



10 August, 2016

News:

New foodbank findings revealed

One of the most comprehensive studies into foodbank use has been published, revealing their rising use and the main causes of food poverty

Foodbank use is rising, one in three foodbank users are children, and problems with benefits play a major role in people needing to access them - these were among the key findings of the #stillhungry report, released this week.

The report was published by the universities of Oxford and Chester, and frontline charities including The Trussell Trust and Cheshire West Citizens Advice Bureau. It drew on two years' worth of data from 5,808 household referrals to West Cheshire Foodbank, part of the UK-wide Trussell Trust foodbank network.

'Our research demonstrates the persistence of hunger in 21st century Britain,' said Dr Elisabeth Garratt, report author and postdoctoral research fellow at the Centre for Social Investigation, based at Nuffield College, Oxford University.

'Referrals have risen in 2016 and there is every indication that foodbanks are here to stay. One in three people receiving emergency food from West Cheshire Foodbank is a child, indicating shocking levels of poverty that are unacceptable in a country as wealthy as ours.

'Despite enormous commitment on the part of volunteers, the provision of emergency food cannot address the underlying and long-term causes of food poverty. We call upon the Government to take effective steps to ensure that foodbanks do not become an established part of our society.'

The report outlined several reasons why people are using foodbanks:

- Benefit sanctions: seven per cent of referrals, one in five of those affected being a child.
- Benefit changes: 14 per cent of referrals, because of stopped or reduced benefits or changes between Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). This was normally the reason for younger adults (17-24) and working-age adults (25-64) being referred.

- Benefit delays, mainly from JSA and ESA also affected people.
- One in five referrals was caused by low income.
- Debt was the cause of 16 per cent of referrals, often due to repayment meaning people were without enough money to live on. Older people were more likely to come because of debt or low income.

The length of crisis varied, lasting anything from one to four weeks with benefit changes to more than 13 weeks with benefit sanctions.

Although a large proportion of the food parcels went to the highly disadvantaged wards, food parcels were delivered to people living in all 46 wards. Children made up one-third of those receiving help from West Cheshire Foodbank.

Young adults and those of working age were most likely to be referred to foodbank due to problems with benefits, while people aged 65 and over needed emergency food because of debt and low income.

'In a prosperous country, it is completely unacceptable that national policy consistently fails to respond effectively to the evidence that on-going hunger remains a reality for increasing numbers of people,' said the Revd Christine Jones, Chair of Trustees at West Cheshire Foodbank.

She added that, in order to avoid foodbanks becoming part of “welfare furniture” we should “all understand and act on the drivers of food poverty together.”

The report offers suggestions for ways in which change can happen. Its recommendations include improving Job Centre Plus administration and service to make it quicker more accessible, reforming benefit sanctions policy and practice, introducing safeguards to ensure families have enough money for essentials, and improving access and awareness of local welfare assistance schemes.

David McAuley, CEO at The Trussell Trust said, 'The work of The Trussell Trust's foodbank network and sustained commitment from its volunteers has provided much-needed support for people in crisis; yet this alone will not solve the problem of hunger. Charities can be part of the solution but they cannot be the sole solution.

'We are at a pivotal point in British politics post the EU referendum, with a new Prime Minister who has an opportunity to make social justice the centrepiece of what they do. Now more than ever we must work together to ensure fewer families face poverty. There's an opportunity for all of us to look at the body of evidence in the report, particularly on sanctions, where an alternative approach would help tackle the underlying causes of hunger.'

In response to the report, a government spokesperson said, 'Reasons for food bank use are complex so it is misleading to link them to any one thing. We're determined to create a Britain that works for everyone, not just the privileged few and that's why we're increasing the new National Living Wage and spending around £90bn on working age benefits to ensure a strong safety net for those who need it most. The vast majority of benefits are processed on time and the number of sanctions have actually gone down.'

On benefit sanctions, the spokesman pointed out:

- Decisions on sanctions aren't taken lightly but are an important part of our benefits system — they are only ever used as a last resort and the number of sanctions continues to fall.
- Even when someone is sanctioned they can still get financial support through hardship payments.
- Sanctions are only imposed in a small percentage of cases. Each month on average less than five per cent of JSA claimants and less than 1 per cent of ESA claimants were sanctioned in the past year.
- If someone disagrees with a decision to sanction them, they can ask for a reconsideration or appeal to an independent tribunal.

Links between religion and well-being

Religion really can significantly improve your physical and mental well-being, new research has shown

In a compilation and comparison of 139 academic studies into the links between religion and well-being, Christian think tank Theos has shown there is now “overwhelming” evidence of a positive correlation between what people believe and how this affects both their physical and mental health.

It stated that the relationship between religion and wellbeing is widely and frequently reported, but that neither term is self-explanatory. In its study *Religion and Well-being: Assessing the evidence* it therefore summarised religion as anything from religious group participation to religious affiliation, and categorised well-being from physical to mental health to make it easier to spot the correlation.

By doing so the report not only 'clarifies the extent to which religion is good for well-being, but begins to explain what this means, adding detail to the big familiar picture'.

Highest for the positive link to well-being is religious group participation, while religious affiliation is perhaps the weakest of positive correlations.

'At the most generalised level, it seems that the more serious, genuinely held and practically-evidenced a religious commitment is, then the greater the positive impact it is likely to have on well-being,' the study found.

However, the report emphasised that these benefits could not be gained by wanting them. 'To join community for the sake of 'me' is to kill community ... If there is any well-being to be got from religion, it should be got on the way, almost accidentally,' it stated.

There was also emphasis on how different religions and translations of religions vary in respect to well-being. Cults and sects can damage well-being, while atheists who volunteer may reap the benefits of group activities.

The report said, 'One study, for example, reported that belief in the afterlife is inversely associated with feelings of anxiety, while strong beliefs in the pervasiveness of sin are positively linked to anxiety. Belief matters but it is not everything.'

The think tank believes its findings will open up new areas of research and inquiry for those working in professions studying and working on mental health related issues, as well as physical and public health professionals.

'The evidence linking religion and well-being, and especially religious participation and well-being is now overwhelming,' said Theos' head of research Nick Spencer.

'It is time we thought carefully and creatively about how we can harness this powerful resource to improve well-being and mental health, rather than running scared from the very idea of religion.'

Theos is a Christian think tank which debates the place of religion in society and carries out research, events and challenges ill-informed thinking. It believes that "you can't understand the modern world without understand religion".

Co-creation around the camp fire

A report from the first ever Fire Camp – not your usual Baptist gathering

Fire Camp was not your usual camp. True, we had deflating air beds, grass in our tents and we toasted marshmallows, but this was a camp made by the people, for the people who were there; co-creation around the camp fire.

The aim of Fire Camp was to get away from the consumerist experience so often associated with gatherings. Instead there was co-creation of art, reflection and story-telling – of a space to be and to do together as an expression of the body of Christ.

Fire Campers of all ages spent time in the prayer tent, listened to each other's stories, produced art from natural products, origami hearts and children's tipis. We ate breakfast together, made our own dough and fired pizzas, prepared and smoked fish. Green Path Ventures taught us to forage, start fires and make didgeridoos. We walked by the Colne estuary, enjoying the sunshine and, in the evening, glorious sunsets around the fires listening to stories of Abraham, Nehemiah and Jesus. All of this in the beautiful setting of Ivy Farm on Mersea Island, Essex.

Fire Camp, as the title suggests, included a lot of fire. Over four days we had the chance to step away and reflect over a 'crucible fire', creating melting pot moments where we are refined.

The 'funeral fire' reflected on letting things go in order for something more beautiful to emerge. A 'beacon fire' proclaimed that we all carry a message with us to the wider world which is local and visible.

All the activities were created, produced and enjoyed by all of us. It was fresh, real and a welcome change.

Fire Campers were very positive and encouraging. Comments have included, 'It was an amazing time. Thank you Firecampers for the fellowship and fun and space to reflect and rest in God!'; 'A huge thank you to you all for having the vision and being prepared to bring it to fruition. It was an amazing few days and we thank God for you all and the opportunity to share in Firecamp with you'; 'Wow! That was an amazing camp' and 'Thank you to those who dreamed this up and held space for us to co-create together. A really fun and inspiring time!'

Fire Camp was coordinated by a small group of Baptist Christians from across the UK, who put together this report, but everyone who came along shared in creating a memorable event.

'We vandalised it with wool and creativity'

'We vandalised it with wool and creativity' - minister Michael Shaw introduces an initiative that has brightened up his community's main shopping street

For all the time I have lived in Devonport the main shopping street, Marlborough Street, has always left a lot to be desired.

With a few bric-a-brack shops, charity shops, a couple of greasy spoon cafés, a betting shop, a slot machine shop, a hairdresser, a couple of run down pubs and take aways, and a small Iceland and Co-op, it is not a buzzing town centre by any stretch of the imagination, even on good day.

It has always been a little tired.

Then last year the doctor's surgery moved and footfall reduced to 1,000 people a week. If Marlborough Street was already struggling, things have actually worse.

We decided it needed some love. It needed to see some life.

We came up with the idea of vandalising it with wool, art and creativity. We started with a bench, decorating it with wool and pompoms, and hanging bunting from the trees. We moved onto another bench, then we weeded some flower beds, covering them in painted stones and painted plant pots. We started planting the odd flower. Then another local church provided us with wool squares so we sowed them to the trees.

We do not have a huge amount of money in the church, but this has brightened up the street and got people talking. People have approached volunteers asking them why they are doing it, while shop owners have supplied drinks and sweets. Feedback from passers-by include:

"It's crazy, but it's lovely,"

"You're all doing a great job"

"The street looks much better"

"It looks lovely"

Covering trees in knitted squares may not seem like a radical mission initiative, but it has got people talking. It is also bringing churches together in mission: we've had offers of knitted squares from other churches in the South West Baptist Association. Knitting groups are being inspired to knit for the Kingdom of God.

The Revd Michael Shaw is minister of Devonport Community Baptist Church, Plymouth

Improving your cross-cultural competence

A Baptist minister wants to equip churches seeking to better engage with diverse cultures

The Revd Osoba Otaigbe is the author of *Building Cultural Intelligence in Church and Ministry - 10 Ways to Assess and Improve Your Cross-Cultural Competence in Church, Ministry and the Workplace*. Assessments and workshops go alongside the book, with the overall purpose being to enable individuals and churches "achieve local and global effectiveness and friendship in mission and ministry through cultural competence audit, assessments, and improvement".

Osoba, the minister of Tooting Junction Baptist Church, says that raising cultural intelligence is key to fulfilling Jesus's commands to make disciples of all nations and to love our neighbours as ourselves.

'Fulfilling the commands of the risen Lord and spreading the Gospel message requires interaction with other cultures not our own only,' he explained. 'Our increasingly global world community requires it as well. If we are going to interact cross-culturally, as we must, it will be helpful to develop the tools and skills needed for successful interactions.'

Osoba is also an Advanced CQ Certified Facilitator by the Cultural Intelligence Centre, while prior to ministry an entrepreneur within the gas and oil industry. The book emerged from his experiences.

'As I minister to multicultural communities, the challenges in intercultural interactions are very many: culture shock experiences, misunderstanding between different culture groups, conflict, mistrust, prejudice, discrimination, hostility, harassment, subtle avoidance and disconnection.

'How to navigate the challenges inspired me to write this book.

'In these days of political, economic, social uncertainty and unrest, the breadth of cultural diversity is staggering in mega cities like London and other major metropolitan cities, towns and villages worldwide.

'The concept of Cultural Intelligence gives us a lens through which to understand how well- or ill-equipped we are for this task and can highlight areas where we might improve the quality of these interactions.'

Churches and small group are being encouraged not only to use the book for improving their cultural competence, but also to carry out a campaign within their churches for "maximum impact and transformation into a cross-culturally competent church and Christian community".

The Revd Wale Hudson-Roberts, Justice Enabler, Baptist Union of Great Britain described it as a "must read for every Baptist church."

'Building Cultural intelligence in Church and Ministry is the finest resource I have read on the subject of Multicultural Intelligence,' he said.

'It is not only superbly written, but deeply theological and applicable to churches and businesses. As far as I am concerned it is a must read for every Baptist Church.

'I would challenge any person to read this outstanding resource and not be challenged by its content. It is an accessible and highly thoughtful contribution to the field of multiculturalism.'

The book was also endorsed by General Secretary the Revd Lynn Green, who said, 'In our rapidly changing society it is really important that we all develop greater cultural intelligence.

'If we are to become the vibrant Kingdom community of all nations that the Bible envisages we need much greater understanding and appreciation of those who are different from ourselves.

'This book, and the assessment and workshops that go alongside it, will be particularly helpful for leaders, churches and groups who want to grow in this area. Relating the concepts of cultural intelligence to passages of Scripture, it will certainly encourage some great discussion, learning and reflection for discipleship and mission.'

Osoba's book has also received glowing endorsements from both the Methodist Church and United Reformed Church.

For more information visit:

<http://www.authorhouse.co.uk/Bookstore/BookDetail.aspx?Book=720657>

AIDS: the risk of complacency

International AIDS Conference highlights risks in the face of a resurgent HIV. By Alan Bain

Prince Harry and Elton John shared the platform to much applause at the bi-annual International AIDS conference in Durban bringing a passionate appeal for young people to be included in the AIDS response.

'What I believe', said the Prince, 'is that it is time for a new generation of leaders to step forward; AIDS has drifted from the headlines (and) we risk a drift of funding and of action to beat the virus.

'We now face a new risk – the risk of complacency.'

Musician Elton mirrored the remarks of the young prince, comparing himself to a mature Stilton cheese who now needs to stand aside for younger people. Or as he put it in his own humorous style; he has become "Stilton John".

Capping the week of a conference that brings together over 18,000 health professionals advocates and activists for the bi-annual International AIDS Conference in South Africa's city of Durban, the remarks resonated with many of the themes of the week.

Michael Sidibe of UNAIDS spoke in an early session of his fear for the future; 'complacency is the new conspiracy, our progress is extremely fragile. If we don't act now we risk resurgence. AIDS 2016 must mark the commitment to finish what we started and Fast-Track the end of AIDS.'

He had every reason to sound a warning with the budget to achieve UNAIDS goal of 90-90-90 (90 per cent reduction of new infections, 90 per cent on ART treatment, 90 per cent will know their HIV status) facing an unprecedented drop at the very point it is required to rise. It needs to reach UNAIDS estimate of a \$7.2 billion of additional funding by 2020.

The "Fast Track" to end AIDS by 2030 was a continual theme, and has consequences for Faith Based groups who work in the most infected area of Sub-Saharan Africa and carry much of the burden for AIDS care. The Archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba spoke of the 'God who wants us to embrace justice - and our goal to make places of worship safe and accessible for those with HIV and AIDS.'

When quizzed on how worn out and tired clergy and churches are to achieve this and the difficulty of them achieving even more, he acknowledged this was true, but pointed to a 'spiritual role where they would find their resources.' However, in September 2015, PEPFAR (President's Emergency fund for AIDS relief) and UNAIDS launched a two-year initiative, with a \$2 million commitment for the first year to 'strengthen the capacity of faith-based leaders and organizations to advocate for and deliver a sustainable HIV response'.

The pursuit of a vaccine or cure is always on the agenda at AIDS conferences but the elusive cure always seems to be 10 years away, in part because of the HIV virus' extraordinary capacity to mutate and evade antibodies that might block it. New vigour has been urged in the search for a new drug with an optimistic claim that the long and challenging road has begun to take some promising turns, with new large-scale human trials.

The research is not without ethical problems; Jennifer Power of La Trobe University Australia has been conducting research on AIDS trials. She pointed out that the word 'cure' in itself was difficult and could mean eradication of the disease or just remission, as she spoke about the need for researchers to clarify and minimise risk in altruistic volunteers who might be asked to reduce or stop their ART.

There were warnings about groups who are missed out. One such group, surprisingly, are infants and children half of whom die within two years of contracting the disease. Assistant Secretary General of the UN Dr Loures said 'all the UN's targets are aimed at 2020 but for children we have had to reduce the target by two years. Children cannot wait, HIV is coming back and it's more selective. It increasingly follows areas of conflict, with rape used as a weapon of war.'

There was a forewarning about a 'teen boom' as the world faces a resurgence in HIV infections. Many of these teens caught the infection from their mothers while they were in the womb, and are now coming of age. Unless action is taken now, the surge in adolescents carrying the infection means the epidemic could spiral out of control again.

Among all the myriads of NGO's and community groups represented at the conference, 'Hope Riders' was one of the most unusual: a group of Indians from Hyderabad whose own family were stricken by HIV determined to raise awareness by using their bicycles.

Following a dream indicating he would recover, one HIV positive member of the family converted from Hinduism to Christianity. He now heads up the Hope Riders who take cycle rides to AIDS events spreading the message of HIV care to communities as they ride. This year six of them cycled 600 kms in three days from Johannesburg to Durban.

The next Aids conference is in Amsterdam in 2018 and Hope Riders plan to cycle from Morocco to the Netherlands, inviting others to join them. Perhaps Prince Harry, as part of the new generation called to lead in the epidemic, could lead the way.

More information about the conference visit <http://www.aids2016.org/>

The Revd Alan Bain is vicar of St Philip and St James Church in Bath and Chairs the Christian HIV/AIDS Alliance

Meditation on Global Violence and Terror

By Gwen Millns

John 1:4 & 5 New International Version (NIV)

4 In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.

5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

In just one full month from mid-June to mid-July many major violent and terror related episodes have devastated our world: – from Cameroon to France; from

Nigeria to Afghanistan; from Somalia to Lebanon; from Turkey to the West Bank; from Kenya to Dhaka; from Iraq to Saudi Arabia; from Texas to Nice – around 700 people have died and countless more have been injured. Violence has always existed in our fallen world. It has no concern for gender or age, race or creed.

Our call is to pray and commit ourselves to being living answers to those prayers. As with Nehemiah, God can and will use us to be peacemakers wherever we may be.

Lord God, You created a world that is Good

But in our sinfulness that goodness has been damaged.

Our world is broken!

Everywhere we look there is...

Anger and Mistrust,

Pain and Suffering.

Hatred and Violence,

Fear and Confusion.

At times the darkness threatens to overwhelm us.

Lord God You have redeemed your world.

In Jesus Christ you have shown us the Light that overcomes the darkness.

The Light who guides our path.

The Light who reminds us that goodness is stronger than evil.

The Light who shows us there is a better way!

A way of...

Love and Compassion,

Confidence and Hope,

Forgiveness and true Peace-making.

Lord God Your presence is with us.

Through the Holy Spirit we can experience Your power.

The Power that calms our fear.

The Power that brings comfort in our sorrow.

The Power that gives boldness to resist the darkness.

The power that gives wisdom to respond rightly in our words and our actions!

Lord God You call us to follow You...

To lament the wickedness in our world.

To build relationships that reflect Your light and love.

To actively mend bridges with our neighbours and our enemies.

To work with you to bring healing and wholeness in our communities.

To declare Your Glory and Sovereignty in our world.

Lord God, You are compassionate and merciful,

Hear our prayers for the violence that engulfs our world.

Let your presence be known in the midst of terror and chaos.

Give comfort to all who have suffered loss in the multiple, ongoing terror attacks across the globe

Bring healing to those who have been injured in body, in mind and in spirit.

Give skilful ability to those who minister to their physical, emotional and spiritual needs.

Give wisdom to those who seek to overcome terror.

Speak directly to those who commit acts of violence and terror and through the power of the Holy Spirit transform their hearts and minds.

Give courage to your people that we may actively pursue peace, not simply as the absence of violence but as the shalom of right relationships.

Lord God, You are Love itself

Help us to know your Love in our lives

Help us to share your Love in our relationships

Help us to demonstrate your Love and Light in our words and actions

In Jesus name

Amen

Gwen and Andrew Millns work for BMS and are both seconded to the Bangladesh Baptist Church Sangha and her key role is with CCTB, an interdenominational college.

Baptisms and other notices

Abbey Centre Baptist Church, Northampton: Trish Newitt and Shellia Boateng

Alvechurch Baptist Church, Worcestershire: Lisa Seeney

Clarence Park Baptist Church, Weston-super-Mare: Rosie Weeks, Tori Harper

Cromer Baptist Church, Norfolk: Jayne Bromwich and Susan Jacobs

Greenfield Baptist Church, Llanelli: Tony & Sally Richards, Andrew Harris, Rob Howells

Greenfields Baptist Church, Crawley, Sussex: Jovy Apostol

Hill Street Baptist Church, Swadlincote: Richard Hill, Liz Smith

Marshalswick Baptist Church, St Albans: Esther Gill, Kirsty Adams

Socketts Heath Baptist Church, Grays: Jack Pittman, Winai and Sandra Akimu-Nyambosaini

Oakham Baptist Church, Rutland: Jennifer Toerien

Underwood Baptist Church, South Wales: Ede Green

Upton Vale Baptist Church, Torquay: Adam Brace, Bekah Hine, Harvey Preston & David Roots

Well Street United Church, Buckingham, Bucks: Emilie Henrickson, Beverely Strong, Joanna Edworthy, Lydia Cooper and Clair Willoughby

Westward Ho! Baptist Church, Devon: Shirley Killow, Kevin Webdell and Paul Garrett

Know anyone preparing for baptism? Check out our range of cards

Send your baptism notifications and stories to phobson@baptist.org.uk

Baptism stories

Cromer Baptist Church, Norfolk has a service on the first Wednesday of the month which, given its location, often attracts some holidaymakers during the summer.

On 3 August two members of the congregation, who are also members of the mother and toddler group, were baptised. Each gave their testimony and shared their journey to baptism, which was a moving witness to all who came. The two people who were baptised were Jayne Bromwich and Susan Jacobs – and both brought their children who were encouraged by the minister to stand by the baptistry to see them baptised.

Death

WILLIAMS, the Revd Edward

Passed away peacefully in Malvern on Saturday 23 July, aged 84 years. There was a service of committal at Worcester Crematorium on Wednesday 3 August, followed by a service of thanksgiving at Malvern Baptist Church on the same day.

Copies of Baptist Praise and Worship

Romsey Baptist Church has approximately 100 copies of Baptist Praise and Worship words and several large print copies which are no longer used. It would be willing to donate them to anyone who could use them. Possible help with delivery if needed. Contact Rosemary Green: rosemary.green60@gmail.com