

# **FOOD POVERTY**

## **AND THE CATASTROPHIC CONSEQUENCES OF COVID NINETEEN**

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**FOOD BANKS TYPICALLY SEE AN INCREASE IN NEED OVER WINTER, PARTICULARLY AT CHRISTMAS. THE IMPACTS CAUSED BY COVID-19 ARE GOING TO MAKE THIS WINTER EVEN TOUGHER THAN USUAL.**

A recent report by Trussell Trust, a charity who support a nationwide network of over 1,200 food banks, estimates 846,000 parcels will need to be provided by their network to people in need during October to December this year, a 61% increase on last year. It also estimates that an additional 670,000 people will be destitute by the end of the year, meaning they cannot afford essentials like housing, energy and food.

Covid has already had a huge impact on Food Bank usage. Between April and June, there was at least an 81% increase in their network. That included almost 100,000 households receiving support from a food bank in the Trussell Trust network for the first time. Emma Revie, chief executive of the Trussell Trust, warns, **"IF WE DON'T TAKE ACTION NOW, THERE WILL BE FURTHER CATASTROPHIC RISES IN POVERTY IN THE FUTURE."**

Sabine Goodwin, coordinator of the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN), points out, on top of the Trussell Trust food-banks, there are at least 916 independent food banks, distributing emergency food parcels every week; all of which have seen a huge rise in demand. The Salvation Army centres, schools, universities and hospitals, which also provide food parcels, are excluded from these numbers. IFAN independent food banks reported a 177% increase in the number of emergency food parcels distributed comparing May 2020 with May 2019.

The Bread and Butter Thing (TBBT), a charity that supports people on a low income, saw a 460% increase in need during April. The numbers have fallen back, but they are supporting 1600 families every week and anticipating the numbers to rise over winter. "All the experts are predicting a deep recession, significant job losses and continued lockdown restrictions," says Fiona Williams, from TBBT. **"THE WINTER IS NOT LOOKING GOOD FOR INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES WHO FACE THE POSSIBILITY OF UNCERTAINTY AND FOOD INSECURITY."**

Sian Mullen, food poverty coordinator at Greater Manchester Poverty Action, makes a similar prediction. "This crisis of unemployment and periods of isolation, is likely to lead to a significant increase in those experiencing poverty, and consequently food poverty."

Things have been implemented during the pandemic to try and ease the problem. The furlough scheme and the £20 weekly increase in Universal Credit have helped. But the scheme, which has supported the jobs of more than 9m workers ended on the 31st of October and was replaced with much less financial support and there is no certainty how long the £20 top-up will continue. Corporate donations and enormous donations from supermarkets - Morrisons are donating £10m worth of food - have eased the strain so far.

But tackling food poverty needs to go way further than just stocking up the food banks. "The government needs to be investing in long-term sustainable support for people", says Ms Williams. "Food banks do an amazing job at responding to emergency need and supporting people in crisis and this must continue to be funded. But many

people require long-term support, access to affordable food and other services to help them manage beyond the crisis period they are in."

Ms. Mullen stresses the underlying issues. **"FOOD POVERTY IS ULTIMATELY CAUSED BY A LACK OF MONEY. IF PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ON A LOW INCOME FOR A LONG TIME, THEN THEY ARE LESS ABLE TO COPE WITH A SUDDEN LOSS OF INCOME"**. Inadequate benefits, restrictions in housing allowance and the five-week wait for universal credit to start, are just some of the causes. "Five weeks is enough time to push someone who has been on a low income for a long time into considerable debt", she says. Life shocks, like bereavement, poor mental health or complex family issues can leave people unable to cope and lead to food poverty.

The government can help by reducing waiting times for universal credit, understanding why people fail to meet benefit requirements, such as no internet access and implementing a real living wage. It would be hard to argue that it's fair for anyone to work full time and still struggle to put food on the table.

And for people who would like to help, it is worth remembering that, "It's not just about donating", says Ms. Goodwin. "It's about calling for change. For every tin or financial donation you make, write to your local MP"

"Volunteers are needed", says Ms. Mullen. "But it is important that food handouts are not embedded as long term solutions to food poverty. Consider giving some of your time or resources to support campaigns that tackle the root causes of food poverty."

POTLUCK  
ZINE

DONATE

**FOOD:** Food reserves will be lower than ever this Winter; use the donation bin at your local supermarket and give some food to. It's best if you check what your local food bank needs most first, using the Trussell Trust website.

**TIME:** Food bank volunteers are often older or more vulnerable members of society who are more at risk from Covid so if you have any free time, why not donate that?

**MONEY:** Donate money to your local Trussell Trust food bank or have a look for an independent food bank in your area using the website:  
[foodaidnetwork.org.uk](http://foodaidnetwork.org.uk)

CAMPAIGN

**WRITE TO YOUR MP:** Food banks need immediate relief, but systematic change is what's really needed to help end food poverty. So take the time to get in touch with your local MP and let them know how you feel. You can use the resource provided by the Independent Food Aid Network to find out who your local MP is and be sent a draft of a letter that you can then send them.

**FUNDRAISE:** Many people are now taking the money they would usually spend on buying and sending Christmas cards and donating that to charity instead. And you can still hold fundraisers safely in Covid-19 times. Why not host an online Zoom quiz and ask everyone to donate what they can to participate? The Trussell Trust website has lots of ideas!

MORE  
INFORMATION

Find your nearest Trussell Trust food bank by visiting:

<https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-help/find-a-foodbank/>

STAY INFORMED

Keep up to date with campaigns from organisations like The Trussell Trust, MIND and Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG).

**RESEARCH** what local efforts are going on to help feed people in your area. Could you cook a few extra meals as part of a meal delivery service? Or have you got a car you could use to deliver them? Google it and see what you find!

**SPREAD THE WORD.** If you've found this leaflet helpful, you can download it for free and distribute it yourself by visiting our website.

HOW CAN YOU  
HELP SUPPORT  
FOOD BANKS  
THIS WINTER?