or meet many people. All except one of these stay-at-home parents were female.

However, for some foodbank clients (although not for volunteers) the choice to reduce social contact seemed to stem from a lack of trust in others.

*Don't really go to meet nobody no more, gone past that. Grew up in*

*[place name], don't really mix with people no more, one man. When I was younger knew a lot of people but when you get older you wisen up.*

*Foodbank client*

The interviews revealed that volunteers are willing to pay for social activities. Volunteers mentioned visiting the cinema, playing tennis, holding a season ticket for a local football team and membership of an art gallery. In contrast, it was only places or activities that benefitted their children, such as study groups or going swimming, that foodbank clients mentioned paying for on a regular basis.

For many of the foodbank clients free, or low-cost, places to socialise or mix with others were highly valued. During the interviews, once we had located on the map the places the interviewee went most often we asked the question: “Which one of these places is most important to you?” and then “Why is this place important?” The answers indicate the importance of social contact to many of the clients we spoke to.

*Q: Why is the day centre important to you?*

*Community centre is important because they give a lot of help; go when you feel bored; people to talk to; can play pool; can play cards; if you have problems with benefits always an advisor*

*Foodbank client*

For some foodbank clients the library was important, not only for the services it offers, but for the chance to get out of the house and see other people.

*Library [is] important because otherwise I go absolutely mad in my own company; and if I read it keeps the old you know, I do a crossword everyday because when I was drinking very heavily I thought if I do one thing a day, if I keep that going, write down, in the library there's that tranquillity that I can do it and reference what I want to. I love thrillers and stuff and order the new ones. I don't know, it's the centre of everywhere, so even if I'm going shopping I'll stop in either on the way there or on the way back*

*Foodbank client*



We find it interesting that the places that foodbank clients told us were the most important to them were not necessarily the places that provided the most direct forms of help – for example, hospitals, advice centres or foodbanks. Instead, it was often the places where they could socialise, or relax that were most important to them such as libraries or community centres. However, the most common place that foodbank clients and volunteers chose as their most important place was home, and this is discussed in section 3.9.

### 3.4 Family and friends

In analysing the interviews we found that the difference between the number of clients and the number of volunteers mentioning family and friends was not high. Only six clients did not mention family or friends at all with twenty-three out of twenty-nine foodbank clients mentioning family and friends. All volunteers mentioned family and friends.

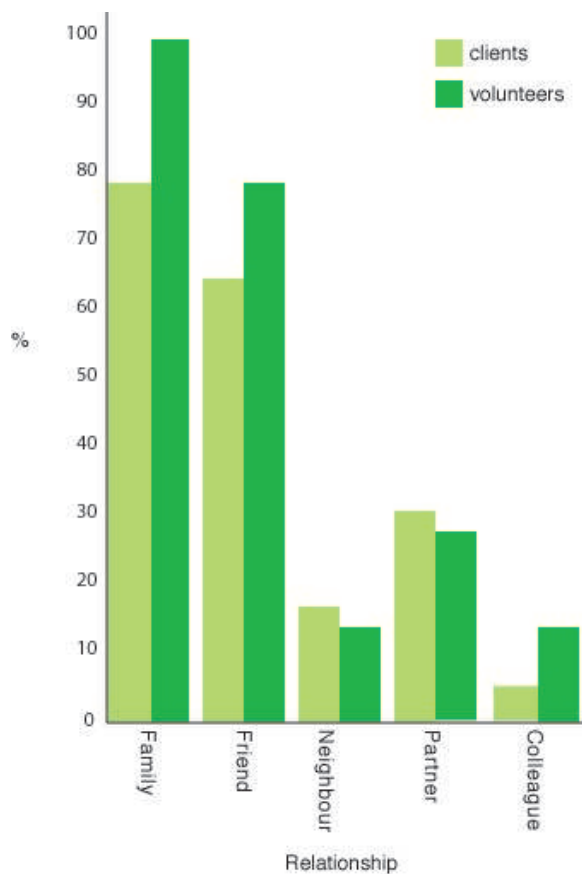


Figure 5: Percentage of clients and volunteers who mentioned particular social relationships during the interviews

Clients and volunteers mentioned children, siblings and parents when talking about family. Most clients and volunteers placed great value on their relationships with family and friends.

Q: Why is your mum's your most important place?

*My mum's my mum, everyone loves their mum, well if they don't something's gone wrong, there's a problem, I love my mum to bits, she's always been there for me, tried to guide me in the right direction*

*Foodbank client*

One difference between clients and volunteers was that while volunteers spoke only of positive relationships with family and friends, some clients had more troubled relationships. Domestic violence, child custody court cases and friends who are a bad influence all came up in interviews with foodbank clients. Two clients, who had overcome drug or alcohol addiction, spoke of the necessity and desire to keep away from their friends (and in one case from their family) who were still using drugs and alcohol and were either seen as people they no longer wanted to be friends with or as a possible temptation back into old ways.

*Just trying to stay away from all the crap, hard for me because 90%, 80% people I know all sniff cocaine, even my whole, most of my family, except my mum she's off it now but my dad sniffs, my brothers sniff, my sister sniffs so everyone I try to meet I've got to keep away from them; I've got to because one more slip and I'm back in jail, minimum 2 years for one line so what's the point*

*Foodbank client*

Relationships with family and friends affected the distances that clients and volunteers traveled and the areas they visited. In some cases, family relationships proved a powerful motivation to travel with children being a particular draw. One volunteer described visiting one of her children who lives abroad. One client described making the journey to a town a few hundred miles north of London in a last ditch attempt to maintain his visiting rights with his young child. From the opposite perspective, in one of the saddest situations we heard about, one client was deliberately isolating herself and her children and limiting how far she traveled to try to ensure her family's safety:

*I don't go anywhere. I left my husband because of domestic violence and he doesn't know where I am so I stay inside. [From notes]*

*Foodbank client*

Analysis of the interviews indicates that lack of social capital, evidenced by few friends and family, is not a characteristic that separates foodbank clients from volunteers. One difference however is that in our interviews, only foodbank clients described relationships with family and friends that they felt were harmful to them.

### 3.4 Spread of information and knowledge exchange

To begin to unpick how information spreads about places, during the interviews, once all the places were on the paper map, we asked interviewees 'Which one of these places is most important to you?' A few questions were then asked about the place that they chose. One of these questions was 'How did you find this place?' Out of the thirty-eight people who answered this question (twenty-six clients and eleven volunteers) thirty-three people found the place that is most important to them through a personal contact. Four people (three clients and one volunteer) found the place that is most important to them by passing it on the street. One client found the place that is most important to them via a council website.

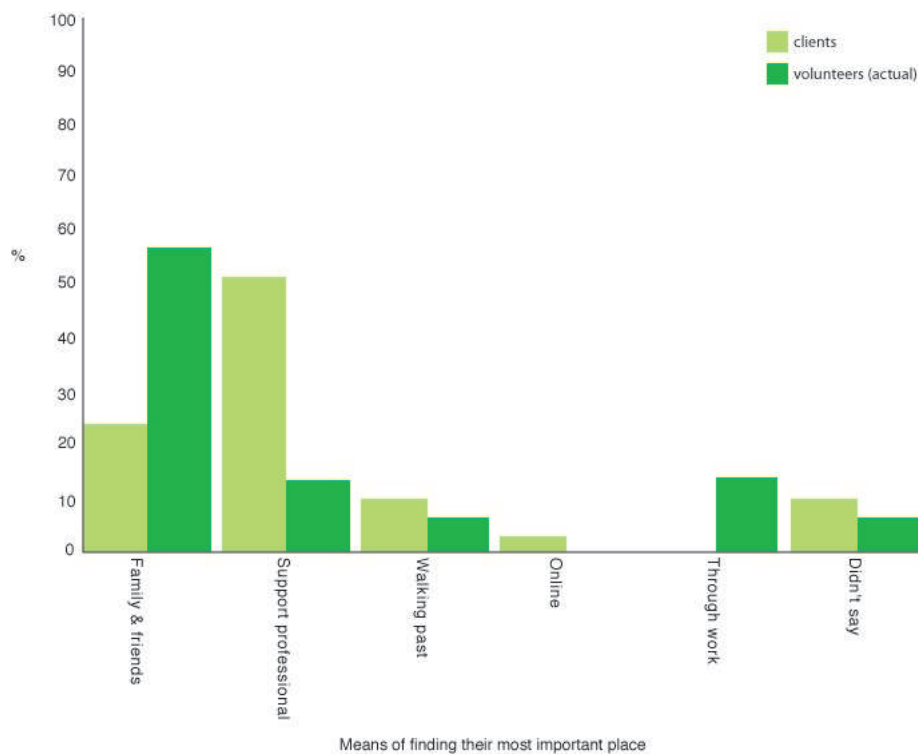


Figure 6: Ways in which foodbank clients and volunteers found the place that is most important to them

Breaking this down further, we see a difference in the type of personal contact who provided the information to foodbank clients and volunteers. For foodbank clients, the information most often came through personal contact with a professional support worker, for example, a healthcare professional, council staff, non-council support service staff or the probation office. For foodbank volunteers the information was more likely to be obtained through friends or family.

As mentioned earlier, only one interviewee told us they found the place that is most important to them online. Although we didn't specifically ask about interviewees' relationship to digital technologies, looking across the interviews a picture begins to emerge. Conversation about using digital technologies was rare during the interviews; in answer to the question "*Where do you go to get help?*" only one interviewee, a foodbank volunteer, told us she would look on the Internet.

From the interviews it is clear that not all foodbank clients have access to the Internet at home. Clients described using the Internet for job hunting and for keeping in touch with friends and family. They told us that they visit libraries, day centres and community centres because these places provide free Internet access. However clients also told us access to the Internet at these places is often limited because of the demand. For example, Lambeth libraries limit each cardholder to using their computers for a maximum of two hours per day (Lambeth Council 2010). One foodbank client described how they increased the time they could access the Internet by holding multiple library cards in different boroughs.

*My friend told me libraries can give you card for free internet, for looking for jobs. First went four years ago when I just arrived, had cards for Wimbledon Library, Wandsworth Library, Brixton Library, Croydon Library.*

*Foodbank client*

The same client also told us how they would walk up to eight kilometres to visit the library.

### **3.5 Benefits, job hunting, work and training**

Interviewing clients who were in training or work was rare. The category of adult education and training was the least mentioned by the people we spoke to. Only two of the twenty-nine foodbank clients we interviewed told us they were currently in

education. One of these was studying at a further education college, the other attended part of the University of London that offers all levels of study through evening courses.

The majority of clients we spoke to were receiving some form of benefit. Although we didn't ask about their work situation specifically this was apparent from their conversation and from the numbers who mentioned Job Centre Plus as a place that they go. Health conditions prevented many of the people we interviewed from working. Those that were fit for work told us of the different strategies they employ to find a job such as visiting commercial job agencies, contacting potential employees directly and using the Job Centre Plus. However, a sense of despair at finding work permeated many of the conversations with clients citing their age, lack of skills and past experiences as reasons why they believe they can't find work. This feeling of hopelessness was expressed by clients with very different personal and professional backgrounds for example, an asylum seeker felt that the Job Centre Plus couldn't help because he saw many people he perceived as better qualified there who were also unable to find work.

*nobody really help, everybody just go there to find me jobs; so many people there who can use the computer really well, speak English better than me and they're still in the queue, still struggling*

*Foodbank client*

Meanwhile, a client who used to have their own business cited his age and past addiction as difficulties that affect his attempts to find employment.

*almost 50 years old, when they say what was your last job 'I ran my own business' can't really give yourself a reference; why did you stop your business, 'Oh, I went into rehab'*

*Foodbank client*

One client we spoke to had no recourse to public funds<sup>5</sup> as he is waiting for the Home Office to respond to his visa application. Consequently he cannot claim any benefits. His wife, who had had a baby six weeks before our interview took place,

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<sup>5</sup> People who are subject to immigration control have no recourse to public funds. This status means they cannot claim welfare benefits, public housing or Home Office support for asylum seekers.

works part-time while he takes care of the baby and their other child. His wife wanted to work full-time but was unable to find a position. As the part-time work doesn't provide enough money for them to live on the client told us he phones around his friends and asks if they could spare £10 or £5 so that he can get some food for his family:

*The days she doesn't go to work I have to call round to ask my friends what they can help me cos I've got two children and I don't want them to go through that stress, so what can they do to help me and maybe some £10 some £5, take it out and buy maybe some fresh food stuff and take it home for the family.*

*Foodbank client*

Despite not asking any questions about finances or welfare, through the course of the interviews foodbank clients described how their everyday experience is entwined with central government policies and practices. The long extract below illustrates how money, health, essential expenses and government systems were intertwined in the everyday experience of one foodbank client we spoke to.

*I'm looking after my daughter's children and she's trying to get the benefit changed from her name to my name because she can't manage the money. She's depressed so she does all nonsense with it. Well I don't think she does nonsense with it, she just manages it the best way she knows how. She's got, you know those heaters you've got to have a key or a card, and they eat your money up, very very expensive, but she cannot see her way to saving the money for paying the bill so it's her only option. At least that way if she puts the money on the key she knows it's there. Or on the card, cos she's got gas and electric. But to save the money, if she sees that money in the bank and she needs something she'll spend it. So it's just very bad. So they're trying to change it over from her to me, and of course it's a big delay, because you have to contact them, the tax credit people, and then you contact the child benefit people, two different bodies and the tax credit people tell you we will send you an application pack for you to fill out, it will take two weeks just to receive the pack! Then you got to fill it out and send it back. And it can take up to twelve weeks to process it. You*

*think, madness, how can you tell somebody that, and they depend on this benefit. So hence why I'm here.*

Q: Does it [the benefit] stop while you're in the process?

*Completely! From the day you call them and tell them about this change that you want to make it freezes. Completely freezes, that's it, it stops.*

*Foodbank client*

### 3.6 Travel and costs

Looking at the maps of places visited by clients (figures 2, 9 and 10) illustrates how these places are distributed spatially across Lambeth and further afield into the City of Westminster to the north, Southwark to the east and Croydon to the south. As clients from Waterloo foodbank told us they visited services in Croydon this means that clients can be traveling distances of up to 16 kilometres to find help.



Figure 7: Foodbank client mentioned places up to fifteen kilometres away from their home

As with the number of places that people go it is important to keep in mind that these maps are aggregate maps. Looking at the diagrams in figures 7 and 8 showing the relative distances of places they go from the home of individual foodbank clients shows that while some individuals can travel up to fifteen kilometres, others only mention places within a three kilometre radius of their home.



Waterloo foodbank client 01  
Rings are at 1 kilometre increments from centre point (home)

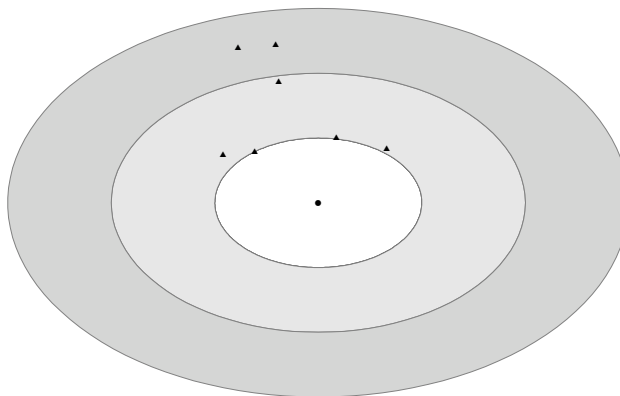


Figure 8: Places mentioned by foodbank client are within three kilometres of their home

With regards to transport, clients looked for cheap travel options, often walking if possible and always choosing to take the bus rather than the tube. Being an urban area means there is good public transport around Lambeth and clients overwhelmingly make use of this. Only one client told us they travel by car for health reasons. More surprisingly, only two out of twenty nine clients mentioned using a bike to get around.

While some clients enjoy walking long distances because they “*find different situation on the street everyday, it's funny*” or because “*when I'm walking ... my mind's more open*”, for some walking long distances isn't an option for health reasons or because they have small children. Even when travelling is difficult clients described downgrading travel options if this helps them save money even if this makes their life more difficult – in this case because the client had very limited mobility.

Q: How do you get from home to the hospital?

*Taxis, sometimes buses. But now I don't use the taxis because they drop the money too much so I take the bus.*

*Foodbank client*

Some travel was unavoidable for all the clients we spoke to, for example for taking children to school, going to work or to benefits appointments or for job hunting.



Keeping the cost of essential travel down can mean that the amount of time spent traveling increases; one client explained how their partner travels by bus for up to three hours each way to work when they don't have money to pay for the train.

*She starts work at 9 and she finishes at 6 but before she comes it can be 9 o'clock or sometimes she doesn't have enough money for train so she has to get on the bus all the way to [A], change from [A] to [B], change from [B] before she can get to [C], sometimes it takes almost about 3 hours. She has to leave home at 6 to make her time to get into town to get to work.*

*Foodbank client*

In this case the travel costs are exacerbated by the family's housing situation. Their local council is currently providing the family with temporary accommodation. This has increased the distance the client's wife has to travel to get to work and also increased the distance between their housing and their son's school. It's now necessary for the client and his son to take a bus to school, so incurring further costs.

### **3.8 Places for purchasing and consuming food**

Places for purchasing and consuming food were mentioned by more volunteers than clients; 92.9% of volunteers (13/14) mentioned places in this category compared to 37.9% of clients (11/29). The majority of these places, for volunteers and clients, are places for purchasing food to be cooked and eaten at home, for example, supermarkets or markets.

Places mentioned by clients were almost all for purchasing food. Both clients and volunteers visited supermarkets and local shops to purchase food, but three clients and one volunteer also mentioned shopping at local markets. While supermarkets were never mentioned as being more than a place to buy food, for clients, the markets and corner shops were sometimes also places where they could find social contact and support through the relationships that developed with the people there:

*The other place I should say is my little corner shop... the other day I came with my last couple of quid and got some milk and stuff, the next day I came and I said I've got enough just about for and she [shop owner] said, she had a whole pot of pasta that she'd made herself and she said over there in the fridge, and I said how much is that because it*

*was like all this ice cream and she said, for you, present, present and I thought that's pretty, you know, pretty sweet*

*Foodbank client*

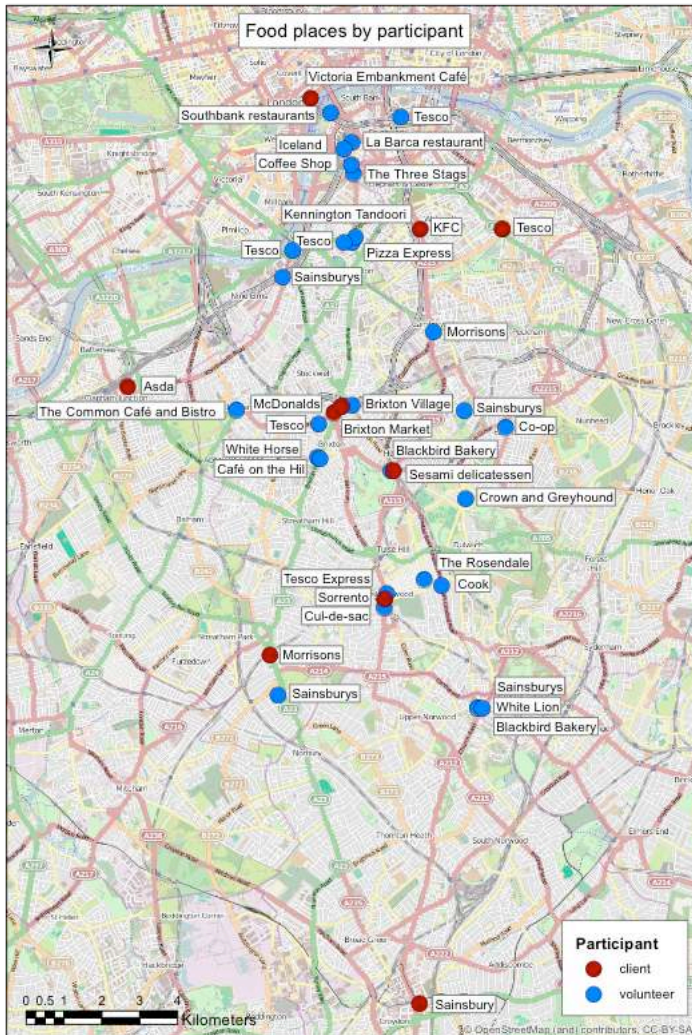


Figure 9: Map showing places for food purchase and consumption (See Appendix D for a larger version of this map)

Only two foodbank clients mentioned visiting places for food consumption. Both of these places were local cafés. However, one of these clients visits the café only because it is the place they meet their keyworker from mental health services. The second client had carefully chosen the café they visited because of its low prices that they compared to the prices in café chains such as Pret à Manger:

*There's a little caff that ain't too bad but, you have to shop around,*

*price of buying a cup of tea ... at the hostel we get that Pret stuff, we get that off them, I've been eating some of that, and I went in there one day to pick the stuff up, one Saturday evening, I looked at the prices and they wanted £1.50 for a cup of tea. It's like coffee is £2.10. Are they taking the mick or what? It's robbery, say 5 pence for a teabag, about 2 or 3 pence to boil a kettle, a little bit of milk and a bit of sugar costs about 10, say 15p. The rest of it's profit.*

*Foodbank client*

It seems that foodbank clients view cafés, restaurants and pubs as non-essentials and have chosen not to spend their money in this type of place. That this is a choice based on their financial situation rather than a personal preference is clear from the number of clients we interviewed who told us they wanted to visit these places:

*I'd love to go and sit in the caff and have breakfast of the mornings, at least once a week, I'd love to go for a meal, I'd love to go to the cinema but I don't go anywhere. Everything is so expensive*

*Foodbank client*

By comparison, eight of the thirteen volunteers mentioned cafes, pubs and restaurants as places they would go to meet friends.

### **3.9 Home**

The final question in our original proposal was “Are places important because of the way people feel when they are there as well as because of the help that is offered?” To begin to address this question we asked interviewees to tell us which of the places they included on the paper map was most important to them. We then asked a number of questions specifically about this place, including “*How did you find it?*” “*Why is it important to you?*” and “*How do you feel when you are there?*” Earlier in the report we mentioned that the places people chose as their most important place include the library and the community centre. However, the place that the majority of foodbank clients and volunteers chose as their most important place was home. These are interesting choices as it suggests that places are important because of the way that people feel when they are there and not only for the help offered. In this section we dig a little deeper into why home was important to people to try to understand what makes a place important.

One client who had previously been homeless told us that home was the most important place because *“it's your own little kingdom, place to go, place to relax in your own... feel safe and comfortable”*. A client who had grown up living with extended family in an overcrowded house mentioned feeling a similar sense of ownership and control over their home *“I've never had anywhere before, remember how we grew up, so when we got this place, it's just, it's like my castle”*. This sense of control over a space, it being private and of not having to answer to anyone else was emphasised by the comments of a client who was currently homeless and housed by a church project. Via a complicated rota system the people on the project sleep in a different church or community hall each night of the week. In some of these locations the twenty or so individuals all sleep in the same hall, in others it's possible for them to have their own room. We asked how the client how they felt to have their own space in one of these private rooms.

*Words can't explain it, really really nice, really nice; I get a decent nights sleep because there's snoring and talking and joking and laughing.*

*Foodbank client*

Feelings of safety and security are another factor in the importance of home to interviewees with clients answering that it was important because *“it's secure you know, it's secure”* and saying *“we feel safe there, I think that's most important thing that I feel that once we shut the door we're safe.”* In contrast, for clients who have very unstable housing situations, home can be a source of stress. The client quoted below didn't choose home as their most important place. Instead they chose the library because it provided a tranquillity that is lacking from their home life.

*get caught up living in little bedsit with just enough room to hang a couple of bits and pieces; the noise of everyone else, nice road and everything but a big turnover of people and you're never quite sure who you're getting so it's quite stressful*

*Foodbank client*

### **3.10 Help that clients and volunteers offer to other people.**

In addition to understanding where clients and volunteers go to find help in the local area, we also set out the aim of uncovering if clients offer support and help to others.

During the interviews we asked the question “*Do you help others?*” – deliberately leaving the word help undefined for interviewees to interpret as they chose.

Out of the twenty-nine foodbank clients we spoke to, only those who were in the most difficult of situations – homeless or with mobility issues – said they don’t help others. The type of help offered by clients included helping neighbours with errands, giving advice when asked, cooking food for people in the community and financial support via direct debit to a charity. In addition, foodbank clients and volunteers both described how they support members of their family who are elderly or suffer from mental health issues:

*Mum's quite old and poorly now so we do do a lot for her*

*Foodbank client*

*Last 2 or 3 weeks been going over to see my mother in [name of area in London] and helping her*

*Foodbank volunteer*

*We go there [hospital] a lot for [child's name] cos he's got mental health problems and he's got really poorly bowels as well so we've spent quite a lot of time there.*

*Foodbank client*

*My younger brother who is, he lives on [Street name], and he has mental illness so I'm often down there you know for meetings. You know, with his key workers, support workers and that so I have to go to meetings there.”*

*Foodbank volunteer*

The similarity of these descriptions of help offered to family members highlights that on some occasions there was little difference between the lived experience of foodbank clients and volunteers.

While many of the examples of help given were small, ad hoc acts of support given as and when it was needed, there were two foodbank clients who described offering more long-term and ongoing help to others. The first was a client who, when asked if they helped others, told us that for the past seven years they had been doing the

shopping for the elderly people on their street:

*... three days a week I go around check on the elderlies see if they need anything; I've got one round the corner from me, I've got about 15 that I do shopping for because they're quite elderly; one's 89, one's 92, one's 83 it's hard and they're on their own most of them so I do the shopping*

*Foodbank client*

This help focuses on supporting people the client knows who live in her local area. In contrast, the second description of ongoing help came from a foodbank client who was running an overseas charity supporting vulnerable children in the African country where some of the client's family lives.

*I run charities, but now, because I've been doing this for 7 years on my own, it's called [charity name] in [country name], but at the moment I'm just trying to build up my foundations because I was doing it on my own so now I'm trying to get funding. ... I'm planning, because I've been doing this so I'm going to contact Bill Gates Foundation which I've searched for and take all my paperwork and my evidence I've got, show them, say this is what I've been doing for years, been doing this on my own so I'd like to get funding so I want to see if I can raise funding to help these kids*

*Foodbank client*

Finally, one foodbank client demonstrated that helping others can co-exist with being in need yourself when, at the end of the interview, he donated the £10 supermarket gift card incentive to the foodbank.

## **4.0 Discussion**

### **4.1 Understanding the lived experience of foodbank clients**

The interviews indicate that the key reason people turn to foodbanks is because they don't have enough money to pay for their essential everyday expenses. This tallies with the work previously done on foodbank clients suggesting that financial concerns

play a part in the need for people to seek help from foodbanks and that before resorting to foodbanks people try other approaches to managing their budget, for example, skipping meals or buying less expensive products (e.g. (Hannah Lambie-Mumford & Elizabeth Dowler 2014)).

Although none of our questions asked about money, many clients told us a great deal about their financial situation and their struggle to make ends meet. Clients told us how they make the decision not to visit places such as cafes or cinemas as they don't have the money. Our interviews indicate that limited finances affect the places that foodbank clients go in the local area and that they choose not to go to places that cost money because they need to pay for essentials such as food, rent and other bills. This suggests that visiting a foodbank is one of a wide number of strategies for reducing costs.

The government believes that the best way to help people on benefits who are in need of food aid is to help them back into work (Downing et al. 2014). However, from our study we think there are a number of issues around this. We outline these below.

### ***Health issues***

The foodbank clients we spoke to have a high incidence of health issues to cope with, either for themselves or for their dependents, compared to the foodbank volunteers we interviewed. These health issues may be related to physical or mental health, including addiction, and are often long-term and chronic conditions. We believe these health conditions impact on the ability of clients to find work as a means to improve their financial situation.

Several of the chronic conditions that clients suffered from impacted their mobility thus affecting their ability to travel around the local area. When the healthcare issues were those of a dependent child this seems likely to affect the client's ability to work or to affect the type of work they would be able to consider as it would have to pay enough to cover the costs of a carer to carry out the tasks they currently do themselves.

### ***Cost of travel***

Our research indicates that the cost of travel is a further potential issue with the approach of improving clients' situations through encouraging them back to work.

The cost of travel is a hidden essential that affects the lived experience of foodbank clients. Minimising the amount of money spent on rent by moving to a cheap area or having no choice except taking whatever housing the council can offer, can mean increased travel that can cost time and money, as indicated by the client whose wife travels three hours one-way to get to work by bus when they don't have enough money for her to take the train. Our study highlights that unavoidable travel costs include taking children to school, getting to work, visiting the job centre and getting access to the Internet for job hunting if clients don't have internet at home. We are aware of very little work that explores the relationship between the cost of travel and food poverty beyond work exploring access to food and the concept of food deserts as factors in food poverty (e.g. (Wrigley 2002)).

Benefit claimants who have been signing on for at least three months, and those on health-related benefits who are trying to gain employment, may be eligible for the Job Centre Plus Travel Discount. Only one client we spoke to mentioned using this scheme. It is possible that clients did not think to mention it to us, however, from the interviews, it seems that the price of travel is an issue for clients when deciding which places to go and how to get there. An increase in income through getting a job would need to be weighed against an increase in travel costs for getting to and from work. This travel cost may be paid in money or time and either of these types of cost impact on foodbank clients' lived experience.

### ***Spread of information and social isolation***

One of the aims in our original proposal for this work was to understand how information about places where help can be found spreads between people. We were interested in this because the findings might highlight possible interventions that could be carried out to try to ensure people were getting all the help available to them. In our interviews the majority of people we spoke to (both foodbank clients and volunteers) told us that they found the place that is most important to them through a personal contact. We believe this highlights two important issues. First, despite the shift to online services digital technologies are not the most effective means of ensuring the spread of information. Second, that social isolation may affect clients' chances of finding information that may offer ways to improve their situation. We will discuss these issues in turn.

In our interviews only one client told us she found the place that is most important to



her online. Several clients told us that access to the Internet is one of the reasons that places were important to them. This suggests that clients value the Internet but don't currently have as much access to it as they would like. As increasing numbers of government services are put online, it clearly can't be helpful that the people who need these services most may only have limited access to them. Not only does this mean they may be missing information, opportunities to promote themselves or find job openings but they can also be financially penalised for not spending enough time online through the benefits sanction system which can require evidence of up to 35 hours per week of job hunting (Citizens Advice Bureau 2014). It's unclear how people without access to the Internet at home are expected to achieve this in an environment where places that offer free Internet provision have to ration access due to high demand.

The second issue raised by our study is that foodbank clients are more socially isolated than foodbank volunteers in terms of the variety of places they go to meet people. Our findings indicate that the types of places volunteers visit when they meet people are often places that require spending money (e.g. cafes, restaurants, pubs). Most clients, on the other hand, met friends and family at their homes and didn't go to places that cost money. Health issues, dependents and the cost of travel contribute to the social isolation experienced by many foodbank clients we spoke to. We suggest that this is likely to affect the chances of foodbank clients finding information that may offer ways to improve their situation.

There are aspects of foodbank clients' lived experience that have an implicit effect on their ability to improve their financial situation. These implicit aspects are health (of themselves or of their dependents) and the cost of travel. Another aspect of their lived experience that may have an implicit effect on their ability to get help or help themselves is that the types of places they go to meet people are limited. As it appears that personal contacts are important to the spread of information this might constrain clients' potential to find information about people, places or organisations that may be able to help them.

#### **4.2 How are foodbanks embedded in community ecologies of organisations, businesses and networks?**

One of our main aims at the outset of this project was to enrich understanding of how foodbanks are embedded in a local ecology of organisations, businesses and

networks. We believe that understanding these relationships may help in the design and siting of interventions to help individuals currently in need of foodbank assistance and those who may be in danger of becoming in need. We also believe that understanding how these networks emerge and are maintained may help any type of organisation that is focused on community engagement.

Analysis of the interviews and maps suggests that foodbanks are embedded in local ecologies through the people and places with which clients and volunteers interact in their everyday lives. However, the variation in places visited by clients and volunteers suggests that interaction and exchange of information is not guaranteed and does not occur simply as a result of geographical proximity.

In 2013, at the start of this project, we carried out a review into other maps of food-related community assets in Lambeth that had been carried out. One of the most comprehensive maps we found had been created for Incredible Edible Lambeth in 2012<sup>6</sup>. This map shows one hundred and twenty three local food growing sites in Lambeth including allotments, community greenhouses, city farm projects and food waste initiatives such as Brixton People's Kitchen where people come together to cook and eat food that would otherwise have been thrown away. As we began our interviews we were interested to see if clients or volunteers mentioned any of these initiatives. In the end, none of the projects included on the Incredible Edible map were mentioned to us by interviewees.

It could be argued that it is not the remit of the food growing spaces to address local food poverty and that the reason no clients mentioned these projects is because foodbank clients are not their target audience. Similarly, clients may be aware of the projects but feel that they need to prioritise their time and energy on more pressing and direct means of finding help. However, we feel it would be interesting to explore this further and investigate any implicit barriers that may be limiting exchange between food production initiatives and those in need of food aid.

### **4.3 What overlap and gaps exist in the community knowledge of food bank clients and volunteers?**

One of the key areas of interest in undertaking this project was to understand in more

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<sup>6</sup> The Incredible Edible Lambeth map was created by City Farmers in association with Lambeth Council and can be found here: <http://www.incredibleediblelambeth.org/our-map/> (accessed 23 October 2014)

detail the extent to which people residing in the same, small geographical area<sup>7</sup> experience the space in similar ways or if socio-economic and cultural differences result in a population who are geographically co-located yet socially disconnected. Our findings explore this issue by looking at where overlaps and gaps exist between foodbank clients and volunteers in their use of space.

The maps indicate that there are areas in the borough of Lambeth that foodbank volunteers visit but where foodbank clients do not go. As yet, we have no information on why these gaps in space exist where there is little overlap in the experiences of clients and volunteers. For example, in figure 10 there is an area in the centre east of the map that is only visited by volunteers of Norwood foodbank and no clients. This area is West Dulwich.

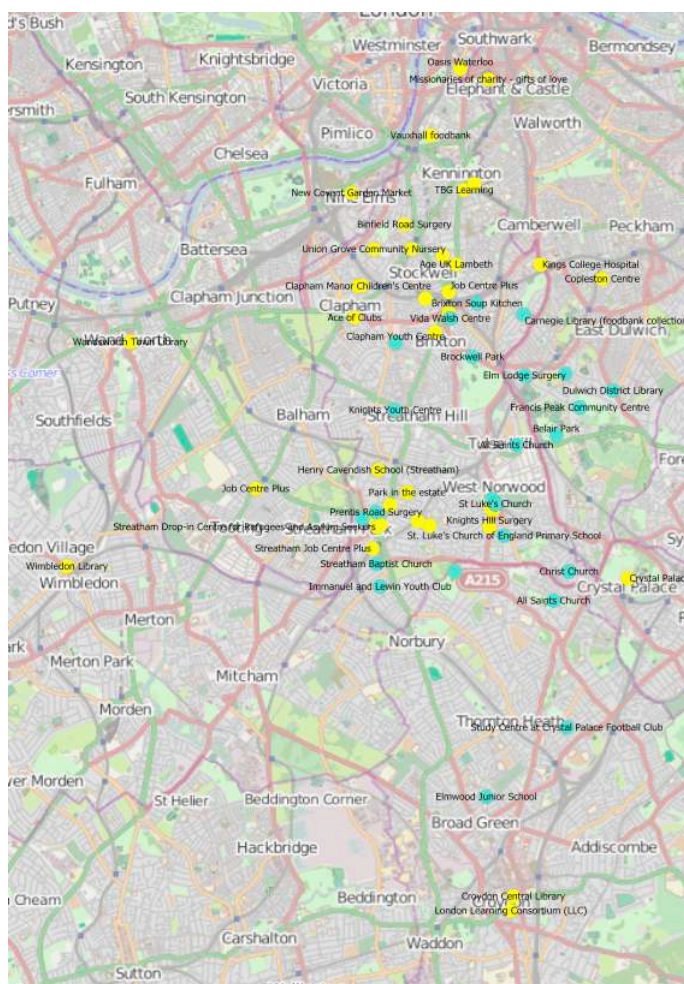


Figure 10: Map showing the places visited by volunteers and clients at Norwood foodbank. See Appendix E for a larger version of this map

<sup>7</sup> Lambeth's population of just over 300,000 people is squeezed into an area of 28.62km<sup>2</sup>. To put this in perspective, Doncaster, a town in the north of England with a similar sized population, covers an area of 568km<sup>2</sup>.

We can imagine that the difference in use of the areas by foodbank clients might come from disparity in the use of space. West Dulwich is a suburban area while Waterloo, which contains many places mentioned by both clients and volunteers, is an urban area. Consequently the two areas have very different style of housing and density of population. To date, we cannot yet explain these spatial gaps exist between where clients and volunteers go. This is an aspect of the findings that would be interesting to explore in more detail in the future.

#### **4.4 Issues with mapping**

Finally in this report, we want to talk about the process of mapping the information contributed during the interviews and participatory mapping session using GIS. Using place as a focal point for the interviews allowed participants' stories to emerge through the places they visit. However, using this information to create a series of digital maps raised three specific issues around how to treat the information. These issues are anonymity and privacy, data visualisation and accessibility of the data.

It's clear from looking over the quotes from the interviews that maintaining anonymity for members of vulnerable communities can be vitally important. There can be no risk taken over preserving the privacy of a victim of domestic violence for example. In creating the digital maps the issue was how to guarantee absolute anonymity for participants as the information collected through interviews and paper-based mapping were transformed into a digital format. Anonymising interviews can be done by altering names and careful selection of quotes, however, in creating maps it's not just personal details that need to be hidden but also patterns of behaviour that are revealed by the places people go.

We approached this challenge by careful consideration of how to classify the information for example, the privacy implications of breaking down the data by individual, by foodbank location, by type of contributor, by those with dependents etc were all thought through before going ahead and creating the maps. When the places identified by one participant are combined with those of others it becomes difficult to separate out individual identities. While this approach does limit the maps that can be used to present the data, for example we are unable to show maps based on a single individual's information, we felt that preserving anonymity was more important.

The second issue in creating the maps was how to preserve the integrity of the data as it is transformed from one type of output to another. The interviews provided rich details of the everyday experience of foodbank clients and volunteers that was lost as the data was converted to the digital maps. For example, while the healthcare map shows the healthcare places used by clients and volunteers it doesn't indicate why these places are visited, that for some they are places to receive long-term care, for others they are places to offer help as a healthcare professional or volunteer or, for one of our interviewees, that the A&E department of the hospital offered a safe refuge during the night while they were living on the streets. This is a challenge that we don't feel we've overcome.

Finally, there is the question of accessibility to the outputs of the data. Who will have access to these outputs and how can we ensure that participants, especially the foodbank clients, are included in any future debate that takes place around the outputs? Clearly digital access is not ubiquitous so it was important to consider all means of access and to balance technical and social challenges and responsibilities. The question of how to do this is still being resolved.

## 5.0 Impact

Impact was designed into the project in two ways. First, we aimed for academic impact through conference presentations and a journal paper. Second, we intended for the work to have a positive impact on the community with which we were working. This desire for local impact had two aims, first to create a large paper map showing all of the places where foodbank clients and volunteers told us they go to get help in the local area. Three copies of this map would be printed and one given to each of the three foodbanks who participated in the project. Our second goal for local impact was to produce a series of maps and findings that might be used by Lambeth Council in their decision-making process. We wanted to ensure that foodbank clients had a voice in putting forward the places and services they most value as decisions about funding are made. During the project we unexpectedly gained a third form of impact as Karen won a secondment to Mapping for Change. Details of these three types of impact are below.

### *Academic impact*

- ITaaU Network+ community conference, June 2014
- RGS-IBG Annual international conference, August 2014
- Creative Citizens conference, September 2014
- Cities Methodologies, *Working with vulnerable communities* panel with Proboscis and Mapping for Change, October 2014
- Design for sharing, workshop, November 2014

*Additional grant funding*

- ITaaU Network+ secondment with Mapping for Change

*Non-academic impact*

- Presentation to Lambeth Council foodbank managers group and invited guests, May 2014
- Key findings submitted as evidence to All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into hunger and food poverty, via Food Matters, July 2014
- Stakeholder workshop at Lambeth Council, Date to be confirmed

## 6.0 Next steps

We feel there are a number of aspects of this project that could be developed and explored further. In particular we believe the following topics have potential for interesting work.

- **Foodbank clients and digital technology:** Our work did not specifically address this topic however the relationship of foodbank clients to digital technologies began to emerge through the interviews. Digital technologies were spoken of as a benefit, in terms of keeping in touch with friends and family, and as a nuisance, for example when clients had to travel to get Internet access to comply with job search requirements. In light of increasing digitisation of welfare services it would be interesting to understand more about the barriers and opportunities the Internet, and other digital technologies, present for foodbank clients.
- **Effect of loose social ties on information exchange** It was seen that for the clients and volunteers we spoke with information spreads through personal contacts. The type of personal contact likely to offer information

depended on the places and people the clients or volunteers met in their everyday lives. As a result of their relative social isolation due to their financial situation foodbank clients appear to have fewer chances to exchange information with a range of people. In particular, loose social ties – those people who are not close friends or family – seem to be missing from the lived experience of foodbank clients. It would be interesting to understand what effect, if any, this has on the potential of foodbank clients to find information that can benefit them.

- **Partnerships between professional and volunteers** Finally, during this project we have become interested in the relationship that exists between the volunteers who co-ordinate, manage and staff the foodbanks and the professional staff of the support services including GPs, social workers and job centre employees who refer clients. Clearly there is a close and reciprocal relationship between these services but it is interesting to consider how this will be managed, or even scaled up, going forward when volunteers have different rights and responsibilities compared to professional workers.

## 7.0 Conclusion

This project, *Capturing the lived experience of foodbank clients and volunteers*, focused on understanding the places and services which foodbank clients and volunteers visit in their local area. We used semi-structured interviews, participatory mapping and digital mapping techniques to capture and categorise the types of places visited and to analyse their distribution across the borough. From this we have highlighted a number of issues that we believe are key to understanding and addressing the lived experience of foodbank clients and that might form barriers to improving financial resilience. We also reflected on how foodbanks are embedded in the local community ecology of organisations, businesses, networks and places. Finally we touched on the issues we encountered in transforming the rich qualitative data from the interviews and participatory mapping sessions into the more quantitative form of digital maps created using GIS applications. Below, we consider the contribution of these findings and reflections.

Foodbank clients can be categorised into two groups; those who have a short term need for food assistance because of current circumstances but might be expected to

become self-sufficient in the near future and those who can be expected to require assistance for the foreseeable future. The latter group was the most common amongst the people we spoke to. We identified a number of issues that impact on the quality of life and lived experience of foodbank clients and affect their potential to improve their financial situation. These issues are ill health - either of the client or one of their dependents - the cost of travel and social isolation. One reason for the significance of these issues is that they impact on knowledge exchange and limit the possibilities for clients to gain information that can help them. With regard to knowledge exchange, personal contact was recognised as more effective than digital technologies in facilitating the spread of information. The identification of these issues highlights possible areas and places where interventions might be made with the intention of addressing these issues. These findings may help to identify places where people at risk of food poverty might go. Interventions could then be put in place to work with individuals at risk of food poverty before they turn to foodbanks. In addition, the identification of these issues, and of the services that are most used and valued by foodbank clients, may help in local authority decision-making if decisions need to be made about which services to support in the future. In this way, we feel we have contributed to foodbank clients having a stronger voice within the community.

By focusing on place as the key concept we believe our findings draw together a broad understanding of the lived experience of foodbank clients. Our study is, as far as we are aware, the first work to compare the lived experience of foodbank clients and volunteers. Looking at the similarities and differences between clients and volunteers opens up new potential research directions to increase understanding of the factors that may affect financial resilience.

Our work highlights that, through the places that foodbank clients and volunteers go and the people they meet, foodbanks are part of a large network of support services within the borough and beyond. At the outset of the project we believed that comparing the lived experience of clients and volunteers would enable us to consider how foodbanks are embedded in the everyday lives of people in food poverty and compare these to the lived experience of those who aren't. As the work progressed the interviews highlighted the many areas of similarity in the lived experience of clients and volunteers such as the high value placed on friends and family, yet it also



indicated some differences in how clients and volunteers inhabit the local area and the types of services they engage with.

The gaps between the local knowledge and experience of clients and volunteers suggests that foodbank managers and staff may be able to further embed foodbanks in the local network of support services through increased communication and collaboration. The map in figure 2 indicates where these services are found in the local area and the interviews highlight effective means of information exchange. We believe the findings around how information is spread between people living in the same neighbourhood will be useful to community organisations as they reach out to their intended audience. The networks of places and services identified by the mapping exercise suggest possible collaborations between local organisations that might be of benefit to both organisations and foodbank clients. However, as foodbanks are run entirely by volunteers this raises the question of how people working on these voluntary, or low-income, community projects will find the time to initiate and maintain relationships with other organisations as the fundamental activities needed to keep a foodbank running are already time-consuming.

In our project proposal we described our aim to create a series of maps of the lived experience of foodbank clients and volunteers with the intention of identifying spatial patterns in their differing use of space. Now, at the end of the project, we feel that we have only begun to scratch the surface of what is possible with this approach. The use of digital maps to analyse the information contributed by clients and volunteers opened up a different perspective on the data than we perceived through analysis of the interview transcripts. From the map in figure 10 we saw how clients are not present in some areas of the borough while both clients and volunteers do visit other areas. Our work so far only enables us to speculate about why this might be. The maps also allow us to begin to get a feel for the distances travelled by foodbank clients in their everyday lives – whether this is the length of the borough or only a few hundred metres from their home.

The approach of using place as a means to understand the lived experience of foodbank clients and volunteers has opened up a number of research questions that are interesting to take forward, in particular, to further understand how the lived experience of foodbank clients and volunteers differ in the spatial distribution across the same geographical area. It would be interesting to try to unpick this further and

understand what spatial, social, economic or other factors contribute to this difference.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview questions

#### Questions for food bank clients and volunteers

1. Where do you go most often?
2. Where do you go to meet people?
3. Where do you go to get help?
4. Do you help other people sometimes? What kind of help do you give?
5. Are there any other places that are important to you that you haven't mentioned yet?

*At this point, interviewees will be asked to select the three places on the map that are most important to them. The following questions are asked for each of these three places.*

6. How often do you visit this place?
7. How did you discover this place?
8. How do you get here?
9. Why is this place important to you?
10. How do you feel when you visit this place?

#### Questions for employees of organisations that provide help to foodbank clients

1. What type of work does the organisation do?
2. What geographical area does the organisation cover?
3. Where are the organisation's offices?
4. Where does the organisation advertise its services?
5. How do potential clients make their first contact?
6. Where do you meet clients after they've contacted the organisation?
7. What kind of community outreach work does the organisation do?
8. What are the most common problems that people come to the organisation about?
9. Do you ever advise clients to contact other advisory services? Which agencies are you likely to advise them to speak to?

10. Does the organisation refer people to food banks? If so, which food banks do you make referrals to?

11. What are the most common problems that food bank clients present?

## **Appendix B: How Trussell Trust foodbanks work**

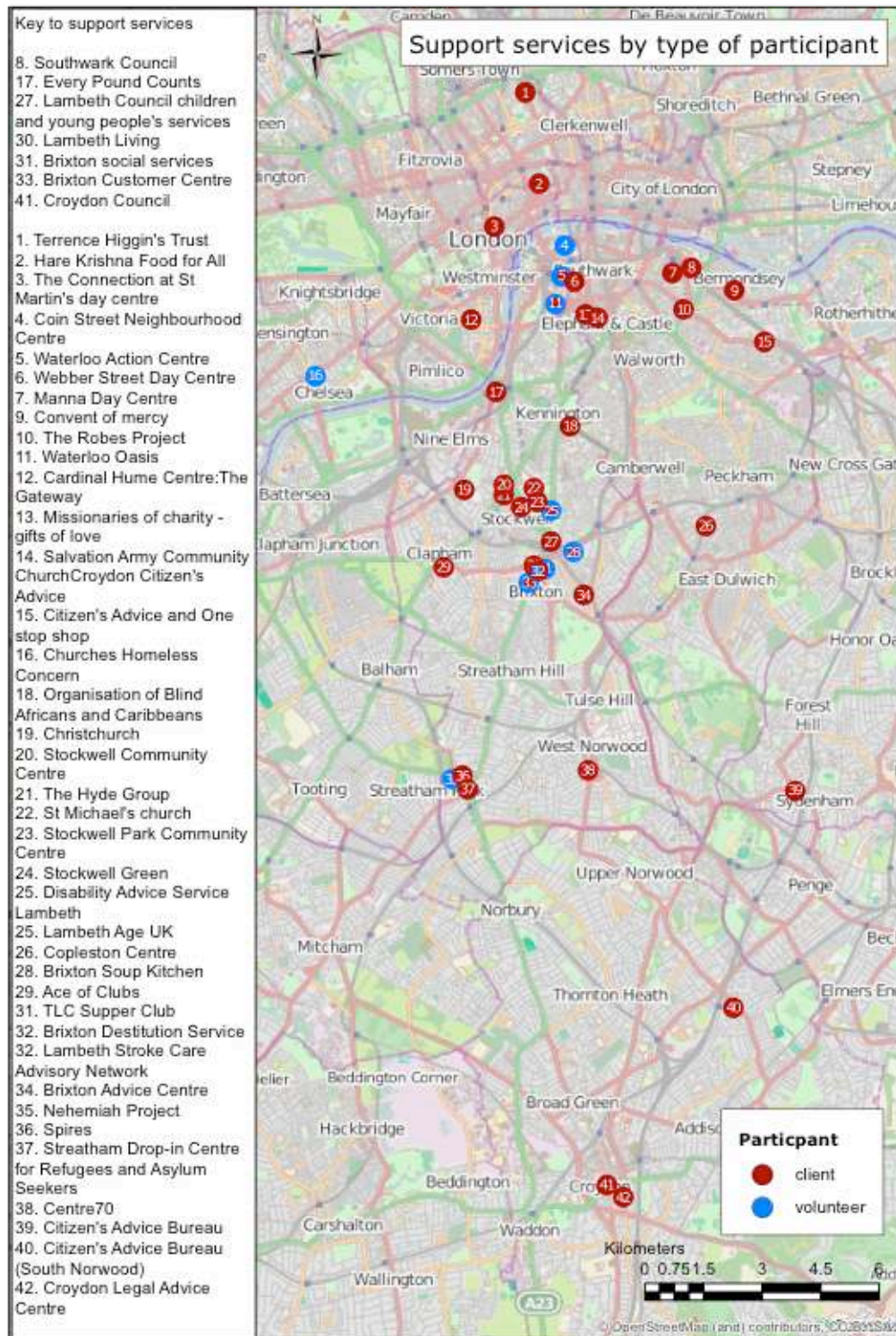
Trussell Trust foodbanks work with government, local government and independent organisations to manage the numbers accessing the foodbank, and to capture data collection, by running a voucher system. The organisations, such as doctors, social workers, Job Centre Plus employees, Citizen's Advice Bureau workers and so on can issue a foodbank voucher when they consider a person is in need of food aid. The voucher is issued for a specific foodbank so clients must visit that particular foodbank in order to receive the food package. Clients can receive up to three vouchers in a six-month period.

The foodbanks we were working with are each open twice a week for either two or three hours at a time. On arrival at the foodbank the client hands over the voucher and their information will be entered into the Trussell Trust software that is used to capture information on clients at all of the Trussell Trust foodbanks across the UK. Clients are asked for their preferences on a small number of food items, such as tea or coffee, pasta or rice, if the foodbank has the stock to offer these. The voucher is then taken to the store room for the food package to be made up. The client waits in the public area of the foodbank. In the foodbanks we worked with these public areas all had seating and tea and coffee and biscuits or cakes to which clients could help themselves. There was also an advisor from a local advice agency to help with problems if necessary, particularly around debt, welfare and housing.

The food packages given out by the Trussell Trust are designed to provide the client's household with food for around three days. The amount of food provided is adjusted depending on the number of people living in the client's household. Trussell Trust foodbanks provide clients with non-perishable tinned and dried foods. This allows the foodbanks to store the food for longer with fewer concerns around food safety and hygiene.

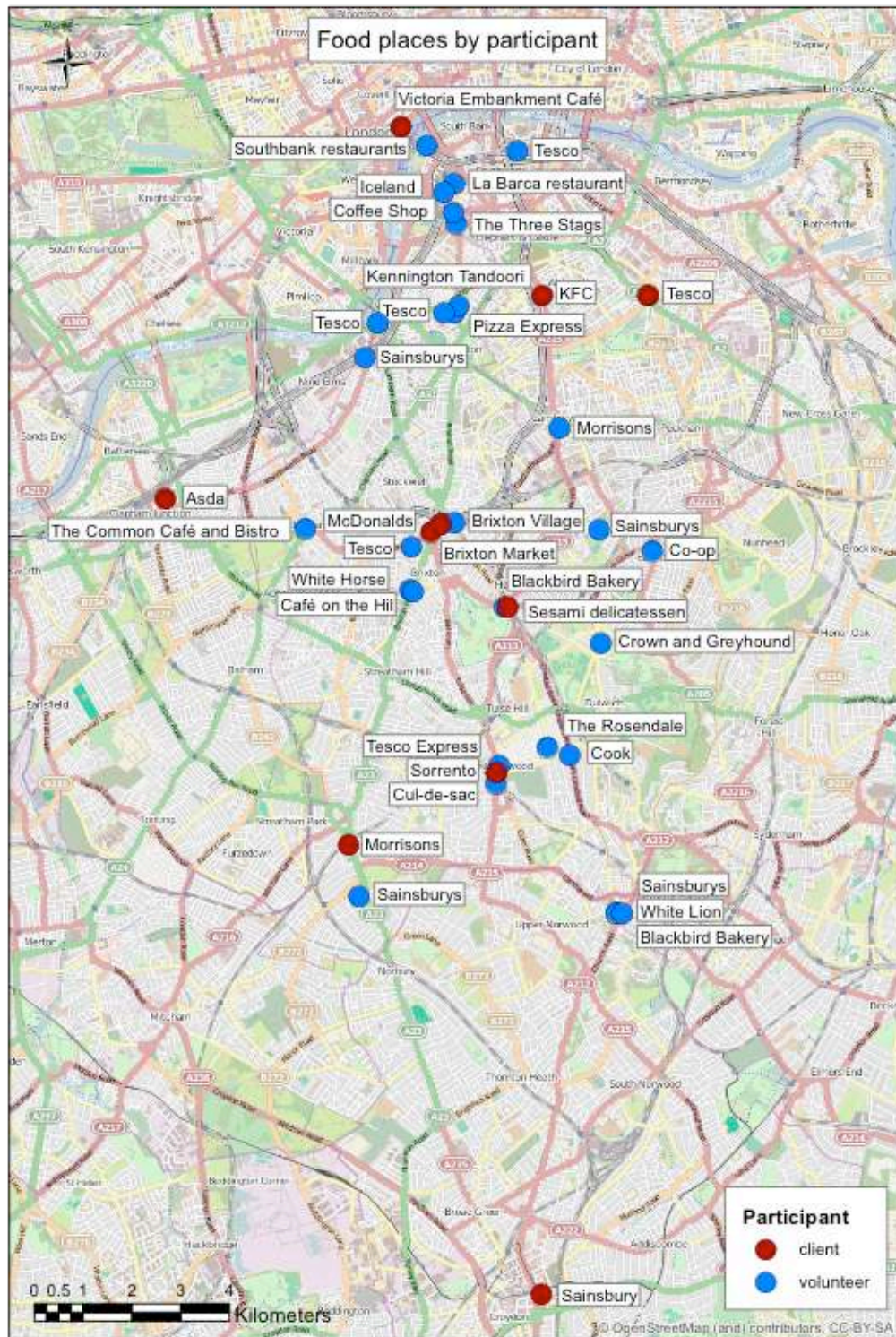
## Appendix C

Map showing the council and non-council support services mentioned by foodbank clients and volunteers.



## Appendix D

Map showing places for food purchase and consumption mentioned by foodbank clients and volunteers.





## Appendix E

Map showing places mentioned by clients and volunteers from one of the three foodbanks

