



Promoting Positive Foodbank Experiences for Clients: Findings and Recommendations

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Executive Summary

Food insecurity is an increasing social problem in the UK, closely intertwined with poverty and austerity. Our interviews explored the experiences of foodbank clients in the Nottinghamshire area, with the aim of: 1) identifying the nature and causes of foodbank use in Nottinghamshire, and 2) exploring how the behaviour of volunteers and the relationships between volunteers and clients affect clients' experiences. Our findings revealed the following primary features of foodbank use:

- Experiences of extreme poverty
- Experiences of food insecurity
- Problems with the UK Benefits System
- Foodbanks contrasting with Government Services
- Lack of Government support fostering desperation
- Perceiving volunteers as possessing a genuine desire to help promotes positive client experiences
- Being seen in terms of a 'legitimate recipient' identity allows clients to perceive foodbank transactions as relating to 'help-seeking', not 'scrounging'

These data reveal the circumstances that lead some members of the UK population to use foodbanks. We use these insights to make a series of recommendations on how foodbank use can shed light on the impact of poverty, austerity, and Governmental policy in contemporary UK society.

Part 1: Exploring the nature of foodbank use in Nottinghamshire

1.1 Introduction

Food insecurity, defined as lack of secure access to “sufficient, safe and nutritious food” (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2017, p. 107), is increasing amongst the richest nations, with one in eight children affected: a finding that Sarah Cook (UNICEF Innocenti Director) considers ‘a wake-up call’ (UNICEF, 2017). The UK is no exception: UNICEF’s data (Pereira, Handa, & Holmqvist, 2017) reveals food insecurity affects 19.50% of UK children below the age of 15 years. Those affected could seek help from community or charitable foodbanks. The Trussell Trust (TT) is the biggest provider of emergency food in the UK, with over 420 foodbanks within their network. In 2018/2019 they provided 1,583,668 three-day emergency food parcels to people identified as ‘in crisis’ by professionals such as GPs and social workers (Trussell Trust, 2019). These numbers have increased steadily (19% between 2018 and 2019), but due to the stigma surrounding foodbank use (Garthwaite, 2016) the actual number of people needing help is likely to be far higher. In 2018/19 the primary three reasons cited for TT foodbank referral include: income not covering essential costs (33.11%), benefit delays (20.34%), and benefit changes (17.36%). In light of this, the TT has been a key supporter of the End Hunger campaign petitioning the Government to change UK benefit provision, including the highly-controversial Universal Credit (UC). The TT has stated that the introduction of UC has been responsible for a 52% increase in foodbank use over 12 months (Trussell Trust, 2019).

TT has several foodbanks in and around Nottinghamshire, and the current research was conducted in two of these foodbanks. Nottingham has been highlighted as an area characterised by high rates of deprivation and poverty: in 2013 it was reported to have the highest proportion of workless households in the United Kingdom (Office for National Statistics, 2014), and a recent report suggests it has the lowest level of household disposable income in the UK (Office for National

Statistics, 2019). This means that foodbank use is common in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, and suggests that this is an appropriate location to conduct research on foodbank use, particularly in a context of austerity and reduced services.

1.2 Data Collection and Analysis

We conducted semi-structured interviews with eighteen foodbank clients in two TT foodbanks in two areas of Nottinghamshire characterised by relatively low socio-economic status. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013), which involves exploring patterns within the data and making sense of them using psychological and theoretical interpretations. We conducted these interviews with the aim of investigating the lived experiences of UK foodbank clients. Specifically, we were interested in exploring the factors that might encourage needy individuals to seek foodbank help, despite the associated stigma. Our data touched on many topics relating to the reasons for foodbank use. These include: austerity, the UK benefits system, and adult and child poverty. We have categorised our data into relevant themes below. We use pseudonyms to preserve participant anonymity, square brackets to add necessary information, and ellipses (...) to indicate where words were removed from extracts for brevity. For each of the themes listed below, further examples of data can be provided upon request.

1.3 Interview Evidence

1.3.1 Experiences of Extreme Poverty

Many people in our sample (17 of 18) reported experiencing extreme poverty due to life circumstances beyond their control, e.g., ill health, job loss, family breakdown, caring responsibilities, homelessness, debt, and the increasing cost of living. As in previous studies, we found that foodbank users typically experience multiple vulnerabilities, which are exacerbated by

poverty and food insecurity (e.g., disability, mental/physical ill-health; Loopstra & Lalor, 2017).

Twelve of our eighteen participants shared experiences of mental ill-health, which has affected their ability to work and has led to issues such as alcoholism, further increasing their poverty and destitution.

Jane: They never give anyone in this country, well our Government, help with such things as when I was going through my chemo, I was cold. And I couldn't afford the heating on. Because I was on sick pay. And that is really bad...I was sat wrapped in blankets, going through chemotherapy, and it was a hard time. I have worked all my life and the Government can't even keep me warm.

Ian: It puts a lot of pressure on my mental health...When you've got a limited amount of money and, you know, you have to pay it out on certain things like bills and stuff, and then you get more bills and it is just a continuous pattern. By the time you've finished you don't get any money for food.

1.3.2 Experiences of Food Insecurity

Unsurprisingly, most participants also described their experiences of food poverty and food insecurity (16 of 18), which led them to draw upon the help offered by foodbanks. Many participants described struggling to pay for food, relying on food donations from friends and family, eating only cheap and unhealthy food to survive, and often going without food for several days:

Ian: ...today is the first time I've eaten in four days because of my financial difficulties.

Henry: I had a place...I had no electricity, no food...And I went to my work every day, and I was so starving. And erm, I think in between I had a bag of chips or something like that. Some guy must have given me a pound or something...And erm, God, I was starving.

Ethan: And I was, I was struggling last week, okay. Just as bad. And I got a voucher to come [to the foodbank], and I was that scared of coming, nervous. I didn't come. And I really, really, had a really, really, bad week.

Paul: I came down [to the foodbank] I think last week or the week before. But going months before that I've sat indoors and I've thought should I go, I might go. And I will make do with what I've got indoors, even if I haven't got meat to go with pasta or rice...So that's why you've got to come down... Some people suffer in silence you know.

While our research highlighted the stigma often associated with the 'foodbank user' label, our interviewees explained that their sheer desperation at their impoverished circumstances led them to feel they had little choice but to attend the foodbank. However, those psychologically unable to enter the foodbank are at even worse risk of food poverty, with Alexander talking of friends who "go in the skips" to find food instead.

1.3.3 Problems with the UK Benefits System

In line with the above data provided by the TT, a large majority of participants (16 of 18) cited issues with the UK Benefits Systems as being a causal factor behind their foodbank use. One of the key circumstances cited was the use of benefit sanctions caused by situations such as lateness to appointments or missed appointments. In several cases, this occurred due to ill-health or the need to attend important medical appointments:

Edward: Well, I should have been paid today, my benefits...I have rang the benefits agency, they said 'Yes well you've been sanctioned', 'Why have I been sanctioned?', 'Late for an appointment'.

David: I am in a situation now where I've been sanctioned for failing to make an appointment, even though I was at the hospital...And they just stop it automatically before they listen to any explanation or anything like that. As soon as you miss it, they stop it.

Changes in circumstances that led to either a halt in benefits or delays in benefits being paid were also another primary cause of poverty and food insecurity:

Jack: I was on JSA [Job Seekers' Allowance] and when I went to the doctors they diagnosed me...with depression. I had to go back to the Job Centre to let them know...So then they put me on ESA [Employment and Support Allowance], then I have to go to their doctors so they can give me an assessment...then it took 6 weeks for me to get my money sorted from JSA to ESA. Which, I thought was diabolical.

Paul: They [Government] push you in a corner...So prime example is this Bank Holiday. I should have been paid on Friday. They are not going to pay me till Tuesday...Went to the cash point this morning, no money. Got back indoors. Sat down for an hour. What am I going to do? Then I thought, the foodbank. And I was fighting with it, and then I thought I've got no choice. I have to come to the foodbank...

Changes to the benefit system were also commonly cited, e.g., stoppage of crisis loans, complex and inaccessible claiming procedures, and inability to meet eligibility criteria (e.g., difficulties participating in work experience). Many people also stated that benefits such as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) were insufficient to cover the cost of living due to increasing bills and debt in the current austerity climate.

Albert: ...when I have been to interviews about my claims, into town and you sit and you try to explain to them. And they look at you vacant, you know what I mean. And then you wait three or four weeks thinking oh, you might get something. And then they just send you a letter saying you didn't even claim one point [on the eligibility scale].

Michael: You get different stories depending on which department you talk to and person you talk to. How is the lay man supposed to make any sense of it all? First time I went, they put me online on one of their computers, filled this online form out. It took me two hours!

At the time of data collection, Universal Credit had not been rolled out in the data collection locations, and as such it does not appear in the majority of participants' statements about benefits. However, one participant did express anxiety and confusion regarding its forthcoming introduction, and various participants mentioned the difficulties they had encountered when trying to navigate the online benefits application system.

1.3.4 Child Poverty

The TT reports that more than 500,000 of the 1,583,668 three-day emergency food parcels handed out in 2018-19 went to children (Trussell Trust, 2019). Moreover, single-parent families constitute the largest number of people receiving foodbank aid (Loopstra & Laylor, 2017). Seven of our eight participants who cared for children described worries around meeting their children's basic needs, and how they and those they know have had to rely on the foodbank to be able to feed and clothe their children:

Mary: It is not nice, thinking that you can't feed them [children]. And they've [TT volunteers] given...me a bag of clothes for him. Which is grateful.

Jack: It was at the Job Centre...I went in for a crisis loan. Because I wasn't getting any money, I says 'well I need to feed my kids'.

Ian: My friend who has got three children, she was in desperate need...and she came down here and got a food voucher and took her out of financial and physical difficulty...So when you've got no money and you've got three kids running about and no food, it is one of the hardest things in the world to watch.

1.3.5 Foodbanks as Alternatives to Government Services

Although participants tended to lament society's need for foodbanks, they recognised that foodbanks possess many qualities that differ dramatically to Government services: rather than being impersonal and perfunctory, foodbanks offer personalised and humanised assistance bound up with an understanding of clients' need for emotional support and companionship. Five of our participants made stark comparisons between experiences of Government services and foodbanks:

Paul: I thought...you came in [to the foodbank], gave them a piece of paper, take your food and go. But the good thing about here, if you've got any problems you can talk to them about it.

Ethan: I was expecting it to be a lot more sort of military sort of 'Right OK, voucher number 258 yes that is yours, go', you know. And off you go. Erm, but it is very sort of, it is nice atmosphere. People are nice, pleasant.

Rachel: She [daughter] says 'they [Job Centre staff] just look down their noses at you and say there is a water thing there if you want a drink of cold water'. She says 'and all they offer you is water'. She says 'a lovely cup of tea [at the foodbank]'.

1.3.6 Lack of Government support fostering desperation

Seven of our participants talked about how the lack of timely and effective support from the Government is creating stark choices for them between attending the foodbank, committing crime, starving to death, or taking their own lives:

Edward: But it does my head in because they keep sanctioning you, they don't realise that they sanction you, and they wonder why the crime rates are going up...If it weren't for the foodbank, places like this, I would be out robbing.

Michael: Well it [foodbank] is a safety net isn't it? You know, the alternative is, you starve or go out shoplifting. So, you know, needs must really.

Albert: You just have to grin and bear it best you can...If I didn't, I'd be hanging over Arch Bridge. You know, I have been out to do it three times now. But I just ain't come to the right place to do it yet.

1.4 Part 1 Conclusions

Across 18 interviews with foodbank users in Nottinghamshire, we have found strong evidence of the nature of poverty and food insecurity in foodbank users. Impoverished people are reluctant to use foodbanks unless they have no other option, and frequently experience extreme food insecurity. One of the primary determinants of foodbank users' current needs involves circumstances relating to the provision of Government benefits, including sanctions, delays, inaccessibility, and the insufficient nature of benefit provision in the current economic climate. Indeed, several participants shared a sense of disappointment and disgust in relation to the need for gaps in Government support to be filled by the charitable sector, and reliance on charitable organisations to shoulder the responsibilities of a relatively rich Government. Finally, our data reveal the potential impact of austerity and Governmental policy on experiences of poverty, food insecurity, and multiple vulnerabilities (such as mental/physical ill-health, trauma, addiction, and unemployment), as well as on people's ability to access basic human rights such as the right to social security, and food and shelter for all.

Part 2: The impact of relationships between foodbank volunteers and clients on client experiences

2.1 Background

Even for those in desperate need, the act of seeking foodbank help can be exceptionally challenging. The increasing politicisation of the foodbank helping transaction (where help is sought by clients and given by volunteers) has reinforced the stigma and shame often inherent in the 'foodbank user' identity that clients are forced to adopt (Garthwaite, 2017).

This issue of identity has important consequences for the foodbank helping transaction. Social psychologists (e.g., Turner & Tajfel, 1986) suggest that alongside our personal identity, we also have a social identity, which is comprised of the social group to which we belong (e.g., family, community, sports group, foodbank user, etc.). We tend to feel more similar to those who share our group memberships (ingroup members) compared to those who do not (outgroup members). We are also more likely to help ingroup members, and to receive ingroup help in the spirit with which it was intended. Viewed in this way, the foodbank helping transaction could be seen as an intergroup context where power and status differences between clients and volunteers may be thrown into sharp relief (Nadler, 2010). This could lead to the lower-status group (clients) becoming reticent about seeking help from the higher-status group (volunteers), especially when doing so may reinforce the negative stereotypes associated with the stigmatised foodbank user identity, such as dependency and incapability. While these challenges are created by social identity dynamics, it is important to remember that these dynamics are fluid: the perceived social distance between ingroup and outgroup (as well as who is actually perceived as ingroup or outgroup) is malleable. As such, it is possible to overcome issues of client stigma and help-seeking reticence.

For instance, by reflecting on aspects that make clients and volunteers similar (such as the potential for anyone to need foodbank help due to Governmental austerity measures), the extent of the perceived social distance can be reduced, and a sense of common fate cultivated. This has important implications for the intergroup dynamic, as it increases the likelihood of humanisation (i.e., outgroup members being seen as fellow humans, rather than 'others'). Humanisation promotes empathy and helping behaviour, and allows the helping transaction to be less about stigma and shame, and more about receiving needed support from people who are sympathetic and understanding (Cuddy, Rock, & Norton, 2007). In our study we investigated the processes that might help to achieve these more positive outcomes, leading to clients feeling supported, humanised, and willing to return to the foodbank in the future if necessary.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

From the same series of interviews described above, we also explored the nature of participants' foodbank experiences, as well as their perceptions and emotions regarding foodbank use. As part of this project, we also interviewed 12 foodbank volunteers (working in the same two foodbanks from which we recruited our client interviewees), so that we could also explore their perspectives on foodbank clients' experiences. Again, interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013), which involves exploring patterns within the data and making sense of them using psychological and theoretical interpretations.

2.3 Interview Evidence

We identified two key themes in the interviews. Together, these themes describe clients' experiences of receiving help, volunteers' feelings about providing help, and the nature of the help given in foodbanks. They show the difficulties clients face before coming to the foodbank and reveal their experiences once inside. They also give voice to the volunteers, demonstrating how they relate to the clients. Theme 1 ('Here to Help') explores participants' conceptualisation of the foodbank and its volunteers, investigating how perceiving volunteers as possessing a genuine desire to help promotes positive experiences. The supportive and personalised nature of the help is also addressed. Theme 2 ('The Legitimate Recipient') relates to participants' conceptualisations of clients as recipients. It reveals how being seen in terms of a 'legitimate recipient' identity allows clients to perceive foodbank transactions as relating to 'help-seeking', not 'scrounging' or 'playing the system', whilst also showing how volunteers interpret and assign this legitimacy. Overall, our study highlights numerous facets of the TT foodbank experience which foster positive helping transactions, as well as examples of good practice which should be maintained and expanded. We have integrated our recommendations into our analyses: these recommendations are designed to reduce the perceived social distance between client and volunteer, as well as foster perceived common fate and outgroup humanisation.

2.3.1 Theme 1: 'Here to Help'

2.3.1.1 Non-judgement

Clients noted their appreciation of receiving a warm and non-judgmental welcome upon entering the foodbank:

Jack: When you go down here you are not judged (...) they don't judge you for who you are, what colour you are, where you are from. You know, you are an individual. They judge you as a person. Which is nice...

Interviewer: Why do you think the foodbank needs to be like that?

Jack: Erm, why? Well I mean, if you go there and it is like. If you go in, no matter what situation you are in to come down to the foodbank, it shouldn't matter really.

The volunteers understood this and considered such behaviour to be central to the TT's ethos:

Ben: A foodbank itself can be more than food (...) We, you know, be encouraging to them, hopefully not make them feel depressed or being judged, but be actually being welcomed here which is part of our creed, of how we want to see people come in. With a bigger smile when they walk out than when they walk in.

Indeed, in situations where they were perhaps at risk of feeling judgemental towards clients, volunteers tended to be guided by the TT's key principles, as can be seen in Hannah's description below of how she responds when she suspects that a client might not be 'in need'. It is therefore important that these principles are reinforced during volunteer training, and that volunteers are reminded about them frequently:

Hannah: Well you still treat them with respect because our image is to be caring, we are charged to be caring, giving, loving. And, as I say, not to judge. And you can't, you can't let anything like that show. You have got to treat them in exactly the same way as you will treat anybody else. And, and you know it is just something you have to live with.

Volunteers not having to make decisions about who should receive food enhances this sense of non-judgement. The voucher system means that everyone who comes into the foodbank is eligible to receive help. Limiting the data gathered about clients once they have entered the foodbank will also help to strengthen this sense of non-judgement: while key statistics clearly must be gathered in order to chart foodbank use, collecting too many details from each client has the potential to exacerbate feelings of stigmatisation and judgement.

2.3.1.2 Being Viewed as an Equal

Clients also highlighted the importance of feeling they are viewed as an equal by volunteers, and how this differed markedly from their experiences of Government services:

Rachel: I says, 'They don't look at you down their noses at you, and they don't look at you as if you are an alien that has just walked in because you've got to go there'. 'They are really nice people, and they are really helpful. 'You get a cup of tea while you are there'. Because when my daughter came with me she said(...) 'yes, I can't believe I've got a cup of tea'.

Interviewer: Why did she say that?

Rachel: She says (...) 'When I've been anywhere such as the Job Centre sent me, they don't so much as offer you a cup of tea. They just look down their noses at you and say there is a

water [dispenser] there if you want a drink of cold water' (...) She says, 'a lovely cup of tea. And I can even have as much sugar as I want'.

We saw evidence of volunteers achieving this sense of equality in two ways: first, by acknowledging that anyone could need foodbank help, even them:

Lily: I had a family came, oh quite a few months ago now. And I think they'd been abroad, good jobs abroad, came over here, thought they'd get work quickly and they didn't.(...)And erm, that was very hard for them. And they seemed quite quiet to begin with, but they had to come two or three times you know and, got to know I suppose that nobody is looking down on them. It could happen to any of us. You know, any of us could end up needing to come to a foodbank.

Second, by sharing stories of their own hardships and life problems (see Hannah's extract below). Such behaviours reinforce a sense of shared humanity between volunteer and client, as well as fostering volunteers' empathy for clients. Volunteer training could reinforce the increasing need for foodbank help in the UK, thereby highlighting that 'it could happen to anyone', and could encourage volunteers to share their stories with clients (if they feel comfortable doing so):

Hannah: To me it wasn't just a coincidence that I thought of coming here [to volunteer]. It is a blessing to be here, and of course you meet all sorts of people with so many problems, but when you've got problems yourself you find that you can talk to them on the level of understanding. Most of them are just very pleased to be able to talk, you know, rather than keeping it all to themselves. Because they do come often in a very distressed state, they are embarrassed that they have had to come, you know, and to feel that they are received with respect and what have you, really I think, hopefully, it does help them.

Clients explained how a large part of feeling treated as an equal involved them feeling that they had choice about the food they receive. For instance, clients appreciated having their likes/dislikes/allergies/intolerances taken into account (see Ethan's extract below). The psychological importance of asking about preferences and allergies could be highlighted to volunteers during training:

Interviewer: What were you expecting [the foodbank to be like]?

Ethan: I was expecting it to be a lot less friendly. I was expecting it to be a lot more sort of military sort of 'right OK, voucher number 258 yes that is yours, go', you know. And off you go. Erm, but it is very sort of, it is nice atmosphere. People are nice, pleasant. They have given me a choice of what sort of food that I would like or don't like. If there is any specific allergies that I have or et cetera. So I am really, really grateful so far. My first impressions are, I am, absolutely amazing, and I feel very very, I sort of feel lucky to be able to use it(...)I mean, I am just quite overwhelmed(...)It is good quality, good variety. Erm, I think that is important as well. If they are just throwing rubbish at you, the worst of the worst of everything, then you, you sort of would be like OK, it is what it is. But it is not. It is sort of gone the extra mile to provide a variety, and a decent product really. Erm, which is great.

2.3.1.3 More Than Food

Finally, clients emphasised the importance of the range of non-food support they receive from the foodbank. Socially isolated, lonely, and mentally-ill clients noted the life-changing potential of the social connections they make with volunteers and fellow clients during their foodbank visits, and how such interactions give their lives a sense of purpose and meaning, as can be seen in the extract from Albert's interview below. It is important that all clients are given the opportunity to

engage with volunteers in this manner, and that the profound importance of such connections is highlighted in volunteer training:

Albert: But it is not just a case of coming here to collect your food. It is coming here to have a chat. Because I am alone you see. I go out early in the morning, I go out on my bike, I go walking. And I don't talk to people, full stop.

Interviewer: But you say it is nice to come here and chat?

Albert: Yes.

Interviewer: Why is that?

Albert: It is like, it is like you have achieved something in your life. Instead of being in a room doing the same thing every day, day in, day out. When you come to somewhere like here you just unload or whatever. I mean, I, not so much that chap [male volunteer] who sat with me [during this foodbank visit], there is another lady [female volunteer] who works on a Friday. I have seen her twice. And she lives in [name of Albert's local community]. And she makes you feel, you want to be alive, you know what I mean. [crying].

The informational support provided by the TT via initiatives such as budgeting and cooking classes was also seen in positive terms by clients (see the extract from Jack's interview below): they described the sense of agency they felt at being given the tools to help them change their lives for the better. These types of initiatives help to expand foodbank aid from dependency-oriented help ('giving a man a fish') to autonomy-oriented help ('teaching a man to fish'), thereby encouraging clients to become more self-sufficient in the future. While the nature of our economy and society mean that both aspects of foodbank help are required, it is important to make sure that all clients have the opportunity to attend such initiatives, and that ideally they are expanded to cover more topics:

Interviewer: So is this the first time that you've come to the food bank?

Jack: No, I've been here about four times. So, brilliant. A great bunch of people that help out as well, so. Friendly place. Always there is you need it. If you have gotten into alcohol or if you've got problems, they are always there to listen and give you advice. And if they can help to on money or, you know, financial situations and that. They have got advisors that can help you work out stuff. And that is it. It is a good place.

Interviewer: Yes, so they have helped you?

Jack: Oh, yes, yes, yes. There was a gentleman that came down who had a, who did financial work for people to better your finances and that. So I phoned him up and I did his questions with him. And it does help.

Interviewer: How did it help?

Jack: Erm, it sorted out all my debt problems and that, so it got more consolidation into one payment rather than this payment, that payment and so on and so on and so on.

Theme 2: 'The Legitimate Recipient'

We saw many examples of clients attempting to reduce potential feelings of stigma and shame during the foodbank helping transaction by highlighting their status as a 'legitimate recipient' of help. They did this, first, by highlighting the genuineness of their need:

Paul: Because they [Government] have cut my benefits, and they push you in a corner, you know what I mean. So prime example is this Bank Holiday [UK public holiday]. I should have been paid on Friday. They are not going to pay me till Tuesday. Prime example. Went to the cash point this morning, no money. Got back indoors. Sat down for an hour. What am I going to do? Then I thought, the foodbank. And I was fighting with it, and then I thought I've got no choice. I have to come to the foodbank.

Second, by highlighting their belief that their situation will get better through their own hard work:

Edward: At the end of the day, like I say, they are not judging, they are not making assumptions of you. They just see you've fell on hard times and giving you a little helping hand. Getting you over the hard times. Making the transition from the hard times to the smooth times a bit better, so you are not struggling or, like I say, going out and doing crime. So, it is nice, I am glad it is here.

Third, by highlighting their desire to reciprocate the help they have been given:

David: I could even bring in a shop [groceries], or bring in the money for them to do it. I don't know. I will ask them when we are in that position, down the road(...)Because when I get back dated pay, for what they've [Government] stopped, get my debts cleared, I'm sure I will be able to do something. Maybe not as much as I've been given. It would just help to know that you've given a bit back when the situation improves. It is not going to stay like this.

Finally, by attempting to distance themselves from the stereotypical 'scrounger' identity:

Jane: I've always worked, and I've, I've you know contributed as such to everything. You know, myself. And I've done, you know, sort of charitable things myself. But people, when they hit hardship. I don't know, because there is a fine line between erm, getting help because you need it, and then people thinking you are like a scrounger. You've got that stigma. So there is a fine line between that. If you genuinely know in your heart like me that I am not a scrounger, then you can pass that pride barrier, and know that you are just getting help. And there is no shame in getting help, you know. That is what they are there for.

While we saw evidence of volunteers understanding the legitimate recipient/scrounger dichotomy (see Daniel's extract below), it would be useful to explain the idea to volunteers during training. This would help volunteers to understand why clients might behave in certain ways when they enter the foodbank, and would also help them to learn how best to respond to clients in order to reinforce their legitimate recipient identity, thereby helping to put them at their ease:

Daniel: Well if you've got that mind-set that people in need are in need because of their own actions, you know, then it's OK you can just say that. Where, you know, it's, it's not true. You know, because people who are in need, it isn't always their own fault you know. And I mean sometimes they are, but even then, that really isn't a reason to turn them away because you know, they've obviously got needs and fairly complex needs sometimes that we can't give them [help for]. Or can't sort out for them but they can be pointed in the direction of people that can.

2.4 Part 2 Conclusions

The 18 clients and 12 volunteers we interviewed discussed various ways in which the relationships between clients and volunteers can enhance clients' experiences of foodbanks, and these observations feed into our summary of recommendations in the final part of our report below. In terms of volunteer traits, the interviewees highlighted the importance of non-judgement, and of using the TT's ethos as a guiding principle when interacting with clients. Clients feeling as though volunteers view them as equals was also deemed to be important, and this was enhanced through the sharing of hardships and life problems, as well as being aware of a sense of common fate (i.e., that anybody could need the foodbank, including the volunteers themselves). Clients also highlighted the importance of having choice over the food that they receive, as this also enhances the feeling of being treated as an equal. The less tangible sources of support found at the foodbank

were also praised by clients, especially the companionship and support they receive, but also the skills they develop through tuition on topics such as budgeting.

There were also numerous ways in which clients attempted to present themselves as 'legitimate recipients' rather than 'scroungers' in a bid to reduce the sense of stigma that is often inherent in seeking foodbank help, and thus allowing clients to enhance their experiences of the foodbank. Clients achieved this by highlighting the genuineness of their need, and that their current situation will be improved through their own hard work, as well as by voicing a desire to reciprocate the help they have been given once they are 'back on their feet'. More generally, clients attempted to distance themselves from a stereotypical 'scrounger' identity, and obtained comfort from doing so.

Together, our observations from the interviews highlight the complex ways in which client and volunteer relationships play out, and the various factors that can enhance them, ultimately leading to clients feeling supported, humanised, and willing to return to the foodbank in future if they need to. Our research has suggested many ways in which the TT can (and does) promote such positive experiences, and we now end our report by summarising these key recommendations.

3. Recommendations for the Trussell Trust from Our Research

- Reinforce the Trussell Trust's key principles (especially that of non-judgement) during volunteer training, and remind volunteers about them frequently.
- Limit the data gathered about clients once they have entered the foodbank.
- Volunteer training could reinforce the increasing need for foodbank help in the UK, thereby highlighting that 'it could happen to anyone', and could encourage volunteers to share their stories with clients (if they feel comfortable doing so).
- The psychological importance of asking clients about food preferences and allergies could be highlighted to volunteers during training.

- All clients should be given the opportunity to receive social support and companionship during their foodbank visit, and that the profound importance of such connections should be highlighted during volunteer training.
- Ensure that all clients have the opportunity to attend foodbank-based initiatives and training on topics such as budgeting and cooking, and ideally this training should be expanded to cover more topics.
- Explain the idea of the legitimate recipient/scrounger dichotomy to volunteers during training. This would help volunteers to understand why clients might behave in certain ways when they enter the foodbank, and would also help them to learn how best to respond to clients in order to reinforce their legitimate recipient identity, thereby helping to put them at their ease.

Together, we feel that these recommendations will reinforce and extend the great work already being done by the Trussell Trust and its volunteers. Moreover, they will help to maximise the chances of clients having positive experiences during foodbank visits, thereby feeling accepted, supported, and willing to return in the future if necessary.

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Research Dissemination

We have published an academic journal article based on this research:

Bowe, M., Wakefield, J. R.H., Kellezi, B., McNamara, N., Harkin, L., & Jobling, R. (2018). "Sometimes, it's not just about the food": The Social Identity dynamics of foodbank helping transactions. *European Journal of Social Psychology*. It can be found here: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/ejsp.2558>

The article is behind a pay-wall, so please contact us if for a copy (contact details on report cover-page).

We have also discussed this research in the following non-academic reports:

1. Foodbank Use and Food Insecurity in the UK: Submission for UN Special Rapporteur (2018). The report can be accessed here: <https://www.ntu.ac.uk/about-us/news/news-articles/2018/11/foodbank-use-should-be-used-to-measure-the-impact-of-poverty-as-part-of-united-nations-visit>. As we recommended in the report, Prof. Philip Alston (UN Special Rapporteur for Extreme Poverty and Human Rights) visited foodbanks during his 2018 trip to the UK to investigate poverty levels, and recommended that the Government maps UK food insecurity.
2. Written submission to the Government's Work and Pensions Committee for their Welfare Safety Net Inquiry (2019). It can be found here: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/work-and-pensions-committee/welfare-safety-net-followup/written/98999.html>
3. Economic and Social Rights in Nottingham: Food, Housing, Work (2019): submitted to Prof. Philip Alston as part of his international investigation in to human rights. It can be found here: http://www.michele-grigolo.com/1/11/resources/news_1237_1.pdf

We have publically disseminated the results from this research at the following events:

1. British Psychological Society Social Section Conference (University of Leicester, 2017).
2. British Psychological Society Social Section Conference (University of Keele, 2018).
3. Nottingham Trent University School of Social Sciences Conference (Nottingham Trent University, 2018).
4. Nottingham Skeptics in the Pub (Nottingham Canalhouse Bar, 2019):
<http://nottingham.skepticsinthepub.org/Event.aspx/19738/Food-Aid-Why-we-should-give-it-and-how-we-should-give-it>
5. Sheffield Skeptics in the Pub (Sheffield Farm Road Sports & Social Club, 2019):
<https://www.meetup.com/Sheffield-Skeptics-in-the-Pub/events/261171403/>