

This is a repository copy of *Seeking justice:how to understand and end food poverty in York*.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/151502/>

Version: Published Version

Monograph:

Power, Madeleine Sarah orcid.org/0000-0002-9571-1782 (2019) *Seeking justice:how to understand and end food poverty in York*. Research Report. York Food Justice Alliance , York.

Reuse

Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

Seeking justice

How to understand and end food poverty in York



York Food
Justice
Alliance
June 2019

Contents

Foreword (Rachael Maskell MP)	3
Executive Summary	4
1. The York Food Justice Alliance: background and development	5
1.1. Founding alliance principles	5
1.2. Founding alliance aims	5
2. Process and methodology	6
3. Food Poverty in York: results of YFJA research and analysis	7
3.1. Foodbank (Trussell Trust) usage	7
3.2. Food insecurity among families with children aged four to 11 years in York	7
3.3. Perceptions and experiences of food and affordability in York	8
3.4. Narratives of food and poverty in York: the community reporter project	10
4. The current role of crisis support in York in mitigating food poverty	11
4.1. Community food aid in York	11
4.2. Measuring food aid usage in York	11
4.3. York Foodbank (Trussell Trust)	11
4.4. York Financial Assistance Scheme	11
4.5. Responses to 'holiday hunger' in York	13
5. Conclusion	14
6. Development of the York Food Justice Alliance: structure and focus going forward	15
7. Food Poverty Action Plan	16
National government	16
Local government	16
Food aid	17
The York Food Justice Alliance	17
Appendix 1. "Have your say on a plate!"	18

Foreword

Food poverty is one of the greatest scourges of our time, with a record 1.6 million food bank parcels being provided to people in the last year (April 2018 – March 2019). In York, referrals to the Trussell Trust foodbanks has increased by 25% between 2017 and 2018. However, this report by the York Food Justice Alliance seeks to uncover the true extent of the problem, exposing the hidden food poverty in York which food bank use statistics fail to reveal. It is estimated that over seventeen times the number of people accessing Trussell Trust food banks are living in food poverty. Indeed, with 64% of households in the lowest income group reporting experiencing food poverty, the scale of this crisis cannot be underestimated.

The pattern identified linking increased food insecurity with the damaging impact of Universal Credit is particularly concerning. From the five week waiting times to the faults in the system which are penalising claimants, it's increasingly clear that the system is simply not fit for purpose. The entirely negative response from interviewees to the Universal Credit system is wholly unsurprising and reflects the serious challenge we face in ensuring that the reformed system does not push more families into poverty. These findings echo the national picture, with 20.34% of food parcels being distributed due to benefit delays, and a further 17.36% for benefit changes according to the Trussell Trust.

When coupled with an economic context of increasing living costs and rising food prices, as well as low and unpredictable pay, it is clear that we require a fundamental structural change in society to address the root causes of the crisis. This includes getting to grips with issues including the lack of affordable housing, the socially unjust food production and distribution system, and the worrying trend of families being priced out of healthy, good quality food.

In order to make the progress that we so desperately need, it is vital that the City of York Council addresses the recommendations which are listed in the report, such as the need to put people with personal lived experience of food poverty at the heart of efforts to tackle it. Likewise, formally recognising the food poverty and insecurity crisis in York and committing to measuring the rates of food insecurity annually is crucial in order to achieve a culture change in Local Government which prioritises the tackling of this issue. The time for action is now, and meaningful steps towards the final eradication of food poverty must be taken urgently.



Rachael Maskell MP

Executive Summary

Key recommendations to Government:

- Provide councils with sufficient funding for an adequate financial assistance scheme by increasing and ring-fencing funding for the scheme in the national budget
- End the five week wait for Universal Credit
- Unfreeze working-age benefit levels and increase them in line with rises in the cost of essentials such as food, clothing and housing
- Provide councils with the funds and guidance required to safeguard child nutrition all year round, including by providing ring-fenced funds to meet the cost of holiday meal provision.

Key recommendations to the City of York Council:

- Formally recognise food poverty and insecurity as issues meriting priority action in York, and commit to measuring food insecurity annually
- Support the development of an urgent York-based crisis alliance, formed of members of the York Food Justice Alliance; connect people with urgent need with the crisis alliance and assist in meeting that need where possible
- Increase promotion of existing initiatives that alleviate food poverty and insecurity and provide help to residents in hardship, including Discretionary Housing Payment, Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Scheme, York Financial Assistance Scheme, Healthy Start Vouchers and free school meals
- Review the application process and criteria for the Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Scheme and decrease the percentage of council tax those claiming Council Tax Support are required to pay, with an aspiration of reducing it to 0%
- Establish and support a food poverty scrutiny group to assess the impact of current local policy and initiatives on food poverty in York.

This report provides the clearest picture yet of food poverty and insecurity in the City of York and of the structures causing it. It is based on research conducted by the York Food Justice Alliance (previously known as the York Food Poverty Alliance) between April 2018 and May 2019. The action plan contained here sets out a way to unlock food poverty for thousands of people in York. We present this report as a starting point for vital and urgent action.

The report reveals that food poverty in York is a widespread, hidden issue – and one not fully reflected in existing data on food bank use. A survey of 612 households with children in primary school found that 24% had experienced food insecurity. Only 8% of parents had used a food bank and, of this number, the majority had used the food bank only once. This aligns with previous research showing many people are deterred from using a food bank by stigma and pride. Among households with an annual income of £16,100 or less, 64% had experience of food insecurity, suggesting low income is key risk factor for food poverty and insecurity in York.

Focus groups with low-income York residents and a film co-produced by seven York parents revealed personal experiences of food poverty. Participants described in work-poverty and talked of having to visit multiple budget supermarkets and rely on reduced items to make their funds stretch far enough. Participants with experience of Universal Credit highlighted systemic problems with the new benefit: reduced personal freedom and agency, and lower income than in the previous system – or, in some cases, no income at all. The long wait for Universal Credit payments was cited as a key cause of food poverty and insecurity. There was widespread concern about rising prices, particularly for healthy food, placing further pressure on household budgets and restricting the amount and type of food that could be purchased.

The research identified 32 organisations delivering varied community food aid in the City of York, ranging from traditional soup kitchens to community allotments. Measuring unique users of independent food aid was found to be challenging, particularly in food aid projects open on a continuous, all-inclusive basis or in projects where food is embedded alongside other services. As a consequence, the available data on the usage of independent food aid in York is limited.

The York Food Justice Alliance coordinated holiday food and activity clubs in conjunction with local food providers every weekday during each holiday period between July 2018 and April 2019. 3,961 meals were served and over 426 food parcels were distributed by 11 ‘holiday hunger’ initiatives during this period. Evaluation identified a clear need for the food provision – 87% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that they spend more on food during the school holiday than during the school year – and revealed high food poverty and insecurity among attendees.

We call on national and local government to take urgent action to reduce food poverty in the City of York.

1. The York Food Justice Alliance: background and development

The York Food Justice Alliance (YFJA) was founded in April 2018 by Adrian Lovett (Good Food York) and Dr Maddy Power (University of York). It is funded by Food Power and the City of York Council, with specific project-based funding from the University of York. It works with groups, organisations and individuals in York to strengthen their ability to reduce food poverty and tackle its root causes.

The development of YFJA was prompted by concerns among local councillors, local third sector organisations and the local media over the occurrence of food poverty in the city, accompanied by the absence of a defined network coordinating practice, action and policy on food poverty.

1.1. Founding alliance principles

Three key principles have underpinned the form and stance of YFJA since its inception:

- YFJA recognises that food poverty is the result of a complex set of structural issues relating but not restricted to problems of insecure, inadequate and expensive housing, insecure and low-paid employment, insufficient social welfare provision, poor health, and an environmentally unsustainable and socially unjust food production and distribution system. We, therefore, acknowledge the need for structural change in society.
- We recognise the importance of good food and wellbeing – YFJA recognises that growing food, taking food beyond the cash economy and connecting with nature, contributes to individual and community health and provides space for wider civic engagement.
- We recognise the complexity of food need – YFJA recognises that food poverty almost always presents as one amongst a set of needs.

Figure 1: Key definitions

Food poverty: ‘The inability to afford, or have access to, food to make up a healthy diet.’¹

Food insecurity: ‘Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.’²

Food aid: Refers to a range of support activities aiming to help people meet food needs, often on a short term basis, which contribute to relieving the symptom of food poverty and insecurity.³

1.2. Founding alliance aims

YFJA members agreed on eight aims to guide its research, campaigning and development work:

- Reduce the need for food aid provision by identifying and raising awareness about the systemic drivers of food poverty, improving access to advice services and ensuring those eligible for financial support are in receipt of it.
- Give people the skills and confidence to challenge food poverty in their area.
- Ensure existing community food aid is inclusive, supportive, sociable and well-coordinated across the city.
- Encourage community food organisations to take on advocacy roles as well as linking them to advocacy organisations targeting national policy change to alleviate poverty.
- Ensure children in York are fed during term time, at weekends and in school holidays.
- Involve experts by experience in YFJA’s work.
- Ensure the long-term sustainability of YFJA’s work by securing funding and community support.
- Develop a regional network to tackle food poverty in Yorkshire by collaborating and establishing formal connections with local food poverty alliances.

¹ Department of Health, *Choosing a Better Diet: A food and health action plan*, 2005, p.7

² Food Standards Agency, *Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey*, 2007

³ Household Food Security in the UK: A review of food aid, DEFRA, 2014, p.iv

Members of York Food Justice Alliance April 2018 – May 2019

- Bell Farm Community Centre
- Chill in the Community CIC
- Church Action on Poverty
- Citizens Advice York
- City of York Council
- Community at Tesco (Askham Bar)
- Good Food York
- Healthwatch York
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust
- Red Tower CIC
- Tang Hall Big Local
- Tang Hall Community Centre
- University of York
- York Community Reporters
- York Foodbank
- York Human Rights City
- York St John University
- Yourcafe

2. Process and methodology

The YFJA working group collectively decided its aims (above) and associated priorities for research and action in April and May 2018. The lead researcher and research assistant designed and conducted the research studies with oversight and regular input from the working group. Findings were communicated with members at working group meetings and recommendations based on the findings were co-produced by all YFJA members across three policy development workshops in February, March and June 2019.

The working group believed it was crucial to hear from and understand the experiences of those in food poverty. As a consequence, the research placed a strong emphasis on learning about lived experiences and engaging people with firsthand experience of food poverty in the design of the research itself.

The research included a survey of parents with children aged four to 11 years; focus groups with low income York residents; audio and video diaries recorded by low income York residents and people identifying as in food poverty; evaluation of food aid provision using surveys; and an audit of food aid provision across the city of York using interviews, Internet research and ethnography. The results of these studies are set out below.

As part of the wider research into food poverty in York, YFJA intended to measure food aid usage across the city. However, successive workshops and extensive discussions with food aid providers highlighted the difficulty of measuring unique users of food aid. This was particularly challenging in food aid projects that were open on a continuous, all inclusive basis or in projects where food was embedded alongside other services. This is further considered in section 4.2.



3. Food Poverty in York: results of YFJA research and analysis

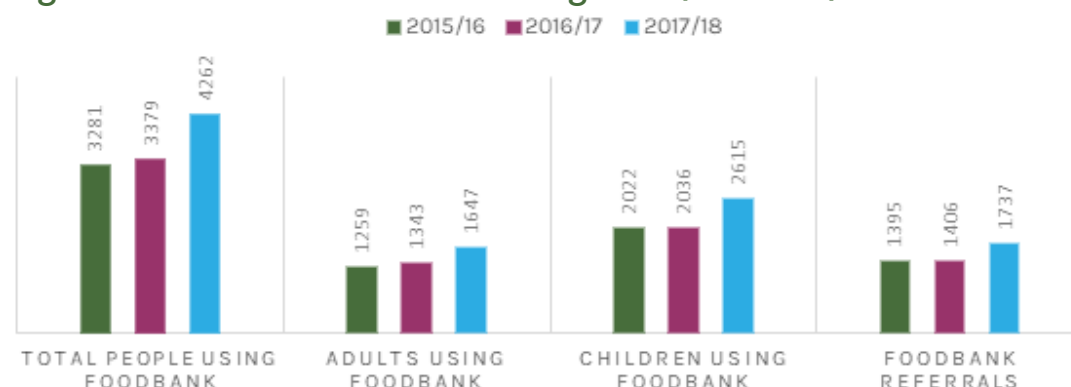
3.1. Foodbank (Trussell Trust) usage

Referrals to Trussell Trust foodbanks in York increased by more than a quarter (25%) between 2015/16 and 2017/2018, with a significant proportion of referrals relating to benefit changes, delays or sanctions. In 2017/18, over 4000 people in York used a food bank, including over 2,600 children (see Figure 2).⁴

This data indicates that food poverty and insecurity in York is increasing. However,

it does not reflect the true scale of food poverty and food aid usage in the city. The Trussell Trust food bank figures do not include independent food bank projects in the city (see overview of independent providers below) nor do they provide an indication of the number of people in food poverty and insecurity not using a food bank. Over 17 times the numbers of people accessing Trussell Trust food banks are estimated to be living in food poverty.⁵

Figure 2. Trussell Trust foodbank usage 2015/16 – 2017/18



3.2. Food insecurity among families with children aged four to 11 years in York

YFJA conducted a survey of parents with children aged between four and 11 years attending primary schools in York. The survey was undertaken between November 2018 and February 2019; 25 primary schools and 612 households took part.

24% of households reported food poverty and insecurity but only 8% said that they had used a food bank. Of those who had

used a food bank (46 respondents), the majority (70%) had used the food bank only once. Low income was a key risk factor for food poverty. 64% of households in the lowest income group (less than £16,100 yearly)⁶ reported experiencing food poverty compared with only 7% in the highest income group (more than £38,399 yearly).

⁴ York Human Rights City, York Human Rights Indicator Baseline Report, 2018.

⁵ The Food Foundation: Anna Taylor and Rachel Loopstra, *Too Poor to Eat: Food Insecurity in the UK*, 2016, p.6

⁶ Income (gross income) is self-reported and includes income from all sources.

A higher number of children in the household increased the risk of food poverty. 39% of households with four children reported food poverty. Being in a one adult household also increased the risk of food poverty: 49% of one adult households reported food poverty compared with 18% of two adult households.

Food poverty was higher among people who rented housing than those who owned outright. 58% of respondents who rented their housing from the council and 42% of those who rented from a private landlord reported food poverty. Only 4% of respondents who owned their property outright reported food poverty.

The survey also investigated diet quality among families in York. Respondents struggled to afford protein products such as meat and fish, with 74% reporting meat and fish to be the least affordable food product. The consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables was high, with 50% of respondents consuming fresh fruit and vegetables at least twice a day (21% consume three times a week or less), while the consumption of processed and/or microwavable food was low. 54% consumed processed or microwavable food less than once a week and only 6% consumed it once a day or more. In line with this, food budgets were high: only 6% of households reported spending £35 or less per week on food, with 75% spending £55 or more.

136 participants responded to the free text question, 'Do you have any further comments on food in York?' Respondents described the causes and day-to-day experience of food poverty and insecurity. Parents reported working long hours on low and unpredictable pay; this income was often insufficient to cover the household budget, while long-hours left parents with little time to cook for their children. York was considered an expensive city, where the high cost of living jeopardised household food security. Parents described the high cost of healthy food which forced them to miss meals in order to afford a healthy, balanced diet for their children:

"Healthy food is expensive, I often skip meals so that I can afford to feed my children a healthy balanced diet. I expect this is the case in many households."

Benefit delays and the five, or more, week wait for Universal Credit was a key cause of food poverty and insecurity:

"Universal Credit has wrecked us. We have just gone on it and I have been told me and my five year old will have to go at least seven weeks with no income at all. We will have to go to food banks and try to get food."

Parents described the strategies adopted to ensure sufficient food for the household, including using budget supermarkets, carefully planning meals, reducing protein, and using waste or surplus food such as 'wonky' vegetables. Accessing food aid and family support were also important in making ends meet.

The high cost of healthy, fresh food, especially fruit, meat and fish, was felt by many to be a major barrier to a healthy diet. There was widespread concern about rising food prices and about high prices in city centre food stores. The expensive bus system in York was seen to hinder low income residents from travelling to larger, cheaper, out-of-town supermarkets:

"The cost of travel for shopping is often forgotten with most of the big supermarkets being on the outskirts. For people with disabilities, this can be an extra £20 or more per shop."

Participant recommendations (a minority only) stressed the need for improved school food and the importance of action on environmental concerns, through reduced food waste and local food growing.

3.3. Perceptions and experiences of food and affordability in York

YFJA conducted four focus groups in multiple locations to understand experiences of food and affordability in York. The focus groups included 22 low income participants, three men and 19 women. A majority (14) of the adults had children.

Two key themes emerged from the focus groups. The first concerned the strategies adopted to provide sufficient food for household members, within contexts of low income and poverty; the second addressed the impact of the wider social, political and economic context on individual experiences around food and poverty.

3.3.1. Management strategies on a low income: shopping, budgeting and cooking

A large minority (42%) of participants described attentive and time-consuming shopping strategies designed to find the lowest prices and best value products. This included attending multiple varied

outlets ('shopping around') to search for low prices and 'offers'; visiting budget supermarkets (Aldi and Lidl); and buying items at the back of the shelf with the longest date mark. Among a significant minority of participants, buying secondary produce – 'wonky' fruit and vegetables; out-of-date, reduced-cost items; and end-of-the day unsold vegetables and fruit in markets – was an important strategy in purchasing sufficient food on a low income. Less common but still discussed strategies involved 'shopping seasonally', replacing expensive ingredients with cheaper alternatives and making cheaper meals, for instance soup. Only one participant mentioned growing their own food as a strategy to 'make ends meet'.

However, there were inherent disadvantages to such management strategies. 'Shopping around' was time-consuming and challenging with young children, while there was a fundamental indignity to being priced-out of healthy, good quality food:

"It's not nice to feel you can't buy food that is healthy or better because it's more expensive."

Only one participant discussed using food aid, specifically a food bank, and did so reluctantly, describing the humiliation associated with the experience:

"I use food banks but I hate using them; it's embarrassing, but sometimes I have to."

3.3.2. Social, economic and policy context: the lived experience of changing circumstances

Social security

A significant minority of participants were in receipt of Universal Credit or, for those who had not yet been transferred to the new system, JobSeekers Allowance or Income Support, as their main source of income. Universal Credit was described as 'not working': faults in the system of processing payments penalised claimants, reducing or stopping income entirely. The administration of work-related social security (Universal Credit, Jobseekers Allowance and Income Support) was described as intrusive and a cause of stress. Claimants described feeling that they were being tightly controlled in how they lived their daily lives and how the money received was spent:

"Who has the right to say what we do, when I'm ill, what is right or wrong or whether

I'm wasting my money or savings. It's very intrusive when they tell us what we can and can't spend our money on."

Participants described how the possession of savings precipitated compulsory reduced benefit payments which severely undermined claimant autonomy:

"I didn't claim until my money had dwindled right down but now I feel I shouldn't have bothered; you work all your life and then you get nothing."

Economic context

There was widespread concern about rising food prices which restricted the amount and type of food that could be purchased:

"It is harder to afford everything like we used to and we are often overdrawn or at the edge of our budget for the same lifestyle as a couple of years ago when we seemed better off – the cost of everything has gone up dramatically."

Healthy fresh food, especially fruit, was described as particularly expensive. Only one participant cited a personally negative impact of food policy – the 'Sugar Tax'⁷ – on her purchasing choices (ability to buy as she used to).

3.3.3. Tackling food poverty in York: participant recommendations

Universal Credit reform: the need for (urgent and meaningful) reform to Universal Credit was discussed emphatically and at length by participants. There was a need for greater claimant dignity and autonomy within the system; for more consistent and accurate interaction with staff processing claims and payments; and for the reassertion of a claimant's right to receive Universal Credit/welfare benefits.

Improved access to healthy, cheap and seasonal food: among participants, there was a widely held desire for improved access to seasonal, cheap fruit and vegetables – for instance, from local markets or independent retailers. According to more than one participant, such improved access was contingent upon a better and cheaper public transport system or the improved availability of affordable parking in York. Cheaper prices for healthy items were also thought important within the 'big supermarkets': "we need cheaper transport or cheaper parking in York to help people use the market more".

⁷ Formally known as the Soft Drinks Industry Levy.

Expansion/development of sociable, inclusive, open-access food aid: a significant minority of participants recommended the further development of open-access food aid, such as community cafés and informal/pay-as-you feel food banks.

3.4. Narratives of food and poverty in York: the community reporter project

YFJA firmly believes that people with personal experience of food poverty should be at the heart of – leading – efforts to tackle it. Funded by the Centre for Future Health at the University of York, the community reporter Project aimed to raise awareness of opinions and experiences of people with food poverty and involve them in the development of a food poverty strategy for York.

Seven parents with young children took part over a six month period, collectively and individually documenting their experiences of food and affordability. Children from a local junior school were linked into the project through a TV interview about their new Community Fridge. The film and some of the unedited video diary contributions are on YFJA's YouTube channel.⁸ The film will be shared widely, with a view to feeding into local and national campaigns.

Key issues discussed by the community reporters included the difficulty of affording healthy food on a low income and the misleading portrayal of people in poverty, including food poverty, by the media. The benefit system, in particular delays and waits for payments associated with Universal Credit; the high cost of living in York; and the difficulty of earning an adequate income in full-time low paid

employment were cited as causes of food poverty.

The community reporters described the intense pressure placed on the household budget during the school holidays, especially the Christmas holiday, as well as the unceasing day-to-day struggle of food poverty and insecurity, with broken appliances, empty fridges, a diet of basic food and no money for luxuries, and the inability to save or plan for the future.

The reporters stressed that food banks were not a solution to food poverty and insecurity, instead emphasising the importance of awareness raising and of supporting others to discuss and campaign on food poverty.

The following quotes are taken from the videos and recordings:

"It only shows one side of the massive devastation that Universal Credit, not even just Universal Credit, wages and housing, how everything else works. I'm just really angry."

"At Christmas time, we need every penny we can to have a couple of nice days of treat food without having to think about it or stress about it."

"When I got that four weeks with no money, I'm now paying that off for a very very long time ... On Universal Credit, each month I'm technically less than minimum wage, the living allowance that they say you can minimally live off."

"Is this really happening? Well, you know what, it is, every single day."

"If we don't stand up, who will, if we don't speak up, who will do it for us? If we all help each other, even little things each individual does can have a big impact."



⁸ www.youtube.com/channel/UCHiskBmP_6SeT1jvcp230RQ

4. The current role of crisis support in York in mitigating food poverty

4.1. Community food aid in York

YFJA undertook an assessment of existing community food aid in York. The database of food aid organisations was compiled in April 2018 and is continuously updated. Managers of each organisation have been contacted for information on the approximate usage of the service and to establish background on the rationale for provision, operations and management.

The scoping work identified approximately 32 organisations delivering varied community food aid in York. This ranges from traditional soup kitchens, to volunteer/peer led community cafés, to community allotments. Of these, 13 (41%) reported food poverty was part of their rationale for setting up; 17 (53%) are open more than once a week; 12 (38%) are open one day per week; 25 (78%) have an open-access policy; and 7 (22%) serve targeted populations only (based on gender, age, area, disability or income).

4.2. Measuring food aid usage in York

Measuring unique users of independent food aid is challenging, particularly in food aid projects open on a continuous, all-inclusive basis or in projects where food is embedded alongside other services. As a consequence, the available data on the usage of independent food aid in York is limited.

Available data on food aid usage is derived from weekly community cafés/informal food banks, including:

- Red Tower Community Hub primarily serving the Walmgate/Navigation Road communities;
- Planet Food serving Micklegate ward;
- YourCafe, Tang Hall;
- Luke's Larder, Clifton;
- Bell Farm Community Association, Huntington;
- Chapelfields and Foxwood Community Hubs;
- Lidgett Grove community café/informal food bank.

The numbers of weekly customers to each of the above food aid providers ranges from 35 to 70 indicating a minimum of 245 and a maximum of 490 food aid customers per week. Nevertheless, this

is likely to be a severe under-estimate of food aid usage in York. It does not capture usage at all community food providers in York, nor is it a reflection of food poverty in the city.

4.3. York Foodbank (Trussell Trust)

York Foodbank is a key food aid provider in York. It operates from four city-wide distribution centres on a referral-only basis. While York Foodbank provides a valuable service to people at the point of crisis, its role is not to be a complete solution to food poverty in York. Further, it is limited by its referral process and three-visit cap which restrict the support available for people in need, and can be stigmatising – as reflected in the focus group data cited above.

4.4. York Financial Assistance Scheme

The City of York Council (CYC) runs the York Financial Assistance Scheme (YFAS). Funding has fallen by 55% in the past five years (a lower cut than the majority of local authorities), but the approval rate for awards also fell sharply last year to 36%. In 2017-18 YFAS received 1092 applications, 704 were refused and 388 were paid. The budget for 2017/18 was £209,590, this included YFAS and the statutory discretionary council tax support scheme. 88% of the budget was awarded (£180,178), of which 6% was emergency awards, 9% discretionary Council Tax support and 71% Community awards.

CYC conducted research into the scheme in 2018, and the full report⁹ provides insight into the low approval rate. Universal Credit problems led to 170 applications in 2017-18 but these were refused. The report says: "There are a large number of people applying, whose applications do not meet the criteria for a YFAS award who are in financial difficulty and struggling to meet every day basic needs, especially those affected by welfare reforms, such as Universal Credit." Indeed, most applicants miss out, and the council is concerned about two of its reasons for refusing applications:

- 15% were refused because people could not provide the supporting evidence of further information, but the council

⁹ City of York Council, York Financial Assistance Scheme Report, 2018

says there are possible barriers. It says: "For people that are vulnerable, in crisis and/or financial hardship getting to West Offices (the council HQ) could be prohibitive, and as we know many people do not have skills to screen shot/ email information or do not have access to the internet."

- The fund does not support people who can access other funds, such as Universal Credit hardship payments – and the council's definition of an emergency leads to many rejections.

4.5. Responses to 'holiday hunger' in York

School holidays can be particular pressure points for some families because of increased costs, such as food and child-care, and reduced incomes, for instance loss of a free school meal and/or reduced working hours. There is a growing body of evidence of a holiday experience gap, with children from disadvantaged families less likely to access organised out-of-school activities, more likely to experience 'unhealthy holidays' in terms of nutrition and physical health, and more likely to experience social isolation.

Free holiday clubs are a response to this issue. Evidence suggests that they can have a positive impact on children and young people, that they work best when they provide consistent and easily

accessible enrichment activities, for more than just breakfast or lunch, and when they involve children – and parents – in food preparation.¹⁰

YFJA coordinated holiday food and activity clubs in conjunction with local food providers every weekday during each holiday period between July 2018 and April 2019. 3,961 meals were served and over 426 food parcels were distributed by 11 'holiday hunger' initiatives during this period. Figure 3 shows food distribution in each holiday period between summer 2018 and Easter 2019. Table 2 shows both food distribution and food interception over this period.

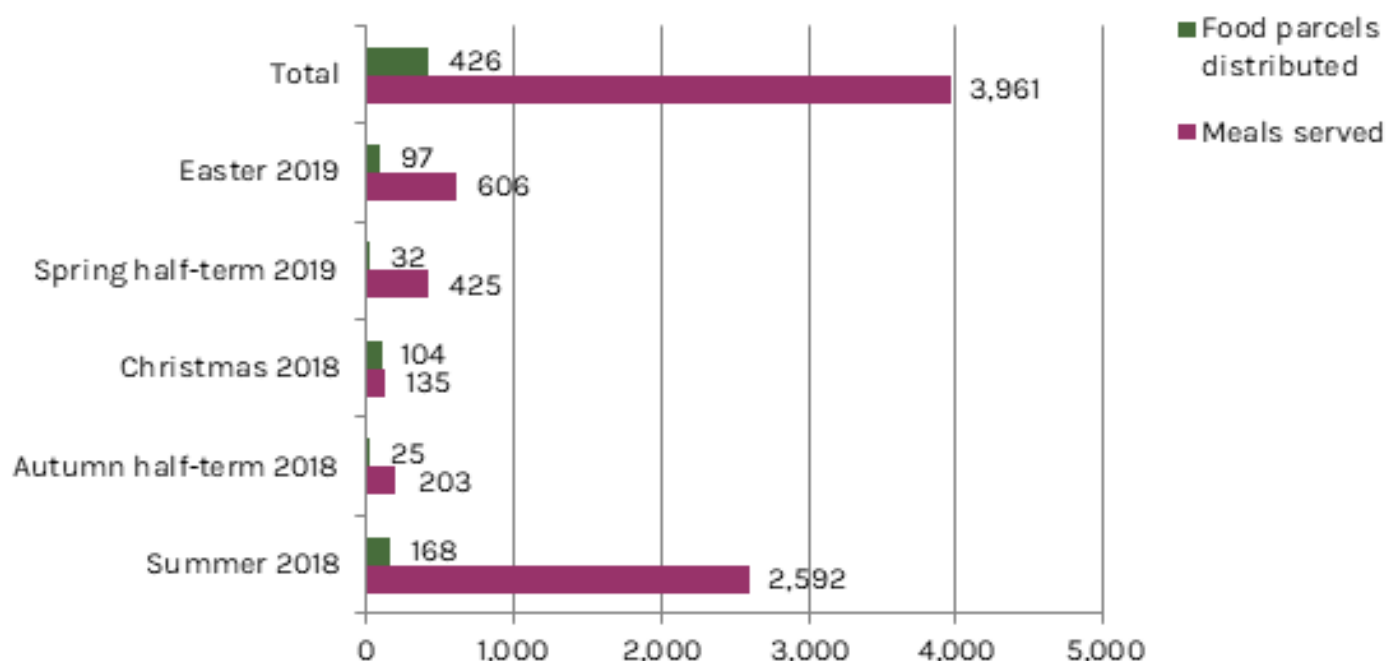
The variety and frequency of holiday food/ activity/ advice provision developed from approximately 17 sessions per week in summer 2018 to 21 per week by Easter 2019. Details of each organisation's rationale, services, management and operations are listed in our full database of community food aid (available on request).

4.5.1. Food and activity club evaluation

Each holiday club was asked to collect feedback from attendees via a paper evaluation form written by the lead researcher, distributed and administered by the research assistant. A decision was taken to specifically target attendees with children rather than asking all attendees to complete an evaluation form in order



Figure 3. Food distribution at food and activity clubs summer 2018 – Easter 2019



to assess the specific impact of the clubs on families with children. 78 attendees completed the evaluation form.

The evaluation identified a clear need for the food provision. 67% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that it was harder to make ends meet during the school holidays than during the school year. 87% agreed/strongly agreed that they spend more on food during the school holiday than during the school year, with almost half (47%) agreeing/strongly agreeing that they sometimes found themselves without enough money for food during the school holiday.

There was evidence of high food insecurity among attendees. 39% of respondents reported that within the past 12 months, they worried whether their food would run

out before they got money to buy more and 35% said that within the past 12 months, the food they bought just didn't last and they didn't have money to get more. This is considerably higher than the 24% reporting food insecurity in the survey of all families in York with children aged four to 11 (see above). However, it suggests that the majority of those using the 'holiday hunger' clubs were food secure. Indeed, only 54% of families with school-age children who responded (37/69 respondents with eligible school age children) were in receipt of Free School Meals.

48 attendees responded to the free text question, 'Do you have any further comments on the food/activity club?' The food and activity clubs were well-received with

Table 2. Food distribution and interception at food and activity clubs

Holiday period	Dates	Meals served	Food parcels distributed	Food intercepted (kg)	Food redistributed (kg)
Summer 2018	23rd July - 4th September	2,592	168	2,585	2,548
Autumn half-term 2018	27th October - 3rd November	203	25	403	543
Christmas 2018	22nd December - 7th January	135	104	657	585
Spring half-term 2019	23rd February - 2nd March	425	32	306	282
Easter 2019	13th April - 27th April	606	97	1,658	1,580
Total		3,961	426	5.6 tonnes	5.5 tonnes

¹⁰ Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, Holiday Activities and Food, 2019

77% of respondents praising the club; the addition of physical activity and the social inclusion aspect were particularly valued. **"Fab event that brings community together and helps take money pressure off a bit and gets kids out the house."**

A significant minority (17%) described experiences of food poverty and insecurity, often related to positive comments about the food clubs:

"This [the holiday food and activity club] is an amazing idea. Towards the end of the week. Even though there is only two of us in our house, my money doesn't stretch that far sometimes, with bills to pay as well."

A full report on the holiday food and activity clubs, including case studies of best practice, is available as a separate document.

5. Conclusion

This report reveals that food poverty in the City of York is a widespread issue requiring urgent action. Food poverty may be higher than previously thought – 24% of parents with young children report food insecurity and the Trussell Trust food-bank, the sole organisation to collect data on food aid usage in the city, is only one of 32 providers serving people in need. Our research reveals that only a minority of those experiencing food poverty access food aid, suggesting a high level of hidden food poverty in the city.

York residents who are on a low income, living in rented accommodation, have more than two children, and are a single parent are at particular risk of food poverty and insecurity. National-level policy choices, as well as the broader social and economic context, contribute to the high level of food poverty among households in York. The five week wait for Universal Credit, the benefit freeze, low wages, and precarious employment were cited by food aid users, food aid providers and wider residents as key causes of food poverty.

But local factors are also important causes of food poverty in York. The high cost of living in the city – particularly the high cost of food within the city centre – combined with an economy where many are in low paid, insecure employment, jeopardises household food security. The lack of an adequate, affordable transport – bus – system restricts resident's ability to visit out-of-town supermarkets where food is cheaper and higher quality.

There is a diversity of organisations distributing food to those in need in York. This provision has a particularly high uptake during school holidays.

Research co-produced with York residents, including people in food poverty, revealed a preference for provision that is open access and universal, rather than referral-based systems, which restrict the extent of support available. Despite moves towards more open-access provision, particularly during the school holidays, the current prevailing model of formal, referral-based crisis support in York does not adequately meet the needs of residents. A shift towards more inclusive, universal models of food aid within wider support services and in line with good practice on delivering a sustainable food economy is required.

Above all, there is a need to address the root causes of food poverty in York (and beyond) through policy change at both a local and a national level. A policy programme towards ending food poverty in York is set out in the Food Poverty Action Plan below.

6. Development of the York Food Justice Alliance: structure and focus going forward

YFJA held a series of collaborative strategy workshops involving experts by experience, community representatives and community groups, food aid providers, the City of York Council and the Universities of York and York St John to discuss and decide upon the form and priorities of YFJA going forward (i.e. beyond the term of the Food Power grant).

Between April 2018 and June 2019 YFJA has successfully established a diverse, cross-sector network around food poverty; raised awareness about the extent and realities of food poverty in York; and shifted existing and developing food aid onto a more inclusive footing, with universal provision as standard and user involvement in governance and day-to-day activities. Stakeholders supported YFJA remaining as an independent network facilitating quarterly meetings, but suggested it withdraw from intensive research and campaigning work. Individual members will take forward research and campaign projects in accordance with both their own priorities and those of the network.

Experts by experience will be central to the future shape and development of the network. The network will encourage and enable people with lived experience to contribute to developing solutions to poverty, and help shape every stage of projects which aim to do so. It will work to make sure decision makers listen to experts by experience and those who support them by including both decision makers and experts by experience on the steering committee and encouraging member projects to take forward advocacy and campaigning, holding elected officials to account on food poverty.

Participants in the collaborative workshop decided on the following issues as areas of priority concern:

- The relationship between welfare reform and food poverty;
- The need for effective financial assistance in times of crisis;
- The importance of safeguarding child nutrition, particularly during the school holidays;
- The need for a legally binding Right to Food at a local and national level.

YFJA believes that our society should be taking progressive steps towards the eradication of hunger, and towards the development of fair and balanced food system that works for both food producers and consumers alike. The Food Poverty Action Plan sets out a policy platform towards these priority areas/goals.



7. Food Poverty Action Plan

The background to and reasoning for the following recommendations is presented within above text. The Action Plan is operative from July 2019 onwards. As such, it is endorsed by:

- Hilary Platt, Bell Farm Community Centre
- Gavin Aitchison, Church Action on Poverty
- Simon Topham, Citizens Advice York
- Adrian Lovett, Good Food York
- Richard Sorton, Joseph Rowntree Foundation | Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust
- Caroline MacDonald, Independent
- Rosie Baker and Beverley Hadfield, Planet Food York: The Real Junk Food Project
- Simon Perry, Red Tower CIC
- Anna Bialkowska, Tang Hall Big Local
- Claire Douglas, Tang Hall Community Centre
- Maddy Power, University of York
- Sydnie Corley, York Community Reporter
- Mike Calvert, York St John University
- Emily Deckers, York Nurturing Community

To address food poverty and insecurity in York we recommend that:

National government:

- Provide local authorities with sufficient funding for an adequate financial assistance scheme by increasing and ring-fencing funding for the scheme in the national budget.
- End the five week wait for Universal Credit.
- Unfreeze working-age benefit levels and increase them in line with rises in the cost of essentials such as food, clothing and housing.
- Establish an infrastructure to facilitate the co-evaluation and co-production of welfare reforms with service users to ensure policy meets the needs of those engaged in the service.
- Provide councils with the funds and guidance required to safeguard child nutrition all year round, including by providing ring-fenced funds to meet the cost of holiday meal provision.
- Improve the standard and availability of Home Economics education in English¹¹ secondary schools. Encourage partnerships between primary schools and industry to develop approaches that use food and drink as the context for learning about nutrition and food preparation.
- Expand free local bus travel to children aged under 16; and to people in receipt of Universal Credit or, where Universal Credit has yet to be rolled out, Jobseekers Allowance, Income Support, and Employment and Support Allowance.

- Connect food insecurity policy and analysis in the Department for Work & Pensions and the Department for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs to develop, pilot and implement a food bank exit strategy.

Local government:

- The Leader of the City of York Council (CYC) write to the secretary of state for the Department of Work & Pensions to outline the nature and causes of food poverty in York, the experiences of local people, and request a meeting to discuss this.
- The Executive formally recognises food poverty and insecurity as issues meriting priority action in the city and commits to measuring food insecurity annually.
- CYC organise development and training sessions on food poverty and insecurity for Councillors, led by the relevant lead Councillor, that includes advice on dealing with residents in severe hardship, how to make food bank referrals, the roll out of Universal Credit, and the local social security safety net.
- CYC fully implements the real Living Wage for all its service supplier's workers in line with its accreditation as a Living Wage Employer and ensures everyone who works to provide council services is paid at least the living wage, including people working in care work, schools, and waste collection services.
- CYC increases promotion of existing initiatives that target food poverty and insecurity and provide help to

¹¹ England is targeted only given the diversity of curricula across the UK and York's position as an English city.

¹² Supplementary, CYC investigate where children's 'change' from missed Free School Meals goes and publicise its findings.

residents in hardship (including, Discretionary Housing Payment, Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Scheme, York Financial Assistance Scheme, Healthy Start Vouchers and Free School Meals¹²).

- CYC review the application process and criteria for the Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Scheme and decrease the percentage of council tax those claiming Council Tax Support are required to pay, with an aspiration of reducing it to 0%.
- CYC continue to improve the York Financial Assistance Scheme to make it more flexible to varied needs and enhancing the support available during the application process.
- CYC review local bus services and work with local bus operators to improve bus routes and bus frequency in under-served areas.
- CYC establish and support a food poverty scrutiny group to assess the impact of current local policy and initiatives on food poverty in York, particularly current food poverty interventions; and to monitor CYC's use of Section 1 of the Equality Act, Socio-Economic Duty.
- CYC encourage and enable people with lived experience of food poverty to contribute to the food poverty scrutiny group. CYC provide the requisite training to allow people with lived experience of food poverty to become leaders of community food organisations and networks.
- CYC commits to leading on funding bids for national government funding available for poverty-related intervention.
- CYC continues to support and monitor informal community food aid provisions, especially those that adopt inclusive, open-access models offering a package of food and/or advice/activity.
- CYC support the development and operation of an urgent York-based crisis alliance, formed of members of the York Food Justice Alliance and others. CYC connect people with urgent need with the crisis alliance and assist in meeting that need where possible.

Food aid

We request local food aid providers consider the findings of the Report and Action Plan, including:

- consideration of self-referral gateways and removal of the three-visit cap;
- altering the paper food voucher forms by adding a tick box to specify Universal Credit as the primary cause of the referral;
- staggering opening times across providers;
- ensuring that all provision is inclusive and no one is excluded on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.

The York Food Justice Alliance

Going forward, the York Food Justice Alliance will:

- be an independent network, facilitating quarterly meetings;
- encourage people with lived experience of food poverty to play a central role in its future development, adopting key governance roles;
- encourage alliance members/groups to take forward research, advocacy and campaign projects;
- advocate that volunteers and those on low incomes are valued properly for leading/providing food poverty-focused services in their communities;
- support children, adults and households to learn about, purchase, prepare and grow good food, and advocate for improved access to good quality, affordable food across York.

To do this, the York Food Justice Alliance needs:

- To be formally recognised by CYC with an elected member allocated to sit on the alliance and its coordination potentially outsourced to a charitable/community interest organisation, and/or;
- CYC staff allocation to continue carrying out food poverty research and supporting/monitoring service provision.

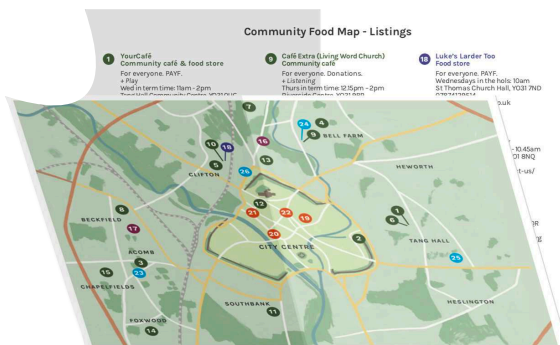
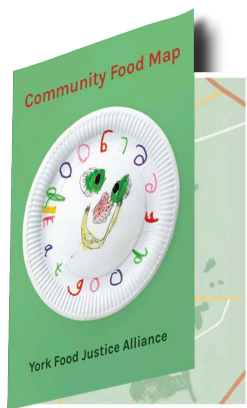
Appendix 1. "Have your say on a plate!"

The YFJA food poverty community art project ran from March to May 2019. It aimed to spread awareness about food poverty, confronting stereotypes and encouraging people to explain what food means to them in a word, image or a doodle.

Finished plates were displayed at Chill in the Community CIC. Three local schools were also involved, Poppleton Road Primary School, Carr Junior School and Hob Moor Community Primary. Rosie Baker (YFJA) and Sydnie Corley presented assemblies on food poverty, involving the plates, at Carr Junior School and Hob Moor Community Primary. The assemblies were very well received by staff and students and filmed by That's TV: York.

The winner from each school will receive a prize and the overall winning design will be printed on the front of the community food aid map.

The project was inspired and ran by Sydnie Corley in association with YFJA, York Community Reporters, Chill In the Community CIC and é CIC.



Contact

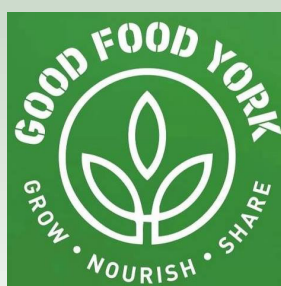
yorkfoodjusticealliance@gmail.com

facebook: @yorkfoodalliance

Acknowledgements

This report was written by Maddy Power, with research assistance from Rosie Baker.'

We are very grateful to those alliance members who participated in the preparation of this report and action plan. We would particularly like to thank the following individuals for their contribution to the development of this report: Rosie Baker, Sydnie Corley, Gav Aitchison and Liam Purcell.



**York Food
Justice
Alliance
June 2019**