



## Pathways from Poverty: Co-locating wraparound support alongside community food provision



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The Pathways From Poverty model ('Pathways') involves placing specialist advice workers into community-led food projects to help resolve some of the wider issues that households are facing when they receive help with food. The Advisors are able to build trusted relationships with households in these familiar settings, and can then provide expert support around benefits, debt, budgeting, housing, energy, or employment. This approach is gathering momentum across a wide range of community food providers in the Feeding Britain network, including food banks and Affordable Food Clubs such as pantries and social supermarkets. This work has maximised people's incomes, cut short the period of time that they are struggling to access or afford food, and helped to bust the limits that poverty can place on their lives.

This document provides a summary of Pathways' development and implementation within the Feeding Britain network, as well as some key considerations for partners wishing to pilot the model in their area (see final page). To find out more please contact [info@feedingbritain.org](mailto:info@feedingbritain.org)

Feeding Britain's initial pilots of the model in Birkenhead, Bradford, Derbyshire and Leicester saw 4,000 households receiving help to resolve problems around benefit applications and appeals, home adaptations, health appointments and assessments, as well as mobility needs. In the process, it increased households' collective annual incomes by around £1 million. We have now supported the expansion of this approach to a wider range of community food providers in Bath and North East Somerset, Coventry, Gainsborough, Halton, Hastings and Rother, Mansfield, Merthyr Tydfil, St Helens, Wirral, Glasgow, Norfolk and Motherwell and Wishaw.

*"Having observed early on that signposting food bank attendees onto other services was not effective, and resulted in return visits to the food bank, we pioneered the concept of Food Bank Plus which is essentially an advisory service that runs alongside the food bank, with welfare rights advisors and the wider council housing benefit department. As a result every person referred to our service has the ability to access welfare rights advice, housing and council tax benefit support, discretionary housing payments and a crisis grant from the local welfare assistance scheme. This has had a significant impact on our ability to assist clients to resolve their benefit delays or issues, meaning that many clients don't need to make return visits for emergency food donations."* Food Bank Manager, London

*"The effectiveness of this approach is clear; the more support made available to people during their first visit to a food bank, the shorter the period of time they are likely to be hungry."*  
All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger, 2015

### **FEEDING BIRKENHEAD, SUPPORTING WIRRAL: INVOLVE NORTHWEST**

An expanded version of Pathways began to be delivered in January 2022, as a result of funding secured by Feeding Britain from Allchurches Trust. A full-time Advice Worker is based at alternating Affordable Food Clubs in Birkenhead and Wallasey throughout the week. They offer immediate

advice within those settings, as well as referrals into specialist services including domestic violence and mental health. Demand for the service has increased and it is now running at full capacity. Within the first 10 weeks of the project commencing, they have supported 90 households.

Case study: At one of the Affordable Food Clubs, the Advice Worker began helping a man whose Universal Credit payments had been sanctioned. The man had built up many debts, including his brother's personal items that were being held at a local pawn broker. Further investigations revealed the man had a diagnosis of schizophrenia with psychotic episodes that were not being treated medically. He disengaged from his psychiatric clinic and GP surgery following a period in prison. The Advice Worker collated all details relating to debt, including rent and council tax arrears, and passed the information over to the debt management team within Involve Northwest. They contacted the local Jobcentre Plus and were allocated an emergency call back from the man's Universal Credit Advisor where they discussed his situation and submitted a reconsideration against the decision to sanction him. Within three working days, the man's sanction was lifted and all monies reinstated. The man received a repayment of over £2,000. He has now submitted a fitness for work note after engaging with his GP and is being fast tracked to the secondary mental health team. The client was able to retrieve his brother's belongings from the pawnbroker and is fully engaging with his family and support workers.

### **FEEDING LEICESTER: COMMUNITY ADVICE AND LAW SERVICE 'FOOD BANK PLUS'**

Pathways began to be delivered in 2019, as a result of funding secured by Feeding Britain from The National Lottery Community Fund. The programme has seen an Advice Worker being co-located in three food banks across Leicester, with between nine and twelve one-hour appointments being offered each week. There is a confidential space on-site at each food bank venue where appointments take place. The Advice Worker is, depending on the circumstances that emerge in that initial appointment, able to draw in additional help with debt, immigration, energy, employment and housing services as well as advanced welfare benefit advice. Trust has been crucial to the success of the programme, with the Advice Worker having an active presence in the food banks and building relationships with people in very vulnerable circumstances. The Feeding Leicester network have engaged with the local authority on potential options for longer-term funding.

Case study: A woman disclosed to the Advice Worker that she was regularly visiting two food banks in order to get enough food for her family. She had fled domestic abuse within the last year, was subject to the benefit cap and was really struggling financially. Her two eldest children were diagnosed with autism and she was their carer. The Advice Worker was able to update her Universal Credit claim and apply to get almost £10,000 of backdated payments for her as well. This resulted in the household no longer having to use food banks.

Case study: One client who had serious mental health problems had their Personal Independence Payment discontinued after a medical review which was completed on the phone. The Advisor was able to put in a mandatory reconsideration and the PIP was restarted, with arrears repaid.

### **FEEDING MERTHYR TYDFIL – FOOD PROSPERITY NETWORK: CITIZENS ADVICE**

Following discussions among the Feeding Merthyr Tydfil – Food Prosperity Network, Citizens Advice Merthyr Tydfil reallocated existing staff resource to place an Advice Worker within the Gellideg Community Pantry for one day per week, offering three appointments during this day. There is a confidential room on site so they are able to offer appointments directly in the building. Feeding Britain covered the rental costs for this room. The service has been advertised to Pantry members through posters and leaflets, and has quickly been taken up by members accessing the Pantry. The approach builds on a similar model that was implemented before the Covid-19 pandemic in the local food bank.

**Case study:** A woman has been accessing the Community Pantry as she was struggling financially. She lives in a caravan site with her children and has to use LPG as her main source of gas. Due to the cost of these gas bottles she is using more electric powered heating sources which is becoming costly. The Advice Worker was able to issue a fuel voucher, help the woman apply for assistance through both the Discretionary Assistance Fund and the Child Disability Living Allowance, and draw in debt management support to repay a £3,000 loan. This helped to maximise the household's income and reduce pressure on their food budget.

### **FEEDING MANSFIELD: CITIZENS ADVICE**

Since March 2022, Mansfield Citizens Advice has piloted drop-in advice and information sessions at three community food providers, including Affordable Food Clubs and food banks. An Advice Worker is available during the sessions for all queries around debt, benefits, housing issues, relationship issues, and employment. If and when more in-depth advice is required, the Advice Worker draws in specialist support from other teams within Citizens Advice who arrange follow-up conversations. Such instances can cover the completion of Personal Independence Payment forms, for example, which takes several hours. Feeding Britain has resourced the initial pilot period thereby enabling an application to be submitted for longer-term funding.

### **MOTHERWELL AND WISHAW: CITIZENS ADVICE**

An Advice Worker post has been funded by the Scottish Government to reduce the long-term need for food banks. They are currently co-locating within two of the larger food banks which are open for two-hour slots. The Advice Worker tends to sit at the food bank during this time and chat with people to gain an initial understanding of their circumstances. Given the lack of space at the food bank, the Advice Worker arranges telephone appointments to discuss people's circumstances in greater depth, with eight such appointments being organised per food bank session. This enables the Advice Worker to speak to as many people as possible while the food bank is open, and then to follow up on specific cases afterwards. The Advice Worker directly deals with all issues relating to benefits and also draws in help from other teams dealing with debt and housing. Moreover, there is a smaller food bank which makes referrals for telephone appointments only, as they do not have space for the Advice Worker to be present in person. In the past year, the Advice Worker has helped 996 people with 4,286 issues being unearthed. Due to the effectiveness of this work, other wraparound support services, such as domestic abuse teams, are now co-locating alongside Citizens Advice within the food banks. Feeding Britain has committed to supporting the extension of the project while joint funding applications are submitted for an expanded version in a number of additional food banks.

Case study: A man and his daughter, who moved in with him two years before, sought help from the food bank. He had been living on a single person's Jobseekers Allowance claim, and hadn't made any changes to these benefits after his daughter moved in. The Advice Worker was able to amend his claim thereby maximising the household's income. This increase in income meant that the household did not need to use the food bank again.

Case study: A man seeking help from the food bank slowly started to open up to the Advice Worker over a number of weeks, having initially said he didn't need support. He shared that he had addiction issues and had no money left for food shopping. He had served in the armed forces, so the Advice Worker was able to draw in support from a veteran support service. They have improved the man's access to a range of services which have significantly reduced his need to rely on the food bank.

### **FEEDING GAINSBOROUGH: IN-HOUSE ADVICE WORK**

Since November 2021, Feeding Britain has resourced an in-house Advice Worker whose services are commissioned by Feeding Gainsborough. The Advice Worker meets directly with people in the Affordable Food Clubs and conducts casework on issues such as benefits, housing, and debt. They also train and manage a team of experienced Advice Work volunteers. Crucial to the effectiveness of the service is the relationship which has been developed with the local Jobcentre Plus. The team are dealing with around 40 cases of advice and casework per month.

### **Other regional partners within the Feeding Britain network that are delivering this model include:**

- **Bath and North East Somerset Fair Food Alliance:** Contain Outbreak Management Funding, managed by the local authority's Public Health team, has been used to fund Advice Workers from Clean Slate and Citizens Advice to be co-located within a number of community food providers.
- **Feeding Bradford and Keighley:** As a result of funding secured by Feeding Britain from The National Lottery Community Fund, The Girlington Advice Centre was commissioned in 2019 to offer advice services within a number of emergency food settings.
- **Feeding Coventry:** As a result of funding secured by Feeding Britain from Allchurches Trust, Coventry Independent Advice Service are offering sessions within up to four Affordable Food Clubs each week.
- **Feeding Derbyshire:** As a result of funding secured by Feeding Britain from The National Lottery Community Fund, Mid Mercia Citizens Advice were commissioned in 2019 to offer advice services within a number of community food settings.
- **Feeding Halton:** Citizens Advice Halton collaborated with the Feeding Halton network to secure regional public funding to co-locate an Advice Worker within the local food bank .
- **Hastings and Rother Food Network:** Staff resource has been reallocated to place an existing Advice Worker from Hastings Advice and Representation Centre within community food providers.
- **St Helens Community Food Providers Alliance:** Feeding Britain is resourcing an initial pilot phase that sees an Advice Worker from Citizens Advice being co-located within up to four Affordable Food Clubs each week.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR NEW PILOTS

Here is some practical information for those wishing to pilot the Pathways From Poverty approach.

- **Costs:** In many areas, the Advice Worker's salary will need to be covered for the time they are located within the food project. In others, the advice agency has been able to reallocate existing staff resource so there are no new staff costs. There may be costs for travel, management and marketing. Room rental may need to be paid to the community food setting.
- **Funding:** Feeding Britain has been successful in securing grant funding from Allchurches Trust and The National Lottery Community Fund to deliver pilots in five areas. Elsewhere, central and local government have in some cases been able to provide funding. Feeding Britain is always happy to work with partners to explore potential funding opportunities for new pilots.
- **Locations and space:** This project has worked particularly well when there is a confidential space within the food project where the Advice Worker can see people for appointments. If there is not a confidential space available on site, the Advice Worker could gather basic information from people at the food project and book follow-up phone calls or face-to-face appointments in another venue. If there is a social space or cafe at the food project, it can work well for the Advice Worker to be placed here to have informal conversations and build relationships, before then offering a confidential appointment as required.
- **Follow up time:** It is important to factor in the follow-up time and casework to be completed by the Advice Worker, in addition to the face-to-face appointments. Some Advice Workers gather all the evidence they need when meeting a person for the first time at the food project (e.g. photocopying medical evidence) and will then take this back to the office to complete the forms (e.g. for Personal Independence Payment).
- **Consistency of attendance:** Having the same Advice Worker attending regularly has helped to build trust, as people begin to recognise them and hear stories from others of how the Advice Worker has helped them. It may take people in very vulnerable situations a number of weeks to decide to speak to the Advice Worker.
- **Support from the food project:** It has been invaluable to have staff or volunteers from the food project on hand to facilitate people's access to, and use of, the wraparound support services. This could include telling people that the Advice Worker is available, explaining the types of issues on which they can offer support, introducing people to the Advice Worker, and having follow-up conversations to see if people need any support completing the next steps.

To find out more please contact [info@feedingbritain.org](mailto:info@feedingbritain.org)