

## **Activity report 23/24 for AGM Oct 2024 Feeding Bradford and Keighley**

As well as supporting food aid providers across the district Feeding Bradford and Keighley strongly believe we need to tackle the root causes of poverty where we can – both by campaigning nationally and locally and by supporting initiatives which offer those seeking food aid more than just food. That may be welfare advice, housing support, cooking skills, jobs clubs or a range of other initiatives including FoodSavers helps people build up a savings habit by working in collaboration between low-cost pantries and our Bradford Credit Union. Lack of food is not really the problem – it is often about lack of income, so a food bag or meal is just a sticking plaster.

I have increased my participation at local strategic meetings including the VCS Leaders network, The Anti-Poverty coordination group, The Food Strategy group and the Act Locally: Keighley Convening Partnership Meeting. This was suggested by my steering group to widen the net of groups who we can work with and know about us and how we can support their work, and ensure we are representing the needs of our sector at these meetings. I also participate in our West Yorkshire Food Aid network and Feeding Britain keeping linked in with developments and campaigns across West Yorkshire and nationally.

I have developed our Share your spare scheme which links allotment groups with local food aid projects and redistribute surplus produce to those projects who are supporting low-income households locally. It is in its second year, and I must admit this year has not been as successful as its first year. It has been a poor year for most amateur growers with a cold wet spring and poor summer so not much spare to be had. Having said that we are getting a fair number of apples coming in now!

I have been supporting food aid projects and other support organisations in Keighley to do more joined up work to ensure that needs like budgeting, cooking skills and benefits advice are offered to all who are using the food aid projects involved. This involved getting groups together, chairing meetings and supporting funding applications. The group worked with Keighley Creative to produce and distribute a newspaper called Open Door which looked at the support available locally as well as food provision. That group now called the Open-Door network which I chair are looking for longer term funding.

I have worked with the Independent Food Aid Network and the Trussell Trust to create and distribute a worried about money leaflet promoting where people can get help with the issues driving them to seek food aid.

We host quarterly network meetings on diverse topics and debates to encouraged working together and spread good practice. We have quarterly steering group meetings which helps guide my work and priorities. We also hold other meetings as the need arises for example, to meet with senior council officers and councillors about the concerns about the effect of the likely cut in household support fund back in February this year. To do this, I collated lots of case studies and information which was shared with the council, MPs and nationally with Feeding Britain.

With a general election this year the network and steering group has been keen that we campaign politically as well as working locally. All electoral candidates were written to individually before the elections in July raising our concerns. The letters focused on the demanding work that food providers are doing, to do more than just give out food, and the growing demand for food aid due to a failing state safety net. We are now working with the regional Trussell campaigns lead with the aim to meet all our five sitting MPs over the next few months.

Over the year we have published nine newsletters reaching an audience of over four hundred and make use of Facebook and host a couple of WhatsApp groups to stay in touch with food projects.

We work with a NHS Dietitian to promote and train staff and volunteers who work in foodbanks and pantries as Healthy Start Champions to help spread awareness and encourage uptake of this scheme which provides money to low-income families with young children to buy fruit, vegetables pulses and milk. We have held three training sessions this year, two where we focused on recruiting via our membership and the foodbanks and pantries, and one of which was for primary school family support workers in Keighley. This came about via my involvement in the Keighley Convening Partnership. It would be worth offering this more widely to schools in the future. We have now trained more than sixty-five champions.

I work with food providers when there are issues between providers or with the council or other official bodies to try to ensure that issues can be resolved. I function as a bridge at times creating better understanding particularly with the newer and more informal groups ensuring they have their voices heard and that they understand the roles, needs and priorities of others working in the area. It is important that these new providers understand where they can go to get additional help for their clients.

This spring there were issues with meal providers working under the arches near Foster Square and Rail Track's plan to block off the arches which had become a focus for a small tent settlement, some anti-social behaviour and where a couple of meal providers worked. We collaborated with the council, the Homeless Outreach partnership and the meal providers concerned to listen to their concerns, ensure they knew about the support that was being put in place for the tent dwellers and to help them find alternative places to work from.

Since then, I have been working with meal providers along with Homeless Link a national charity to reintroduce regular meetings for meal providers, those involved in homeless outreach and the council. We are identifying training needs and sharing common aims to see how we can work more effectively together.

I work with Inn Churches to ensure that information about food aid providers is collated and kept up to date on our website so the public and professionals can get access to accurate information. Until about 9 months ago I had also been collecting regular statistics from our foodbanks, however time pressure has meant that I was not chasing up data, so my data was getting very patchy. Having spoken to Juli (Inn Churches) who collects data from the foodbanks and pantries receiving HSF food I have stopped. We were collecting different data from a similar cohort of groups, and I know some found this time consuming and were confused about it. Also patchy data is useless.

I provide a fuel bank foundation referral system for some of our smaller food providers to enable us to offer fuel top up vouchers to their customers when they are in fuel crisis.

I also helped the local Maternity hospital midwife team who deal with vulnerable clients set up their own referral portal. Initially I was going to have them refer into me, but it became clear than demand might prove higher than I could manage on my own. This work came about when talking to Graham from Metropolitan foodbank, I heard that they were providing food parcels. If families using the service were struggling to afford food, clearly there would also be fuel concerns. The hospital was unaware of this support and have been successful in setting up their own scheme.

I try to visit providers regularly particularly newer providers to share good practice and find out if there are things they would value from our network.

I have made a short film, still in a draft stage, which will be shared at a city of culture event next year.