

Grassroots Responses to Food Poverty in Coventry (UK)

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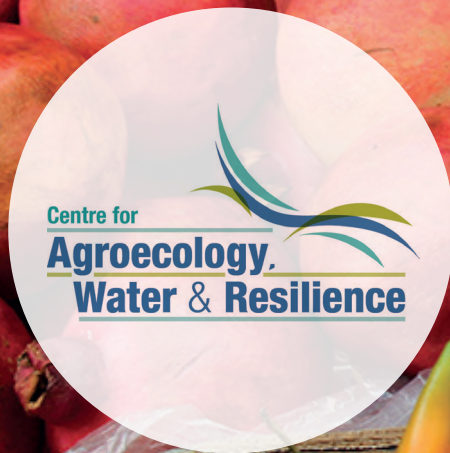
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GRASSROOTS RESPONSES

TO FOOD POVERTY IN
COVENTRY (UK)



PREPARED BY A RESEARCH TEAM AT THE
CENTRE FOR AGROECOLOGY, WATER AND
RESILIENCE (CAWR) WORKING WITH THE
COVENTRY FOOD JUSTICE NETWORK

WWW.COVENTRYFOODJUSTICE.UK



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE UK HAS EXPERIENCED A GROWING NEED FOR EMERGENCY FOOD AID, A CRISIS OF DIET-RELATED HEALTH PROBLEMS AND AN INCREASE IN FOOD POVERTY.

According to recent estimates by Coventry City Council, approximately 20% of residents are living on the breadline and 26% of children are living in poverty. Such statistics are not uncommon in Britain's cities today, as government cutbacks reduce the capacity of the welfare state and local authorities to provide much needed services and infrastructure.

Within this context, this report provides a summary of research which explored how community organisations are responding to food poverty in Coventry. The analysis is based on interviews, desk-based research, and insights drawn from a series of events and workshops in the city which were organised by the Coventry Food Justice Network.

Coventry is a city with a proud industrial heritage and long history of community self-organisation through faith groups, trade unions and other voluntary initiatives to help people struggling with poverty and exclusion, support mutual-aid and to improve well-being in communities. Many innovative projects have arisen from different communities and there is much local capacity to respond to the growing challenge of food poverty in the city. Yet whilst many people are working hard to help those in need, our research shows that there is strong consensus that even if emergency food aid is a vital short-term solution to feeding hungry people, long-term solutions are needed to address the root causes of food poverty.

Based on our research, this report identifies five major aspects of food poverty that community organisations are tackling, and proposes seven key recommendations which could help the city to move towards a future where all of its residents have access to affordable, sustainable food for health and well-being.

Our findings suggest that community organisations are focusing on five main problems related to food poverty (*See Diagram, right*):

- **Hunger**
- **Food deskilling**
- **Poor access to healthy affordable food**
- **Isolation and community disconnection**
- **Poverty (as root cause of food poverty)**

We also draw out five primary types of activities and organisational efforts to respond to these problems:

- **Providing emergency food aid as a short-term intervention to address the immediate problem of hunger.**
- **Facilitating activities related to food reskilling, to build the capacity of individuals and groups in terms of buying, preparing and growing food.**
- **Improving access to affordable fresh food, and thus improving Coventry's food environment for all.**
- **Using food to draw people together in community spaces to strengthen social connections and to reduce social isolation.**
- **Confronting poverty as the root cause of food poverty by linking up with wider political campaigns and social movements.**

Participants in our research expressed a strong interest in connecting with other community initiatives working on food poverty and food sustainability issues in the city to create a better networked and coordinated approach. This is why we worked with community groups to develop the Coventry Food Justice Network (CFJN), which aims to provide a forum for community food initiatives to connect, get to know each other, establish partnerships and to create a space for mutual learning and collaboration. Moving beyond a focus on food poverty, the 'Food Justice' framework emphasises the intersection between food poverty and social justice issues within the broader context of growing inequality.



Our findings reflect a consensus that even if emergency food aid is an important short-term solution to feeding hungry people, long-term solutions need to address the root causes of food poverty. This will include a simultaneous effort to build capacity within communities for mutual aid, social innovation and confronting social exclusion, while at the same time tackling the political, cultural and economic systems that are creating the conditions for widespread poverty and marginalisation. Thus we propose a set of recommendations to move towards food justice in the short- and long-term in Coventry:

- **Coventry should develop a food strategy** for the city to support a multi-actor coordinated approach to addressing food poverty, food justice and food system sustainability. This should be linked to wider strategies to reduce poverty and address inequality at a city and a national level.
- **Food poverty and food justice initiatives**, such as Feeding Coventry, the Coventry Food Justice Network or any city-wide food plan, **should involve the participation of Coventry residents** to ensure these initiatives reflect the needs and visions of Coventry's diverse communities. This will require care to ensure the participation of vulnerable people including refugees, youth, the elderly, the disabled and the wide range of ethnic communities represented in the city.
- Initiatives aimed at addressing food poverty should include a **focus on the structural problems in the economic and political system that form the root causes of poverty**. A food justice approach can be helpful to orientate food poverty and community workers to these root causes and for more people/organisations to pursue policy changes, cultural change and political work to build long-term material security for impoverished people in Britain. This might include focusing on how food poverty arises from low wages, government cutbacks, sanctions against welfare recipients and the normalisation of hunger in Britain.



- **Coventry City Council should develop a long-term strategy to develop urban agriculture in the city**, carefully planning to increase the relevance to those on low incomes or who otherwise may have difficulty physically and financially accessing these resources (e.g. the elderly, people with disabilities).
- **Stronger links** should be developed between strategies for emergency food aid provisioning and the longer-term projects to improve the food environment and/or to pursue food justice (such as urban agroecology, food co-operatives, healthy and sustainable procurement city-wide food policy, etc.).
- Support the **strengthening of community networks** to increase the capacity of citizens to develop joint projects and to engage in dialogue amongst diverse citizens on issues related to food justice. The Coventry Food Justice Network is one initiative that can be expanded to facilitate this dialogue and networking.
- Conduct **more research** to understand the underlying causes of food poverty, the uneven distribution of food poverty, the efficacy of different solutions being proposed and the opportunities to develop more just and sustainable food systems.

INTRODUCTION FOOD POVERTY IN THE LAND(S) OF PLENTY

We live in a paradoxical and unjust world, where hunger exists amongst plenty. It is unacceptable that a large and growing proportion of people in wealthy industrialised nations suffer from hunger and malnutrition. In the UK, this problem is attracting growing media attention (**Weblinks 1, 2 & 3**) and is increasingly known as food poverty. Food poverty means, “the inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet. It is about the quality of food as well as quantity. It is not just about hunger, but also about being appropriately nourished to attain and maintain health” (**Bristol City Council 2013**).

Perhaps the most visible food poverty story in the media is the growth of foodbanks, which are initiatives, often operated by churches and charities, supplying free basic provisions and non-perishable food items, to people in need. A decade ago, foodbanks were virtually unheard of in the UK, but have become ubiquitous over the last seven years (**See Figure 1 below**). Recent statistics from the Trussell Trust indicated that they provided **1,109,309** three-day emergency food packages through a network of 424 foodbanks in the 2015/16 financial year (Trussell Trust 2016). Trussell is one of several foodbank networks in the UK, and there are also many local level initiatives such as soup kitchens, homeless shelters and other sources of emergency food aid.

The growing use of foodbanks is only the tip of the iceberg and does not reveal the full extent of food poverty (Fabian Commission 2015).

Foodbank usage is usually a last resort for people in crisis, and so the figures do not capture the long-term, grinding food poverty experienced by many on low incomes. In the face of hunger, individuals and families manage food poverty through a range of strategies. Individual-oriented strategies include skipping meals and altering diets to reduce costs, often by reducing calorie intake or by eating cheaper foods. Other strategies see people getting help from friends, family and communities, or using free meal projects, soup kitchens, community care (home meals), institutional meal. Charitable food aid is typically only accessed after all other options have been exhausted – largely because they only offer short-term support and sustaining oneself through hand-outs is stigmatised (Purdam et al. 2015).

WEBLINK 1

<http://www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/coventry-news/coventrys-food-bank--largest-6507583>

WEBLINK 2

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/food-bank-visitors-in-coventry-compassion-has-disappeared-out-of-the-welfare-state-9263042.html>

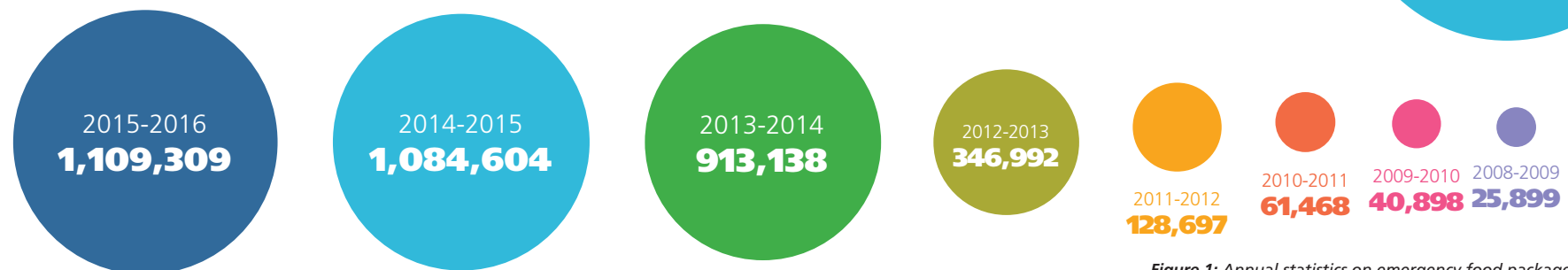


Figure 1: Annual statistics on emergency food packages distributed at Trussell Trust food banks since 2008. Source: Trussell Trust 2016

The Centre for Economic and Business Research (2013) found that low-income households spent about 25% of their income on food, compared to around 4% of income in more affluent households. Long-term dependence on nutrition-deficient diets contributes to reduced life expectancy and an increased likelihood of developing diet-related ill-health. Based on a report by the UK Faculty of Public Health there was a 19% annual increase in hospital admissions due to malnutrition in England and Wales in 2013 (**Weblinks 4 & 5**). The impacts of food poverty are also highly uneven, for example lone parents – 89% of whom are women – are twice as likely to live in poverty (Cooper et al. 2014).

Food poverty arises from myriad socio-economic circumstances including benefit delays, low income, high debt, unemployment, redundancy, rising food and fuel prices and changes to welfare benefits (e.g. Trussell Trust 2016, (**See Figure 2 below**). Diet and health are also influenced by factors such as the distance to fresh fruit and vegetable shops, ability to travel to these shops, access to food growing spaces, having the time to cook food, the ability of individuals to choose and prepare healthy foods, prior knowledge of what is healthy and what is unhealthy, and family arrangements (living alone or with family).

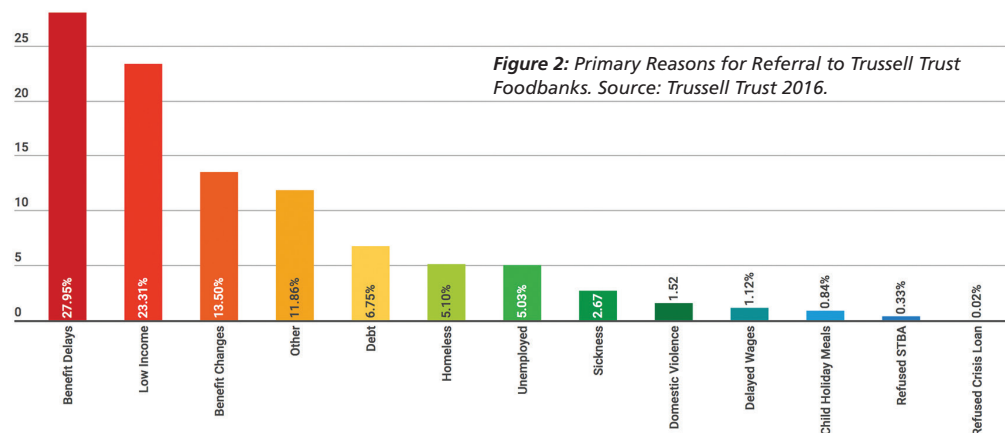


Figure 2: Primary Reasons for Referral to Trussell Trust Foodbanks. Source: Trussell Trust 2016.

WEBLINK 3

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-coventry-warwick-shire-16650492>

It is through the intersection of such issues and those relating to wider socio-economic inequalities across communities, groups or individuals based on class, race, gender, age, and disabilities, that food poverty is situated in the wider political and economic system.

Food poverty has long been a part of British society, however the recent rise of food poverty is related to several political and economic trends. The ongoing effects of the economic recession, government cutbacks to social welfare, low wages and rising living costs have contributed to a deepening crisis of poverty in the UK (Cooper and Dumbleton 2013). With several 'spikes' along the way, real food prices rose by almost 8% between 2007 and 2014 (Defra 2015) and real wages fell by 10.4% between 2007 and 2014 (TUC 2015). As in many other developed and emerging economies, the cost of healthy foods rose more quickly than the cost of unhealthy foods (Wiggins and Keats 2015). In this context, an increasing number of households in the UK find themselves in worsening conditions of food poverty – especially those who are most deprived in society (Trussell Trust 2016), including refugees, asylum seekers, the homeless, the disabled, children, the elderly, the unemployed, lone parents and those in low-wage positions and zero-hour contracts.

The rise of food poverty in the UK has also been directly linked to cuts in funding to social welfare and especially what have been referred to as austerity measures (Dowler and Lambie-Mumford 2015). Thus, national social welfare has become more difficult to access and more punitive, pushing many struggling families into crisis – unable to afford basic needs including putting food on the table. As the national government in the UK implements budget cuts, municipal and city councils are forced to reduce funding to community programmes and social care, sell public assets and withdraw public services meaning fewer public resources are available for neighbourhoods, communities and individuals. Where state supports are withdrawn it is often civil society – charities, the voluntary sector, families and individuals – who are expected to make up for the shortfall (Caplan 2015).

WEBLINK 4

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/aug/30/child-poverty-link-malnutrition-rickets>

WEBLINK 5

http://www.fph.org.uk/uploads/lbs_food_poverty.pdf

Food poverty is increasingly recognised as a problem, prompting responses on the part of government, charities, researchers and non-governmental organisations. Much of the immediate response has focused on short-term solutions to address emergency food provisioning or to focus on improving the skills and capacity of individuals in conditions of food poverty through advice on job seeking and accessing other social services (Caplan 2015). While these short-term stop-gaps and charitable programmes provide a vital service for those most in need, they can also obscure more difficult questions and responses that challenge the political, economic and social systems creating widespread conditions of food poverty and of poverty and inequality more generally.

An emerging response to this situation by food activists and researchers has been to focus less on the immediate and observable effects of a deteriorating food environment – as encapsulated in terms like ‘food poverty’ and ‘food insecurity’ – and to move towards a more critical analysis of the wider systemic problems. The term ‘food justice’, which has largely been developed in the USA demands a transformation of the current food system informed by principles of social justice, anti-racism, feminism and anti-oppression (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010) and reflects strategies rooted in collective action, grassroots organising and critical political analysis. While the food justice movement in the USA has deeper roots than in Europe (linked to the civil rights and environmental justice movements), there is a growing recognition of the need to more deeply interrogate and address the ways that food systems are embedded in wider systems and histories of inequality (e.g. Mama D; 2016; Mama D and Anderson 2016).

In early 2015, a team of researchers from the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience (CAWR) at Coventry University came together to learn how local community groups and the city council were responding to the growing incidence of food poverty in Coventry. This report documents the findings that have emerged and the main outcomes of the research:

- In the first section we describe the scoping exercise and the exploratory approach we adopted for the study.
- The following section describes the context of food poverty in Coventry.
- The next section examines the diverse range of initiatives/projects and our analysis of the responses to food poverty in Coventry.
- The main outcomes of the research are described next.
- This is followed by recommendations and a postscript on some of the emerging opportunities and networking initiatives in Coventry as key spaces to scale up the work on food justice in the city.



OUR APPROACH

This exploratory research started in 2015 with a review of research on poverty, health and food poverty in Coventry. Next, we carried out a preliminary mapping of food initiatives and organisations in Coventry. We then conducted eleven semi-structured interviews with people involved in eight community initiatives (**See Table, page 14**). We also conducted interviews with four representatives from the city council. We asked the interviewees about their initiatives, their motivations, the challenges or barriers they faced, emerging opportunities and future plans. We also asked participants to discuss the wider context and underlying causes of food poverty. The local initiatives ranged in size and scope and involved a range of strategies and activities.

Some had an explicit focus on marginalised communities in Coventry (e.g. refugees and migrants), while others did not target any specific beneficiary group. Our goal was to better understand the different approaches to addressing food poverty in Coventry and to support efforts to amplify and strengthen civil society led approaches. Early on, interviewees expressed a need for a more networked and coordinated approach to addressing food poverty in the city. We integrated this need into our project in the form of two goals for this report and for our ongoing work to:

- **Make visible and celebrate the wide range of food initiatives underway in Coventry**
- **Help connect up the initiatives, projects and organisations**

We used this exploratory research to work with community partners to set up the Coventry Food Justice Network (CFJN). The network is intended to provide a forum for relationship building between initiatives, to amplify the food justice work in the city, and to create a space for mutual learning and

collaboration. The CFJN is open to all those who are engaged or interested in food justice issues in Coventry. The CFJN webspace, www.coventryfoodjustice.uk includes information about Food Justice, upcoming events and a map of community food projects in Coventry.





Photos from Coventry Food Justice Walk - a process of co-learning and exploration of food justice initiatives in Coventry (October 2015)



Video 1: Coventry Food Justice walk video. <http://www.coventryfoodjustice.uk/food-justice-walk-videos/>

Each group presented their own work within the context of food justice while participants in the Coventry Food Justice Walk were prompted to discuss food justice in the city. The organisations visited were:

- **Coventry Men's Shed**
- **Rising Café**
- **Leigh Street Community Garden**
- **Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre**
- **EGO café**

In total, 40 people participated in the walk, which was roughly three miles. Food was provided at Coventry Men's Shed (ROSE Community Centre) and Rising Café and the walk ended with a meal at EGO café. This last stop also included a small exhibit of local initiatives and research projects relevant to the theme of the walk. The walk was photographed and filmed by participants, volunteers and a film maker (Ben Cook), which were then edited into short videos to highlight the food justice issues that emerge from the walk **(See Video link, left)**. Throughout this process, we worked as a team of community and university partners to reflect collectively on the event, food justice, and future plans for the CFJN.

We also held a workshop in May 2016 to establish a dialogue amongst CFJN members to reflect critically on what food justice means in Coventry and how it can be implemented in practice **(see page 12)**. This deliberative approach is part of the CFJN's core methodology; that is, to seek 'transformative change' together with a commitment 'to work along with, not merely report on, marginalised people and non-academics, respecting their knowledge practices and decentering the cultural authority of academic knowledge' (Cadieux and Slocum 2015: 2).

The flyer for the Coventry Food Justice Walk describing the route taken and containing information about each organisation is included in Appendix 3.

FOOD POVERTY IN COVENTRY

Coventry is a multicultural mid-sized British city with a population of roughly 323,000 people. It is a city with a proud industrial heritage and long history of community self-organisation through faith groups, trade unions and other voluntary initiatives to help people struggling with poverty and exclusion, support mutual-aid and to improve well-being in communities. The city has a high level of inequality – deprivation indices show that as of 2010, 18% of people in Coventry live in areas that are in the bottom 10% for deprivation in England and 31% live in areas that are in the 20% most deprived areas in England. A quarter (25.9%) of children in Coventry live in poverty (Public Health England 2014).

Studies suggest that inequality and food poverty have worsened further under recent austerity measures and welfare cuts (Dowler and Lambie-Mumford 2015; Trussel Trust 2016), with a disproportionate impact on vulnerable groups, which include lone parents, carers, Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, refugees and asylum seekers and the disabled. Furthermore, inequality in Coventry, and elsewhere, is highly gendered as women bear the brunt of poverty and austerity (Stephenson and Harrison 2011). According to recent estimates by Coventry City Council, approximately 20% of residents are living on the breadline (have no cash left after housing, fuel and food costs are spent) and an increasing number of families, children and individuals are facing food poverty on a daily basis.

Governments at a city level play an important role in shaping the food environment and thus in improving affordable access to healthy foods. They also provide vital funding to community food programmes. Coventry City Council has been committed to improving health and reducing health inequalities in local communities through its Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. However, the council does not have a specific unit that focuses on food poverty or the 'food environment' and, unlike a growing number of cities (**Weblink 6**), does not yet have a coordinated food plan for the city.



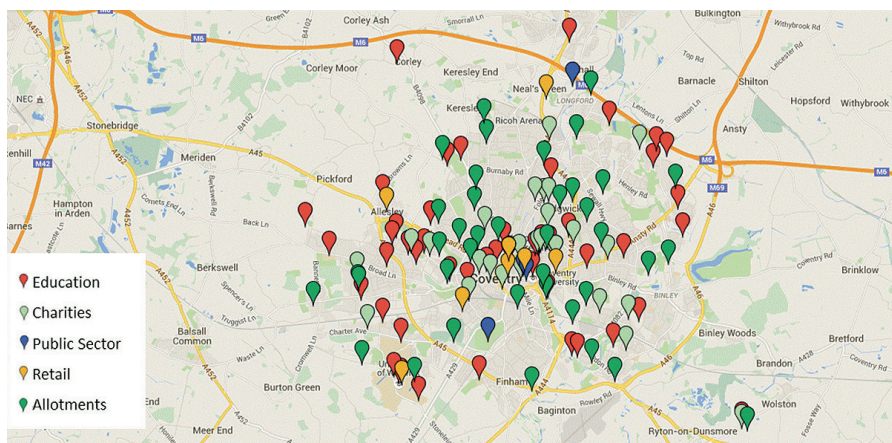
WEBLINK 6

<http://sustainablefoodcities.org/findacity>

For a list of cities in the UK that are at various stages of establishing urban food plans.

In 2014, the council initiated a working group called the 'Food Environment Group' to develop strategies to address food and health in the city, but due to changes in staff and cuts in funding, this group is now defunct. More recently, however, the city council has endorsed a new initiative called 'Feeding Coventry' and is beginning to consider strategies at a city-wide scale to address food poverty. Like most local councils, deep cuts in funding have hollowed out Coventry City Council more than halving its staff between 2010 and 2015 and forcing it to implement cuts in essential services in social care and community spaces such as libraries and community centres. As a result, civil society is increasingly asked to support the social welfare of those experiencing food poverty, through volunteering and acts of charity. Ironically, the capacity of civil society to respond to this devolution of responsibility from government to the voluntary sector is undermined by deep cuts to funding for community development, social care and community spaces. For example, the city council will make £3.8m in cuts in 2017/2018 across libraries, children's centres and youth services (Coventry City Council 2016).

Given the extent of food poverty, and erosion of Coventry City Council's capacity to address this situation in the short-term, the research team sought



Go to <http://www.coventryfoodjustice.uk/directory-coventry-food-justice-projects/> for more detailed information on the initiatives shown here. Please email the authors at coventryfoodjustice@gmail.com to suggest changes or additions to this map.

to explore how community organisations, institutions, associations and their participants as well as the remaining council services are responding to food poverty and what synergies could be developed between these initiatives. We identified many organisations working on projects in Coventry that respond to food poverty and that aim to improve Coventry's food environment (see the list of these organisations and initiatives in Appendix 1). This list is non-exhaustive and is meant to be a starting point to provide a sense of the variety and number of community food initiatives operating in the city.

We have identified five primary themes around which the initiatives can be categorised.

- **Educational initiatives such as schools and universities running food-related activities (usually growing food)**
- **Food-related charities running emergency food programmes or other activities**
- **The public sector, including the City Council and its various departments dealing with sustainability and health**
- **Retail businesses with an emphasis on sustainability or improving food access**
- **Public allotment gardens**

We created an interactive Google Map to show the initiatives listed, available at <http://www.coventryfoodjustice.uk/directory-coventry-food-justice-projects/> and will be updated as our understanding of food initiatives in Coventry evolves (*see left*).

The initiatives and organisations represented by the participants interviewed in Coventry are shown in the table on the following page.

INITIATIVE	FOOD RELATED OBJECTIVES	USERS/BENEFICIARIES
Bethel Allotment (Bethel Church)	To teach and share food growing skills. All produce is grown by volunteers and given to Bethel's foodbank distribution centre.	Local community and foodbank users
Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre (CRMC)	To provide emergency food, support access to foodbanks, and seek longer-term solutions for beneficiaries (e.g. advocating for rights of refugees and migrants) in order to promote integration and relieve hardship.	Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants
Claire Hartry (Brook Farm)	To sell healthy, affordable food and share cooking skills through various events.	General audience
Cook & Eat Well (Groundwork)	To develop healthy cooking skills and to build confidence in cooking from scratch on a budget.	Coventry residents
Coventry Men's Shed	To help men learn how to cook meals using fresh and affordable produce, to share information related to health and wellbeing and to provide an opportunity for peer support and learning.	Mainly middle-aged men recovering from substance misuse and mental health issues
Coventry Retail Market (managed by Coventry City Council)	To provide culturally diverse fresh vegetables and fruit and opportunities for small business owners, adapting to the evolving needs of market users and the local community.	General audience
FolesHillfields	A now defunct project based in Foleshill and Hillfields, aiming to bring communities together across social barriers, around music, culture and food.	Foleshill and Hillfields communities
Food Union (part of 'The Pod', a Coventry City Council mental health social brokerage and creative hub)	To build community through food growing, cooking and eating; to grow food at the Leigh Street Community Garden; to run collaborative cooking sessions (Revive Café 'Takeovers'); to promote city-wide mental health and community cohesion; to promote the Pod's community capacity building approach to mental health practice which focuses on positive risk taking, resilience and recovery.	General audience
Garden Organic	To garden and grow food organically, in order to improve people's physical and mental health.	General audience
Healthy Eating and Diet Activity Programme (HEDAP)	To encourage and support healthy eating through cooking classes and food demonstrations.	Mainly the Afro-Caribbean community
Urban Fruit Collective	To harvest fruit from gardens in the Earlsdon area of Coventry and then give it to local charitable groups.	Local community and local charitable groups

ANALYSIS EXAMINING FOOD POVERTY IN COVENTRY

Our findings suggest that there are five main problems related to food poverty being addressed by community food initiatives: hunger; food deskilling; poor access to healthy affordable food; isolation and community disconnection; and poverty (as root cause of food poverty). Our analysis also identifies how individuals and organisations are engaged in a range of different activities and organisational efforts to respond to these specific problems through the provision of emergency food aid, food reskilling, improvement in access to fresh affordable food, strengthening community connections and confronting poverty (**See Figure 3 below**). In the following section we look at each of these in turn.



Figure 3: Primary ways research participants framed problems related to food poverty and their responses

PROVIDING EMERGENCY FOOD AID AND SUPPORT

Most of our interviewees discussed the growing need to address hunger through the provisioning of emergency food aid, and the importance of foodbanks in filling this gap for the many struggling families and individuals in Coventry. The Coventry Central Foodbank was mentioned frequently and is the largest provider of food aid in the city. It coordinates the distribution of food parcels seven days a week through 17 local churches and community centres across the city. It is part of a nationwide network of foodbanks run by the Trussell Trust and ranks as one of UK's largest and busiest foodbanks and fed 29,292 people between April 2013 and March 2014 (Kibble 2014), although numbers have fallen by 18% over the past year (Personal Communication with Gavin Kibble, Foodbank manager at the time of writing). In addition to these centralised foodbanks, there are providers of food aid organised via independent charities and churches that provide food parcels, hot meals, soup kitchens, community care (home meals), as well as institutional meals such as free school meals for low-income children.

While some of these initiatives focus on getting food to the needy, others embed emergency food aid in a wider programme of aid. The Coventry Central Foodbank through its Restart Project works with Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau to provide advice services at seven foodbank centres in Coventry. The Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, one of the initiatives interviewed for this report/research, provides hot meals once a week as well as food parcels and foodbank vouchers. They also offer more sustained support for the people they work with, going beyond one-off food aid (**Quote 2**).

QUOTE 2

"It's trying to give six months of sustainable sustenance... We start the process off with some food parcels, then on to food vouchers, then on to destitution fund... so hopefully you can help people at least feed themselves"

Dimitri Kafizas, CRMC

Dimitry Kafizas, from the Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, described how asylum seekers are particularly at risk as those who have their asylum claims refused have no recourse to public funds and are forced to "live in limbo" because they are not allowed to work, and are unable to access state welfare. The inadequacy of support for asylum seekers exemplifies the inequality of a welfare system which can leave many people in the UK in dire circumstances. The

Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre also offers a wider suite of support for refugees and migrants where the emergency food aid work is offered alongside longer-term solutions for refugees and migrants, such as providing opportunities to build connections in Coventry both amongst other refugees and migrants and also with local residents. The centre also offers legal advice and engages in political advocacy for the rights of refugees. The Centre has a wider focus on providing social, economic and political support.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO HEALTHY, AFFORDABLE FOODS

Participants expressed concerns that food security is often impeded by inadequate access to retail outlets that provide fresh food at an affordable price, such as not being within walking distance. Sometimes this uneven geography of food retail units produces what are referred to as 'food deserts'. These often occur in more disadvantaged neighbourhoods where residents have little option but to shop at expensive convenience stores or pay for transport to neighbourhoods better serviced by food retailers. These food deserts have also been referred to as 'food swamps' because they are also often characterised by a disproportionate availability of unhealthy, highly processed, fast food and low-nutrient foods. There has been no published research on food deserts and food swamps in Coventry, however, the unevenness of the food environments

in different communities was identified as a problem in a participatory mapping project by Sustain in the Foleshill neighbourhood (Sustain 2001).

While there is often a focus on supermarkets as providers of fresh food, there are other important outlets for affordable food in the city such as local shops, low-cost greengrocers and public markets (Williams and Hubbard 2001) which are sometimes ignored in research on food deserts.

QUOTE 3

"As a generalisation food is much cheaper than in the supermarkets... whether it be Syrian refugees or the CEO of a company, we are here to adapt to and serve the needs of the community"

Brian Sexton, Coventry Retail Market

The Coventry Market is one of the oldest indoor multi-vendor markets in the UK. It is managed by the City Council and provides affordable food and goods that reflect the cultural diversity of Coventry (Quote 3).

The market provides a wide variety of local, fresh, ethnic, whole, bulk and street foods, providing Coventrians with access to fresh and affordable food in the city centre, without having to go to large supermarkets in the outskirts of the city. Whereas some public markets in other cities have become gentrified, the Coventry Retail Market focuses on serving the social, cultural and economically diverse communities in Coventry. (Quote 4).

QUOTE 4

"It's about trying to have food out on the streets that reflects the communities that we have in the city."

Brian Sexton, Coventry Retail Market





WEBLINK 7

<http://www.fiveacre-farm.org.uk/>

Another initiative is The Pod, which runs a community cafe in the city centre. It offers low cost healthy meals to the general public and is especially geared towards participants in The Pod's mental health recovery work. It offers a space not only to access fresh cooked food but to connect socially with others and to participate in the wider range of opportunities offered through The Pod.

Other interviewees mentioned the development of 'alternative food chains' such as community-supported agriculture, as potential ways to access healthy organic food. For example, there is a community supported farming initiative located outside Coventry called Five Acre Farm (**Weblink 7**) that provides a weekly basket of organic vegetables at a low price. More broadly, there has been growing interest in expanding these types of alternative forms of exchange and markets to support and scale up sustainable agriculture or agroecology. Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), like Five Acre, have been criticised for being primarily geared towards middle-class consumers (e.g. can be expensive, difficult to access without a car, and provides produce that is time consuming to clean) (Allen 2010). At the same time CSAs are diverse in their focus and composition, can provide an innovative alternative to corporate retail and are growing in number across Europe (Urgenci 2016). <http://urgenci.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Overview-of-Community-Supported-Agriculture-in-Europe.pdf>

QUOTE 5

"It would be really great if someone could set something up so people could get their produce easier here."

Claire Hartry,
Brooke Farm

In other areas, there has been a concerted effort to make food box schemes and alternative food networks more accessible (physically and financially), a sentiment reflected by Claire Hartry from the now closed Brook Farm. She suggested that a place like The Pod could be a suitable partner to make this connection if locally produced fresh food was sold through the community café, and it could also act as a drop-off site for vegetable boxes (**Quote 5**).

Another initiative, the Coventry Urban Fruit Collective, brings volunteers together to collect fruit from gardens in Earlsdon, which is then shared freely with local community groups including foodbanks. In this way, community gleaning and volunteer labour serves to make use of an existing but often wasted source of fresh fruit in the community. There is a great deal of underutilised fresh fruit on public and private land that often goes to waste so community gleaning initiatives can provide an innovative way of ensuring that these food resources in the city are channelled to feed communities.

Others discussed how food growing in allotments, balconies and home gardens as well as in community gardens can provide an important source of food for Coventrians, including those with low-incomes. Many of the initiatives we spoke with were working to increase the potential of "growing your own". For example, Garden Organic, a national charity located just outside of Coventry, worked with interested foodbank users to teach them how to start growing food at home, focusing on low-input and low-cost food growing strategies.

Another initiative, a community garden organised by The Pod's Food Union in Hillfields, primarily serves as a community learning and social space, rather than as a source of food for participants. At the same time, Chris Maughan, the organiser reported that some of the low-income participants used the garden as an important source of food, which reduced dependence on food aid. Urban agriculture can provide a supplemental source of food but may not be relevant for those who are busy and time-poor and has little relevance for those in conditions that require emergency food aid (**Quote 6**).

QUOTE 6

"I think it's easy to engage with people who are already interested in growing anyway, but I think for people that are really in a situation where food poverty is an issue, I'd say perhaps growing your own food is just another thing to worry about."

Kate Newman,
Garden Organic

RESKILLING AND CONNECTING COMMUNITIES

Many of the interviewees discussed the lack of food-related skills – cooking, budgeting, growing – as one issue that prevents people from eating a healthy, affordable diet. The deskilling of consumers has been associated with the trend towards easy availability, aggressive marketing and low price of processed nutrient-deficient convenience food in industrial food systems (Jaffe and Gertler 2006). A number of initiatives we spoke to focused on developing food-growing skills. For example, Garden Organic is the national charity for organic growing and operates several initiatives, such as a Master Gardener's programme, for the promotion of organic growing as a means for mental and physical health. Bethel Allotment and the Leigh Street Community Garden (run by The Pod) also focus on food growing as a means of gaining growing skills, building community and promoting general wellbeing. Bethel Allotment has been a foodbank distribution centre for many years but has endeavoured to share food growing skills and to strengthen connections between people through an allotment space that is offered to foodbank users, church-goers and the wider community **(Quote 7)**.

QUOTE 7

"We are a community allotment, a community gardening group, and we have an allotment here in Tile Hill, which is a double plot. All of our produce goes to the foodbank. We run open days and events for the local community here, as well as working party days for people. The other element of our project is that we run growing activities."

Beth Hall,
Bethel Allotment

The Pod, Cook & Eat Well, the Healthy Eating & Diet Activity Programme (HEDAP) and Coventry Men's Shed are initiatives that involve working with individuals, families and communities to build food preparation and planning skills in order to support better health and nutrition on a budget.

An important aspect of their strategy is to provide simple, time-efficient ways to cook using fresh, affordable ingredients and culturally appropriate recipes in a relaxed, fun and social environment. For these initiatives, increasing awareness about cooking healthy food can be accomplished through sharing knowledge and transferring skills – for example on budgeting, food purchasing and reducing food waste.

A community café run by The Pod offers affordable, healthy food and opportunities for Food Union participants to build links with the local community sharing food, and exchanging skills. Claire Hartry described the community 'cook offs' she ran, hosted by The Pod, as an opportunity to reskill in a fun environment. Claire worked with participants to develop and cook a healthy menu based on low-cost, fresh food which was then sold at the community café at low prices **(Quote 8)**.

Some participants in the reskilling programmes at The Pod have gone on to work in the food industry, using their newly developed food skills to support their livelihoods and improve their material condition.

While reskilling around growing, cooking and budgeting is an important area of work, others have argued that focusing on educating individuals often fails to recognise that the primary causes of food poverty are a lack of income and resources (transport, cooking facilities etc.) needed to access and prepare healthy food (Harrison 2014). Pat Dedoo, who ran the Healthy Eating & Diet Activity Programme (HEDAP), described how education and training of individuals can only be a part of a larger strategy to address food poverty, since it is the lack of money to spend on food that is the most significant problem for most individuals experiencing food poverty **(Quote 9)**.

QUOTE 8

"Service users from the Pod, and also friends of ours, and people that have heard about the Pod, come in, and teach everyone recipes that they like. It's all about knowledge sharing. Community food, cheap food, good food, healthy food, local food."

Claire Hartry,
'formerly' at the Pod

QUOTE 9

"You might teach people about healthy eating but if they don't have money to afford it, they are not going to use that knowledge."

Pat Dedoo, HEDAP

Many of the education initiatives viewed their food reskilling projects as an opportunity to simultaneously learn skills while building community and capacity through collective and social learning processes. One narrative that was clearly woven through all of the projects was the

importance of strengthening social connections

and networks as a way to increase community and individual resilience, improve wellbeing and – for some – to cope with food poverty (**Quote 10**).

One of the initiatives we interviewed, the Coventry Men's Shed (Video 2) uses cooking exchanges/lessons as an opportunity

to facilitate learning and community

building amongst men, many of whom have histories of substance misuse and are going through processes of mental health recovery. Cooking together allows the men to socialise and freely discuss their lives and builds confidence. It is organised by and for men, creating a space where men can listen to and support one another, reducing social isolation and providing a forum for men to work out health issues that are generally kept private (**Quote 11**).

QUOTE 11

"[We] educate men a little bit more about their health issues and to understand a little bit more about their body, rather than just holding it inside. It's a way they can come and talk with other like-minded guys and hopefully give 'em a better future."

Mark Gibbins,
Men's Shed

QUOTE 10

"I think what was important about what we did was that people were able to build relationships, and have conversations about food. 'I do this, how do you do it?'... Resilience is really important. How are you resilient in the teeth of poverty?"

Mark Hinton,
FolesHillfields



Video 2: <http://www.coventryfoodjustice.uk/food-justice-walk-videos/>

CHALLENGING AUSTERITY AND PRIVATISATION

Beyond addressing the immediate problems related to food poverty through practical solutions (food aid, reskilling, re-connecting communities), many of our interviewees discussed their work in the context of the wider political problems that are at the root of food poverty. Many were critical of the political system, which some argued normalises poverty and low-paying work. Indeed, the problem is not only a lack of jobs, but also the growing prevalence of low paying jobs and zero hour contracts in the context of increasing living costs. Interviewees described the need for reforms for 'living wages' and how individuals and households are becoming increasingly vulnerable in the context of welfare reforms which are most damaging for those in the most disadvantaged locations and positions (**Quote 12**).

QUOTE 12

"There are an increasing number of people who are at, or approaching, destitution in various ways. There are people who are occasionally unable to buy food through to stateless people who aren't allowed to work or have benefits.... I think the policies of this current government have been awful for the likes of people in neighbourhoods like Hillfields and are promising to be worse."

Mark Hinton, FolesHillfields

While many were proud of the important work that their organisations were carrying out, many were also aware of the limitations of charity-based responses, especially in the context of government cutbacks (**Quote 13**).

While government cutbacks are directly impacting welfare recipients, cuts in funds and public resources have also drastically changed the funding climate for community organisations working to fill the welfare gap left by the state. Indeed, almost all interviewees spoke about how recent reductions in funding have directly undermined their work.

Currently, the cuts to City Council budgets are also threatening the funding for community spaces like libraries and community centres, but also other publically supported institutions that contribute to the availability of food and community support in Coventry. The Coventry Retail Market, which is managed by the City Council, provides an important source of fresh affordable food and business opportunities for operators of food stalls. But, there is a risk that the market could become privatised which could shift its focus towards increasing profits of the market owner rather than serving the community. Organisations and networks like the National Market Traders Federation (<https://www.nmtf.co.uk/>) can provide important support and collective structures for communities to gain agency and work co-operatively to meet their needs (**Quote 14**).

QUOTE 13

"Main services are being cut but charities are still expected to deliver because the main services are no longer existing. Different ways have to be thought about how we tackle food poverty I think."

Dimitri Kafizas,
CRMC

Most initiatives prioritised local level initiatives for supporting immediate community need but also were compelled to link up with broader campaigns that address these wider issues (**Quote 15**).

In this context, Food Union was set up by the Pod to create opportunities for participants to engage in political discussions around food poverty and sustainability through talks, film screenings, and social media that connect to wider social movements.

QUOTE 14

"Eventually, with the way the councils are, there will likely be very few employees. At this point the market could easily become privately owned and we will have exactly the same scenario as every other retailer, where they would be looking at what makes profit. Not about what serves the community. Thankfully, there are other options for Coventry Market. It could remain managed by the council or it could become a vendor-managed enterprise."

Brian Sexton,
Coventry Retail Market

QUOTE 15

"I think the strongest thing would be to be able to campaign and try to make a change working together with large organisations and use their campaigning arms too, because no one has lots of money to throw at this and it's only going to work if you get people to care and to make an effort..."

Dimitri Kafizas, CRMC



STRENGTHENING CONNECTIONS AMONGST FOOD INITIATIVES IN COVENTRY



The organisations we spoke to described how there was no strong mechanism to connect those working on food issues in Coventry. They also said that they had little time to develop connections, largely because of the intensely focused work of each organisation and the difficulty in going beyond their own operational sphere **(Quote 16)**.

There was a sense that better networking and partnerships amongst food-related initiatives in Coventry could provide pragmatic opportunities to connect groups who don't typically work together because they focus on different constituents **(Quote 17)**.

QUOTE 16

"We have tried to toy with the idea of doing a collective, but it has been difficult to get it off the ground because everyone is quite happy doing what they do and yes, that does reach a lot of people. But maybe together they could reach more and you know it might be less resources used and used more effectively? I think to be able to work collectively might be difficult in the city because there are different places doing different things to feed people, and we do access or signpost or refer and vice-versa, but could we focus on working together city-wide?"

Dimitri Kafizas, CRMC

Thus, connecting together can provide opportunities to develop stronger communities, mutual understanding, partnerships and collaborative projects together. As Chris Maughan of The Pod (and project lead on Food Union) pointed out, more concerted efforts to connect initiatives could also provide opportunities for greater political clout in Coventry **(Quote 18)**.

This interest in connecting the food-related initiatives underway in Coventry was the impetus for the creation of the Coventry Food Justice Network (CFJN).

QUOTE 17

"The many organisations working on food and social justice issues in Coventry have a strong impetus and, if they join forces, they will be able to gather resources and have a stronger voice. Food can be an excellent binding element for different organisations because it is a basic need, a human right that connects people whatever their gender, race, origin or background. And as much as it has a unifying effect, food is also a vector to talk about culture, experiences and perceptions, recognising that we all have different stories to share. I think food can be a really important way of building community cohesion."

Mark Hinton, FolesHillfields

QUOTE 18

"There's so many projects that are great but are kind of isolated and part of a latent social movement of fragment, because they haven't been brought together. The solutions will come through strong civic organisational structures that we could use to then say: 'We want a food ethics council to be established here. We want healthy school meals for everyone. We want there to be provision in every school for kids to learn how to grow food.' Whatever it is, we could come together and, using our own collective bargaining power, as civil society organisations, we could really make a difference."

Chris Maughan,
The Pod/Food Union

TOWARDS FOOD JUSTICE: THE COVENTRY FOOD JUSTICE NETWORK

All the participants in our research discussed the need for a more networked and coordinated approach to addressing food poverty in the city. Our conversations revealed multiple layers of deprivation within which food poverty is experienced. We heard a strong emphasis on building community, strengthening networks between initiatives and on challenging broader political, economic and cultural systems. This collective and political focus suggested that food justice could become the organising or mobilising framework as the basis for a network to focus on issues that lie at the intersection of food poverty and social justice. As a result, the Coventry Food Justice Network began to take shape.

After a year of gathering and organising, we held an open meeting and workshop on the 3rd May 2016 to discuss the meaning of food justice in Coventry (**See right**). Twenty-three participants from a range of different groups and organisations, including many of those interviewed for this report, were divided into seven groups of three members each. Each group was given the task to discuss among themselves what they understood by ‘food justice’ and how it could be applied to their work. This process indicated that, while there were different perspectives on food justice (**See Appendix 2, page 38**), the term generally suggested:

- Focusing on underlying causes of hunger
- Connecting to other issues of marginalisation (e.g. class, gender, racism)
- Struggling for equal access to culturally appropriate food, including concern for the environment, access to knowledge, the right to grow food, and a human rights perspective
- Creating systemic change
- Addressing unequal power relations



Participants discussing the meaning of food justice



Beyond Coventry, the term 'food justice' has rapidly become an important term in both food activist and scholarly circles (Food Ethics Council 2010; Clendenning et al. 2016). While the term remains an emergent concept, particularly in terms of application (Cadieux and Slocum 2015; Bradley et al. 2016), it has been praised largely for its capacity to emphasise the importance of 'transformative' and 'collective action' (Cadieux and Slocum 2015) **(Quote 19)**.

Food Justice demands a critical intervention into the structural - or the political and economic – issues that cause food poverty and social injustice in food systems. From a food justice perspective, food is viewed as a human right, demanding a collective response to challenge injustice in the food system and to ensure that we are all properly nourished by food. Food

QUOTE 19

"Ensure that the benefits and risks of where, what and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed and eaten are shared fairly. Food justice represents a transformation of the current food system, including but not limited to eliminating disparities and inequities."

Gottlieb and Joshi,
2010

justice is therefore rooted in collective action, and moves beyond concerns over food poverty and food insecurity, which tends to focus on measuring the extent of food insecurity without addressing the underlying problems. Food justice demands political action to challenge inequality while simultaneously building just alternatives, and requires a critical, open and inclusive approach to community action and organising.

Participants discussing the meaning of food justice

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report explores how voluntary groups and community projects in Coventry are responding to food poverty and how we might articulate a future food system in the city based on the concept of food justice. The different approaches to addressing food poverty were not only aimed at those in conditions that require emergency food aid (e.g. foodbanks, soup kitchens) but also those who are in less severe conditions of food poverty, and those who can benefit from engaging in food-related activities, as a means of collective learning, social connection and to improve wellbeing.

Many of the projects we examined used food to draw people together in community spaces, to strengthen community and to reduce social isolation, for example by exchanging food skills and experiences. Other projects focused on increasing access to affordable fresh food, playing an important role in improving Coventry's food environment for all. The range of strategies followed can therefore be listed under five main categories of work: focusing on providing emergency food aid; strengthening community networks through food activities; food reskilling; improving access to fresh affordable food; and targeting poverty as root cause of food poverty (**See diagram on page 5**).

The initiatives that we engaged with expressed an appetite to work towards a more connected and coordinated network amongst community-food initiatives in Coventry. Working with the participants in this research project, we have developed the Coventry Food Justice Network, which aims to connect community food projects and to create new possibilities for joint activity. Although in its initial stages, we have developed a website, hosted planning meetings, hosted the Coventry Food Justice Walk and created a Google map of community food initiatives in Coventry.



Similar networks, emerging from other cities, have provided important opportunities to develop strategic approaches that link civil society up with municipal governments to develop programmes, inform planning and to coordinate efforts to confront poverty and support sustainable diets. We believe that these networks also provide spaces of learning and innovation amongst grassroots organisations and an opportunity to develop pragmatic approaches to addressing food poverty.

A person wearing a pink hoodie and a backpack is bent over, working in a garden. They are surrounded by tall corn plants and other greenery. In the background, there is a brick wall and a wooden fence. A blue circular callout box is overlaid on the image, containing text about local authorities and food poverty. A green circular callout box is also overlaid, containing a weblink.

Local authorities are increasingly engaging with food poverty and food system sustainability by working with stakeholders in cities to develop food strategies (e.g. Bristol and London are working on zero hunger and food poverty strategies). The national Sustainable Food Cities project has been established to support this work to help cities develop plans to address, “food poverty, diet related ill health and access to affordable healthy food.

WEBLINK 8

<http://sustainablefoodcities.org/keyissues/tacklingfoodpovertyandaccesstohealthyfood>

Based on this research, we propose the following recommendations and areas for future collective action and policy change:

- **Coventry should develop a food strategy and food plan for the city** to support a multi-actor coordinated approach to addressing food poverty, food justice and food system sustainability. Currently the city of Coventry does not have a food strategy (**Weblink 8**). A coordinated city-wide approach would consider how to develop more just and sustainable food systems at the intersection of multiple departments of government, civil society and the private sector based on the needs and priorities of citizens. Developing a food strategy for the city would best be accomplished over an extended period of multi-actor collaboration based on the priorities and participation of Coventry's diverse constituents. A recent initiative by the City Council called Feeding Coventry has been instigated to address food poverty at a city level, which may form an entry point for a longer-term food strategy for Coventry. This food strategy should be linked to wider strategies to reduce poverty and address inequality more generally, at both a city and a national level.
- **Coventry City Council should develop a long-term strategy to increase urban agriculture in the city**, carefully planning to increase the relevance to those on low-incomes or who otherwise may have difficulty physically and financially accessing these resources (e.g. the elderly, people with disabilities).
- Food poverty and food justice initiatives, such as Feeding Coventry, the Coventry Food Justice Network or **any city-wide food plan, should involve the active participation of the wide diversity of Coventry residents** to ensure these initiatives reflect the multiple needs and visions for Coventry's food environment. This will require care to ensure the participation of women, refugees, youth, the elderly, the disabled and the wide range of ethnic communities represented in the city, who are often marginalised and generally have a difficulty in fully participating in consultation processes.

- Initiatives aimed at addressing food poverty should include a **focus on the structural problems in the economic and political system that form the root causes of poverty**. There is a need for dialogue and efforts to orientate food poverty workers to these root causes, and to mobilise to pursue political solutions that build long-term material security for impoverished people. This will require focusing on how food poverty stems from poor wages, government cutbacks, sanctions against welfare users and the normalisation of hunger in the UK.
- **Stronger links** should be developed between strategies for emergency food aid provisioning and longer-term projects to improve the food environment and to pursue food justice (urban agroecology, food co-ops, city-wide food policy, etc.).
- There should be a focus on **building stronger community networks** to increase the capacity of citizens to develop joint projects and to engage in dialogue amongst diverse citizens on issues related to food justice. The Coventry Food Justice Network is one initiative that can be expanded to facilitate this dialogue and networking.

- Conduct **more research** to understand the underlying causes of food poverty, the uneven distribution of food poverty (e.g. differentiated by class or by geography – food deserts/swamps), the efficacy of different solutions being proposed, and the opportunities to develop more just and sustainable food systems.

While there is clearly a growing condition of food poverty in the UK, it can also be said that individuals and groups in civil society are responding to these challenges through acts of charity and of mutual aid. Importantly, communities are increasingly developing a critical consciousness of the larger problems that underpin food poverty and are imagining and experimenting with projects that work towards building new sustainable futures. Despite the continued challenge of government cutbacks, there are promising community-based initiatives and new possibilities for coordinated action emerging in Coventry, and beyond, that can provide new spaces and levers for supporting long-term responses to food poverty in the city. These networks promise to form the basis for new partnerships, coordinated action at a city level and to amplify the voices of those affected by food poverty as well as to connect to wider initiatives to build a more just and sustainable food system and society.



POSTSCRIPT WHERE TO FROM HERE?

The Coventry Food Justice Network and related projects and partners are working to bring new people and conversations to the table to work towards a more just and sustainable food system. At the time of completing this report, this work has also expanded to include a number of additional initiatives that aim to address food poverty and food justice in Coventry and beyond.

If you would like to get involved in these or any other related activities of the Coventry Food Justice Network please email: coventryfoodjustice@gmail.com

COVENTRY FOOD JUSTICE NETWORK

At the open meeting workshop (held in May 2016, detailed above), participants described different projects and initiatives that the Coventry Food Justice Network could take forward in the short- and long-term. These included:

- **A joint event at the Positive Images Festival (June 2016)**
- **Research projects with Law Students at the University of Warwick**
- **Regular food justice conversations/events in Coventry hosted by grassroots organisations and supported by the network.**
- **An intercultural exchange project focusing on food justice**
- **Funding partnerships and joint bids**
- **Participating in the Feeding Coventry Initiative**
- **Participatory Video Project on Food Justice**

FEEDING COVENTRY INITIATIVE

Feeding Coventry is one of the pilot initiatives of the nationwide Feeding Britain initiative (**Weblink 9**), and in Coventry it involves a multi-actor partnership initiated in January 2016 by the city council and involving government, academic and NGO partners. Members of the CFJN have played a role in its sub-group 4: 'long-term approaches to food security, food access and resilience'. Through our participation in this group and in the steering Committee we have developed further links with local organisations that have done important work in Coventry around food poverty, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and the Trussell Trust. The sub-group aims to coordinate research, to inform policies and to encourage and enable community engagement in building and implementing long-term, just and sustainable approaches to food.

WEBLINK 9

<https://feedingbritain.com/>

Thanks to a follow-up grant to the research from Coventry University, we have been able to dedicate time to explore the demands, needs and responses from the institutional and policy arena in Coventry, and to have a number of ad hoc conversations with council directorate's chairs. Part of this work has included the development of a critical debate on some of the tools that have recently been gaining interest in the policy arena, such as the 'social supermarket' (**Weblink 10**).

Social supermarkets sell a limited selection of food products at a price usually 50% to 70% lower than the regular market. They are aimed at low income consumers, and access to the stores is controlled based on income. Products are usually donated by companies because they are un-sellable for various reasons (e.g. close to the expiration date, in the wrong packaging) but still consumable.

WEBLINK 10

<http://socialsupermarkets.org/>

We have engaged a number of students as paid interns to carry out more research in Coventry (i.e. preliminary research on food deserts and the potential to expand fruit production on public land). In July 2016 we have held a workshop at the council house, in which 35 people including farmers, third sector organisations, managers of social housing estates, sustainability champions, council officers and councillors, among others, started to discuss what a city-wide policy for food poverty and sustainable food provision should look like. This workshop has generated interest for Coventry to join the Sustainable Food Cities Network.

For example a number of council-funded pilot initiatives to address children food poverty during school holidays

The time seems right to explore new avenues for policy and action. Members of Coventry City Council are very receptive and are investing time in facilitating dialogue among actors as well as funding and coordinating grassroots action. Foodbanks and other actors which have been delivering emergency food in the past years have started to look beyond temporary measures, and to explore options for longer-term approaches.

We have also started to explore more closely food waste, food growing and food procurement policies, in ways that will not only impact on the injustice of food waste and food access, but will also reshape the local economy and tackle some of the structural problems (i.e. lack of, or underpaid employment) that generate poverty in the first place.

These efforts have led to a number of ideas and initiatives planned for the next months. These include, for example:

- **A one-day seminar on food waste, at the School of Law, University of Warwick**
- **Three community workshops on urban agroecology and food commons**

- **Research project on Austerity Retail (led by Coventry University, funded by the British Academy/Leverhulme Trust)**
- **Partnership for Coventry conference on the 22nd of November 2016 on sustainable food provisions and strategies to tackle food poverty beyond food banks.**
- **Regular food justice conversations and events**

OUR FOOD: PARTICIPATORY VIDEO FOR FOOD JUSTICE IN THE UK



<http://www.peoplesknowledge.org/projects/food-justice/>



Another spin-off project is a participatory video project called Our Food funded by the British Academy and Leverhulme Trust. We are working with communities in central London (Harrow), the North (Gateshead) and the Midlands (Coventry) of the UK as the basis for a participatory video project. Our Food is using food as a lens to explore social justice issues in the UK. Food insecurity and diet-related health problems are increasing in the UK, as they are elsewhere. It seems clear that these problems stem from wider injustices and deepening inequality in a brutal age of austerity. Yet, mainstream institutions, politicians, professionals and activists often perpetuate a range of 'food myths' about the causes and the best solutions to the problems with our food system. These food myths shift attention away from structural political problems towards blaming individuals for food related problems like food poverty. These myths also encourage people to think about short-term sticking plaster solutions by encouraging individual behavioural change and food charity, rather than confronting structural political and cultural issues

that are at the root of food related injustices. It is almost always expert authorities and voices who have a say in defining the problem and proposing the solution. In contrast this project is about bringing marginalised people together to analyse, voice and act on food injustices in collective and political ways.

This overview of ongoing initiatives is just a snapshot in time, and we anticipate this work to take us in new directions, making connections to community initiatives and social movements working on social justice issues in a range of different contexts. In this spirit, we invite you to connect with us and to imagine new strategies to work together towards a more just and sustainable society.



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APPENDIX 1

A LIST OF FOOD RELATED PROJECTS IN COVENTRY (2016)

CATEGORY	ORGANISATION (INITIATIVE)	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA	YEAR PROJECT STARTED
Charity	Carriers of Hope Hillfields Evangelical Baptist Church, Waterloo Street, Coventry CV1 5JS	Charity supporting local people (mainly asylum seekers, refugees or recently arrived Eastern European migrants), providing food, basic household items, and general support.	Website Facebook	-
Charity	Children's Food Trust (Let's get cooking / Lads and Dads) The Children's Food Trust, 3rd Floor, East Parade, Sheffield S1 2ET	Cooking classes for dads and their sons in Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Funding from People's Health Trust.	Website	-
Charity	Coventry Citizens Advice Bureau Kirby House, Little Park Street Coventry CV1 2JZ	Advisory service. Debt and benefits-related enquiries. Foodbank Debt Enquiry Form.	Website	1940
Charity	Coventry City Mission Deedmore Christian Centre, Deedmore Road, Coventry CV2 2AA	Christian charity. Foodbank distribution centre.	Website Twitter	1983
Charity	Coventry Foodbank Mosaic Church, Sparkbrook Street, Hillfields, Coventry CV1 5LB	Cross denominational partnership of churches in Coventry distributing from 17 distribution points across the city. Member of The Trussell Trust.	Website Facebook	-
Charity	Coventry Jesus Centre 7 Lamb Street, Coventry, CV1 4AE	Café working with people in substance misuse recovery. Foodbank distribution centre.	Website	2002
Charity	Coventry Men's Shed Rose Community Centre, Hope Street, Spon End, Coventry CV1 3LH	Organisation working with men in substance abuse and gambling recovery promoting cooking from scratch and healthy food.	Website	2014

CATEGORY	ORGANISATION (INITIATIVE)	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA	YEAR PROJECT STARTED
Charity	Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre 15 Bishop St, Coventry CV1 1HU	Organisation working with migrants and refugees. Emergency food provision. Food also used as a focal point for cultural celebration and integration.	Website	2005
Charity	Coventry Roma Project Broad Street Meeting Hall, 126 Broad Street CV6 5BG	Support (incl. food distribution) to Roma people.	Website	2010 Twitter
Charity	Garden Organic (Master Gardener / Master Composter / Big Dig Cities) Ryton Gardens, Wolston Lane, Coventry	Volunteering programme to support new and existing community growing spaces in Coventry.	Website Twitter	2010?
Charity	Garden Organic (Sowing New Seeds) Ryton Gardens, Wolston Lane, Coventry	Initiative designed to support allotment holders, schools and community groups in the Midlands to grow exotic crops not traditionally grown in the UK.	Website	-
Charity	Groundwork (Cook and Eat Well) 101 Lockhurst Lane, Coventry, West Midlands CV6 5SF	Organisation promoting cooking from scratch healthy food. Includes Food Dudes initiative.	Website	-
Charity	Gurdwara Guru Nanak Parkash	Sikh organisation proving food to all.	-	-
Charity	Hope Centre (Foodbank) Mosaic Church, Sparkbrook Street Hillfields, Coventry CV1 5LB	Christian charity. Foodbank distribution centre.	Website Facebook	-
Charity	Saint Peter's Centre (Growing plot) Charles Street, Coventry CV1 5NP	Charity with raised beds to promote community cohesion and growing your own food, especially to refugees.	Website	2014
Charity	Salvation Army (Anesis) Hillfields, Coventry and Upper Well Street, Coventry, CV1 4AG	Soup kitchen	Facebook	-

CATEGORY	ORGANISATION (INITIATIVE)	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA	YEAR PROJECT STARTED
Charity	Urban Fruit Collective (formerly Abundance) Earlsdon, Coventry	Harvest share project which collects fruit in the Earlsdon area of Coventry. Volunteers gather to harvest fruit from local gardens. The fruit is then shared freely with the community and local charitable groups.	Website	-
Charity	WATCH (Hillz FM) Hillfields, Coventry	Community-led organisation that seeks to secure, co-ordinate and manage resources for the social, economic and environmental improvement of the area. Also manages Hillz FM, a community radio station.	Website Twitter	2005
Charity	YMCA (Growing Communities)	Community garden project managed by Coventry and Warwickshire YMCA to provide young people with the opportunity to learn new skills and gain experience.	Website Facebook	-
Education	Coventry University (Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience) CAWR, Ryton Gardens, Wolston Lane Coventry CV8 3LG	Research centre specialising in transdisciplinary research aimed at understanding and developing resilient food and water systems internationally.	Website Facebook	2010?
Education	University of Warwick (Food GRP) Warwick Crop Centre, University of Warwick, Wellesbourne, CV35 9EF	Food and sustainability research group.	Website Twitter	2010?
Education	University of Warwick (RAWKUS) RAWKUS, Medsid, Students' Union, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL	Food waste initiative which gathers food from student accomodations at the end of each term.	Website	2014
Education	Workers Education Association (Grow Your English)	Programme combining food growing and language learning, especially with asylum seekers and refugees.	-	-
Food growing	5 Acre Farm 5 Acre Community Farm, C/o Ryton Gdns, Wolston Lane, Coventry CV8 3LG	Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Scheme. Organic vegetable farm.	Website Facebook	2012
Food growing	Bethel Church (Get Growing It Bethel Allotment) Spon End, Coventry CV1 3HB	Allotment created by a Master Gardener and Master Composter. Links also with Foodbank.	Facebook	-

CATEGORY	ORGANISATION (INITIATIVE)	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA	YEAR PROJECT STARTED
Food growing	Coventry City Council (London Road Allotment)	Allotment with 320 plots. Also main point of contact for all allotments in Coventry.	-	-
Food Growing	Food Union/Motorvate UK (Leigh Street Community Garden) Leigh Street, Coventry CV1 5HG	Community Garden run by Food Union and the Pod (up until 2016) now managed by Motorvate UK.	-	2015
Food Growing	Team Springboard (Community Garden, Stoke Aldermore)	Community garden run by Team Springboard	-	-
Food Growing	The Pod/Food Union (Beake Avenue Community Allotments) Beake Avenue, CV6 2HR	Community Garden run by Food Union and the Pod	Facebook	2016
Food growing	University of Warwick (Allotment Society) Allotment Society, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL	Campus allotment, managed by volunteer students and staff. The allotment is fully organic and grows a variety of field and protected fruit, veg and flowers.	Website Facebook	2011
Food Growing	Coventry University Edible Garden	Edible garden managed by Coventry University Estates Department	-	2010
Food Growing	The Pod/Food Union (Cultivate CV5) Sherbourne Valley Allotments, CV5 8DH	Community Garden run by Food Union and the Pod	Facebook	2016
Food retail	University of Warwick (Food Co-op) Food Co-operative, Students Union, University of Warwick, Coventry, CV4 7AL	Student-run, non-profit co-operative selling healthy, affordable, organic, and fairly traded produce.	Website Facebook	2013
Public Sector	Coventry City Council (Climate Change and Sustainability Team) Sustainable Communities & Climate Change Team, City Services and Development Directorate, Coventry City Council, Floor 1, Civic Centre 4, Much Park Street, Coventry CV1 2PY	Team responsible for the planning of climate change adaptation and the move towards a low carbon future.	Webpage	

CATEGORY	ORGANISATION (INITIATIVE)	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA	YEAR PROJECT STARTED
Public Sector	Coventry City Council (Food Union) 1 Lamb St, Coventry, Coventry CV1 4AE	Community food project managed by The Pod. It has a community café and two food growing spaces.	Blog Facebook	2014
Public Sector	Coventry City Council (Public Health) Coventry City Council, Council House Reception, Earl Street, Coventry CV1 5RR	City council department dealing with a wide variety of issues such as health inequalities, sexual health, physical activity and infectious diseases.	Webpage	-
Public Sector	Coventry City Council (The Pod) The Pod, 1a Lamb Street, Coventry CV1 4AE	City-wide community and creative hub. A Coventry City Council resource for people that are striving to improve their mental health.	Website Facebook	-
Retail	Coventry City Council (Coventry Retail Market) Queen Victoria Road, Coventry CV1 3HT	Food market in the centre of town, open Monday-Saturday.	Website Facebook	1958
Retail	Down to Earth	Organic and fair trade wholefoods, locally grown fruit and veg, meat and fish, home care and body care products.	Website	-
Retail	FarGo Village Far Gosford Street, Coventry CV1 5ED	Independent shopping and creative arts in Coventry	Website Twitter	2014?
Retail	Farmers Fayre (Farmers Fayre Farm & Coffee Shop Stoneleigh / Leekes) National Agricultural Centre, Kenilworth CV8 2LZ	Family-run fine meat and local produce specialist.	Website Twitter	-
Retail	The Good Honest Food Company 1c Gardenia Drive Allesley Coventry	Independent cafe in Allesley Village using locally sourced, locally produced and fair trade ingredients.	Website Facebook	-
Retail	Turnips	An independent Green Grocer based in Binley Woods	-	-

APPENDIX 2 SUMMARY COMMENTS FROM SMALL GROUP WORK AT COVENTRY FOOD JUSTICE NETWORK OPEN MEETING (6th May 2016)

Groups were asked to briefly summarise their discussions, and key points were written down. They were as follows:

GROUP 1

- Food justice is essentially about the right to food, about having access to food that is nutritious and culturally appropriate.
- It is also about addressing underlying causes behind the problems with access to food.
- An important dimension of food injustice is that it is connected to other aspects of marginalisation arising from divisions of class, gender, racism and disability.
- Food justice requires moving away from individual responsibility to a collective way of thinking about food.

GROUP 2

- Working on food justice means using food as a relatively simple entry point to much more complex issues of health, wellbeing, poverty, employment, the environment, etc..
- Food justice is about exploring the marginalisation arising out of power relations.

GROUP 3

- Food justice is about flexibility in making choices about food that you want to have, it is about culture and taste, what you feel comfortable with.
- Food justice is also about skills and access to knowledge.
- Food justice means freedom of choice when it comes to deciding what to buy and from where.
- Food justice concerns the availability of food in terms of being affordable and having easy access is important.
- Food justice is also about biodiversity – looking at the connections between what we grow and how that impacts nature and environment.
- Food injustice also emerges from energy poverty as it affects food consumption.

GROUP 4

- There are many food projects and food policies around but they do not reach the right people.
- Social inclusion of marginalised communities is important to food justice.
- Food justice is about looking at the barriers to making food choices.

- Food justice should make available healthy, allergen-free food for all.
- An important consideration for food justice is the environmental costs incurred by the way we grow our food and how that affects the land, water and other natural resources we depend on.

GROUP 5

- An important dimension of food justice relates to knowledge – knowledge about food, cooking skills, the benefits from different foods and about what to eat and how to cook/eat. A big question which emerges is why do we lack this knowledge? Is it because of lack of time?
- Food justice is also mainly about distribution issues – there is a lot of food around while at the same time people are going hungry.

GROUP 6

- Food justice is a complex issue – the different dimensions are interconnected as addressed by the other groups (described above).
- In order to achieve food justice, changes are required across the entire system – production, distribution and consumption of food.
- The right to grow food is an important dimension of food justice, which is often neglected and overlooked.

GROUP 7

- Food justice requires achieving a balance between the different issues raised by the groups (as described above).
- An important point concerns the lack of skills or lack of equipment to cook food as this affects health and wellbeing.
- Being able to have nutritious food is critical to achieving food justice.



APPENDIX 3 COVENTRY FOOD JUSTICE WALK FLYER

Coventry Food Justice Network

What is Food Justice?

Food Justice involves projects that work on social justice and food. It considers issues of race, class, gender and culture to ensure the fair share of the benefits and risks of how food is grown, processed, distributed, accessed & eaten.

About the Network...

The Coventry Food Justice (CFJ) Network is a group of individuals, projects and organisations in the local community who are engaged in tackling the problems in our food, like the lack of access to healthy food and the negative impact food can have on our planet.

About the Walk...

The aim of the CFJ Walk is to visit food-related projects that engage in social justice issues in Coventry. We want to learn from each other and build good networks, whilst sharing new experiences. This is a 3 miles walk with 5 stops.

Free walk but registration needed at

www.coventryfoodjustice.uk

This walk is organised by Coventry University's Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience in partnership with community partners.

In the future...

We plan to organize more walks and other events, a web-space, and videos that will help us connect and support each other.

Come and join the CFJ Network!



CFJ Walk stops

A – Coventry Men's Shed, The ROSE Community Centre, Hope Street, Spon End, CV1 3LH

B – Rising Café, Coventry Cathedral, Priory Street, CV1 5FB

C – Leigh Street Community Garden, Leigh Street, Hillfields, CV1 5HG

D – Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, 15 Bishop Street, CV1 1HU

E – Ego, Silver Street, CV1 1JN

Filming

We are planning to make a film about the walk and we'd like you to contribute and film with cameras provided or with your own devices. Join us too for the joint editing of the film!

Please be aware that by taking part in the walk you allow your image to be used in the film.

Join the Network!

Visit our website www.coventryfoodjustice.uk

Send us an email coventryfoodjustice@gmail.com

Join our Facebook Group [Coventry Food Justice Network](https://www.facebook.com/CoventryFoodJusticeNetwork)

Coventry Food Justice Walk

7 October 2015 | 10:30-13:30



Register at www.coventryfoodjustice.uk



