

# Research into faith-based foodbanks: key findings

## *Bristol NW Foodbank and North Bristol Foodbank*

The research has 3 questions which are shown below with the key findings

- Stephanie volunteered for 4 weeks at 6 of the 7 outlets
- She interviewed 37 clients, 39 volunteers and the 3 managers across the foodbanks

This research has considered how the foodbanks are about more than food:

1. The foodbanks can increase the abilities of volunteers and clients
2. The atmosphere at the foodbanks is welcoming, caring and aims to be non-judgemental to treat clients as individuals. The atmosphere is founded around a Christian ethos.

### How are the foodbanks characterised?

All of the volunteers that I asked felt they benefited from volunteering, mainly through gaining perspective and satisfaction from helping others.

Many of the volunteers were motivated to be involved at the foodbanks by their Christian faith.

Ways that the abilities of clients increased:

- Have food to eat (without resorting to crime)
- Improved knowledge to deal with issues
- Improved mood

It is not known from this study if a long-term improvement was made in the clients' lives



A similar atmosphere was found across the foodbank outlets

- The atmospheres changed with the actions and reactions of clients and volunteers
- The dominant atmosphere is described above by the words of clients and volunteers. The larger the word, the more times it was said

## What is the role of Christian faith in the foodbanks?

Faith motivated the managers to establish the foodbanks and many of the volunteers to be involved. However, people of all or no faith were welcome at the foodbanks.

*We are doing what the Lord tells us, to feed the hungry. It's part of who we are and what we believe.* (Volunteer)

The teachings of Jesus on serving people unconditionally were important for some at the foodbanks, as they aspired to do the same and reflect the eternal Kingdom of God on earth.

The Christian ethos at the foodbanks was not always explicit but was shown through the welcoming, caring, and non-judgemental atmosphere.

*Christian people show a lot of love, sprinkle happiness, joy, love... Many times [I've] come here on the verge of tears and left with a smile on my face.* (Client)

The Christian ethos was more explicit when prayer was offered to clients, but it was important to the foodbanks this was optional and 'not pushed down people's throats'.

## Do the foodbanks show an overlap between faith & secularism?

There is a clear overlap between faith and secularism at the foodbanks:

- Clients and volunteers were both Christians and of other/no faith
- Some volunteers were motivated by faith
- Overall the foodbanks aimed to give food to people in crisis

*It does get people talking and meet people rather than being shut behind doors.* (Client)

*Finally [names denominations]... they're not arguing with each other!... we're all doing the same job, finally! I imagine Jesus is up there saying "doh!"* (Volunteer)

*When you're at your lowest point you can come here, be treated as a human. And leave with food happy.* (Client)

Many volunteers and clients agreed the foodbanks bring people together of different beliefs helping people to gain greater understanding of each other.

*If they [clients] walk out through that door [still] broken we haven't done our job.* (Volunteer)

This was seen most between different Christians denominations, and between Christians and people of no belief.

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