

Food Banks: Scotland Week 2014

Meetings with Food Banks during Scotland Week 2014 were with:

- Cecile Noel, Executive Deputy Commissioner, Emergency and Intervention Services, NYC Human Resources Administration / Department of Social Services.
- Carolyn Stewart, Manager, Operations and Finance, and Amanda King, Manager, Membership and Communications, Ontario Association of Food Banks

New York

In New York, the following main points were covered:

Organisation

- NYC Department of Emergency and Intervention Services provides Adult Protective Services including Domestic Violence and Emergency Feeding Services – which was the focus of discussion.

Food Banks

- There are 500 programmes of food bank support in NYC provided via emergency feeding services. This represents 50% of support in NYC.
- Food banks receive £8.3m per annum in funding from State and Federal sources.
- 75% of the service involves providing food pantries.
- 25% of the service involves the provision of soup kitchens.
- Food pantries and soup kitchens receive 10m visits per annum.
- There has been a recent increase in families using these services.

Food Stamps / Debit Card

- NYC also operate a food stamps scheme and now also have a debit card scheme. A monthly supplement is paid onto a recipient's debit card which can be used at any store.
- More than 1.5m New Yorkers receive food stamps in NYC. 18% of the NYC population (population was 8.4m in 2013).
- An income based eligibility criteria is applied to the debit card scheme.
- 1.8m people use the debit card scheme.
- Maximum of \$189 per month per person. The amount of money you receive depends on household size, expenses and client's income.
- A recipient can use the debit card and also use Food Banks.

Other Forms of Support

- NYC also operate a Food Stamp Nutrition Outreach Programme which provides education about the available benefits, eligibility rules and the application process for the Food Stamp programme.
- NYC also work with supermarkets and other food companies to ask them to increase their donations of healthy, nutritious food.
- NYC also offer nutrition workshops and cooking classes.
- There is an umbrella organisation in NYC called ' Food Bank NYC' which has a formal arrangement with supermarkets to offload unused food.

Concluding Points

- The provision of emergency feeding services has become part of the fabric of the welfare system in NYC.
- There is no investigation of the background of people who use the service – they are open to all. Majority of providers are faith based communities located in communities.
- There is no strategic approach to the provision but rather a reliance upon grass roots organisations providing support in communities.

Toronto

In Toronto, the following main points were covered:

OAFB

- The Ontario Association of Food Banks is a voluntary organisation which receives no Government funding and is completely autonomous. Individual food banks affiliate to OAFB. OAFB came into being in 1992.
- OAFB has 127 food banks as Members and 1,100 affiliates (hunger relief programmes and agencies across Ontario). OAFB work to address the root causes of hunger and to develop sustainable solutions that ultimately make food bank use unnecessary.
- The first Canadian food bank came into being in 1982. Since then food banks have gone from being a temporary solution – a 'band-aid solution' - to become a need.
- In Ontario, the food bank system grew from the grassroots and was born out of the church system.
- You can go to a food bank once a month and receive 3 to 4 days food which is intended to get you through to the end of the month.
- Particular issues in rural areas, as in small communities everyone knows everyone else and there is a stigma / loss of dignity associated with using food banks in rural communities.
- OAFB do not operate food stamps or vouchers.

Extent of Demand

- Food Banks serve 375,789 people in Ontario a month – 2.8% of the population. 35% are children.
- In March 2013, 186,267 households accessed FB's of which 16,294 did so for the first time.
- Children, aged under 18, are the largest group of food bank user – more than 131,734 per month.
- 69% of food bank clients' primary source of income is social assistance and disability support.
- Most recipients are rental tenants and spend 71% of their income on housing.
- The client base of food banks is varied for example, people in full time employment use them as do senior citizens, school leavers and every University has a food bank.
- The average food bank user uses foods banks for 1 year to 18 months. Less than 5% of users are long-term users.
- Recent drivers of demand since 2008 – deindustrialisation and the increasing use of contract workers by employers. Food Bank use increased by 28% between 2008 and 2009 and has not fallen since i.e. impact of the recession which was relatively mild in Canada.
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More than just food banks

- OAFB views hunger as a symptom of poverty and so the role of food banks has evolved and become much broader and now act as community hubs.
- Food Banks operate as community hubs and provide a range of social services. Some have dental programmes, free child care, CV classes, exercise classes. Some are solar-powered and operate fresh food programmes and maintain community gardens. Other services provided include Public health nurses, provision of low-cost, free furniture and emergency shelter.
- OAFB has a big focus on promoting healthy food and work with egg, dairy, beef and chicken farmers in this regard. OAFB supports activity that assists local companies.
- OAFB also works with all 5 major grocery chains in Canada.

- Essentially food banks are plugging gaps in State provision and a danger that this just becomes institutionalised, mainstream support in the longer term.
- Rural Food Banks undertake specific programmes aimed at children. Also father – child cooking classes.
- Ontario Local Food Act – farmers can claim a 25% tax credit based on the fair market value of food donated to food banks and other charitable meal programmes.

OAFB's recommendations for Scotland

- Standardise information on the characteristics of food bank users from all food banks in order to monitor trends in use. i.e. get the same information from all food banks.
- Set the same standards for all food banks e.g. feed people on need not on religious affiliation terms. Have a code of conduct in terms of decent treatment of clients.
- Should Scotland have a food policy in relation to health and well-being?