

# Impacts on life, health and wellbeing of being food insecure: Insights from food bank users

## Research Report



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## **Executive Summary**

This summary presents findings from a qualitative study conducted by ARC-NWC and PRAN, exploring the lived experiences of food bank users in Lancashire, UK. The research highlights how food insecurity affects individuals' daily lives, health, and wellbeing, drawing on the findings from interviews with 18 participants and a participatory workshop.

### **Understanding the Drivers of Food Bank Use**

Food bank users often found themselves in crisis due to a range of factors, including:

- Debt: not enough money to meet the demands on their income, driving choices out of necessity
- Unemployment: gaps in employment often due to poor health or lack of suitable opportunities
- Health: poor physical or mental health

### **Experiences of Food Bank Support**

- Despite initial reluctance, once engaged food bank users generally described food banks as compassionate and supportive environments.
- Wider services beyond food provision were highly valued by food bank users, including emotional support, counselling, cooking equipment, and a sense of community.
- However, food banks were not always able to meet users' dietary, cultural, or health needs, and some food bank users faced barriers such as transport costs or limited opening hours.

### **Coping Strategies**

- People adopted various coping strategies to manage food insecurity, including bulk buying, switching to cheaper stores, and relying on frozen or processed foods.
- Many participants also described 'going without' to manage.
- Reducing or skipping meals was a common practice, with parents often prioritising their children's needs over their own.
- Compromises often meant choosing between food and other necessities such as rent or utility bills.

### **Impact on health and well-being**

- Food insecurity had a profound impact on people's sense of control and self-worth.

- Mental health was significantly affected, with many reporting anxiety, depression, and emotional distress.
- Physical health also suffered due to poor diet, fatigue, and worsening of chronic conditions.

### **Impact on self-worth and dignity**

- Food bank users described a sense failure and loss of agency arising from no longer being able to provide for themselves.
- Feelings of guilt and disbelief were common amongst participants.
- Many users reported feeling shame and embarrassment when seeking help, indicating that stigma remains a significant barrier to access.
- Seeking support from a food bank was often seen as a last resort.

### **Impacts on Families**

- Children's health and wellbeing were similarly impacted, with parents expressing concern over inadequate nutrition and the emotional toll of poverty.
- Parents felt guilt and distress over their inability to provide, often concealing their struggles from children to protect them.
- Social isolation was common, and routine family activities such as cooking or outings were often unaffordable.

### **Systemic Challenges and Gaps in Support**

- Food bank users frequently described the welfare system - particularly Universal Credit - as inadequate and difficult to navigate.
- Sanctions, infrequent payments, and complex application processes exacerbated hardship.
- Awareness of available support was low, and information was often inaccessible. Users relied on word-of-mouth or chance encounters to find out about services.
- Participants often focused on personal responsibility, expressing a desire to improve their circumstances through employment, training, or better budgeting. However, prospects of employment were often limited due to their circumstances such as poor health, caring responsibilities or age.

### **Conclusion**

This study provides insights into the lives of food bank users and how food insecurity can have severe consequences on day-to-day life and on the health and well-being of food bank users and their families. The need for more responsive, flexible, and empathetic support systems was highlighted, including better signposting, digital inclusion strategies, and community-based outreach.

Whilst it is recognised that food banks can provide critical support, they cannot address root causes of food insecurity or address the consequences of being food insecure. More co-ordinated approaches are required that help address structural poverty, improve welfare systems and ensure equitable access to employment, mental health care, and nutritious food.

## Introduction

This report presents findings from a research project which explored the lived experiences of food bank users and the impacts of food insecurity on their health and well-being. The study was undertaken by the Northwest Coast Applied Research Collaboration ARC-NWC in collaboration with the Poverty Research and Advocacy Network (PRAN).

### 1.1 Background

Food insecurity is a serious and increasing concern in the UK, estimated to affect 7.5 million people in 2024 and thought to have been worsened by increases in the cost of living (Francis-Devine 2025). It is a topic of growing importance, particularly due to increases in the number of children living in food insecure households – an increase of nearly a million since 2020 (Loopstra 2024). This sits against a backdrop of significant rises in food bank prevalence and usage in the UK over the past two decades (Sosenko 2019). Given the overlap between food insecurity and food bank usage (Loopstra 2023), this highlights the need to understand the experiences of those experiencing food insecurity and the impact it has on their lives.

While there are existing studies with those with lived experience of food insecurity that provide insights into the drivers of hunger (Trussell Trust 2023); experiences in accessing food support (through food banks, food pantries, community food hubs etc) (Garthwaite 2016, Loopstra 2023); eating practices and food preparation; food coping and management strategies (Douglas 2023); and why some people choose not to access support, our initial scoping work showed that there was less qualitative research into food insecurity and impacts on health and wellbeing, compared to specific or grouped diseases or conditions. This study focused on those who are food insecure (those reaching food crisis and accessing a food bank) and how they perceive the impacts on daily life and their health and wellbeing, exploring individual impact as well as on families.

This research project and design has also been guided by conversations with Trussell, discussions with food officers and other local practitioners, and by consulting with Lancashire food banks, who indicated the potential of focusing on social determinants of food insecurity, on health and well-being and giving a voice to those with lived experience.

Two public advisors also supported the project by providing input into research design, analysis and reporting. Both advisors had experience of food banks and volunteered at local food banks.

The research aimed to:

1. To explore how individuals accessing food banks perceive food insecurity to impact their/their family's day to day living/life
2. To explore the impacts on health and well-being of food bank users and their families

3. To understand what might mitigate negative impacts of food insecurity on the lives of food bank users

Research Ethics was granted by Lancaster University ethics committee.

## **1.2 Methodology**

Data collection took place during 2025. Interviews were undertaken with 18 participants who had accessed the food bank in the last three months. Interviews explored experiences of accessing the food bank, impacts on daily life and health and wellbeing, as well as identifying potential sources of support. All participants were aged over 18.

Recruitment was undertaken by three food banks operating in three research sites in Lancashire. Purposeful sampling was used to identify individuals accessing the food bank, and designated food bank staff helped recruit and support participants to take part in the study.

Eighteen interviews were undertaken which included 11 females and 7 males aged between 25 and 65+. Appendix 1 provides a detailed breakdown of participants. All participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form that were completed before interviews taking place.

Interviews were undertaken face to face at each food bank, online on Microsoft Teams or by telephone.

## **1.3 Data analysis**

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed, and thematic analysis using a-priori-themes from the interview questions was undertaken using qualitative data analysis software (NVivo 15).

Six I-poems were also produced from transcript data (Appendix 2). I-poem methodology emphasises the centrality of participants voices and helps to identify continuities and changes in how a research participant speaks, thinks or feels about themselves and the situations they may be in (Edwards & Weller 2012). I-statements were extracted from the sample transcripts and then edited to focus on key statements being made by the participant that helped described their perspectives on how being food insecure impacts their lives and the lives of their families.

Six participants also attended a participatory workshop which was undertaken after preliminary data analysis. Interview participants were invited to take part in the workshop which involved activities to help participants reflect on the findings, review if these resonated with their experiences and contribute their ideas on what might help individuals in such circumstances. The workshop also discussed how findings could be disseminated.

Please note pseudonym names have been used for quotes in the report, and no personal details of participants have been included to provide anonymity.

## 2. Findings: Food bank experiences

### 2.1 Food bank engagement and access

Participants were asked about their foodbank experience and how they had initially accessed a food bank. Participants frequently described their first impressions of the food bank, seeking support that they often had not previously thought of as being meant for them whilst managing a range of feelings about doing so.

Participants described a range of referral pathways to food bank use, reflecting the large variety of people and organisations that provide varying degrees of support to those in need. Often food banks were mentioned as a recommendation from a previous source of support, rather than being sought after independently. Local councils were a frequent referrer of food bank services, as described by **Deborah (Area 1)** when seeking support initially regarding housing:

*So, I have two kids, six and seven years old. I came in contact with food bank through the council... the landlord where we lived, she basically kicked us out because she sold the house. So I was in contact with..., with council, to help us with the housing...But it took a long time and the landlord wasn't patient, so we had to move somewhere else..., and that was kind of a bit expensive for us, we were struggling a bit, and someone told me about household support that you can apply to the council and refers you to food bank.*

Job centres and Citizens Advice also acted as referral sources, with some participants being directly referred "By the job centre" (**Andrew (Area 2)**). Others were made aware by the job centre that this support was available through the council, as described by **Darren (Area 2)**:

*Through the job centre. One week had no money, and then I asked the job centre about it, and then they said just go over to the council office and see them about it, and that's what I done. Given me a number and brought it over here.*

In addition to specific referrals, some participants were informed about the food bank through family members or friends. 'Somebody put me on to [Charity 1 food bank], a friend, he explained to me what they do and how easy it was.' (**Peter (Area 3)**).

### 2.2 Gratitude for support

When speaking of their experience of visiting and receiving support from a food bank, there was an overall sense of gratitude towards the organisations, volunteers, and staff. **Sarah (Area 3)** spoke of the generosity of the food and support provided and the immediate emotional impact that it had on her:

*Yeah, so I just called them myself, and literally within the same day they told me to go down. And the first time that I went they actually handed me a £50 food voucher*

*for Aldi, which honest to god, I cried. I really did, I just couldn't believe like how generous they were.*

Similarly, **Gina (Area 2)** talked of her gratitude for the support and for the potential for it to be an agent of change in her life: *'But it will be a turning point I think. I'm really grateful for the help, obviously, but I think I need to stand on me own two feet.'*

The gratitude included more specific support that the food bank was able to offer for particular people's needs; such as cooking equipment and support for mental well-being as described by the following two participants:

*They even give the kids like treats and stuff like that. It's just been brilliant I've actually booked in with them for counselling sessions for my PTSD as well, so I just think that they're brilliant. (Kylie (Area 3))*

*[Charity 4] are fantastic, and then somebody got me a cooker. I think that were town hall ...I even got a air fryer. do you call them air fryers?...Yeah, I got one of them, and a microwave, cause I'd nothing to cook on. (Wendy (Area 3))*

### **2.3 Importance of personal elements of support**

In addition to the food and resources provided, participants' positivity was often linked to personal elements of the support provided, such as the familiarity of the people at the food bank and the friendliness shown towards those in need. The gratitude extended beyond purely the food being provided, as **Shaun (Area 3)** described the value of the familiarity of the place and people:

*Coming here eating, it's a regular thing, so I think it becomes part of your... You know people have lives and they have a pattern... So I'll get up and I'll go to the library, I'll come here and have dinner, and then you recognise the faces. And I think that's probably true for a lot of people, because it's... not just for food, but I get the feeling people come for familiar faces.*

This familiarity was considered to provide a sense of validation that they were not alone in needing such support as **(Peter Area 3)** narrated: *'I met a few people in here as well, made me feel more better, more easier, that I was generally struggling like everybody else'.*

Staff/Volunteers working at foodbanks were considered to be friendly, approachable and described as *really nonjudgemental*, (**Gina (Area 2)**) and it was noted *People are always smiling!* (**Deborah (Area 1)**).

### **2.4 The price of using a food bank: Embarrassment, shame and guilt**

However, although the overall emotions towards the food banks were positive once individuals had accessed a food bank the initial experiences felt by many indicated this came with significant emotional and personal distress. Many participants expressed strong feelings of embarrassment and guilt, triggered by the need to seek help from and rely on external sources. Interviewees found using a food bank for the first time especially

challenging. **Adam (Area 1)** revealed: *'At first, it was humiliating, embarrassing really. It's like you've gone as low as you can; it's like you're begging. No, it didn't feel good, really.'* Similarly, **Linda (Area 3)** also felt embarrassment, guilt, and humiliation when using a food bank for the first time:

*I were a bit embarrassed about going in, if anyone saw me. Just because I think people'll think look at her, going into a food bank, well she can't afford to get her own food and stuff like that, that's what you get embarrassed about. (...) It's just affected my, sort of like my confidence, if anyone saw me going in...you feel a bit inadequate, if that's the right word... and a bit worthless.(...)Yeah, I just felt awkward, like guilty that I weren't able to go out and get food for my daughter and I had to use the services, like I just... I felt a bit disappointed in myself.*

In a similar vein, **Kylie (Area 3)** shared that at first she felt so uneasy about collecting food donations that she attempted to find someone else to do it on her behalf.

*Well to be quite honest with you, at first I was trying to get anyone I could to go for me. I mean like obviously I didn't want to go. I just, I don't know why, I just didn't want to go in myself. I was quite embarrassed, which is probably part of the reason why I cried. Well I think it's just probably because I've never been in that situation before. I've never actually been in a situation where I've had to ask for help like that. I've always been able to provide for the children,*

## **2.5 Limitations of food banks**

Participants also identified, some limitations of the food bank system. One particular aspect was not always being offered food suitable for people's needs or considered to be healthy enough. For example, **Shazia (Area 1)** spoke about how healthier foods and more specific types of food such as halal meat would be of benefit to them:

*I think with the food bank, if they didn't have unhealthy options. Just healthier, like basic necessities, obviously bread and things like that, it's not really healthy, but then if they go for like brown bread instead of white, or you know, 50/50 or something like that, and brown pastas...,. And more vegetable and fresh fruit. They don't have fresh fruit. That would be a good option, like an option for halal meat. They don't have meat.*

However, it was recognised that food banks are reliant on donations with regards to the choice of food available and that they did try to meet their needs where possible. **Zainab (Area 1)** mentioned *'obviously my first priority was halal, and they tried to, tried their best to provide me whatever I needed.'*

Another limitation identified was location, either in terms of the cost or difficulty of getting to and from the food bank. **Fatima (Area 1)** described the added costs of travel required to reach the food bank, which adds another potential barrier to access that may make the first (or subsequent) visit to the food bank more difficult:

*Actually, for me, because I stay in [ area x], the food bank is far a little bit. I spend a lot of money going and coming... like you can say £12 going and coming to the food bank. And also on Friday mostly I don't get taxi. Buses are difficult here, also. It's not that much, two hours they come, and sometimes they are... ending by four o'clock 4.30, no buses.*

Some participants highlighted that employment can hinder access to food banks, which are usually open during typical working hours.

### **3. Findings: Circumstances leading to food bank use**

The interviews highlighted three key circumstances that resulted in participants needing support from a food bank.

#### **3.1 Financial issues and debt**

During discussions around circumstances prior to visiting a foodbank, financial issues and debt were mentioned by multiple participants as part of the progression towards their first contact. **Shazia (Area 1) told us:**

*When I was with my ex I was able to, we were able to financially afford it, and then when we broke up... I was referred through by [Charity 3], cause I needed help because I wasn't able to any more financially afford the weekly shopping for me and my five children.*

Others highlighted how their debts impacted food security; '*... I had quite a few debts because I was trying to prioritise different stuff, so I just didn't have the funds to then go out and be able to get the food shopping*'. (**Sarah Area 3**).

Aside from the financial implications and limitations imposed by debt, participants described a sense of inevitability and hopelessness around there not being enough money to pay for necessities. **Adam (Area 1)** portrayed this sense when mentioning debt: '*I mean there's never anything left. In fact I've just gone overdrawn. It'll be payday on Tuesday, but I thought well I've got to get... So you always seem to be in debt.*'

#### **3.2 Unemployment**

Gaps in employment were also mentioned as a circumstance that eventually led to some people needing support from a food bank. **Linda (Area 3)** related her gap in income to her ability to buy food, and thereby her food security:

*I finished work, I think it was about March time, and I wasn't getting the income from my part time job, so then I had, you know, I missed that money, cause that would have been for food and things like that.*

These employment gaps were often the result of people's circumstances rather than choice. **Peter (Area 3)** was unable to work due to a heart condition, and the lack of income quickly impacted their savings and ability to pay their bills which ultimately led to the need for food bank support:

*My savings disintegrated really, and I started generally trying to struggle and try and get on top of my bills. Cause I wasn't allowed to return to work due to the heart palpitations, I had to go for sort of medical background on it.*

### **3.3 Mental health**

Several people cited previous mental health conditions, often as a factor in their eventual appearance at a food bank either as a direct cause of their visit or in combination with other issues. Depression was mentioned multiple times as a previous and current state of being, and in some cases, this had been the case for several years. **Peter (Area 3)** saw a decline in his mental health alongside his physical health and being unable to work, resulting in a compounding effect on his overall sense of wellbeing:

*I'm 51, I did work all my life really. I started with a heart condition while I was at work, didn't realise that, and sort of my life declined a little bit from there. So as well as that my mental health declined at the same time, due to not being at work and stuff like that. So it was just like a barrel roll going down a hill really.*

In the case of **Joe (Area 1)**, mental health was more directly cited as a reason for visiting a food bank: *'Mental health, I've struggled since I found out I've got a problem. So that's what brought me here.'*

## **4. Findings: Access to food**

Participants in this study generally described that physical access to shops and supermarkets was reasonably good as illustrated by the following quote from **Kylie (Area 3)**: *Oh, well, in the area it's pretty... Shopping-wise, it's pretty easy, because I've got literally Asda just five-minute walk, a Lidl a five-minute walk, Aldi a five-minute walk, just like all in different directions.*

However, despite the availability of food shops, for some this still posed challenges due to mobility issues or other time commitments for example like **Linda (Area 3)** who found it difficult to balance trips to the shops with looking after children, without the help of other forms of transport than walking or other people to look after her children, instead managing with walking with a pram:

*You know like it's not just the food, it's the travelling to get it, and I've got a pram and a baby and walking, and do you know like it's taking a lot of time, and I've got to go to places to try and get some help.*

Another participant Wendy (Area 3) required transport in order to access the supermarket, which then presented additional costs to an attempt to save money at a cheaper shop:

*I: And so, so given that you're housebound, how do you, how do you manage to, to buy your food?*

*R: Taxi man comes up and gets hold of me, puts me in taxi and gets me a trolley, and then there's... put all the shopping in, and then it costs me a tenner for him to carry it up and put it in house for me. (Wendy (Area 3))*

Transport costs also arose due to access to cultural food items and shops, given that they are not as common as standard supermarkets. **Fatima (Area 1)** faced a similar expense for transport to a particular shopping store, which required a bus or taxi to carry the shopping home. This was also due in part to another attempt to save money by buying in bulk less frequently, which then means there is substantially more shopping to carry home:

*I go to [Asian grocery store], I buy for example chicken and mutton and these things for a month, maybe for a month and a half, in the fridge...and certain things..., I find it only in [Asian grocery store] like masala or chili, purchase from there. It saves a little time, and it goes, then we wait till we go like that. And I manage like that, in such a way, sometimes like if I suppose for example [go with daughter] goes by bus, I go with her going, but coming we cannot, so we have to order a car, take a taxi, because we have a lot of things to carry. The taxi takes £6, £6.50*

## **5. Findings: Adapting to food insecurity and coping strategies**

Participants described how they had to adapt to being in food insecurity, demonstrating the choices faced by those who are food insecure and the methods by which they try to mitigate the impacts on their lives. One of the first adaptations made for many of the participants was to consider changing supermarkets or buying and acquiring food from a different source as highlighted by **Heather (Area 2)**:

*They have got a couple of supermarkets round here, they're quite good. So, I'll just go to the shop that's cheaper to buy and then I know I can have a bit more food in then.*

### **5.1 Bulk buying**

To help avoid costs of going to supermarkets, some participants mentioned bulk buying to get through a month as described by **Peter (Area 3)**, who booked a delivery slot with their supermarket for their monthly shop:

*To sustain what I'm going through, and to try and keep level, what I have to do is I do a major shop once every four weeks. So, I book that out, because I don't drive, I book that out with Asda or something. So, I've learned how to do that.*

**Shaun (Area 3)** also told us he would bulk buy 'In situations where I don't have enough money, I normally, I tend to stockpile.'

### **5.2 Changes to food consumption and shopping behaviours**

All participants reported making changes to their diets and food purchasing habits to make their money go further. Several participants talked about buying more frozen foods and having to now accept this as a food option for example, Linda (Area 3) mentioned she was:

*....just basically eating just like frozen options, you know, things that were sort of like cheaper. But in general, I like to cook, I like fruit and vegetables, things like that, but they were more expensive... I was just eating... microwavable pizzas and like ready meals and stuff, which I don't really like to eat, but you have to when you're struggling..., and it tends to be like tins and things like that. They can make me feel like sluggish, I like to eat healthy, so it may affect me in what way.*

This choice was often made even with an awareness of the dietary consequences and participants recognised their food was not the best in nutritional quality as illustrated by **Sarah (Area 3)** who reported: *'So mainly it's either freezer food, not the right nutrients every day, if that makes sense?'* Food choices were limited for many, and healthy eating was considered to be more expensive. Participants also talked about not being able to buy fresh products regularly due to not having sufficient money, as described by **Sarah**: *'Not a lot of fresh food, because once I do, do a big shop, and then all the fresh food's gone, it's like trying to then find funds to get more fresh food.'* Whilst **Linda (Area 3)** described *'being able to eat fresh vegetables and stuff like that...it's unbelievable to think, but it is more expensive to actually eat healthy.'*

**Adam (Area 1)** also stated that he is *'always going for the cheaper meat... Now whether that's any good health-wise, I'm not sure,'* highlighting an awareness that his health may worsen from his dietary changes but not having the means to be able to make healthier choices.

### **5.3 Influence of cost**

Inevitably, the compromises highlighted were all made with money as a key consideration. For some people, cost was effectively the only consideration when deciding what food to buy and where to buy it from. **Shazia (Area 1)** described how *'we've started only shopping in Aldi now. It was cheaper rather than anywhere else.'* Whilst other participants such as **Heather (Area 2)** stated that the only distinction between foods *'the cost based on what money I've got available to me'*, and **Joe (Area 1)** framed cost against the resulting lack of choice:

*It has to be cheaper. Yeah, that's it, it has to be cheaper. There's no option. Your choices are limited. You can't pick and choose what you get from here [Food bank] either.*

In some instances, participants described stark differences between their previous and current diets, as demonstrated by **Wendy (Area 3)**:

*I've got to change what I buy because it's so expensive. I used to buy beef, you know, and cook beef and steak. I can't afford that. Wow, the prices are ridiculous. £24 for a piece of beef. Eggs £4. So, I just buy some Pot Noodles and crisps, and they've got some cheap bacon in there, I think one pound 20p bits, so I'll just get that.*

## 5.4 Choosing between necessities

If changes to food and spending habits weren't enough to make ends meet, participants reported making more severe choices centred on not being able to pay for all categories of necessities and instead having to choose between them. **Linda (Area 3)** described this as *'you're having to prioritise you know like your money, where you're gonna spend it, where's it gonna be most effective.'* While **Peter (Area 3)** another participant reported *'it was a choice between paying my bills and living, and sometimes one has to counteract the other. I couldn't, I didn't have enough money to pay both, so that's when I used more food banks.'*

This sense of competing priorities was highlighted by many of the participants as illustrated by **Sarah (Area 3)**:

*Obviously I need food for my child... so then some priority bills do go below... Well I'm behind on my council tax, because when they say about my council tax, I've tried getting the single-person discount, but it's not letting me do it online and they still haven't been in contact with me. So, they're expecting more money, so I'm trying to prioritise them and then cutting out on food, but then I need to get the food in for my child.*

In some cases, this is a property of life in general as discussed by **Shaun (Area 3)** who shared how the uncertainty of extra payments that might be needed created tough choices for other expenses in their life:

*So, if there's something that I'd need, and something crops up or something, cause like I said, ...If life was as consistent as my budgeting... but things crop up, in person and in the world... Like I can have a bill that comes out, OK, I'm gonna get this bill out the way, this bill, and pay that amount. I'm gonna have to skimp on food, and gas. I need gas and everything, there's something that I have to miss.*

The cost of bills was noted by many of the participants. Expensive utility bills made food one expense too many and left no money for some to feed themselves, as described by **Wendy (Area 3)**: *'I just did without food, because me electric was, me gas and electric over two and a half grand.'*

## 5.5 Going without

This notion of going without was shared by several participants who simply described "go without" food as their only option when other expenses arose or there was no money for food. Here **Andrew (Area 2)** shares:

*I couldn't have done owt, just gone without... There's not much more you can do, cause I'm not one to go shoplift or nothing for food. If the food bank doesn't help you, you're stuck.*

Others described a sense of making do such as finding things in their cupboard to eat in light of not being able to buy any food as referred to by **Heather (Area 2)**: *'Well not do*

*without but if I've got just bits and pieces in the house, I'll reduce my meals to a couple of times a day.'*

Those with children highlighted how they sacrificed meals to prioritise their children's needs over their own as illustrated by the Peter (Area 3) and Sarah (Area 3)'s quotes.

*I'd starve myself to feed my kids... I had to. But any rational person would. That's what makes it good on me. I've learned, when I've got back to that stage, that I can't be too proud and I can ask again. (Peter (Area 3))*

*I've gone without food... Because say like there's only enough in, I'll make sure my daughter gets it before me. Like she'll always get fed before me, do you know, I'll always think about myself last. (Sarah (Area 3))*

## **6. Findings: Impacts on life**

### **6.1 Lack of agency and control**

Respondents expressed a sense of powerlessness and lack of control over how external factors affect their lives. For example, **Zainab (Area 1)** felt that, *time is passing by, but you can't really control your situation, and especially your financial situation getting worse day by day, you know?*, while **Joe (Area 1)** observed that specific periods during the year are particularly difficult to handle: *'well it's gonna be bad this month, bloody freezing. But it's generally from November to February, all the rest of the year I'm fine.'*

Some also expressed feelings of self-doubt and internalised blame and questioned what role they had played in experiencing such circumstances. **Zainab (Area 1)** expressed frustration and confusion when reflecting upon her experience and situation:

*Your thinking is very limited, you just can't really think straight sometimes. You just think oh, where have I done something wrong? And what did I do? Like what should I have done? That you know.*

**Peter (Area 3)** echoed similar feelings of self-doubt and helplessness; however, he viewed seeking help as a proactive step towards changing his current situation:

*Suffering from anxiety and depression, you will ask these questions, day-to-day, hour-to-hour, minute-to-minute, what can you have done more to do something? I think when you're doing all you can, and you don't know the answers to the questions(...) You've got these little Jekyll and Hyde things in your head. You wish you could change, but you don't know how to change it. You wish you could do this, but you can't. It's scenarios that what you're putting in your head is that you're only going to set yourself up to fail. Cause you know you're trying your best, and by asking for help is the first step of anything.*

### **6.2 Impact on employment**

The lives of the participants were also often marked by unexpected and life-altering events, such as job loss, employer-imposed reductions in working hours, illness, divorce, bereavement, or pregnancy. In some cases, more than one of these events occurred

simultaneously. **Zainab (Area 1)** for example, revealed that she had suffered an unexpected loss of income when her employer decided not to grant her maternity pay:

*I left work three days before she was born. So, I was supposed to go on maternity straight away, but I couldn't really, obviously because my boss decided to be a rascal! So, he stopped my maternity, for nine months he didn't pay anything.*

The participants of this study also revealed various ways in which their precarious circumstances and poverty have impacted their career prospects. Some disclosed that mental or physical health issues prevent them from obtaining or maintaining employment. Others revealed that caring responsibilities, transportation costs, the inability to afford packed lunches, and even discrimination within the labour market were significant obstacles to securing work. For example, **Heather (Area 2)** described her difficulty in finding employment, which she attributed to age-related discrimination in the labour market:

*Because when you're applying for jobs and that and, I think once you get to a certain age you think, it's like me I'm 63 so I'm getting my pension in three years so they probably think, she might not stay after three years, and they're looking long term, for someone to stay longer than that, they might not employ you so.*

Another participant **Kylie (Area 3)** revealed that she had to leave her employment due to caring responsibilities that she was unable to manage because of an inflexible and unsociable working schedule:

*Well, I did have a, I've had a part-time job, but I had to leave ... it was just getting too much, cause I'm a single parent and I'm having to rely on my 18-year-old daughter to look after the baby from Thursday until Sunday while I do 10-hour shifts at night time from four until two in the morning. It's, you know, it's just too much.*

Despite these obstacles, there were notable efforts to improve individual employment prospects through training and other educational pathways. However, such efforts also presented their own challenges. Those with experience of employment or education, report that often they could not afford to buy or prepare food and therefore frequently had to skip meals at work.

### **6.3 Impact on parents, family and relationships**

The inability to afford essential items and provide for children, including purchasing necessary or desired goods described by participants, lead those with parental responsibilities to a range of negative emotions such as frustration, sadness, embarrassment, helplessness, failure, anger, and desperation. As described by **Deborah (Area 1)**, who had revealed that her primary concern, and the source of her distress, was the wellbeing of her children:

*I think just the biggest impact is not, like myself not being able to provide for my kids. Mostly because I've been doing this for a long time and I made sure they have everything, and seeing myself like down there, it makes me... a bit like upset and angry at the same time, because I don't know where to go, what to do.*

While another participant, **Zainab (Area 1)**, also believed that her own happiness was tied to her children's feelings of happiness, security, and safety. She spoke about trying to conceal their financial struggles from the children to protect them from distress and maintain a sense of normality in their routine:

*So yeah, it was mixed feeling. I was trying to be strong in front of my children, and then I was quite upset, you know, I have 11 years old twins in my house, and they do see and know everything... They notice everything, , they're at that age where they can see that their mother is struggling and they were very upset as well, you know, past few weeks were terrible to be honest.*

Participants with children such as **Zainab (Area 1)** shared how they tried to protect their children often feeling they were failing as parents which triggered feelings of self-blame and guilt about their situations:

*To be honest I could never ever blame anyone else. It's myself. I was thinking, you know at one point I was thinking oh, I shouldn't have had my second child (...) I used to think that oh, why did I have her? Cause it's not fair on my children that I gave her birth and I can't really afford them, do you know what I mean?*

Similarly, **Peter (Area 3)** discussed his effort to conceal his struggles from both his children and others in his environment:

*So, I put a very brave face on, and I don't let anybody see, especially with my children, what's going on. I've learned if I hide it from them, it's more better on me. So, I just play the happy person all the time.*

Insufficient income to provide for their children's basic needs was one of the greatest concerns and sources of distress for parents, as illustrated by **Andrew (Area 2)**:

*Just not being able to go out shopping, just walking past shops, you see something you can't buy it. And me son's forever asking, can I have this, can I have that? And if you've not got it, it's hard to say no(...). Cause sometimes I've not got what he wants in. So, he's started getting a bit funny, saying he's hungry and he's not eating this and that.*

#### **6.4 Reluctance to seek help from family**

A number of our interviewees said they try to do everything possible to avoid asking for help from family and friends, so as not to lose face or worry their loved ones. However, occasionally they are left with no choice but to ask for assistance. In such circumstances, they turn to relatives, neighbours, or friends to borrow small amounts of money. Like **Gina (Area 2)**, who revealed that she often relies on her daughter's help, who receives a regular income in the form of a student maintenance loan, even though this puts a strain on their relationship. She explained that her '*daughter doesn't like me asking for things and doesn't seem to understand*' her financial situation.

Feelings of embarrassment when seeking support due to financial struggles from family members were also noticeable among other interviewees, as was a sense of unease and

conflict within families. Highlighted by **Kylie (Area 3)** here, who discussed her feelings and experience of asking for help from family:

*Obviously with having less money... you turn to your family to help you and stuff like that, and then obviously, you know, they try their best. But having to just, having to ask them, it's just, it's a big deal for me...then you find out that they're talking and stuff behind your back. I know it sounds bad but there was a big fallout over it all, because obviously I asked one of my sisters to lend me some money... you know, they help you, but then they talk about you behind your back and stuff. It just, just, affects your mental wellbeing, that's all I can say.*

### **6.5 Social activities and family time**

Living in poverty also had a significant impact on people's ability to spend quality time with their families and participate in various family activities or simply 'go out' and create pleasant memories. **Peter (Area 3)** recounted that before he lost his job, he was able to provide for his family and even treat them to things. However, he expressed regretfully '*I have to save up all the time, and it's just like penny pinching.* Even routine family activities, such as grocery shopping, become a challenge under such circumstances. **Kylie (Area 3)** revealed that experiencing consistent financial pressure makes a family visit to the supermarket a real challenge:

*Well, it's difficult, because obviously when the children come shopping with you... they just want things, and you have to say no. You know, it's quite difficult... but having to say no is the hardest thing, when they want the things that they normally can buy. And then when you're having to stick to a budget while you're in the supermarket, having to calculate things and stuff, it's just hard. (...) it's so embarrassing. I mean I have to hide the calculator and stuff like that, you know, and... having to do it in front of the children, it's hard.*

What is more, this also affects the ability of families to enjoy another activity that, for the most part, is considered a routine family event – cooking as described by **Kerry (Area 1)**:

*We've got four girls and they're all quite old, got 18, 17, 13 and two, but they all like to take turns at making tea, and obviously when you don't have the stuff, ingredients in for them to make something good and healthy that they want to make, they have to go to the freezer for fish fingers and chips for example, it's just not ideal, is it? So that's another way that it kind of affects us.*

Similarly, **Deborah (Area 1)** disclosed that she had to use methods to conceal their financial struggles with her children to distract them in order to avoid spending money on social activities: *Oh, they keep asking me to take them to, like, a soft play, and I keep telling them next week, next week!* Furthermore, **Zainab (Area 1)** reflected on the heartbreak of being isolated from social experiences with her children during the holiday period:

*I couldn't really take them out anywhere, I couldn't really, you know normally during holidays you do take kids, I wasn't going out... I was isolated, cause I knew I can't really go out... I was isolated with my children in the house(...)Yeah, of*

*course, you know, cause I was scared, if I take my children out, right? What if they asked for something, right? It's natural, isn't it, when you take children out, they do, they would like to go to the corner shop, they would like to have ice cream, you know, all those little things children enjoy in their holidays. I couldn't really do that, so.*

Participants also described how financial constraints can severely limit an individual's ability to engage in social activities, often leading to a pattern of isolation. For example, **Zainab (Area 1)** discussed the extent to which poverty affected her lifestyle and ability to socialise.

*I can't really go out. I used to... I remember I used to go for walk, I can't really go out for walk cause I feel down and no strength at all, putting weight on, just you know, by sitting at home and feeling depressed.*

**Peter (Area 3)** also spoke of a similar impact:

*When you don't have money to do a lot of things ... You find you'll make excuses not to go out and stuff like that. I don't have a lot of socials at all. I'm actually, I'm 51, and pretty ashamed to say I've no hobbies, because I would rather provide for my family. That's a necessity to my life and that brings balance to me. (...) Yeah, when you don't go out as much, sometimes I don't go out because you have to spend money to go out.*

Participants clearly expressed discontent with their inability to socialise and indicated that their social lives would look different if they were in a better financial situation. For example, **Darren (Area 2)** admitted that *'I'd be out on a Friday night, out with City playing on a Sunday afternoon, I'd be out watching the match. But with being on jobs I'm doing can't do it as much, just have to take care of your money'*. This was also a sentiment expressed by **Heather (Area 2)** who told us:

*I just still want to go back to what I have been and just want to enjoy life and be able to go out to days out to wherever and go out for a meal when I can. I just want to sort the depression out and get back on track with my flat and get involved with other people and have a social life.*

## **7. Findings: Impacts on health**

Participants of this study discussed how poverty and food insecurity affect both their mental and physical health. While the interviews did not necessarily show whether some health conditions were triggered by poverty, they revealed that poverty often worsened existing conditions.

### **7.1 Impacts on mental health**

Several participants reported experiencing declining mental health, frequently manifesting in episodes of severe anxiety and depression. **Linda (Area 3)** spoke about how chronic financial struggles leads to deteriorating mental health: *'If you suffer from depression, it just heightens it and makes you more anxious.'* and **Fatima (Area 1)** said: *'It's disturbing a*

lot, but sometimes you say, oh my God, how can I manage this month? I have to do this; I have to do this.' Similarly, **Zainab (Area 1)** reflected on the serious impact that not being able to provide food had on her mental wellbeing below:

*Everything is linked with having no money, having... Like you know, if you can't afford things, you really want to do for your children, so it is affecting me mentally, and it's affecting my health as well because I'm always, always stressed and depressed.*

While **Heather (Area 2)** opened up about the impact of depression on her daily activities:

*Yeh I just some days can't properly doing anything and that's why I suffer with depression because various things block me and just sit there and watch the telly and take it from there don't you so? Well, you sometimes you feel low, don't you, if you've got no food, you feel a bit anxious cause you're thinking where'm I gonna, who am I gonna turn to.*

Another participant, **Shaun (Area 3)**, also shared his perspective during the discussion, offering insights based on his own lived experiences and his observations about others:

*It's harder to think through things if you ain't got food. You can be more depressed, you're hungry as well, you ain't got the energy to think, to think... Your head above water, if that makes sense? (...) It can add to stress for people, thinking man, I've got this problem, I've got that problem, I've got this, and now I can't... I can't afford... So even just that they think it's I can't afford to buy food. The worrying about it can affect people even more than actually not the physical effect of not having it. If that makes sense?*

## **7.2 Impacts on physical health**

While the majority of participants emphasised the effects on their mental health, some acknowledged that a lack of nutritious food also negatively impacts their physical health. **Linda (Area 3)** discussed how limited access to healthy food options, and the necessity of relying on cheaper, less nutritious alternatives such as fast food, affects the way she feels:

*I just don't like eating pizzas, and it tends to be like tins and things like that. They can make me feel like sluggish, and do you know, like I don't... I like to eat healthy, so it may affect me in what way.*

**Kylie (Area 3)** also told us that she felt sadness and frustration about inability to 'cook the things that you want to cook' and she felt constantly worried about not having enough products for cooking:

*There's a lot of aspects to how it affects you, because obviously not getting the right protein and all that kind of stuff, it affects your brain. You know, I suffer from headaches quite often as well, because we're eating crappy foods most of the time. (...) My anxiety. I've got really bad anxiety, and I just sit and worry about what I'm gonna make for tea and stuff like that. You know, what I'm gonna make for... What I'm gonna do for breakfast.... Just sometimes where I forget that we've no butter, and then I realise I can't make the kids bloody toast for breakfast, but there's no*

*cereal as well. So, it's just them little things, you know, and it really does affect you, I've cried numerous times over it.*

Similarly, **Sarah (Area 3)** discussed the emotional and physical toll that limited access to healthy, nutritious food had on her health and wellbeing. Despite understanding the importance of a balanced diet, she was forced to rely on whatever food was available and affordable.

*When you don't get enough like fruit and vegetables you feel tired. (...) I'm not getting the right nutrients, so then you start feeling tired, you start feeling worn out. (...) With my anxiety and depression, when I start feeling like I'm a shit parent, I overthink things, more, like more of a bigger problem than what it is. So, my brain goes into overdrive then.*

Another participant, **Shaun (Area 3)**, described below health impacts such as dizziness from a lack of meat and had to buy vitamins to offset the effects:

*Now the point I'm saying is as well, if I don't eat enough meat, so I have to supplement that with vitamins, iron, because that would, if I'm just eating stuff and there's no... I can get dizzy and things like that. If there's no meat in my diet then there's a problem... I couldn't afford, to be honest with you, to buy meat and grill it and cook it.*

### **7.3 Impacts on families and children's health**

Such impacts often extended to the family of those receiving support from a foodbank as well. **Shazia (Area 1)** saw the impacts on her health and that of her children from compromising between cost and health:

*"Even though the snacks are cheaper, ... their diet's already gone so unhealthy, I just don't want them to get any more unhealthy. ... And, like my kids were used to juice. I've tried to cut that down... I have noticed a change in my health, in my kids' health, through being... I don't know if it's not eating enough vegetables and fruits, what it is, it's definitely, I feel like it has impacted our health."*

Feelings of guilt and anxiety related to the inability to provide children with healthy food were commonly expressed by the interviewees. Many described a deep sense of personal failure and emotional distress, particularly when they were unable to meet their children's nutritional needs despite being aware of the importance of a balanced diet. **Zainab (Area 1)** revealed that it has affected her self-worth as a parent:

*To be honest, obviously not having enough money to buy food, for a mother it's a big thing, right? It affects your mental health, right? (...) You try to be strong in front of your children, and then at same time you can't really hold your emotions back, you can't really hold your tears back, it is difficult, and it's not just myself, it's my children as well. They're girls, they're emotionally very sensitive. and when I see them down it makes me feel more depressed, you know what I mean? So, it is affecting a lot.*

**Kylie (Area 3)** also shared that *'it does affect the children in that sense, and me, obviously because I can't give them what they want, it's like, you know, upsetting'*, while **Shazia (Area 1)** shared the following:

*You feel like a failure that you can't feed your children like what they want to eat. Especially my middle daughter, she's very fussy eater, so she won't, she won't, she will just not eat if she doesn't have something that she likes.*

Participants also described that other harmful aspects of living in poverty, such as inadequate, poor-quality housing often characterised by issues such as damp and mould, impacted health of their families. This is well illustrated by the experience of **Deborah (Area 1)**, whose child's asthma was exacerbated by living in mould-infested accommodation:

*Because the house what we found, it was literally you cannot live there, there was water leaking from the bathroom downstairs, and basically the whole thing can fall on someone else, or my kids or anyone else. And there was no floors, there was like so many nails and stuff. You could, like children cannot live there.*

#### **7.4 Impacts on self-worth and dignity**

Many participants felt a strong sense of disbelief and a profound feeling of failure at needing such help. The interviewees often found themselves in situations they never imagined they would be in, which were frequently accompanied by feelings of shock and disbelief, as recounted by **Shazia (Area 1)**:

*It was really difficult. It wasn't something I thought I'd ever... It's not something I've ever used in my whole life before. It's really hard too... Cause you think that, you know, food bank is when you really really need help, and I just never thought I'd find myself in that situation. (...) not being able to afford such a basic thing like to feed your kids is really hard.* Another participant, Zainab (Area 1) described that she felt that she was failing as a parent because she was unable to provide for their basic needs.

*It makes you feel that you are a failure, do you know what I mean? You feel that you can't provide basic needs to your children. So, this is something horrible ... a mother cannot explain this, cause this is something shouldn't be happening, do you know what I mean? You never imagine that this time will come.*

In addition, some participants highlighted their personal struggles to overcome pride and coming to terms with seeking help from a food bank as reported by **Peter (Area 3)**, who also experienced feelings of guilt, believing that others might be in even worse situations and therefore more deserving of such assistance:

*I was generally struggling, and I didn't have what I used to have, and there was no way I could make the money because of my ill health, so I had no choice but to come into the food banks... it was very stressful, I felt very degraded. Really, most of it can be described myself as male pride, because I used to, I've always worked, I never had any handouts, I've always struggled on the best I could. So, from having that, down to asking for help, it was a very challenging thing for me to get over*

*personally. (...) I was ashamed of myself coming in, my life had declined, and I generally felt bad in myself. These people who were on the streets sort of thing, and then I'm coming in and I've got a house roof over my house, I'm generally struggling, it took a lot for me to try and get through to my mind on this, about coming in to help.*

One participant also compared her experience with others and revealed that she felt others were able to get by while she was not, which created a further sense of distress:

*'It's an embarrassment. It is an embarrassment, asking for food. (...) I'm just embarrassed and then I have a next-door neighbour and another and they're coping, you know, and I think oh my god. (Wendy (Area 3))*

While another, **Zainab (Area 1)**, placed her personal experience within a broader context, discussing how her cultural background and beliefs influenced her feelings about receiving food donations:

*To be honest at first, I was quite nervous. Being an Asian, I never experienced this before, cause you probably know, the Asian community, we feel a bit like hesitated when it comes to these sorts of things. As me having a wide family around where I live, I never ever needed this help, but obviously because of the circumstances changed, and you know, things changed a lot, and then because of the cost of living, I thought you know what, this is the only option I have at the moment. To be honest, I feel sad, if I be honest with you. In a sense like we're struggling financially that much that we had to go to these places.*

Overall, as the quote below from **Joe (Area 1)** captures, many participants in our study felt an overwhelming sense of failure and loss of agency stemming from their inability to provide for themselves. Reliance on external sources to survive was particularly difficult when individuals reflected on their previous experiences of independence and autonomy:

*Well, it shouldn't be needed, should it? It's shameful that you've got to ask for... Ask for something you should be able to get for yourself. What the other people you're asking think of when you're actually asking for it. Yeah, along those lines. Yeah, I've worked all my life. That's why it's harder to come to this place to be honest. You've always been self-sufficient, having to rely on something else.*

## **8. Findings: Support for food bank users**

People experiencing food insecurity and accessing food banks shared their stories about support that was or was not provided, what support they knew was available, and their ideas on what other support should be available now and in the future.

### **8.1 Awareness of support**

Participants shared that support is available, describing it as 'so much', 'quite a lot' and enough. Conversely one participant, **Peter (Area 3)** said, 'there's not a lot of things out there to help'. Whilst it was acknowledged that support existed participants generally felt that the availability of support was not readily known about, as experienced by **Linda (Area 3)**:

*There's so much support and lots of different groups, it'd be good for people to know more about these places and what they might be entitled to, cos I didn't have a clue really, I was so shocked at what I could apply for and things like that*

Participants described having to take action themselves to find out about what is available. This included making their own enquiries and doing their own research, such as asking other people or organisations, and knowing where to look. This was summed up by **Shaun (Area 3)** when describing how people in food insecurity consider how they are going to get through their situation: *'because people don't know what to do. They don't know. Maybe even there are things in place and people don't access them, because they don't know about them'*.

Participants reported a reliance on others informing them about accessing support; this could be someone at the food bank, a professional, another charity, peers or family and friends. Sometimes the availability of other support became apparent as a response to a specific conversation, rather than a professional routinely telling their clients about a service for which they are eligible. For example, **Linda (Area 3)** heard about the Healthy Start scheme only when she told her health visitor that she was struggling to afford essentials for her child: *'you don't necessarily always get told about these things'*.

A diverse set of circumstances for which awareness of support was low or questioned was mentioned by the interviewees. For example, where to find support with the costs of what are life's essentials: utility costs (electricity, gas and water); the provision of clothing, especially kids' clothing, and school uniforms; and for coping with the winter (coats, bedding). Other interviewees mentioned support with finding work or getting closer to the labour market through opportunities of work experience, thereby increasing their income to be able to afford more essentials. But again, as described by **Shazia (Area 1)**, knowledge of support can rely on others passing on information:

*It... would help if there was like more ways of getting into work. Like they do, I do go to the job centre where they do the group sessions, but I had to ask, I didn't even know they existed until like someone else told me.*

## **8.2 Lack of external support**

The interviews demonstrated that when external support is accessed it doesn't always meet the needs of food bank users. Support mentioned included receipt of benefits, interactions with public sector organisations such as local councils, local Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) offices, local health services, charities, and family and friends.

While some support was available through the welfare benefits system, it was viewed as insufficient, overly complicated, and unreliable, further contributing to a sense of insecurity and lack of control over their circumstances.

Trying to survive on the amount provided was extremely difficult with the pressures of paying bills, rent and other necessary outgoings as well as feeding themselves or their

families. **Sarah (Area 3)** revealed the impossibility of providing for her family on the level of benefits received:

*I was trying to pay the bills, trying to keep the food on the table, but it were just, it just seemed impossible, for the little money, that obviously being on benefits at the time, you know, what they give you, it were just impossible to survive. Literally impossible.*

Specific aspects of Universal Credit were highlighted as challenges by other participants for example **Andrew (Area 2)** indicated his mental health issues meant he was unable to attend a Universal Credit appointment, leading to sanctions: *At the moment, at the time, I was on sanctions with Universal Credit cause I missed an appointment due to mental health, then the situation just worsened and worsened over the months.*

Whilst another participant indicated that the frequency of payments made things more difficult for them to meet their financial obligations, and that payments twice rather than once per month would make a difference to their situation:

*I would say it is, but I've always been working, buying food, and then with being on Universal Credit, getting paid once a month, you struggle. Should pay you twice a month, your money won't go down and then you're not struggling. (Darren Area 2).*

Navigating the systems to receive support was time consuming, exhausting and put pressure on those who are food insecure to find out what to do to access support, their eligibility and then complete paperwork, often online. This was described in detail by **Peter (Area 3)**, and the impact on his well-being:

*I think you can exhaust every opportunity, and I think that's what you get to. You get to that stage where you've tried everything, and you failed. There's only so many times you can go back. You can go to food banks, you can ask for help, you can fill in forms, you're doing that...It's like a vicious circle, of constantly always filling in forms, and then... I felt less as a person when I was personally doing it, because it just felt like I was getting bounced around pillar to post, pillar to post.*

The experiences of interactions with those public agencies that provide or gatekeep support for individuals and families were often described in negative terms. Some of the interviewees shared how the interpersonal aspect of these interactions lacked empathy, understanding and professionalism, how staff made them feel, and the preconceptions of staff. **For example, Zainab (Area 1)** spoke of being:

*So scared to talk to them, if I be honest with you, cause first experience I had, the people were very rough when they were talking.... I was just more stressing, oh god, I have to ring them, oh god, what they gonna say? You know, that was even, it was topping up my stress. So yeah, they need to be more professional I would say*

Another participant **Shazia (Area 1)** talked about assistance from the job centre not being as much as expected in terms of helping to get a job although:

*I'm trying really hard, I've applied, I've even started applying for like warehouse jobs, everything. And nothing... I don't even get like interviews. She had also asked family and friends for support and shared: I think it's that you find out who your true friends and families are in these situations. Who's actually there for you and who just was there for you when you had everything.*

Asking for support from family and friends can be categorised as external support. Sometimes family were not close by, so reliance moved to friends, or relationships with family members were already strained making it 'hard to ask sometimes', as expressed by **(Gina (Area 2))**.

### **8.3 Potential sources of support and help**

Participants were asked what could help people's situation improve or reduce their need to access a food bank. This question was not easy for participants to answer and most of them initially focused on personal responsibility and actions; what they could do to help themselves get out of or cope better with their current situation. Some of these personal actions were described by **Heather (Area 2)** such as *getting out*, trusting people more, building confidence back up and *'I'm just taking each step, you know one step at a time. I think once I've sorted my depression out and get back on track... I'll probably feel better.'*

**Gina (Area 2)** also considered that she was taking actions that would help her: *'I think I'm putting things in place. I've joined a gym, starting to try and eat a bit healthier, access this support, temporary, and I hope I'm gonna get back on my feet.'*

When asked about what others could do to help or support them or others experiencing food insecurity, a range of ideas were elicited, which were mostly general in nature. Participants also generally struggled to describe how the support could be delivered or by whom.

Maximising income and having more money to spend on essentials was an obvious way in which people's situation could improve. **Gina (Area 2)** felt *'If I'm on better salary things would improve. Yeah, it has a knock-on effect for everything, doesn't it?'* In this respect, employment was key, whether that be finding a good job, changing their current job or hours worked, learning or training to enable better employment, or accessing careers advice as **Kylie (Area 3)** highlighted:

*The only ways I could think of to try, was to bring some extra money in, or to get a career so that in the future we won't have to ever be in this situation again, you know.*

During the workshop, participants spoke about how more assistance with applying for jobs would be beneficial, as described here by **Shazia (Area 1)**:

*I feel like you know, instead the job centre... where they tell you what jobs may be. Tell you like actually help you with special offer for me. Maybe I don't need it, but*

*people with lower English or something, help them actually apply for these jobs because you can't expect them, to cause nowadays it's all about online. Not everyone can access online.*

Support with managing finances was also mentioned as something that could help, whether that be through learning budgeting skills or how to reduce outgoings. **Heather (Area 2)** explained that the timing of this help could be more beneficial:

*I: Is there a specific point or any point in time that you think "that's where the help would have been most effective"?*

*R: Probably at the beginning, to manage your money better.*

Interviewees and workshop participants mentioned a few ways in which changes to systems could help those facing food insecurity. Navigating inflexible support systems was challenging, as noted previously, so changes to make systems more responsive to individual circumstances were proposed. For example, landlords giving more time to find alternative housing, tapering of social security financial support when a drastic change in circumstances has resulted in life and families 'falling apart', receiving benefits more frequently than once per month, and longer appointments in general practice for complex situations. One of the participants, **Peter (Area 3)**, described the complexities of accessing support for those occasions when children stay part time with a parent:

*I think the government could understand that when somebody like myself who's separated with a few more kids, I don't claim for them, but they have to still come to my house, but they don't regard that as them being yours, because the other person's getting family allowance. So, they don't subsidise anything like that... The council says... you're gonna have to ask their mum to provide more food for them... she won't give anything at all.*

Accessible support was proposed and discussed in the workshop. This included geographical accessibility. There was a perception that all support services and places to obtain help were located in town centres and not necessarily close to where food insecure people lived. Participants suggested that community centres providing hubs in residential areas or outreach from town centres would be beneficial. The reliance on accessing services online was considered to be contributing to inequalities in access. This was particularly the case for job centres; participants felt there should be an option for clients to go to the job centre or other location and use their computers for free.

Accessible information about what support is available and help with understanding what organisations there are to help was also proposed by workshop participants. They indicated that information should be digital and non-digital. One of the participants, **Sarah (Area 3)** highlighted the need to consider digital inclusion:

*Workshop Facilitator: How would information be provided?*

*That's what they need to work out because obviously some people can't get on internet...some people might just get credit, they might have mobile data or they might not have Wi-Fi, can't afford it.*

Several participants suggested that there should be more mental health support. They indicated this could be support for specific conditions such as anxiety or depression; or changes to how the support is delivered, for example face-to-face counselling rather than by telephone, or consistency in the professional providing the support to enable building up trust over a number of interactions. For example, **Peter (Area 3)** described why mental health support from the GP is important:

*[Doctors] could sit down and offer more help for the mental health side of it, because there's that many people struggling out there with mental health problems, and it's all interrelated, if you can't feed yourself and you can't clothe yourself and you can't provide stuff, you're only gonna go down one way.*

The topic of healthy food was mentioned in a variety of different contexts. Participants suggested that support with making healthy meals could be addressed through cooking classes for both children and adults, and the provision of healthy and 'in date' food items in food bank parcels. Workshop participants described the barriers and stigma around providing content for cookery classes in schools and suggested that schools should be more understanding about parents' inability to afford the items required, some of which are expensive non-store cupboard essentials:

*...when asking to buy all the ingredients, that is not a quick meal. Want that meal to be worth, you know, £20 to a single parent. That's a lot of money and I think, they're making me pay for everything and then nothing is even subsidised. (**Shazia (Area 1)**)*

**Sarah (Area 3)** succinctly described how changes at a national level would change the circumstances of those experiencing food insecurity. *"I think they need to have a look at the cost of living because they keep putting the cost of living up and then that's getting more people into the position that we're doing at the minute."*

## **9. Discussion**

Our findings revealed a variety of factors that contributed to individuals requiring support from food banks, often stemming from broader circumstances beyond their control. This included life events such as the loss of a job, end of a relationship, and ill health that set off a chain of events, ultimately creating conditions whereby participants felt they had little choice but to seek support for food. This is reflective of other studies that have found similar drivers to food bank use (Loopstra & Lambie-Mumford 2023, Perry et al 2014).

The lived experiences shared in this study demonstrated that seeking support from food banks has a significant emotional and psychological toll on individuals' sense of self-worth and dignity. Accessing support from a food bank was often the last resort and even then, many of the participants described a considerable reluctance in seeking this help. Food

bank users commonly described the stigma of accessing food banks along with feelings of shame and embarrassment. This has been described as elements of 'hunger trauma' by Walker et al (Walker2022). Many users struggled to come to terms with the fact their lives had come to this point as their previous lives, whilst not lives of luxury, did not involve worries about food. In the wider context, this shame and loss of dignity adds further trauma to already traumatic circumstances.

Once overcoming their initial reservations and in direct in contact with food banks, food bank users generally reported positive experiences. Some participants described being made to feel at ease and the warm attitude of staff they encountered, helping to reduce some of the stigma they felt. In addition, they met others in similar situations to themselves, creating a sense of common ground with others and that they were not alone in finding themselves in such circumstances. This recognition that others were also struggling to manage and that it was acceptable to receive help from the food bank helped to validate individuals' situations and needs. However, it is important to note that while food bank users may express gratitude for the support received through food banks, there is an inherent sense of stigma attached to their use and accepting food charity can come with significant costs to their mental health (Caraher & Davison 2023, Loopstra & Lambie-Mumford 2023, Garratt, 2017, Purdham et al 2016).

All food banks users found the support they received from food banks helpful. They described the support extending beyond the provision of food to resources such as cooking equipment, access to debt advice, counselling services, and for some a place to have meals and meet others for social contact. The food banks provided far more than just access to food to meet short-term needs. As organisations, they provide routes to other sources of support that impact the wider lives of individuals.

Although many food bank users felt they received valuable support from the food bank, several issues were noted. Food bank users recognised that food provisions were limited by the food banks' donations, and whilst they felt that food banks tried to meet their needs, they highlighted a need for food that met religious and dietary needs. The food banks were not always able to accommodate such needs adequately, for example providing halal options, meat, and fresh produce or food considered healthier. This links to other research which has identified food banks can struggle to meet the dietary needs of people with specific health conditions or cultural needs. (Power et al 2017, Garthwaite et al 2015, Guthman 2008). In addition, the location of food banks can bring additional costs to food banks users who live a distance away and may have to pay for transport services. This highlights that there are still personal costs to accessing support from food banks (Loopstra & Lambie-Mumford 2023, Purdham et al 2016) despite the benefits of the support.

As part of the broader picture on food insecurity, participants were also asked about how accessible food was to them. The food bank users in this study generally reported that physical access to shops and supermarkets was good in the areas they resided in, indicating

that a range of local shops and supermarkets were relatively easy to access. However, this may not be the case for others facing food insecurity, as there can be challenges for food insecure people in accessing preferred grocery stores due to location and transport barriers (Wainer et al 2023). Furthermore, whilst physical access to food was good, transport costs were incurred by some in our study, such as those doing a monthly shop or those requiring visiting specific shops that cater to their cultural needs.

Food bank users made a number of adaptations to their lives as result of being food insecure in order to reduce costs. This included shopping at cheaper shops, purchasing behaviours, bulk buying, eating less meat and less fresh foods. The latter was one of the most significant changes described by many of the food bank users, who indicated they now reluctantly relied on tinned and frozen foods. Participants specifically mentioned the costs of fresh foods being a barrier to healthy eating. Healthier food can cost up to twice the amount as less healthy options (Food Foundation 2025), making it extremely difficult for those on low incomes to afford healthy diets as recommended by the government.

Unsurprisingly, cost was the key consideration in deciding what foods to buy and where to buy from. A Food Foundation survey revealed that 60% of households experiencing food insecurity reported reducing their purchases of fruit, 44% cut back on vegetables, and 59% on fish (Food Foundation,2025). More detrimentally, costs and available funds meant food bank users had to often choose between necessities. In reality, this meant having to 'make do' with limited food or even 'do without' food to cover bills and other household expenses. In addition, those with children made personal sacrifices of not eating to ensure their children had sufficient food.

Such food management coping strategies described by participants fall into the four groups described by Douglas (2024): "eating as cheaply as possible to make the food budget go further; stockpile food when some money or food becomes available; parents going without food in order to feed children or other loved ones; and relying on others for food items or meal... as a last resort".

Many of the food bank users were in receipt of benefits that were not considered sufficient to meet their needs, and the lack of frequency in payments made managing budgets difficult, particularly for those on universal credit (UC). In one situation, benefit sanctions led to a further deterioration of mental health. It is recognised that many people referred to a foodbank are in receipt of some form of income from the welfare state however Trussell reports that the design and delivery of the social security system is a major contributor to people being unable to afford essentials (Trussell, 2025). Changes in welfare policy - particularly UC - have also been shown to exacerbate vulnerability amongst low-income groups (Cheetham et al 2019).

Being weighed down with financial worries and not having sufficient resources to feed themselves or their dependants had numerous negative impacts on the lives of food bank

users and their families. Food bank users were often unable to afford purchasing things for their children and worried about how they would meet the needs of their children or provide them with the right types or enough food. Food insecurity has been shown to be more prevalent in households with children (Independent Aid network 2022), leading to detrimental impacts for both children and their parents.

Those with young children felt a sense of guilt and failure as a parent, leading to impacts on their mental health including stress and anxiety. Parents often tried to conceal their financial situations from their children to protect them, and this brought additional pressures of keeping up a front and adding further emotional strain. These pressures often left families isolated and reshaped day-to-day routines, highlighting that food insecurity affects not just nutrition, but relationships, emotional wellbeing, and family life. These findings reflect parenting practices found in other studies such as shielding children by eating less themselves and compromising on the nutritional quality of food due to its cost, and the emotional stress and feelings of inadequacy, failure and helplessness (Hevesi R, 2024).

Wider family members were often turned to when individuals felt they had no choice but to ask for their help. However, this often-brought further feelings of shame and helplessness. In addition, for some food bank users their circumstances meant they could not socialise as much with family or take part in family activities and going out as this often came with an expense. Inevitably, being food insecure often impacted individuals' ability to socialise. Hunger and food poverty can be damaging to individuals' relationships and communities (Trussell, 2025).

Over time, such withdrawal from family and social activities can significantly alter a person's lifestyle and daily routines, reducing opportunities for connection, recreation, and emotional support. This withdrawal can also be described as cutting 'them off from the things that make life enjoyable' (Trussell, 2025). The impact extends beyond behaviour, often triggering a range of negative emotions, including embarrassment, shame, and a persistent sense of missing out. This emotional toll can further reinforce isolation.

These experiences all cumulatively led to negative impacts on the mental health and well-being of food bank users. Food banks users reported declining mental health, increased levels of anxiety, and depression. Anxiety was often driven by the uncertainties of being unable to provide for themselves and their families, alongside concerns about being able to manage and adapt to challenging circumstances. Not being able to provide children with types of foods they preferred also caused significant mental burden for parents. Food bank users described budgeting pressures adding to their worries and constantly having to think about their spending or what they might have to do to get through the month to meet household expenses/needs. All of these factors can put individuals under considerable emotional and psychological strain, as reflected in other studies reporting worry, anxiety

and stress as common indicators of poor mental health for those in food insecurity (IFAN 2022).

Interestingly, all participants were able to distinguish this impact on their mental health and well-being more readily than other impacts on their health. However, food bank users were also quite aware of the impact of food insecurity on their diets, highlighting their limited access to healthier food options and having to eat less nutritious foods. In turn, this contributed to feelings of poorer physical health and perceiving that their family's health was not as good as it could be. This indicates that food insecure individuals do have knowledge of healthy eating as described by Douglass (2024), who indicates that "food-insecure people generally have a good appreciation of and knowledge about healthy eating messages" and "the desire to feed the family good quality food." However, financial constraints significantly restrict food choices, resulting in health considerations taking a lower priority (Puddephatt et al 2020).

Participants also spoke about the perceived loss of control and the limited ability individuals felt they had to change or influence their life circumstances. They expressed a deep sense that they had exhausted all available options, yet their efforts remained insufficient to improve their situations. This often led to overwhelming feelings of helplessness, as they struggled to assert any influence over the conditions shaping their lives.

Whilst several food bank users described the desire to work and improve their circumstances, their current situations impacted their future opportunities. A range of factors were mentioned such as caring responsibilities, age-related barriers to employment, the cost of transport to get to and from work, and the cost of packed lunches. Nevertheless, a number of the food bank users demonstrated their desire to work and were actively trying to improve their employment prospects through educational and training pathways, as well as seeking help through the job centre.

Our findings demonstrated that food bank users were aware that support existed to help individuals in similar situations, but this awareness only came after finding themselves in need of support and being informed by others. Therefore, participants largely felt that the availability of support was not generally known, and information on support provisions was not readily available to others. Examples were given of a lack of knowledge on how to access support related to energy and utility costs, support with clothing for children and school uniforms, coats and bedding, and wider employment support provided through job centres. When support was accessed, it was not always considered to meet the needs of food bank users. This was a key theme in relation to the social security system and the level of financial support provided by Universal Credit. The issues faced by food bank users were overlaid with the rising cost of living, making it difficult to manage on the limited income provided. Often food bank users felt they had exhausted all avenues of support and were still left to struggle and do the best they could, reinforcing a sense of helplessness

Interestingly, when asked about what might help mitigate the negative impacts of food insecurity, individuals largely viewed this through the lens of personal responsibility, demonstrating again the desire for change by personal actions rather than intervention from support services. This may reflect how individuals in food insecurity are made to feel by public and political opinions. We find assumptions being made by some who perceive food insecurity to arise from the mismanagement of resources and the notion that aspects of poverty are linked to individual responsibility (Caraher & Davison 2023, Caraher 2018).

Food bank users were well aware of what the potential of an increased income through suitable employment could bring to their lives. More support from job centres was highlighted along with considerations for digital exclusion, given many employment processes are based online. However, it is important to note that employment itself is not a guarantee of food security (Blake & Cromwell 2022).

In addition, other sources of support that could be beneficial included support with managing budgets and finances, more in-person support for mental health, and healthy cooking classes for both children and families. Those with children also touched on the role of schools supporting parents in food insecurity in the context of food technology/cooking lessons and considering that not all families can afford to purchase ingredients required for such lessons, which in turn can increase stigma faced by children and parents.

In terms of national policy level interventions, food bank users like many others advocating for disadvantaged groups identified the broader issue of the cost of living requiring additional consideration. Costs have been rising since 2021 and 66% of adults in Great Britain reported a higher cost of living than the previous month as recently as March 2025 (Francis-Devine 2025). There were concerns that if costs continued to rise, this would push more and more people into food insecurity, increasing the need for such support. More equitable allocation of benefit payments was also mentioned, as well as the need for more simplified processes to apply and receive benefits.

## **10. Conclusion**

This research highlights the profound and multifaceted impact of poverty and food insecurity on individuals and families who use food banks. While this report shares insights from a sample of food bank users, it reflects a wider picture of challenges faced by those in food insecurity. The findings indicate a two-fold relationship, whereby immediate financial hardship drives individuals to seek food bank support, while other underlying life events, often outside their control, contribute significantly to the development of that hardship. The food banks were not only seen as providers of essential food items, but also as vital access points for broader forms of assistance, including debt advice, mental health support, and opportunities for social connection. Despite initial reluctance to use a food bank, users generally report positive interactions with food bank staff, valuing the sense of community and understanding found among others in similar circumstances.

At the same time, food bank users experience a number of challenges. Food banks can struggle to meet religious, dietary, and nutritional needs of their users, and there can be hidden costs of accessing support such as from transport. Many food bank users have had to make significant lifestyle adjustments because of food insecurity, including relying on less nutritious foods and making personal sacrifices, particularly parents who prioritise their children's needs over their own. Parents often attempted to conceal the extent of their difficulties from their children, but inevitably there were obvious changes to routines such as fewer meal or missed school activities. These experiences not only reshaped family life, but also deepened the emotional strain on parents.

The experience of accessing food banks is profoundly emotional, frequently accompanied by feelings of shame, embarrassment, and a diminished sense of self-worth. Families - particularly those with children - face an acute emotional burden, with parents reporting guilt, anxiety, and sadness at not being able to adequately provide for their children.

The negative impact on mental health is also significant, with increased anxiety, depression, and a sense of helplessness reported by many. The complexity of navigating the benefits system and the inadequacy of support further exacerbate these issues, especially against the backdrop of the rising cost of living.

The findings emphasised a lack of awareness about available support services, alongside perceptions that existing welfare systems, particularly Universal Credit, are often insufficient and difficult to navigate. Food bank users demonstrate resilience and a desire to improve their circumstances, often seeking employment or training opportunities despite considerable barriers including digital exclusion, caring responsibilities, and the rising cost of living. The need for more accessible information about available support, greater flexibility in benefit provision, and targeted interventions to address digital exclusion and support healthy eating were highlighted.

In conclusion, this research study provides insights into the lives of food banks users and how food insecurity can have detrimental impacts on daily life as well as illustrating that while food banks provide critical immediate support, they cannot nor can be expected to address the root causes of food insecurity. Addressing food insecurity requires a more coordinated national response that addresses structural drivers of poverty and better support systems as well as more localised support. This should include action to address the cost-of-living crisis, more responsive benefit systems, better access to employment and mental health services, and targeted support to meet the diverse needs of vulnerable households. Addressing these systemic issues is essential to reducing reliance on food banks and improving long-term outcomes for individuals and families experiencing poverty.

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## 12 Appendices

### Appendix 1

**Table 1: Participant demographics**

		<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	7	<b>39%</b>
	Female	11	<b>61%</b>
<b>Age group</b>	25-44	12	<b>75%</b>
	45-64	3	<b>19%</b>
	Over 65	1	<b>6%</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Identified as a minority group i.e. not white British or English	4	<b>25%</b>
<b>Disability</b>	Identified as having a disability	4	<b>25%</b>
<b>LTC</b>	Identified as have a long-term chronic health condition	6	<b>38%</b>
<b>Employment status</b>	Employed	1	<b>6%</b>
	Not employed	13	<b>81%</b>
	Student	1	<b>6%</b>
	Prefer not to say	1	<b>6%</b>
<b>Household occupancy</b>	Single Adult household with children aged 0-16 years	14	<b>88%</b>
	Single Adult household without children	1	<b>6%</b>
	Multi-Adult household with children aged 0-16	1	<b>6%</b>

Please note that only 16 of the 18 participants completed the monitoring form

## Appendix 2: I-Poems

### I-poem 1: Liam single person

I got put on to what was it called Universal Credit  
I had to spend my first bit of money  
I was skint basically  
I would have been stuck very much so. If it weren't for them [Foodbank]  
I didn't have any money for food.

I don't like it... when you go for a handout  
I would rather do that than starve  
I have always worked never been homeless before  
I've never been without food  
I'm not well that fussed like.  
I will eat things in cans  
I mean it's not nice not having food  
I eat when I eat

I absolutely love cooking  
I would rather cook fresh  
I'd like to eat more fruit, but it's expensive, isn't it?  
I think I could be healthier

I do buy a lot of bit reduced stuff so that sometimes can dictate a lot  
I think, what I can do without?  
I think that's what we call it, budgeting and all that

I've not even met one of me grandkids, yet  
I don't see them as often  
I don't want them to know  
I was pretty embarrassed  
I don't want them to come down and not be fed  
I say it just hard work not knowing where your next meal is going to come from  
I didn't have enough money

I'm hoping the cost of living goes down, you know,  
I used to be on the ESA, which is every two weeks. Well, this is every month  
I have got to a budget for a whole month,  
I had to spend it in other places... to get a bed  
I have struggled  
I'm not just used to it  
I'll just, I'll eat owt  
I'm just embarrassed

### I-poem 2: Kylie single mother

I was involved with a domestic violence relationship.  
I were just in this rut  
I was trying to pay the bills, trying to keep the food on the table

I just called them [Foodbank] myself  
I didn't want to go  
I just didn't want to go in myself  
I did feel so embarrassed  
I cried  
I just couldn't believe like how generous they were

I've never actually been in a situation where  
I've had to ask for help like that  
I've always been able to provide for the children  
I can't give them what they want it's... upsetting  
I've got a two-year-old baby

I've got myself back into university  
I've been going to university without...any dinner  
I did nearly pass out one time

I suffer from headaches quite often  
I've got really bad anxiety  
I just sit and worry about what  
I'm gonna make for tea and stuff like that

I forget that we've no butter  
I realise I can't make the kids bloody toast for breakfast  
I've cried numerous times over it

I've had a part-time job  
I had to leave  
I'm a single parent  
I was having to go to university during the day  
I was never sleeping  
I had to give it up  
I tried  
I feel like it's down, it's all down to me now

I do feel that there is quite a lot of support out there  
I think they're [Foodbank] absolutely brilliant  
I really do, but you've just got to ask and know where to look

### **I-poem 3: Peter: Single parent**

I did work all my life really

I was a boss  
I always had a purpose  
I've lost that purpose now  
I don't work due to ill health

I had no real choice but to sign up to a few food banks...to survive really  
I felt very degraded.  
I swallowed my pride  
I didn't have what I used to have  
I was ashamed of myself coming in, my life had declined  
I was very proud,  
I didn't want to go  
I didn't want to ask for that word, help.

I've always worked, I never had any handouts,  
I've always struggled on the best I could.  
I used to feed the homeless  
I had to stop all that

I used to eat bare minimum to save money, if I didn't have it  
I would just go without  
I know what it's like to go hungry

I was trying,  
I was generally struggling to put food on the table  
I was very worried.  
I'd starve myself to feed my kids.

I have to save up all the time, it's just like it's...penny pinching.  
I'm not left with very much by the time I've paid everything else  
I think life's all about survival  
I put a very brave face on  
I don't let anybody see

I've been suffering from anxiety and depression  
I just feel why can't I get my life back?  
I try to balance my mind out  
I'm not the only person  
I've learned...that I can't be too proud  
I'll say look, is there any more help out there?  
I'm very thankful for the help I receive

#### **I-poem 4: Deborah: parent with young children**

I came in contact with food bank through the council  
I have two kids, six and seven years old  
I usually...provide everything for my kids

I couldn't do anything  
I need to like prioritise what's important  
I prioritise the housing.  
I had to prioritise that so we have a roof over our heads  
I know that I'm struggling, and my kids probably won't have anything to eat

I usually just go shopping  
I go knowing that I'm struggling,  
I start to like cut back  
I will survive cause it was cheaper way.

I don't sleep.  
I don't sleep for like days.  
I'm kind of an overthinker  
I think a bit more since we've been struggling  
I think about everything.  
I've been thinking like what I'm gonna do tomorrow  
What I'm gonna do

I can't go to work  
I'm not working  
I get like benefits and PIP  
I'm struggling with my mental health  
I do really want to go to work, but I cannot.

I think just the biggest impact is... not being able to provide for my kids  
I've been doing this for a long time and I made sure they have everything  
I don't know... it makes me a bit upset and angry at the same time  
I don't know where to go, what to do

### **I-Poem 5: Gina, widowed**

I've never needed it before, me hours got reduced at work  
I dealt with it for a bit  
I borrowed money sometimes from family  
I had no one else to ask  
I got to a point where I had no other help

I lost my partner a couple of years ago  
I've struggled... since then  
I don't really want to be relying on people

I work  
I couldn't afford to eat  
I've actually took a tin  
I didn't steal it, I was gonna replace it  
I felt quite embarrassed about it

I've got to really prioritise my money  
I get paid on Friday  
I think it'll be me prioritising food shopping every time I get paid

I'm getting some cognitive behavioural therapy  
I've got a degree in criminology  
I've joined a gym  
I hope I'm gonna get back on my feet

I'm not that proud though  
I never thought I'd end up at a foodbank  
I'm not saying it's a bad thing  
I see it as a positive thing more than anything now  
I've sort of hit that point in my life where I've actually  
had to come and ask for help  
I'm really grateful for the help but  
I think I need to stand on me own two feet.

### **I-poem 6: Zainab single parent**

I'm a single mother with three children  
I was struggling financially  
I received a call from the food bank  
I was quite nervous  
I never experienced this before  
I thought you know what, this is the only option  
I really needed that help at that point

I feel sad, if I be honest with you  
I can't really afford my own children  
I had to go there where at one point I used to take things to donate  
I am the one in the queue getting those things...for my children

I was thinking last month  
I had no food in my house  
I didn't tell anyone  
I was feeling bit embarrassed.

I don't know what they were doing, you know, Universal Credit  
They stopped my rent, they didn't pay me anything  
I was in like stress  
I was panicking a lot  
I didn't have any money,  
I had no electricity at all  
I was crying  
I was isolated to be honest

I was trying to be strong in front of my children  
I was quite upset, you know  
I didn't even have flour in my house,  
I couldn't really make any chapati for them  
I never experienced something like that  
I couldn't really make anything for my children

I would like to go back to work  
I'm at a position where  
I cannot even go back to work full time  
I would like to thank food bank for being there for people like us