



# **A Britain without Poverty**

2010-2023 | The Journey so far ....

# Our Vision

**A Britain without POVERTY**

# Our Mission

We empower people to create their own independent lives by working alongside them, with LOVE





# Tower Hamlets

## A Tale of Two Cities

Located in east London is one of the most deprived boroughs in the UK

Highest level of Child Poverty –

One of the most densely populated boroughs with the highest rents in the UK

..Our first project was the Tower Hamlets foodbank (Trussell Trust), launched in 2010 (4<sup>th</sup> in London, 61<sup>st</sup> in UK) - left in 2014



We wanted, from the outset, to really think differently about how to tackle poverty ...

We embarked upon a process to...

**Listen, learn then design** and implement solutions to effectively **break the cycle of persistent poverty and crisis**



# CRISIS

No Money + No Food

“Without the means to provide the essentials\* for yourself, or your household”

\*Food, Shelter, Clothing, Heat



# LISTEN Learn Design

## CRISIS

- **Debt** – high rents, low or no income, benefit-related overpayment, fuel
- **Isolation** - financial/digital/social
- **Health & Wellbeing** - Mental illness, Isolation, long term illnesses
- **Breakdown of the Family** - domestic abuse, child protection,
- **Food** - child poverty, holiday hunger, heat or eat etc.,



# Listen **LEARN** Design

## DRIVERS

- **Benefit Policy** – austerity - benefit cap, bedroom tax,, universal credit
- **Signposting** – does not work
- **Access to Advice** - lack of capacity, long waiting lists, so hard to access advice in timely way
- **Foodbank usage grows** - and dependency, whilst households descend into further, more complex crisis
- **Faulty benefit administration** - leading to incorrect denial of income, or incorrect levels of benefits, so no income ...





# Food Poverty? Or Injustice?

You be the judge ...

- Angie\* was referred for food from local referral partner
- No income – successfully challenged an incorrect benefit decision
- Visited foodbanks and other food projects to feed her two boys, whilst awaiting payment ...
- ..... for 12 years!
- She said “you are the first foodbank to ask me why I needed food - no one else has ever asked me”.
- The DWP simply forgot about her ...







## Our Hub Style Model

- Maps the unmet needs of the household
- Restores and/or uplifts income – we return at least £1m p.a.
- Removes seen and unseen barriers to thriving
- Stabilise household, support into work, education, training
- Reduces reliance on welfare benefits + food aid



# Influencing Change across the UK



Rt. Hon Frank Field MP  
Chair of APPG on Hunger & Poverty - 2014

“When the All-Party  
Parliamentary Group  
(APPG) collected  
evidence .. on what could  
be done to counter  
hunger in this country,  
**First Love Foundation**  
presented us with a  
**stunning example of  
good practice .....**”





# Systemic Change

- **2012** - Integrating holistic wraparound support and advice alongside foodbank and income maximization for the household
- **2016** - [Lorna](#), an ex-user of our service, inspired the House of Lords to continue measuring household income as an indicator of Child Poverty – along with the statutory requirement for Parliament to report on Child Poverty on annual basis going forward
- **2017** – Independently assessed as best advice service across UK
- **2018** - Systemic change - TD v AD & Patricia Reynolds Judicial Review – ensuring levels of benefits are protected for claimants with illnesses as they transition onto Universal Credit – compensation of over £70m paid to those affected across UK



## 2020 – The Pandemic

- 319% increase in referrals (year on year)
- Allowed self-referrals, of which a significant number were for **advice only**
- Launched a Befriending Service
- Still continued to help stop evictions (tenancy sustainment), helped people into employment
- **120 hours of advice** delivered on average per week (included volunteers)
- By end of year 8,000 people supported, and reclaimed over **£650,000 of benefits owed**



# 2021-2023 - Recover & Reflect

- We slowed the service down to recover, but also reflect on what we had seen during the pandemic
- 2020 - **LISTEN & LEARN** - deeper levels of crisis revealed through the pandemic i.e. now incl. CAMH, bereavement, diet-related disease & untreated terminal illnesses
- 2021 - gained accreditation to deliver advice in our own right
- 2022 - closed the foodbank to focus resources on responding to this **new and emerging crisis**
- 2023 - **DESIGN** - review and co-design of a new service. **LAUNCHED** our **Advocacy & Advice service**



# Rules of Engagement

We foster a culture of Collaboration, Partnership, good Mental Health & Wellbeing, Boundaries, Ongoing Learning

- **Boundaried** – to do this job well, you need to be – or you will burn out. Every member of the team commits to being accountable
- **Collaboration** – every case is discussed at cross disciplinary case management meetings, held daily. Decisions on actions to be taken (including Safeguarding) are jointly agreed – opportunity to learn through collaboration
- **Support** – we support good Mental Health & Wellbeing through Supervision, 1-2-1's, Reflective Practice, Employee Assistance (24-7), access to Counselling
- **Learning** – this practice does not stand still – we encourage short courses, refreshers right through to exploring how policy changes and recent case law impacts our work



**2023**

“I just want to live a normal life”



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a red hoodie, is looking down at a shopping cart filled with various food items. The cart is in a room that appears to be a community center or a food bank, with other people and tables visible in the background. The lighting is somewhat dim, and the overall atmosphere is one of quiet activity.

## The Issue is **POVERTY**

(NOT food poverty)

- **POVERTY & CRISIS is complex**
- **It is hard to escape**, but when dealt with holistically, is wholly avoidable for our society
- Emergency food aid is a **sticking plaster**, not a solution
- **Supporting the whole household** is required to escape poverty – specifically income and **other barriers to social mobility**
- Putting those building blocks in place when you are in crisis is extremely difficult, **but possible**, **with the right kind of support**





# The Needs of the Community has changed

The needs have evolved since COVID – no longer poverty, or even in-work poverty - but **JUSTICE**

- **Long-term illness** – be it long COVID, or terminal illness, leading to economic inactivity amongst people of working age, previously employed struggle to secure health-related benefits
- **Housing & Debt** – the continued freezing of the local housing allowance as well as the Cost-of-Living Crisis means a growing gap between income, and rent – evictions and debt are the new emergency
- **Policy** – incl. **Universal Credit Managed Migration** has begun – the (final) phased transition of those on more generous legacy benefits (typically more vulnerable, health-related citizens), plunging more into poverty
- **Yet, at a time when access to (expert) advice is urgently needed, the advice sector is shrinking, due to chronic underfunding. Growing numbers are closing their doors - for good.**



# It's time for Change ...

*"I have fed the same person for the past 18 months, and I know I have not made a difference ..."*

**Foodbank Manager  
London, 2021**

## 'Food banks are not the answer': charities search for new way to help UK families

**After years of austerity, local pantries are starting to question whether food handouts get people out of poverty**



📷 Food bank organisers want a social security system that would give people the dignity to buy their own food and essentials. Photograph: Jon Santa Cruz/Rex/Shutterstock



## Manifesto for Change

- **Emergency** food aid should be just that i.e. **short term**
- **Influence** - local policy to fund projects that want to transition to advice & support – need to advocate for a shift in policy
- **Focus** on addressing the needs of the household in crisis, stabilise and increase/maximise household income
- **Access** - work to provide access to fresh, healthy & culturally appropriate food. Champion locally grown – direct links to farms, create food trade co-ops (food aid to food trade) – to improve health outcomes and dignity for your clients



“The solution to poverty is not wealth ....  
the solution to poverty is (social) **justice**”

Bryan Stevenson  
(adapted)

