

# Enough is Enough project

## Food Poverty Scoping Exercise

### Food banks in Belfast

#### Executive Summary

Food poverty is a complex issue which goes beyond the matter of simply having 'enough' to eat. One widely accepted definition is the *'inability to access a nutritionally adequate diet and the related impacts on health, culture and social participation'*.<sup>1</sup> Food poverty is not new to Belfast. However, it is difficult to assess the scale of food poverty in the city due to the lack of an agreed measure of food poverty.<sup>2</sup>

Our research highlights the increasing frequency at which people are presenting to front-line services at a crisis point where they cannot afford to buy food. The most common reason behind a client's need for food support is low-income. This was followed by benefit delays, cuts and sanctions.

We found a steadily increasing demand for emergency food, followed by an increase in the numbers of working people requiring referrals to food banks, as well as increasing demand from families with young children with concerns about the consequences for infants' development. Food banks and other forms of food support were set up as a direct response to the increased need observed in local communities. It was also consistently highlighted that food banks cannot provide adequate long-term support to clients with complex needs, such as the homeless, people with mental health issues, asylum seekers and migrants with no access to public funds.

Several food bank coordinators expressed a desire for greater collaboration with other food banks and food-related projects in their local areas. They highlighted that without a joined-up referral system, clients could be accessing multiple food banks without receiving support for underlying issues. Food banks actively signpost clients to other organisations where they can receive further assistance, aiming to provide a service which is 'more than food'.

Although courses on nutrition and cooking skills can play an important role in tackling food poverty, they are only one element of the solution. The primary causes of food poverty are structural. They are directly related to how much money people have to spend on food, the cost of food and the costs associated with its preparation, rather than knowledge of nutrition, budgeting and cooking skills.<sup>5</sup> A solution to address food poverty in Belfast must incorporate goals to tackle these issues over the longer term, as well as initiatives to support people experiencing food poverty in the short and medium term.

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<sup>1</sup> Friel, S. and Conlon, C. (2004) *Summary of food poverty and policy*, Dublin

<sup>2</sup> The Food Poverty Network (NI/ROI) is currently leading work to develop a measure of food poverty.

<sup>5</sup> Prof E. Dowler (30<sup>th</sup> June 2014) Submission to the Inquiry into Hunger and Food Poverty in Britain

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## Food Poverty Scoping Exercise

### Food banks in Belfast

3 Trussell Trust  
6 Independent  
currently in  
operation  
3 banks  
in  
development



Over **1663**  
people fed by  
**Trussell Trust Dundonald**  
since April 2013

Over **2000**  
people fed by  
**Trussell Trust North Belfast**  
since July 2013

Over **670**  
people fed by  
**Trussell Trust South Belfast**  
since October 2014

Over **4,338**  
people fed by  
**5 food banks independent of the Trussell Trust**  
in 2014.

# 11,697

people in NI received three days' emergency food in 2013 – 2014 from Trussell Trust food banks

## ▲ 489 %

over the previous year

The most common reasons for visiting a food bank in Belfast are:



Low - income



Benefit delays, cuts and sanctions.

**Other reasons** include debt, unemployment, homelessness, mental and physical health problems, and having no access to public funds.

### RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

- ↑ demand for emergency food
- ↑ numbers of working people using food banks
- ↑ demand for food parcels from families with young children

What do organisations in Belfast provide people with?

**36** distribute food parcels, either through a food bank or independently

**26** run courses on nutrition/cooking skills/healthy eating on a budget

**19** regularly provide free cooked meals

**6** provide low-cost cooked meals (e.g. through a community café)

**2** provide un-cooked food at low cost

*“I visited a food bank four times as I had my brother staying with me and found it hard to support him and my child. They were very helpful and understanding of my situation and helped me in more ways than one.”*

*(Food bank client, Belfast)*

*“I feel embarrassed about having to receive food parcels however my food parcels were delivered (through a local advice centre) so I didn't have to physically see anyone.”*

*(Food bank client, Belfast)*

## Community Gardens

# 14

organisations in Belfast run or participate in community gardening projects.

**Belfast City Council** also runs 12 community gardens and 6 allotments.

**Community gardens** enable access to fresh food at low or no cost, as well as enabling participants to exercise, develop new skills and make new friends.



## Redistribution of 'surplus' fit for purpose food



FareShare provides a wide variety of surplus food to charities which in turn provide free/low cost cooked meals.



FoodCloud facilitates the safe donation of surplus produce from food businesses to charities in their local area via an app to text message system.



SOS Bus NI also picks up surplus food from supermarkets and distributes it to various charities and refugee centres across Belfast.

**138**  
tonnes of surplus food  
distributed to make  
**330,000**  
meals  
in 2013/2014

Between August 2014 and December 2014, **FoodCloud** redistributed 660kg of surplus food from businesses in the East Belfast area to charities – the equivalent of 1650 meals for people in need.

*“It just takes one thing to go wrong. We had a family here before Christmas and the mother was working. Her car broke down so that ate her money up and she had nothing left to fix the car, to get out to work, to earn money. She was in a vicious circle with no money for food.”  
(Advice worker, Belfast)*



## Belfast Food Network

### Enough is Enough project: Food Poverty Scoping Exercise

#### Overview of scoping study results: Initiatives to tackle food poverty in Belfast

##### Some statistics from previous studies:

- 2009 – 14.8% of NI households were at risk of food poverty (Institute of Public Health using data from the Living Costs and Food Survey).
- 2012 – 29% of people have ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ skimmed on food so that others in the household would have enough to eat (Poverty and Social Exclusion survey of living standards in NI, ESRC).
- 2013 – 11 food banks had opened in NI in the 12 months up to December 2013; Advice NI launched a report entitled ‘Turning the Tide’ which highlighted the rapid increase in the number of people seeking help from emergency food providers and called for action to address the root cause of hunger in Northern Ireland.

2014 - the proportion of people in NI who said the cost of food was the most common barrier to eating healthily had increased from 11% in 2010 to 32% in 2014 (Food Standards Agency).

Advice NI (Jenny McCurry) on behalf of the Belfast Food Network, funded by the Public Health Agency, carried out the scoping study to understand the reasons behind the rising use of food banks and other sources of food support in the Northern Ireland context. The study also sought to provide an overview of current initiatives in Belfast to tackle food poverty and provide the foundation for developing an action plan to address food poverty in partnership with the community, voluntary and statutory sectors.

**It is difficult to assess the true scale of food aid in Belfast; many organisations do not collect data and methods vary in relation to data collection across different time periods.**

