



Tackling Destitution Together: Lived Experience in East Hull

An analysis of the lived experience of food bank, food pantry
and community shop users in East Hull

**citizens
advice**

**Hull &
East Riding**

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Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Tackling Destitution Together is a partnership between Citizens Advice and Trussell designed to reduce destitution and reliance on foodbanks through community-based support, advice and engagement. As part of the project, Hull & East Riding Citizens Advice undertook lived experience research with people accessing food support across East Hull.

Research was conducted with 51 participants across three settings representing various stages of the food ladder: East Hull Foodbank, St Philips Community Pantry and the Community Shop on North Bransholme. Through surveys, group discussions and lived experience conversations, participants shared their experiences of poverty, food insecurity, financial hardship and accessing support.

The findings reveal that food insecurity is rarely an isolated issue. Participants consistently described wider challenges including low incomes, rising food and energy costs, debt, poor physical and mental health, caring responsibilities and difficulties navigating support systems. The majority of participants were living with a disability or long-term health condition, and many were unable to work due to ill health or retirement. Food insecurity was therefore often one symptom of broader financial and social disadvantage rather than a standalone problem.

While the three venues occupied various positions within the local food support system, the underlying causes of hardship were remarkably similar. Participants using the foodbank were more likely to be experiencing immediate crisis, describing situations where they had exhausted all other options and were struggling to afford basic essentials. Community shop and pantry participants were generally focused on managing ongoing financial pressures and avoiding crisis, using affordable food provision to make limited incomes stretch further.

Across all settings, participants valued services that promoted dignity, choice and independence. Community shops and pantries were frequently praised for allowing people to choose their own food, access healthier options and maintain a greater sense of control. Participants also highlighted the importance of social connection, with many describing food support settings as places where they could meet others, reduce loneliness and access wider community activities.

One of the strongest findings from the research was the role of community food settings as trusted gateways into wider support. Participants frequently reported difficulties accessing advice services and understanding what support was available. Many described only becoming aware of help once they had already reached crisis point.

Participants repeatedly highlighted that support often exists but is difficult to find.

“Lots of support - so much - but people just don’t know.”

This finding reinforces the importance of community-based and co-located advice provision. Projects such as Tackling Destitution Together, Feeding Britain and the Foodbank Adviser service demonstrate the value of embedding advice within trusted community settings, enabling issues such as debt, benefit problems, housing difficulties and financial hardship to be identified and addressed before they escalate into crisis.

The research also provides important insight into the operation of the food ladder. While there was evidence of movement between emergency food aid and more preventative forms of support, there was limited evidence of progression to the third rung of the ladder: self-organised community change.

Participants frequently moved between foodbanks, pantries and community shops depending on changing circumstances, but many remained reliant on some form of food support over extended periods. This suggests that while community food provision can improve stability and resilience, it does not on its own address the structural causes of poverty.

The absence of progression to the third rung raises important questions for local partners. If communities are to build long-term resilience, there must be greater investment in community-led initiatives, co-production and opportunities for people with lived experience to shape and lead local solutions. Participants demonstrated significant knowledge, skills and commitment to improving their communities, but further support is needed to translate these assets into sustainable community-led change.

The findings suggest **four key priorities** for future action

Expanding embedded advice and outreach services within trusted community settings

Improving awareness, visibility and accessibility of support before people reach crisis point.

Continuing investment in preventative community food provision that promotes dignity, choice and social connection.

Supporting community participation, leadership and self-organised solutions that help communities progress towards the third rung of the food ladder.

Ultimately, the research demonstrates that food support alone cannot end poverty or destitution. While emergency and community food provision remain essential, long-term progress will depend on addressing the underlying drivers of hardship, including inadequate incomes, rising living costs, poor health and barriers to accessing support.

The experiences shared through this research highlight both the resilience of local communities and the urgent need for a more preventative, integrated and community-led approach to tackling destitution in Hull.

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Introduction

Introduction

Tackling Destitution Together

Tackling Destitution Together is a pilot project conducted between Citizens Advice & Trussell. Operating out of five local Citizens Advice offices, the pilot is targeted at reducing destitution and reliance on foodbanks.

As a pilot location, Hull & East Riding Citizens Advice has focused on four areas:

1

Community based advice in areas of high need

2

Community based training to organisations across Hull

3

Development of a problem solver app

4

Lived experience work with foodbanks and community organisations

A core aim of our research was to explore the experiences of people accessing food support and understand the causes of food insecurity and financial hardship. Secondary aims included being able to compare how experiences varied across different food support settings & the progression throughout the food ladder. This could then be used to identify opportunities for improving support and reducing destitution, whether through placing our community advisor, our community trainer or looking at systematic changes.

To speak to a variety of people across food support settings, we conducted our research at three different venues.

Hull Foodbank

Initial sessions took place at East Hull Foodbank - a Trussell Foodbank - who primarily provide emergency support to those in crisis situations¹.

St Philips Community Pantry

We then visited the Community Pantry - focusing on offering regular affordable food access, choice and community based support. They do not require referrals or vouchers².

Community Shop

Our final location was the Community Shop on North Bransholme offering membership to those who live within 1km of the shop or wider afield who receive means tested benefits. They sell surplus food at a deeply discounted price, and operate a community hub and community kitchen³.

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Food Poverty

Food Poverty

Food poverty is commonly understood as the inability to access or afford sufficient, nutritious and culturally appropriate food to maintain a healthy and active life. While often associated with hunger, food poverty encompasses a much broader range of experiences including poor diet quality, anxiety about running out of food, reliance on emergency food support and the need to make difficult choices between food and other essential household costs. The term is often used synonymously with household food insecurity⁴.

It is rarely caused by food alone. It is often the result of wider social and economic factors such as low income, unemployment, ill-health, rising living costs, problems accessing welfare support and insecure housing. As a result, people experiencing food poverty frequently face multiple and interconnected challenges that extend beyond their immediate need for food.

Food poverty is a particularly visible form of poverty due to food budgets being relatively elastic compared to other expenditure.⁵ As a consequence, food is often one of the first things those on low incomes start to cut back on.⁶

The Governments Households Below Average Income (HBAI) paints a stark picture of food insecurity. In 2024-2025, over 1,000,000 households had used a foodbank in the last 12 months across England. 66% of those who accessed the foodbank lived in social housing, with private housing accounting for 19%.⁷

The picture painted by Trussell is just as stark, with more than 2,600,000 food parcels distributed in 2025, accounting to one every twelve seconds.⁸ In Hull alone, over 9,000 parcels were distributed in 2024-2025. This does not take into account the hundreds of independent food aid providers and community groups providing food aid.



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Methodology

Methodology

The lived experience research used a mixed-method approach to explore the experiences of people accessing food support services in Hull.

The research combined:

- Participant surveys
- Facilitated group discussions
- Open conversation and lived experience testimony
- Interactive experiences exploring causes of hardship and potential solutions

The approach aimed to create a safe and informal environment where participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences and views.

Sessions were designed not only to gather insight, but also to ensure participants have opportunities to reflect on their experiences, discuss shared challenges and contribute ideas for improving support locally.

Research sessions were carried out across three food support settings – a foodbank, a community pantry & a community shop, which were selected to capture experiences across different forms of food support provision and to better understand how people interact with services operating at different points within the food ladder.

A total of 51 participants took part across the three venues.

Participants by Venue

Number of participants across three food support settings



Participants were recruited directly through the foodbank & St Philips and took part voluntarily in our sessions. Participants at the Community Shop were recruited during their visit to the shop on the day of our session and took part voluntarily.

Many participants identified as experiencing ongoing financial hardship. Many were also accessing multiple forms of support simultaneously and several participants described additional pressures including:



Session Structure

Each session followed a similar structure while allowing flexibility for open discussion. Sessions generally included:



A key difference between locations was how the sessions took place – with the initial foodbank sessions covering the same content across three sessions, whereas St Philips was conducted in one extended session.

Furthermore, the session at the Community Shop was conducted following the same structure but on a one-to-one basis with each participant primarily – with some participants opting for small group discussions. This difference took place due to the location & how we could operate.

This research placed lived experience at the centre. All participants were treated as experts in their own experiences and were encouraged to speak openly about the realities of poverty, food insecurity and navigating support systems.

Direct quotes and participant comments have been used throughout this report to ensure findings reflect the voices and experiences of local people. All participants contributions have been anonymised.

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Demographics

Participant Demographics

The demographic profile of participants provides important context for understanding the findings of this report. Overall, participants were more likely to be women, living with a disability or long-term health condition, economically inactive due to ill health or retirement, and living in single-adult households.

The demographic profile of participants paints a clear picture of the communities accessing food support in East Hull.

Participants were predominantly women, most were living with a disability or long-term health condition, many were economically inactive due to ill health, retirement or unemployment, and half lived alone.

These characteristics are important when interpreting the findings of this report. They demonstrate that food insecurity is closely linked to wider issues of health, disability, income adequacy and social isolation.

The demographic data supports the wider findings of the research, which show that participants are often facing multiple and interconnected forms of disadvantage rather than experiencing food insecurity in isolation.



Gender

71% of participants
were women

The majority of participants were women, accounting for 36 of the 51 respondents (71%), while 15 participants (29%) were men.

Women were particularly well represented within the pantry group, where they accounted for 84% of respondents. Across all three venues, the findings suggest that women continue to play a significant role in managing household food provision and navigating financial hardship within their households.

This reflects wider national evidence showing that women are often disproportionately affected by poverty, caring responsibilities and food insecurity.

Disability & Long-Term Health Conditions

76% living with a disability
or health condition

Of the 51 respondents, 39 participants (76%) identified as having a disability or health condition. Rates were consistently high across all three venues, ranging from 70% of community shop participants to 84% of pantry participants.

This finding is reflected throughout the qualitative research, where participants frequently described the impact of poor physical health, disability and mental health conditions on their ability to work, manage finances and access support.

The data suggests a strong relationship between ill health, disability and food insecurity within the communities represented in this research.

This correlates with previous research carried out by Trussell Trust, which found 75% of those referred to Trussell foodbanks were either disabled or had someone in the household who is disabled⁹.

1 in 3 participants had caring responsibilities

Among those who responded to the question, almost one-third of participants reported having caring responsibilities.

Seven participants were caring for children under the age of 18, while five were caring for a disabled adult. A small number reported other caring responsibilities.

Caring responsibilities were often discussed alongside financial pressures, with participants describing the additional costs, time pressures and emotional strain associated with supporting family members while managing on limited incomes.

Household Composition

50% of participants lived alone

Half of all participants lived alone, making single-adult households the largest household type represented within the research.

Twenty-five respondents identified as single adults, while eight were single parents with children and a further six lived in couple households with children.

The high proportion of single-adult households is significant. Participants living alone often described having limited financial resilience and fewer opportunities to share household costs. Single-adult households may also be at greater risk of social isolation, a theme which emerged throughout the research.

The findings suggest that food insecurity within East Hull is affecting a diverse range of household types but may have a particularly significant impact on people living alone.

Employment Status

37% unable to work due to ill health or disability

Most participants were not currently in employment.

The largest group of respondents (19 participants) reported being unable to work due to ill health or disability. A further 16 participants were retired and 12 were unemployed.

Only two participants reported being in work, both in part-time or insecure forms of employment.

The employment data reinforces the wider picture emerging from the research: many participants were facing barriers to employment linked to poor health, disability or age. This helps explain the prominent levels of reliance on benefits and fixed incomes reported during the sessions.

Importantly, the findings suggest that food insecurity within this group is not primarily driven by short-term unemployment but is often associated with long-term financial insecurity and limited opportunities to increase income.

Previous Foodbank Use

47% had not used a foodbank in the past 12 months

Participants reported varying levels of previous foodbank use.

Almost half of respondents (24 participants) reported not having used a foodbank within the past twelve months. In contrast, 11 participants reported having accessed a foodbank six or more times.

This variation reflects the different roles played by the three food support models. While foodbanks continue to provide an essential emergency safety net, the community shop and pantry appear to be supporting a wider group of residents who may not access traditional emergency food aid, but who are nevertheless experiencing significant financial hardship.

The findings also suggest that some participants continue to rely on food support over extended periods, highlighting the long-term nature of poverty and financial insecurity experienced by many households.

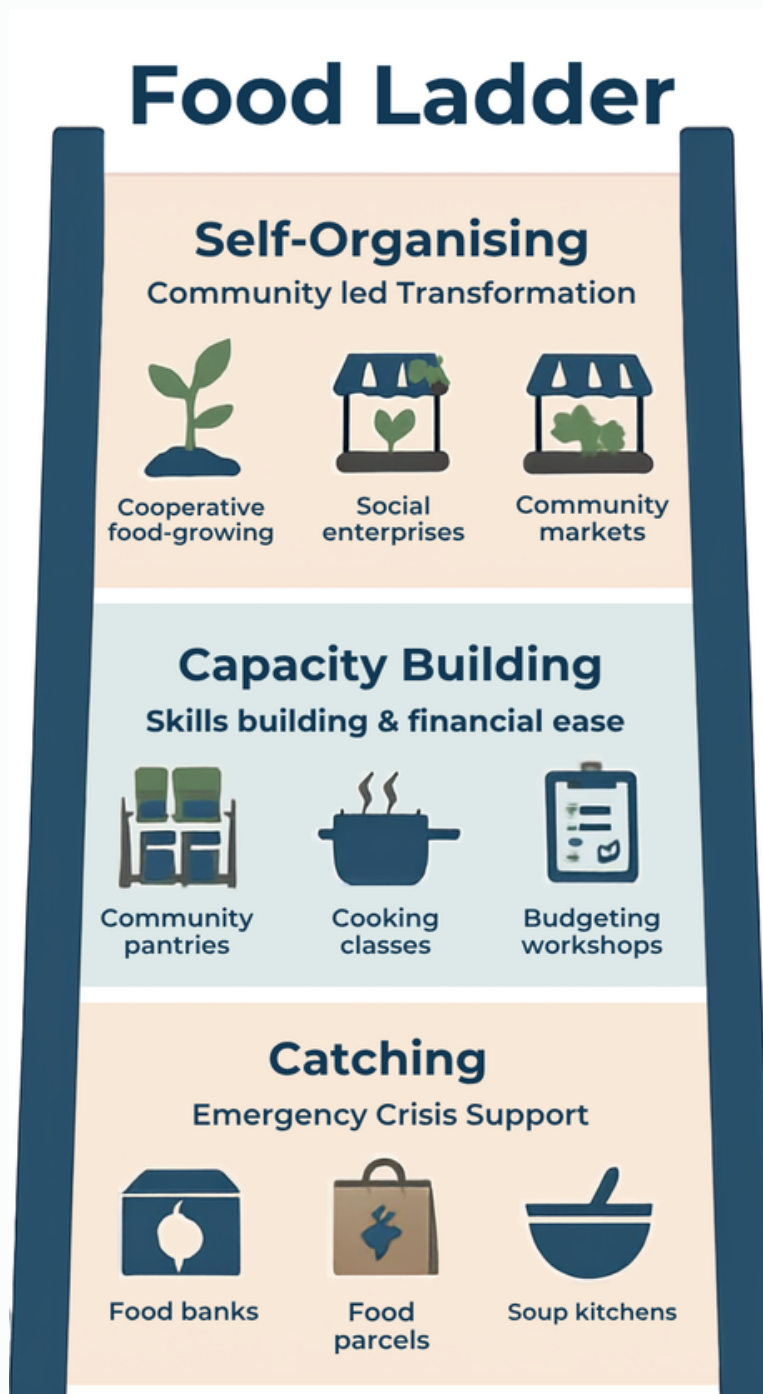
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The Food Ladder

The Food Ladder

The concept of the food ladder is used to describe the range of food support available within communities and the ways in which people may move between different forms of provision depending on their circumstances. The concept was developed by Dr Megan Blake at the University of Sheffield and is used by local councils and decision makers to tackle food poverty¹⁰.

At its simplest, the food ladder describes a progression from emergency food aid towards more sustainable and community-based forms of support. Different services sit at different points on the ladder, each designed to meet diverse levels of need.



The three venues where lived experience research took place reflect the first two stages of the food ladder; the foodbank presents emergency crisis support, and the Community Shop and the Community Pantry represent capacity building with on-going access to low-cost food, community and preventative support.

The foodbank model is generally intended as a short-term emergency response for people facing immediate crisis, such as benefit delays, debt emergencies or other periods without access to food.

Community shops and pantries are often viewed as more preventative approaches. Rather than providing emergency food parcels, these models aim to support households through methods such as:

Affordable food access

Greater choice and independence

Removed stigma

Improved budgeting

Social connection

Earlier intervention before crisis escalates

The underlying assumption of the food ladder is that people may gradually move away from emergency support and towards greater financial stability and independence.

Reducing stigma is a critical area. Stigma has deep and measurable consequences and can lead people to delay or avoid claiming the support they are eligible for, accessing food support, and undermining their health and wellbeing¹¹.

At the top rung, the food ladder looks at self-organised community change, and how the local community can create self-organised projects to capitalise on local assets. This could include cooperative food growing, community storytelling, social enterprises and community markets¹².

Many organisations tend to put resources into fixing the immediate problem of tackling food hunger. While this helps in the short-term, it does not tackle the long-term resilience of communities. It poses the question as to what barriers lead to participants not rising to the third rung of the ladder.

There is an opportunity for local authorities and other partners to provide the funding and support to help residents progress to the third rung – whether it's reviewing their existing policies to understand the barriers or opportunities, acting as a connecting agent to facilitate, identifying partners and mapping services and community organisations¹³.



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Findings by Venue

Foodbank | Community Shop | Community Pantry

Foodbank

Crisis, Poverty and Immediate Need

Participants accessing the foodbank were often experiencing immediate and severe financial hardship. Many described experiencing multiple challenges simultaneously, including benefit issues, debt, rising utility costs, poor health and social isolation. Rather than a single event causing hardship, participants often described a combination of factors that had gradually pushed them into crisis.

"I'm using my overdraft to pay for food and essentials."

"People forget things like pet food, travel costs and replacing things when they break. It all adds up."

Participants frequently described reaching a point where, after paying rent, energy bills and other essentials, there was little or no money left for food. For many, accessing the foodbank was not a first choice but a last resort. The findings suggest that foodbank use was often the visible consequence of wider financial insecurity rather than the result of a short-term emergency.

Living with Constant Financial Pressure

A strong theme throughout the discussion was the relentless nature of financial hardship. Participants described constantly having to make tough decisions about where limited money should be spent. Several participants spoke about balancing food costs against other essential expenditure, including utilities, transport and debt repayments.

"You're constantly worrying about money and trying to work out what bill can wait."

The research found little evidence that participants were overspending or failing to budget effectively. Instead, participants described incomes that were simply insufficient to meet their basic needs. For many participants, they were unable to work due to their health or were currently seeking employment.

The Importance of Advice and Early Intervention

Discussions highlighted that food insecurity was rarely the only issue participants were facing. Alongside the need for food support, participants frequently described debt problems, benefit issues, housing concerns, utility arrears and mental health challenges.

"Lots of support – so much – but people just don't know."

This suggests significant value in providing advice services directly within foodbank settings. Many of these issues could potentially have been addressed earlier through income maximisation, debt advice, welfare support or housing support. The success of embedded advice models demonstrates how foodbank settings can function as an important gateway into wider support, helping to address underlying causes of hardship rather than simply responding to immediate need.

Mental Health and the Emotional Impact of Poverty

The emotional impact of poverty was one of the most powerful themes to emerge from the foodbank sessions. Participants frequently linked financial hardship to anxiety, stress and declining mental health. Several described feeling overwhelmed by their circumstances and struggling to cope with the constant pressure of managing debt, bills and food costs.

"Mental health is a big barrier itself in getting support."

Others described how anxiety and depression made it difficult to complete forms, attend appointments or engage with support services, even when help was available. Feelings of embarrassment and shame were also common. Participants often spoke about not wanting to ask for help and feeling uncomfortable discussing their circumstances.

"I don't like to ask for help."

The findings suggest that poverty is not solely a financial experience but also has significant emotional and psychological consequences.

Difficulties Accessing Support

Participants consistently highlighted the challenges of navigating support systems. While many recognised that support existed within the community, they often felt it was difficult to find, difficult to access or difficult to understand. Several participants spoke about complicated application processes, long waiting periods and uncertainty about who could help with particular issues.

"The admin required to access support is hard to manage."

"Lots of support – so much – but people just don't know."

Participants also suggested that people often only become aware of available services when they are already in crisis. This finding reinforces the importance of outreach, effective signposting and embedding advice services within trusted community settings.

Summary

The foodbank findings demonstrate that participants were often experiencing severe and complex hardship characterised by low income, debt, poor health and financial insecurity.

While the foodbank provided an essential safety net, participants' experiences suggest that emergency food provision alone cannot address the underlying causes of poverty.

The findings highlight the importance of combining crisis food support with embedded advice, advocacy and early intervention services to reduce repeat crises and improve long-term outcomes for households experiencing destitution.

Community Shop

Managing Financial Pressures and Stretching Household Budgets

Participants attending the community shop were less likely to describe immediate crisis and more likely to discuss the ongoing challenge of making limited incomes cover rising living costs. Many described feeling under constant financial pressure, with food costs becoming increasingly difficult to manage alongside rent, utilities and other essential household expenses.

"I spent a small fortune before. Now I get more fresh food, fresh meat, and 100% healthier food."

"This year I didn't struggle in the winter with my energy and still had my cupboards full of food."

"I get Universal Credit and it barely scratches my rent. I find that the Community Shop is the difference between heating and eating."

The findings suggest that the community shop plays an important preventative role, helping households maintain financial stability before problems escalate into crisis.

Choice, Quality and Dignity

One of the strongest themes was the importance of choice. Participants repeatedly described how being able to choose food gave them a greater sense of independence and control. The ability to select food according to personal preference, dietary requirements and household needs was viewed as fundamentally different from receiving pre-prepared food parcels.

"I didn't have enough food before. But now I come here and have fresh food and veggies. It's amazing. The staff are really amazing."

"I'm a meat eater, but I wasn't getting enough because it's so expensive. Now I've been eating more meat, and it's really helped."

The findings suggest that participants associated food choice with dignity, self-respect and wellbeing. The community shop model appeared to create an environment that felt less stigmatising and more empowering than traditional emergency food aid.

A Gateway to Wider Support

Participants highlighted the value of having support available within a trusted and familiar environment. Several people explained that they had become aware of services, advice and support opportunities through attending the community shop. Others described feeling more comfortable asking for help because they had already developed relationships with staff and volunteers.

"I once had a long-standing issue with accessing disability benefits and didn't know where I could get support. If this was here at the time, my issue would've been solved so much faster."

This finding reinforces the value of embedding advice provision within community food settings. Community shops are uniquely positioned to identify issues early and connect people with support before problems become unmanageable.

Community Connection and Reducing Isolation

Alongside financial benefits, participants consistently spoke about the social value of the community shop. For many, the venue was not simply a place to access affordable food but an important part of their social life and routine. Participants described meeting new people, building friendships, attending activities, developing confidence and feeling part of a community.

"It gets me out of the house and gets me socialising."

"I don't really know anyone in this area. But coming in here, I meet people and they're really friendly. There is always someone to talk to."

The research suggests that the social impact of community food provision is often underestimated. For many participants, reducing isolation was almost as valuable as the financial support itself.

Summary

The community shop findings demonstrate that participants were primarily seeking affordability, stability and support rather than emergency assistance.

Participants valued the service because it:

- Reduced pressure on household budgets
- Improved access to healthy food
- Promoted dignity and independence
- Reduced social isolation
- Created opportunities for community participation
- Improved awareness of wider support services

The community shop appeared to occupy an important middle ground within the food ladder, helping households maintain stability and prevent escalation into deeper crisis while providing wider wellbeing and community benefits.



Community Pantry

Supporting Stability During Ongoing Hardship

Participants attending St Philips Community Pantry frequently described living with long-term financial insecurity. Discussions rarely focused on immediate crisis. Instead, participants spoke about the ongoing challenge of managing rising living costs on limited incomes. Many described the pantry as an essential part of their household budgeting strategy.

"I wouldn't have food if St Philips wasn't here."

Participants frequently described the pantry as providing reassurance and consistency during periods of uncertainty. Knowing that affordable food would be available helped reduce anxiety and made budgeting more manageable.

Choice, Independence and Respect

As with the community shop, participants consistently highlighted the importance of being able to choose food. The ability to select items according to household needs was viewed positively and was often linked to dignity and independence.

"If I want it, I get it. If I don't, I won't."

Participants also appreciated the respectful and welcoming nature of the service. Several commented that they never felt judged for needing support and valued the way staff and volunteers interacted with them. These findings reinforce the importance of dignity-based approaches within community food provision.

Building Community and Belonging

A particularly strong theme was the sense of community created by the service. Participants described the pantry as a place where people felt welcomed, supported and connected to others facing similar challenges. Many spoke positively about the relationships they had developed with staff, volunteers and other pantry users.

"The food pantry is more social. There is community and bonding. You can sit for a cup of tea and a biscuit and just have a chat."

"I learnt a lot from the session, and how it's not just me struggling."

Others described gaining practical information, confidence and encouragement through conversations with people they met at the pantry. Participants frequently highlighted the value of being able to share experiences and learn from others who understood the challenges they were facing.

Continuing Financial Insecurity

Despite the positive impact of the pantry, participants remained concerned about their financial circumstances. Many continued to experience:

- Debt
- Rising energy costs
- Housing affordability issues
- Low incomes
- Benefit related challenges

This finding highlights an important limitation of community food provision. While the pantry reduced pressure and improved food security, it could not fully address the wider causes of hardship.

Opportunities for Advice and Early Intervention

As with the community shop, participants demonstrated the value of having support available within trusted community settings. The pantry environment encouraged conversation and relationship-building, creating opportunities to identify wider issues affecting participants. Many of the challenges discussed - including debt, benefits, housing and energy costs - could potentially be addressed through earlier access to advice and support.

Embedding advice services within pantry settings could therefore help households resolve issues before they become crises while strengthening the preventative role of community food provision.

Summary

The pantry findings demonstrate that participants were using the service to manage ongoing financial pressure and maintain stability. Participants valued the pantry because it:

- Improved access to affordable food
- Supported household budgeting
- Promoted dignity and independence
- Reduced social isolation
- Created a strong sense of community
- Provided opportunities for informal support and learning

The pantry model is a strong example of the preventative end of the food ladder, helping households maintain resilience while providing important social and community benefits.



08

Cross Venue Analysis

Introduction

The lived experience research revealed significant similarities across all three venues despite the different forms of food support being provided. While participants accessed the foodbank, community shop and pantry for different reasons and at different stages of need, the underlying drivers of hardship were consistent.

The findings suggest that food insecurity is rarely caused by a lack of food alone. Instead, participants described a complex combination of low income, rising living costs, debt, poor health, insecure housing and difficulties accessing support. The type of food support being used often reflected the severity of a participant's situation at a particular point in time, rather than fundamentally different experiences of poverty.

Common Drivers of Hardship

Across all three venues, participants identified similar factors contributing to their financial difficulties:

Rising food costs	Increasing energy bills	Debt and borrowing
Low incomes	Inadequate benefit levels	Poor physical and mental health
Caring responsibilities	Housing affordability issues	Transport costs

Participants consistently described struggling to make their income stretch far enough to meet basic living costs. Many reported having to make difficult choices between food, heating, transport and other essentials.

"You're constantly worrying about money and trying to work out what bill can wait."

There was little evidence that participants' difficulties were the result of poor financial management. Instead, participants repeatedly described incomes that were simply insufficient to cover essential expenditure. The findings suggest that food insecurity is fundamentally linked to wider issues of poverty and income inadequacy.



Different Services Meeting Different Needs

While the causes of hardship were similar across all three venues, the type of support participants valued varied according to their circumstances.

Foodbank participants were generally experiencing immediate crisis. Their focus was on meeting basic needs, accessing emergency support and resolving urgent financial problems.

Community shop participants were more likely to describe efforts to maintain stability and avoid crisis. The emphasis was on affordability, stretching household budgets and accessing healthier food.

Participants attending the pantry often described using the service as part of their ongoing strategy for managing financial pressure. The pantry was viewed as a reliable and regular source of support that helped maintain stability over time.

These findings suggest that the three services perform complementary rather than competing functions within the local support system. Together they provide a continuum of support that enables people to access help according to their level of need.

The Importance of Dignity and Choice

One of the clearest differences between the foodbank and the community-based models related to dignity and choice. Participants using the community shop and pantry consistently highlighted the importance of being able to choose food themselves. Choice was associated with independence, self-respect and a greater sense of control.

"If I want it, I get it. If I don't, I won't."

Community shop participants frequently spoke about the benefits of being able to access fresh food and select products that met their household needs.

"I can try new things without worrying and eat more healthier food."

By comparison, foodbank participants were often focused on immediate survival needs. While emergency food parcels were highly valued, participants generally had less opportunity to exercise choice. The findings suggest that dignity is not an optional extra within food provision but an important component of effective support.



Food Support as a Community Asset

Participants attending the community shop and pantry frequently described benefits that extended beyond food itself:

Reduced loneliness	Increased confidence	Opportunities to socialise
Informal peer support	Access to community activities	Improved mental wellbeing

"It gets me out of the house and gets me socialising."

"I've made friends through crafts."

In contrast, foodbank participants were less likely to discuss community activities and more likely to focus on immediate practical needs. These findings suggest that community food settings can play an important role in strengthening social connections and reducing isolation alongside addressing food insecurity.

The Value of Embedded Advice Services

A consistent theme across all three venues was that food insecurity rarely existed in isolation. Participants frequently discussed wider issues including:

Debt	Benefit problems	Housing difficulties
Utility arrears	Mental health challenges	

This highlights the importance of embedding advice provision within community food settings. The research suggests that food support venues provide valuable opportunities to identify issues early and connect people with wider support before problems escalate.

Projects such as Tackling Destitution Together and our Foodbank Adviser service demonstrate the benefits of combining practical food support with advice and advocacy. Participants often described community food settings as trusted spaces where they felt comfortable discussing problems they might not otherwise disclose.

Embedding advice services within these environments can help:

Maximise household income	Resolve benefit issues	Prevent debt escalation
Improve housing outcomes	Reduce repeat crisis	Strengthen financial resilience

The findings suggest that integrated models of support are likely to be more effective than food provision alone.

Understanding the Food Ladder

The research provides valuable insight into how the food ladder operates in practice. In theory, the food ladder suggests that people may move from emergency food aid towards more sustainable forms of support that promote independence, affordability and resilience.

The findings provide some evidence of this progression. Participants using community shops and pantries often described greater stability, improved food access and reduced reliance on emergency support.

However, the research also highlights important limitations within the model. Participants rarely described a straightforward journey from crisis to independence. Instead, movement between services was often influenced by changing personal circumstances, benefit payments, debt levels and unexpected financial shocks.

Many participants continued to rely on some form of food support for extended periods, even when accessing less crisis-focused provision. This suggests that people are not necessarily moving out of poverty as they move through the food ladder. Rather, they may be moving between different forms of support that help them manage ongoing hardship.

The findings therefore reinforce the importance of viewing community food provision as one part of a wider response to poverty rather than a solution in itself.

Furthermore, residents are not progressing to the third rung of the food ladder to look at the self-organised community change. The question is then posed as to what barriers are in place and what further support is required to help residents move up the ladder to build the long-term resilience of communities across Hull. Whatever action takes place at the third level must incorporate the voices of local voices, be informed by those using the service, and build on locally held assets¹⁴.

Summary

The research demonstrates that while foodbanks, community shops and pantries fulfil different functions, they are responding to many of the same underlying issues.

Participants across all three venues described persistent poverty, financial insecurity and difficulties navigating support systems. The key differences lay not in the causes of hardship, but in the type of support people required and the ways services helped them manage their circumstances.

The findings suggest that effective responses to destitution require a combination of emergency support, preventative community provision and embedded advice services.

Most importantly, they highlight that reducing food insecurity ultimately depends on addressing the wider structural factors that leave households without sufficient income to meet their basic needs.



09

Conclusion

CONCLUSION

This lived experience research provides important insight into the realities of poverty, food insecurity and destitution within our communities.

Across all three venues, participants described ongoing financial insecurity shaped by rising living costs, low incomes, debt, health conditions and challenges with the welfare state. While the participants accessed different forms of food support, the underlying causes of hardship were often consistent across all settings.

The research demonstrates that food insecurity is rarely an isolated issue. Participants frequently experienced multiple overlapping pressures at the same time, including:

High utility costs	Housing insecurity	Debt and borrowing
Poor mental health	Disability and ill health	Caring responsibilities
Social isolation	Difficulties accessing support	

For many participants, these pressures were long term rather than temporary. Food support had become integrated into everyday household survival strategies rather than being used solely during short-term crisis situations.



The findings also highlight the different roles played by the three food support models.

Foodbank

The foodbank was primarily experienced as an emergency response service providing immediate relief during periods of acute hardship. Participants valued the support provided and recognised its importance in preventing hunger and immediate destitution. However, foodbank use was also associated with stress, stigma and a lack of control or choice.

Community Shop & Pantry

In contrast, the community shop and pantry models were more commonly associated with dignity, affordability and prevention. Participants described these services as helping them stretch household budgets further, access healthier food and maintain a sense of independence.

The ability to choose food and access support within welcoming community environments appeared to have a significant positive impact on wellbeing and confidence. Participants also described wider benefits including reduced isolation, increased social connection and improved awareness of available support.

The research suggests that community-based food provision can play an important preventative role by helping households maintain stability and avoid escalation into deeper crisis.

The Food Ladder in Practice

An important finding from the research is that residents are moving between rungs one and two, moving between the catching and capacity building stages. However what is lacking is the progression to rung three where the long-term resilience for the community emerges.

The Value of Embedded Advice

A particularly important finding from the research was the value of embedding advice and support services within trusted community food settings. Participants frequently described experiencing wider unresolved issues alongside food insecurity, including benefits problems, debt, housing insecurity and poor mental health.

The research suggests that community food settings can function as important gateways into earlier intervention and wider support, particularly for people who may not otherwise engage with formal advice services. Participants often described community venues as trusted and familiar environments where they felt more comfortable discussing financial pressures and asking for help.

The Tackling Destitution Together project demonstrated the value of combining food support with embedded advice and engagement work, allowing issues to be identified and addressed earlier before escalating further. Similarly, projects such as our Food Bank advice project and the Feeding Britain project demonstrate how co-located advice provision within food bank and other food venues can support people to resolve underlying issues linked to crisis.

The Peripatetic Advice Model

The model of advice carried out under both the Feeding Britain project and the Tackling Destitution Together project is a peripatetic model. In this model, advice provision is based within a variety of community settings, and the venues change regularly once all advice provision is given. Our advisors are seeking out clients in these community venues to provide pro-active advice, to prevent future destitution.

Once all advice is given within that community setting, the advisor moves to a new location to start again, but the door is kept open to return to the previous venue when new advice needs emerge.

There are barriers to the peripatetic model in that advisors may see fewer clients than in other locations due to the proactive model. Peripatetic advice is more labour intensive than traditional advice due to the work of seeking people out, analysing the data to secure areas of high need, securing those locations and allowing residents to know the advice provision is available.

Peripatetic advice has proven across our Tackling Destitution Together and Feeding Britain projects to result in fewer issues per case, showing that our advisors are getting to residents at that earlier stage before their issues accumulate. On average, residents seen by peripatetic advisors had two advice issues. For foodbank-based advice, this was three issues.

Embedding advice provision within food support settings creates opportunities to:

Identify problems earlier	Increase income through benefits	Prevent debt escalation
Improve access to wider support	Reduce repeat reliance on emergency food	Support holistic interventions

CONCLUSION

Trussell Trust Research

Previous research by Trussell Trust found that 39% of those referred to their foodbank had not received any previous advice. Further research looked at the specific reasons people did not access advice¹⁵. Reasons included finding it difficult to ask for advice, uncertainty on whether it would make a difference, and questioning of whether they were eligible or worthy of support¹⁶.

This reinforces the need to have co-located advice in foodbanks, alongside peripatetic advice in community centres, so that people can be sought out and reached to provide advice before crisis is reached.

Structural Limitations

Although some participants appeared to move away from emergency foodbank use through accessing the community shop or pantry services, many remained reliant on some form of food support over lengthy periods. Participants often moved between different services depending on benefit payments, debt pressures, household emergencies or changes in health and personal circumstances.

This suggests that movement through the food ladder is rarely straightforward or permanent. Community food provision can reduce hardship and build resilience, but it cannot fully address the structural causes of poverty. Participants repeatedly highlighted the impact of:

Inadequate benefit income	Rising energy and food costs	Debt
Housing affordability pressures	Limited financial resilience	Complex support systems

The findings reinforce that food insecurity is fundamentally linked to wider social and economic inequalities.

A consistent message throughout the research was that people want more than emergency aid. Participants valued services that promoted dignity, respect, choice and inclusion while recognising the realities of living on a low income.

The research also proves the importance of combining practical food support with wider advice, advocacy and community-based approaches. Participants responded particularly positively where services offered opportunities for social connection, informal support and access to wider help.

Closing Statement

Ultimately, the findings highlight that tackling destitution requires both immediate practical support and longer-term systemic change. Without action to improve income adequacy, reduce debt pressures and address the wider cost of living crisis, many households will continue to rely on food support simply to meet basic needs.

The experiences shared throughout this research prove both the resilience of local communities and the continuing challenges faced by households experiencing poverty and insecurity in Hull.



10

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATIONS: LOCAL SERVICES AND COMMUNITY PROVIDERS

The lived experience research found a range of opportunities to strengthen support for people experiencing poverty, food insecurity and destitution in Hull. Participants consistently highlighted the need for both immediate practical support and longer-term system change.

The recommendations below are informed directly by participant feedback, survey findings and the themes found across all three venues.

Local Services and Community Providers

Expand Embedded Advice Provision Within Community Food Settings

The research highlighted the significant value of providing advice services directly within trusted community food environments. Participants often felt more comfortable accessing advice within familiar and non-judgemental settings. Embedded advice provision within these venues can help identify issues earlier before they escalate into crisis.

Community food settings should continue to develop integrated support models that combine food provision with:

Welfare benefits advice	Debt advice	Housing support
Energy and utility support	Income maximisation	Mental health support
Referral and advocacy services		

Projects such as the Foodbank Advice project and Feeding Britain, alongside Tackling Destitution Together, demonstrate the value of co-located advice provision in helping reduce repeat clients and addressing underlying causes of hardship.

Improve Early Intervention and Prevention

The findings suggest that many households only seek support once problems have reached crisis point. Services should strengthen preventative approaches by:

Identifying financial hardship earlier	Increasing proactive outreach	Improving referral pathways
Offering support before issues escalate	Regular wellbeing and budgeting support	

Community shops and pantry models demonstrated the potential to reduce pressure on households before emergency intervention becomes necessary.

Strengthen Community Participation and Community-led Solutions

Participants demonstrated significant knowledge, experience and commitment to improving their communities. Services should create greater opportunities for people with lived experience to influence service design, shape local responses and participate in community-led initiatives.

This should include support for co-production, community leadership, food growing projects, community cooking initiatives, food-sharing schemes and other locally led solutions that build on community strengths and assets.

RECOMMENDATIONS: LOCAL SERVICES AND COMMUNITY PROVIDERS

Improve Visibility and Awareness of Support

Participants repeatedly described confusion about what support existed locally and how they could access it. Local organisations should work collaboratively to improve:

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Public information about support | Signposting between services | Community outreach |
| Accessible information in venues | Awareness of advice services | |

Continue Developing Dignity-Based Approaches

Participants consistently valued services that promoted dignity, respect and independence. Community food providers should continue to prioritise:

- | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Food choice | Welcoming environments | Person-centred approaches |
| Community participation | Peer support and social connection | |

Participants responded particularly positively to settings that felt supportive and community-focused rather than purely crisis driven.

Strengthen Community and Wellbeing Activities

The research highlighted the wider social value of community food settings. Participants frequently described improvements in wellbeing linked to:

- | | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Reduced isolation | Social interaction | Community activities |
| Increased confidence | Informal support networks | |

Community organisations should continue to develop activities that support social connection alongside practical food provision.



Policy Makers / Funders

Address Income Inadequacy

A consistent finding throughout the research was that many participants simply did not have enough income to meet basic living costs. Participants repeatedly highlighted the impact of:

Inadequate benefits	Low-paid and insecure work	Rising food prices
Energy costs	Housing costs	Debt repayment pressures

Improve the Benefits System

Participants frequently described stress, delays and complexity linked to the welfare system. Policy changes should focus on:

Faster processing of benefits	Reducing waiting periods	Simplifying systems
Support for disabled people	Flexibility during crisis	Reducing punitive sanctions

Participants also highlighted difficulties linked to housing support rules, particularly for single people under 35 affected by shared accommodation rate restrictions.

Increase Investment in Preventative Community Support

The findings suggest that preventive community food provision can reduce pressure on households and prevent escalation into deeper crisis. Funders and decision makers should continue investing in:

Community shops and pantries	Warm spaces	Community hubs
Advice in community settings	Wellbeing and social activities	Early intervention support
Resident-led food initiatives		

Investment in preventative community provision may also reduce longer-term demand on emergency and statutory services.

Improve Access to Affordable Utilities and Transport

Utility and transport costs were repeatedly identified as major contributors to hardship. Consideration should be given to:

Increased energy support	Improved transport affordability	Health-related transport needs
Local fuel poverty initiatives		

Reducing these pressures may significantly improve household financial resilience.

Recommendations for Future Research and Development

Continue Embedding Lived Experience Within Service Design

The research demonstrated the value of involving people with lived experience in shaping services and identifying solutions. Future work should continue to involve people with lived experience in:

Service planning	Policy development	Evaluation and monitoring
Community engagement	Research and consultation	

Participants provided important insight into how systems operate in practice, and where the barriers remain.

Explore Long-Term Use of Food Support

The findings suggest that many households are relying on food support for extended periods rather than during isolated emergencies. Further research should explore:

Long-term movement through food ladder	Repeat reliance on emergency provision	Links between poverty and mental health
Financial resilience of households	Impact of preventive food models	

Understanding these patterns will help to shape more effective long-term responses to destitution and food insecurity.

Final Recommendations

The findings from this research reinforce that food support alone cannot end poverty or destitution. While foodbanks, community shops and pantry models all provide vital support, participants consistently described wider structural pressures that continue to drive hardship and insecurity.

Future approaches should therefore focus on combining:

Immediate practical support	Embedded advice and advocacy	Prevention and early intervention
Community connection and wellbeing	Long-term systemic change	

A holistic and person-centred approach will be essential in reducing destitution and improving outcomes for households experiencing poverty across Hull, and the wider country.



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