



NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2022

CHATTING TO THE GOVERNMENT

As I sit writing this first Pathfinders Newsletter, I am very aware of the Chancellor's recent 'mini budget' and the devastating effect it is will have on so many in our communities across the country. Shortly after it was delivered, Hannah (the Project Manager) and I (Iain, the Project Officer) took part in a Zoom call with the Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions, Chloe Smith, who is also the MP for Norwich North. She had been booked to come and visit us at the warehouse on Ivy Road but, understandably, was in Parliament for the announcement.

She listened carefully as Hannah explained how we work and the assistance we are able to give people in addition to food. I then outlined the aim of the Pathfinders Project and explained the different ways in which we are seeking to intervene to stop people needing us in the first place. The CEO of the Trussell Trust, Emma Revie, was also on the call and gave Chloe a run down of the ways in which national trends are moving and particular areas of concern. The Secretary of State was in accord with much of what we said, but the fundamental issues regarding benefit levels and the speed at which people are able to access help were left unaddressed. The government is determined that the best way to help those in destitution is to push them back into work or, if they are already in work, to take better paid jobs. It does not address those who cannot work or increase their working hours, or those who do not have the skills to get better jobs. As a charity we must ensure that we challenge policy not party and we urge those who make policy to address these issues.

There is no doubt that, as the cost of living rises and inflation rates follow, there are going to more people than ever needing our help over the winter months.

SWIMMING UPSTREAM

The Pathfinder Project is, of course, about finding ways to end the need for food banks and we have achieved some success in deploying our colleagues from Citizens Advice, Shelter and CAP to distribution centres to chat to clients and try to help them with the difficulties they face. We have also started to introduce the idea of making the same advice available in schools and community hubs such as church coffee mornings. St Catherine's church on Milecross Road is our first Pathfinder Church and colleagues have been able to help a number of people with benefit checks and debt advice. We have also visited a local primary school where parents have been referred to us as being in need of guidance.

By moving 'upstream' from the distribution centres, we are trying to catch people before it is too late. It is difficult to quantify success in such ventures, but anecdotal evidence from our advice workers is that it is working and they are able to help guide people away from becoming destitute and needing the food bank.

"I just wanted to say a very big Thank You for your support a couple of weeks ago. I was so blessed with the items which have helped me out in the short term and I am now back on track." (Recent client.)

OPEN MORNING

On Saturday 3rd September we held an Open Morning at the Norwich Foodbank Warehouse on Ivy Road. It was part of a national day of action organised by the Trussell Trust and an occasion to welcome anybody who wished to visit. We especially invited members of the City Council, local District Councils and our local MPs. Our intention was to explain the work that we do and to give them a glimpse of the collection, storing, packing and distribution of food.

We were very pleased to welcome Carla Denyer, co-Leader of the Green Party, who happened to be in Norwich to meet Green Party colleagues and supporters. She was very supportive of the work that we are doing and asked a number of questions. We later learned that she had been inspired by her visit to include some of what she had learned in her conference speech.

One of our donors wrote later: *'I was so pleased to have met you all at the Open Morning recently. Such an organisation - I was really impressed with the depth of thought put into the food donations re: diets etc. Everything looked so organised and another visitor was being shown how this happens - attention to detail!'*

WHAT IS HAPPENING ON THE CAMPAIGN FRONT?

The Trussell Trust is currently asking the government for a stronger, more fairly balanced social security system. In May a cost of living support package was given out, but it was nowhere near enough to ensure that people already struggling would be able to survive through the winter months. Fuel prices have rocketed, food prices have risen and people are having to make serious decisions as to whether they eat or heat.

I recently spoke to a young mother who had saved all year knowing that her child starting at senior school would be expensive in terms of new uniform and equipment. She had managed to save the money that she needed only to be sent a letter three days before the beginning of term asking her for a £90 "contribution" towards the cost of art materials, minibuss travel and other "sundry expenses." She was crying tears of purest frustration that, having anticipated the forthcoming expense and having managed to save for it, she would still have to go into school and humiliate herself by explaining that she could not afford to pay that "contribution."

Nobody should have their dignity stripped away like that.

She is a single mother and works part time as she has two children under the age of 5 who require care. She receives a Universal Credit payment to top up her earnings. Under the new proposed plans announced by the DWP, she will be required to work longer hours or have her benefits cut.

If you would like to add your voice to thousands of others across the country calling for reform to the benefits system and for people to be paid an amount that does not force them to make impossible choices, you can write to your MP online at:

<https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-involved/campaigns/true-cost-of-living/>

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

We are always pleased to answer any questions that you may have with regard to the work we do or ways in which you get involved.

You can contact the office on 0300 365 1123 or Iain Turner, the Pathfinder Lead, on 07743 726919.

Alternatively email Iain at:

iain@norwich.foodbank.org.uk

Best wishes to you all.

Iain

