

America's 1980s food bank explosion was seen as a short-term 'emergency' response to hunger and waste: what can this teach the UK?



In early summer 2016, GMPA Food Poverty Special Interest Group member Charlotte Spring spent two months travelling to 8 cities in the USA and Canada to seek lessons about the role of food banking as a response to poverty, hunger and waste. After 30 years of redistributing 'surplus' food to people unable to afford an adequate diet, often in the form of charitable food parcels, America might provide some lessons and warnings for how the UK understands and approaches rising levels of both household food insecurity and food waste. Charlotte's PhD at the University of Salford explores these questions in a UK context but her Winston Churchill Memorial Fellowship sought comparative lessons from other nations that experience high levels of inequality, an industrialised food system and a history of charity as well as state welfare as a response to poverty.

Charlotte's travels took her from the vast warehouses of the Feeding America foodbanking network to street feeding sessions in New Orleans, via community campaigners turning their experience of receiving food charity into political demands, 'free' farmers markets and a project training those excluded from the job market to cook nourishing meals for local schools. These visits revealed the hard work of people trying to build more sustainable, inclusive and healthy local food systems. But the trip also highlighted the risks of entrenching a 'second-class' food system in the form of food banks and pantries, which has not reduced overall levels of food insecurity or food waste over their decades of existence. While they can be seen to be 'managing' the problems of food hunger and waste, and enabling certain beneficial outcomes, they can also be seen as a 'moral safety valve'¹ which distracts public attention away from retrenchment of state welfare and other income-based solutions to poverty, while allowing donors and volunteers to 'feel good' about providing 'emergency' food.



Visits, interviews and participating in activities formed the basis of Charlotte's report, which gives a series of recommendations to those involved with policy, practice and campaigning around food waste and food insecurity.



Charlotte Spring

Ultimately, it asks readers to keep looking and acting beyond the sticking plaster of charity, which is largely reliant on unpredictable and often unhealthy donations from large companies that represent an unsustainable food system and concentrated power over the food that we all need to live and access to which is, after all, a basic human right. At a time that the UK has seen a wealth of research, reports and campaigns such as End Hunger UK's [Big Conversation](#), Charlotte hopes her report will provide learning for those active in both environmental and social justice work.

[Link to full report](#) Charlotte would welcome any feedback [by email](#) or via Twitter: [@eatingwaste](#)

¹Poppendieck, J (1998). Sweet Charity. Palgrave.

Its been a month now since we launched our [Emergency Food Providers map](#) and the response has been extremely positive. We have made amendments to the details on the map as requested and although we've lost a couple of pins we've also gained a few. Can you help? If you have a chance to look carefully at the map and you know of any food providers or any of their details that we have missed - that is food banks, pantry schemes or places that can provide a meal - then we would really appreciate it if you could [let us know](#). Together we can build this map into an even more valuable resource. Thanks

Our Work and Wages series looks at how work can become a route out of poverty. In this article Deborah Leigh from the Greater Manchester Living Wage Campaign talks about the importance of creativity, training and investment in people, as opposed to de-skilling roles, in the context of automation.

The cleverest man in Britain says that automation is causing problems for workers. What's to be done?

'Stephen Hawking says that "we are at the most dangerous moment in the development of humanity" and that the "rise of artificial intelligence is likely to extend job destruction deep into the middle classes, with only the most caring, creative or supervisory roles remaining."' ¹

What does this mean for our young people in Greater Manchester?

Government continues to claim that a degree is the 'social-mobility jetpack zooming wearers to more money and high-powered jobs.'² Yet every day we see examples of de-skilling and a lack of creativity in low paid job roles. Automation has also taken out management layers, leaving less room for job progression.

A relation of mine works for a well-known supermarket chain. The job title is Cashier and this is what the initial training was for. One month into the job, the next person hired is now the cashier. My relation instead stands at the auto checkouts wearing the 'happy to help' gilet, standing up for a 5-hour shift and pointing a large sponge finger at unoccupied self-service checkouts, for the benefit of whom? Allegedly customers, who are deemed to be unskilled at finding a checkout but skilled enough to operate as a cashier without any training. When not occupied in this way my relation waves a small card and taps a screen twice to allow the customer to continue their unpaid cashier role. What happened to the social mobility jetpack?

As a counterpoint to that my relation enjoys the camaraderie of the team and is well accepted and liked by colleagues, which is the only source of satisfaction but still an important one.

'Leaders don't need to go searching for skills – their duty is to help everyone on their team harness these skills to become exceptional.'³ Retailers could learn from Homebase who have axed zero hour contracts in order to 'build a strong culture within the company', and 'to engage employees in their work, train them and offer development opportunities'.⁴ Ikea are another good example, as they committed to paying all staff the real Living Wage rate of £8.45/hr as 'a long-term investment in our people based on our values and our belief that a team with good compensation and working conditions is in a position to provide a great experience to our customers.'⁵

Actions for Employers:

In the case of a supermarket job we can apply Hawkings' ideas about 'caring, creative and supervisory roles' by applying some basic principles. What could my relation be doing if automated checkouts reduce the number of cashiers required? Perhaps...

- Personal shopping, while a customer takes lunch or a much-needed break in the cafeteria.
- Being an expert Advisor on more complex purchases such as electrical goods (which are very profitable)
- Assist vulnerable shoppers to navigate the enormous stores and reduce shopping time for them i.e. be an advocate.
- Run a crèche for busy carers with kids.

Employers would definitely benefit from up-skilling their employees to use their communication and PR skills to advantage. Our young people are very well educated and many people who are lonely, disabled, elderly or vulnerable need points of contact in their daily lives. Some of these people have serious spending power and are loyal customers when properly treated.

Paying the Real Living Wage, that is linked to the cost of living (£8.45p per hour in Greater Manchester – Living Wage Foundation rates) will ensure committed staff, higher staff retention, lower recruitment costs and happier customers.

Actions for Policy Makers:

Create a ground-breaking Greater Manchester policy for 'Automation in the Workplace' that gives employers clear guidelines on how to implement automated solutions in the context of sharing its advantages among customers, staff and suppliers – not just shareholders.



Deborah Leigh

¹ Article by Andrew Yang Published on LinkedIn, February 7, 2017 " Silicon Valley is right - our jobs are already disappearing"

² Article by Aditya Chakraborty Published in The Guardian 19.4.16 'What the great degree rip-off means for Graduates:Low pay and high debt.'

³ www.linkedin.com/pulse/do-you-have-right-personality-successful-dr-travis-bradberry

⁴ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2017/02/05/bunnings-axes-zero-hour-contracts-homebase-staff/>

⁵ <https://www.retail-week.com/sectors/home-and-diy/ikea-pledges-to-pay-newly-increased-real-living-wage/7013551.article>



The poverty issue
January 2017

Greater Manchester Housing Providers Poverty Newsletter Issue 15 has been published. As ever it is packed with interesting reports as well as infographics produced by GM Housing Providers and the National Housing Federation summarising housing's significant contribution to the GM economy, which includes their poverty reduction work. Read more: **Bolton at Home** and contractor Forrest flew to parts of Eastern Europe to take part in a project that's improved the lives of people in deprived areas. **First Choice Homes Oldham** and **Get Oldham Working** are helping people to progress from rehab to employment. **Great Places** are supporting a new opportunities club in Langworthy which is dedicated to getting Salford residents into work and improving their lives. **Irwell Valley HA** have worked alongside Neighbourhood Managers to obtain funding to install secure bike racks. **New Charter** are helping residents tackle the rising costs of food by launching 'Dukinfield Pantry'. The Pantry is a co-operative, community food store where members are given access to discounted groceries sourced through **FareShare**. **One Manchester** is working with local residents to launch of three community gardens which will give local people the chance to grow their own vegetables. **Regenda Homes'** Creative Credit project is a one year programme working with local schools to help educate pupils about financial matters and support them setting up Young Savers clubs with Oldham Credit Union. **Stockport Homes'** Money Advice Team has been working proactively with customers who were likely to be affected by the reduced Benefit Cap. A partnership forum of 12 HAs, organised by **Symphony Housing Group**, met to identify projects that would prove their effectiveness in reducing poverty and social exclusion. Twelve over 19s took part in a 'Building Futures' programme, designed to give jobseekers a career kick-start in the house building industry. The programme at Stonebrook forms part of **Trafford Housing Trust** and **Wates Residential's** joint pledge to use the building work to provide training and employment opportunities for local people. **Wigan & Leigh Homes** commenced a scheme in February 2015 of enhancing void properties in lower demand areas. One of the contractors, Community Warehouse, provides work experience and employability skills to individuals in long term unemployment. In support of End Hunger UK, **Wythenshawe Community Housing Group** launched Unit-E in October 2016. The food warehouse supplies food to seven food banks in Wythenshawe.

And all that is just the tip of the iceberg - check out the newsletter in full [here](#).

What's happening in the fight against homelessness

Manchester City Council has admitted that some of their services have not kept pace with the problems and have committed £1.5 million to 'strengthening services for homeless people including a new Emergency Hub and more community-based support to stop people becoming homeless in the first place. The Council is committed to its pledge to the Manchester Homelessness Charter to support and work together with partners to overcome homelessness.'



Andy Burnham

In the House of Commons on January 27th the **Homelessness Reduction Bill** was debated for the third time. The debate lasted almost 5 hours. Leigh MP and GM Mayor Candidate Andy Burnham attended and among other things said *"I support the Bill but, as good as it goes, we will be kidding ourselves today if we leave this House, pat ourselves on the back and believe that the House has done everything that it could to tackle an emergency that is unfolding before our eyes. I chose to speak in today's debate to reflect the rising concern among my constituents in Leigh - a concern that is shared widely in Greater Manchester - that an increasing number of people can be seen huddling in doorways across the region. People will not just walk on by; they do not accept that things have to be like this. Homelessness and rough sleeping are not inevitable facts of life in 2017. Our society is wealthy enough to ensure that nobody should spend a night without a roof over their head. We need new urgency on both sides of the House to bring forward appropriate action to address the situation. If there is a problem with the Bill, it is that it goes nowhere near far enough to tackle the scale of the problem."* On January 30th the Bill had its first reading in the House of Lords and was 'ordered to be printed'.

FREE Basic Energy Awareness Training

NEA the national energy efficiency and fuel poverty charity and GMPA are offering 3-hour energy awareness training courses to those working with low-income and vulnerable people who struggle to manage their energy use or keep their homes warm. Places on the training are available to those working in both statutory and voluntary sector organisations. NEA is grateful to EDF Energy for supporting this project.

The course will help trainees to become more energy aware and will equip them with the knowledge to provide basic energy advice and to signpost individuals to appropriate schemes, support and services to help them achieve a warmer, more energy efficient home. All trainees receive free information resources to help signpost advice recipients to available services.

Course content: Understanding fuel poverty and the impact of cold homes; Energy use at home; Getting to grips with heating and hot water systems and controls; Understanding fuel bills, payment methods and getting the best energy deals; Dealing with damp and condensation; Sources of other advice, schemes and services.

Date: Wednesday March 1st 2017 Times: either 09.30-12.30 or 13.30-16.30 Location: Church House, 90 Deansgate, Manchester M3 2GH. RSVP to [Peter](#), indicating preference for morning or afternoon. Course is CDP Certified.



Forthcoming Events:

Memorial Service

Wednesday February 22nd at 3pm at St Ann's Church, St Ann's Square Manchester M2 7LF

You are invited to attend this memorial service which is a chance for people with experience of homelessness, for volunteers, supports and other providers of homelessness support to remember those who have passed away. Please email info@boothcentre.org.uk if you like to attend.

Booth Centre Special Afternoon Tea at the Opera



Saturday March 4th at 2.30pm at
The Victoria & Albert Marriott Hotel,
Water St, Manchester M3 4JQ

Tickets are now on sale for Eventasa's Afternoon Tea event raising vital funds to support the Booth Centre's services for homeless people. They would love you to join them for this special afternoon of delicious food, drinks, live entertainment and top prizes. Tickets (£25/30) are limited. [More information and book](#)

Early years and poverty workshop

Monday March 6th 2 - 4.30pm at the Friends Meeting House, Mount Street, Manchester M2 5NS

The Family and Childcare Trust and GMPA are hosting a workshop, supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, to discuss the role of the early years in reducing poverty.



Recommendations from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's strategy to solve poverty in the UK will be presented and participants will discuss local and national challenges and priorities for early years services and the opportunities created by devolution in Manchester.

The workshop will be a chance to feedback on JRF's recommendations, identify shared priorities and network with those with an interest in the potential of early years provision to reduce poverty.

Numbers are limited. Please email [Chris](#) if you would like to attend. There is no charge for attendance.

The Greater Manchester Mayor and the VCSE Sector – a hustings

Tuesday March 7th 2017 from 9.30am - 12 noon at St Thomas Centre, Ardwick Green North, Manchester M12 6FZ

The newly elected Mayor of Greater Manchester will be a significant figure. They will have decision-making powers in their own right over transport, housing and planning, fire and police services and will also wield considerable 'soft power' within the GMCA. They could have a big effect on the future of all VCSE organisations.

Please turn out in strength! This is our chance to put questions and requests to the candidates in advance of the election.

All candidates for election as the Mayor of Greater Manchester have been sent a copy of the 'Manifesto for a new relationship with the VCSE sector' and have been invited to attend this meeting.

[Please register to attend](#) A copy of the Manifesto is available [here](#)

Why GM Poverty Action?

In the Recommendations Report of the Greater Manchester Poverty Commission, 2.4 *Maintaining Momentum on Poverty* called for the formation of a Poverty Action Group to help take forward the work of the Commission.

A small number of public, private and civic sector individuals came together to form GMPA. This group has since grown to over 700 individuals from more than 200 organisations plus Local Authorities and MPs and an increasing number of members of the public.

GMPA is based upon principles of cooperation between organisations.

For more information about Greater Manchester Poverty Action

please visit our [website](#), follow us on [Twitter](#) or visit our [Facebook](#) page.

You can also visit our YouTube channel [Community Voices](#)

All these platforms are there to share news and opinion from our readers, from GM Poverty Action and from the community.

We want to celebrate our successes, find new ways of working together and provide a voice for the people living in poverty in our region. But we can only do this with your help and support.

For more information or to share your news please contact [Chris](#) or [Peter](#).

Copies of previous newsletters are available on our [website](#)

If you would like to contact us or submit an article for inclusion in a newsletter please get in touch in one of the following ways:

Post: c/o 5th Floor Church House, 90 Deansgate, Manchester M3 2GH

Or contact our Communications Manager: Chris Bagley
T: 07419 774537 [Email](#)
and we will reply as soon as possible.

NB GMPA does not have full-time dedicated administrative support so please do not expect an immediate response.

