



**Sheffield Church  
Action on Poverty  
Update - August 2020**

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*You are welcome to share this update with  
your Church/Networks*

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare-Jeremiah 29v7

At National CAP Zoom meetings we have heard about some inspiring work being undertaken in communities by Churches/Projects from across the country. **These meetings recommence on 22 September** after a break in August. Highlights can be found on the National CAP web page:

[www.church-poverty.org.uk/gatheringmargins](http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/gatheringmargins)

Using Zoom, it is easy to take part using a laptop, PC or smartphone. But you can also dial in from a normal phone if you like.

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**Sheffield Church Action on Poverty**  
Facebook page.

Details of campaigns and updates are put on this page regularly and can be shared with your networks, friends, and Churches. **If you haven' already done so and you are able, please go to the page and like it.**

*"There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to **go upstream** and find out why they're falling in".* Bishop Desmond Tutu

**Sheffield Church Action on Poverty Pilgrimage:**

For a number of years Sheffield Church Action on Poverty, has organised a Pilgrimage which raises awareness and understanding of how poverty is affecting people in different areas of Sheffield and how various organisations are endeavouring to reduce its impact.

Normally, a group of people from different churches and faith organisations across the city would visit organisations that are playing an important role in alleviating poverty, to learn about their work.

This year, for understandable reasons, we cannot stage the usual walk, but, given that the challenges for people facing poverty are, if anything, greater than ever we are keener than ever to spread the word about the work organisations are doing.

Instead of the usual walk we are organising a "Virtual Pilgrimage", comprising a series of short videos covering the work of the organisations we would, in more normal times, wish to be visiting in person. More details later.

But the date for the virtual pilgrimage will be Saturday 10 October.

### **Food insecurity & social isolation**

**Physical distancing presents problems for food banks, says Charlotte Killeya (a trustee at PXI and Emergency Food Co-ordination Officer at Voluntary Action Sheffield)**

If you walked into the church on a Friday before the Covid-19 crisis, it was always busy. Volunteers at Parson Cross Initiative would start early: setting up the social café, organising the food stall deliveries from Fareshare and a local greengrocer, sorting food ready to make up emergency food parcels before an afternoon of welcoming people and offering them support.

**We will continue to campaign on the reasons why people need their support in the first place.**

During the afternoon there was always plenty of food to eat and people would sit together and talk. It was rarely quiet. The volunteers I work alongside were amongst it all and they were there to listen. The conversations they and I had may have begun with why people

needed support for that particular week, but would often go onto talking about things that had happened weeks and months before which had led people to visiting us.

As Covid-19 hit, many food banks like our own have simply not been able to operate as before. Distressingly, just as record numbers of adults and children are turning to the charity sector to help provide them with food, the social, face-to-face aspect of our work has had to cease or dramatically reduce.

Recently, a national coalition of anti-poverty charities including the Trussell Trust and the Independent Food Bank Network have reported record increases in the number of people needing support.

**The Trussell Trust saw an 89% increase in the need for emergency food parcels during April 2020 compared with the same period last year; the Independent Food Aid Network saw a 175% increase for the same period.**

There is a deep concern that due to the lack of the social aspects of what charities and food banks provide, people are increasingly isolated. During the crisis, the safest option has been to deliver food parcels to people's doorsteps or give them out at the doors of buildings, ensuring people physically distance themselves from one another. But handing a food parcel to someone will only help so far -and food banks are acutely aware of this.

As Jackie Butcher, co-ordinator of Grace Food Bank and co-chair of the Sheffield Food Bank Network, says, *providing a food parcel is only part of the story. "We don't just hand out food parcels - we build relationships"*. For Jackie, the need for a food parcel is *"the presenting issue"*. A critical role of food banks is to support and signpost people to other agencies and organisations who can help, such as Citizens Advice or Shelter.

Nicola White and Susan Vinall of Fir Vale Food bank tell a similar story. For them, *"food is a way of bringing people together."* *Before Covid-19, their community meals sat alongside the food bank and were an important part of building relationships. "Often people don't open-up straight away. It takes time to work through what might be happening and what support they need,"* Nicola and Susan explain.

This social aspect of what the team at Fir Vale do helps people to get to know one another and feel less isolated. It's never been about "just about receiving a food parcel."

When Vin was first referred to a food bank last year he explained that alongside the parcel he received, he got so much more support. A Citizens Advice advisor helped him with his benefits and budgeting, and volunteers spent time getting to know him and making him "feel part of things I've got to know so many local people. *I want to help people in my community because I know what it's like to go to a food bank.*"-----continued

Terry, who helps at a Sheffield food bank, has at times needed food support himself. He believes that the social side of what the food bank offered is just as important as the food. *“It gave me the time and the chance to talk to people. That’s important, especially if you are on your own. Sometimes you look fine on the outside, but you aren’t on the inside, and you need someone to talk it through with.”*

Terry explains that out of those conversations, you find out about the skills and talents that people have. *“We have all sorts of different groups like gardening, art and music. We find out what people are interested in and encourage them to join or help them find a group nearby. At the end of the day, it’s about valuing people and building friendships.”*

For Susan and Nicola at Fir Vale Food Bank, the devastating impact of Covid-19 has been that *“the social aspect of our work was the first thing to go and will likely be the last thing we can put in place.”* Like many charities, the team have worked hard in trying to maintain contact with people they support through phone calls and emails.

Across the city we have seen things like online coffee mornings, quizzes and befriending helplines, and arts and crafts materials being delivered to people as ways of staying connected to people. But Susan and Nicola are concerned for people who are falling through the cracks.

As Ben Pearson from Church Action on

Poverty highlights, *“many of the individuals I work alongside have become more socially isolated during Covid-19, whether that’s because a local group has had to close or they’re digitally excluded so they can’t participate in online activity... [The] vital connections that have been lost have had a significant impact [on their] mental health and wellbeing.”*

The impact of Covid-19 and personal

**food insecurity and social isolation often go hand in hand and the emergency food parcel is only ever part of the story.**

experiences springing from it will take a long time to work through. Food banks, charities and community groups will continue to find ways of connecting with people and supporting them. We will continue to campaign on the reasons why people need their support in the first place, what policymakers should be doing to address poverty, and endeavour to share peoples’ experiences in an empowering, honest and non-judgemental way.

In all of this we must never lose sight of the fact that food insecurity and social isolation often go hand in hand - and that the emergency food parcel is only ever part of the story.