

Stories Of Hope And Hardship from Wirral Foodbank

30/10/2024

Over the last few months Wirral Foodbank have collected stories of hope and hardship from the people who currently use our foodbanks. Through this we have spoken to numerous community food organisations across the Wirral, to gauge the wider problems that may result in a person needing food support. We are currently in the process of organising a campaign on the issues driving food poverty and the following article delves deeper into some of those concerns.



Following a discussion with people who were using Wirral Foodbank, the following reasons were concluded as just some of the main reasons why people may struggle to access food. These reasons included: lack of help with childcare costs, lack of accessible employment, an inaccessible benefit system and struggles to gain face-to-face specialist advice. The findings also showed the struggles with digital and rising costs further exacerbated the need for help.

The opinions given were instrumental in uncovering the driving factors that mean people need to access food support and the customers kindly consented to their thoughts being shared for the purposes of Wirral Foodbanks campaign to end food poverty.

In terms of lack of options for childcare, in particular for single parent families or in families where a child may require additional support, the following points were discussed. Some said “more information” should be given in schools of the support available to parents. Others present stated that they were “relying on

grants” to help them through difficult periods, in particular where one parent had to take time off to care for their unwell child.

Some stated that barriers in the benefit system prevented them from earning more due to ‘earnings cap’ – that is, the amount a person can earn before it affects other benefits. One client said they wished they could take “overtime hours” but in doing so they would be worse off financially.

Another driver of the need for food banks was found to be, lack of support and information for those facing sanction on their benefits or debt. Often members spoke of feeling “passed from one agency to another” or “jumping through hoops” to get support. One person stated that “more qualified staff” in certain advice services would help those applying for particular benefits, especially when the forms can be complicated or time consuming. Others mentioned this lack of support, leaves them feeling “apathetic” after “too many negative experiences” within a system designed to help them. A reoccurring thought was “better support” is needed for people receiving benefits.

Some of the acute reasons for people accessing food support for the first time included one off sanctions of means-tested benefits. This means those that were previously managing, now cannot afford food, after their employment suddenly ended. Other’s mentioned health struggles directly affecting their finances meant that they are now struggling to afford essentials. In this situation, the customer stated there needed to be more “streamlined” avenues for support for those in crisis, rather than being “passed around” various services.

These tablecloth stories will be used to inform what we will campaign about and will be used by Trussel for their ‘Guarantee our Essentials’ campaign to influence MPs to take action on ending the need for foodbanks.

Molly Bostock, Wirral Foodbank Campaigner Volunteer. October 2024

I am a single mother
of three and was recently
made redundant.
I have come to the foodbank
and been welcomed & helped
after being sanctioned and
left with next to nothing.
Without the foodbank's
help and support we would
have been left with nothing.
I can't thank you all enough.
I wish universal credit
had more compassion for
families and single parents.

Need more people to
meet the phone or be able
to see people face to face.

