# The Food Ladders Project: Mapping the Geographies of Food Provision in Sheffield.

Lydia Leather and Selina Treuherz.

# Contents

# 1.0. Introduction

The context surrounding emergency and low-cost food provision in Sheffield has changed significantly in recent years. The combination of austerity cuts to services, Coronavirus, Brexit, and more recently the war in Ukraine combined with the cost of living crisis has led to over 14.5 million more adults themselves below the poverty line, unable to purchase food using traditional market streams (JRF,2022). Yet, at the same time, there has been increased recognition of the importance of community food provision, that these spaces provide far 'more than just food' (Blake,2019). Notably, the agency of these spaces is to bring communities together, provide a place for advice in times of crisis, and facilitate social and economic development at a hyperlocal level. Blake's (2019) theoretical framework of the Food Ladders approach, which considers where an organisation is on a scale between meeting an immediate emergency need and food projects which aim to create resilient communities allows these 'more than just food' aspects to be positioned in the appropriate context according to the level of crisis and/or resilience of the community in question. Using this framework through the lens of the 4 UN pillars of Food Insecurity (accessibility, availability, stability and utilisation) has enabled this research to both to consider the significant need for short term change, whilst also considering a longer-term view for food sustainability and justice within the city.

The network of food provision in Sheffield is particularly unique. Considering the amount of resources available, the provision is spectacular. The hilly 'collection of villages' and significant variance between communities at a hyperlocal level means that a centralised one-size-fits-all system as seen in cities such as Rotherham would be incredibly difficult to implement. Yet, our research shows that the current nature of food provision is fragmented across all 4 of the UN pillars of food insecurity, leaving many unnecessarily hungry. In September 2021, Sheffield City Council passed a motion for the Right To Food within the city-meaning that they must ensure that people in Sheffield are not hungry (SCC,2021). For the sake of the most vulnerable in our communities, strategies to further this motion must be implemented (Butler,2022).

Considering the resources and funding currently available, all the projects involved achieved a staggering amount. During the Coronavirus pandemic, both Together For Sheffield and the Sheffield foodbank network each hosted a weekly meeting with most of the food providers in the city. This was vital during the start of the pandemic, leading to a fantastic city-wide response that fed as many as 100 households at its peak (VAS,2020)[1]. However, many of the relationships between organisations that formed over zoom have since dissipated during a difficult recovery period. This research aims to map these relationships socially and geographically with an aim of creating a more cohesive strategy for food provision that works within the Sheffield context.

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[1] These are the official figures for the city, although the actual response was significantly higher.

Our research suggests food provision in Sheffield can be separated into 3 categories: the network of Trussell Trust foodbanks, headed by S6 foodbank; Independent food banks; and low-cost food provision in the city, often founded on principles of mutual aid, community and sustainability such as social eating spaces and community pantries. As well as the general location of each of these categories on the Food Ladders framework, the aims and values of these organisations often vary significantly and this affects levels of cooperation between organisations. This has implications for their development on the Food Ladders scale, and the future of Sheffield's food system.

Food insecurity and poverty are heavily correlated and affirm the entrenched inequalities based on gender, race, disability, health, age and identity within the UK food system(Bishop and Singh, 2022). Throughout this report, whilst we want to highlight the incredible work taking place within these organisations, we also need to acknowledge that the practices of many organisations in Sheffield perpetuate/entrench societal inequality brought about by the need for food aid and food as a commodity instead of a right.

# 2.0 Methodology

This research follows qualitative methods using a constructed questionnaire. The questionnaire was created using the previously used VAS template (Appendix 1.1) circulated in 2020 as a response to the emergency coronavirus food aid funding circulated within Sheffield City. Taking that template and its findings, we then reconstructed the questionnaire (Appendix 1.2) with the purpose of conducting interviews in person, without recording them to prevent intimidation. We conducted these interviews using a participatory action research approach, where our findings are focused on exemplifying the voices of those we interviewed, instead of relying on the researcher's lens of experience in these issues. The responses from each interview can be found in the collective table of responses in the Appendix links below (1.3). Interviews took place on the understanding that findings would only be made accessible to the Sheffield City Council, as outlined within the consent forms (Appendix 1.4). We made it clear in the consent forms that research was conducted independently of the council as freelance researchers motivated to make food provision in Sheffield work for everyone.

The questionnaire was based on Megan Blakes's Food Ladders theoretical framework whilst also taking Blake's recommendations to integrate the UN 4 pillars of food insecurity. This breaks organisations into 3 ladder rungs and is aimed at building local level resilience in the face of food insecurity (Blake, 2019). Simultaneously, we explore the availability, access, utilisation and stability (FAO, 2008) within these organisations, given the cost of living crisis(GOV.UK, 2022). Blakes (2019) three rungs are outlined as:

*"**Rung 1: Catching**. This first rung provides a starting point for those who are in crisis. Such interventions might include emergency food aid, mental health support, access to social services, etc. Catching enables the ability to cope with a shock, whether that be the loss of a job, an unexpected large payment, debt, longer-term illness or relationship breakdown.*

***Rung 2: Capacity building to enable social innovation**. This second level supports those not currently in crisis, but who may be struggling to afford and/or access good food. Activities include training programmes, shared cooking and eating activities, food pantries, children's holiday clubs, and voucher schemes. Done in a manner that celebrates difference and is not stigmatising, activities provide residents with accessible choices that relieve the stresses that coexist with low incomes, expand skills, and enable the recognition of personal and local assets. These interventions connect people together by creating networks of trust and reciprocity through shared activity around food. This sort of intervention enables people and communities to be more adaptable by expanding their pool of assets.*

***Rung 3: Self-organised community change.** This third rung supports communities to realise goals through self-organised projects that capitalise on local assets. Projects meet community needs as communities themselves identify them. Examples include developing a social enterprise based on community cooking knowledge that provides employment, community story-telling that leads to activism, cooperative food growing and food procurement that*

*increases the local availability of good food, regular social cooking and eating activities to overcome loneliness, cross social divides and create intergenerational knowledge transfer."*

Within the questionnaire, we first collected information on the operational logistics of each organisation, that being the locations, contact information, operating times, opening times and cost of service if any. We then broke the questionnaire down into five sections;

1. ***How do you operate?*** - Asking where food sources come from, quantities, distribution, estimated service reach and food preparation support.
2. ***Access*** - What is the referral process? Do they refer to Citizen Advice? Who do they struggle to reach in their community? What is the demographic they see within their organisations?
3. ***Your Community*** - Who do they feel supports their community with more than food projects? How have activities and aims have changed over the past 6 months? Where can other organisations support them?
4. ***Volunteering and Community engagement*** - How are volunteers supported? How big is the volunteer network?
5. ***Closing Remarks*** - What rung do they consider themselves on? What do they want the council to know?

With reference to column V (Appendix, 1.3), the assessment of the food ladder rung has been collectively accessed by both organisation representatives and researchers and will be discussed within our overview of findings.

Twenty organisations were interviewed over the course of February and March 2022 where we intended to interview participants whilst the organisations were active. 19 of the 20 interviews were done in person, whereas Regather Co-operative had instead filled in the questionnaire through email correspondence. Within the research itself, we actively sought to interview organisations aimed at providing for migrant populations, refugees and asylum seekers within the city, to ensure we were getting the perspectives of multiple demographics, especially those marginalised.  As we will discuss later, we were not successful in reaching multiple organisations that represent BPoC led or minority-faith groups, partially due to them not being represented in the Together For Sheffield database as well as both researchers' native languages being English, limiting communication capacity.

# 3.0 Overview of findings

## 3.1 The geography of food distribution.

We found that the majority of the provision in the city is fractured both temporally and geographically.  For example, the majority of organisations interviewed were open for very limited times, some for as little as four hours once or twice a week.  This means that for both users and referrers in the city, there is a limited timeframe to ensure that those that need it can get access to food. As such, the phone lines for many of the food banks that use a referral process have the potential to become overloaded if demand increases. There were fears from some organisations in the city that receiving a parcel from a foodbank may become more of a lottery. Only three organisations were open 5 days a week (Archer Project, Burngreave Foodbank and New Hope Foodbank). Food Works in Handsworth is the only organisation in the city open seven days a week. The majority of organisations seemed to be open later in the week, particularly on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Considering how far Handsworth is from the city centre, this means that if a successful application has not been made on the Wednesday for a Thursday food parcel, it is often difficult to get food in some areas until the following Tuesday. In addition, almost all projects were open during day working hours, with few open after 1 pm. This compromises access for those that work, or who have caring responsibilities.

An initial glance at Figure 1. M would suggest a fairly even spread of access to food distribution in the city, especially considering that the majority of public transport is focused around the city centre. However, when viewed against the indices of multiple deprivations (HMRC,2019), it becomes apparent that there are many areas of high deprivation in the city where there is an insufficient emergency and/or low-cost food provision. For example, Fir Vale food bank, Church On The Corner and L4G community pantry cumulatively feed around 120 people per week and are based within tight-knit communities. On the industrial belt out of Sheffield towards Rotherham, where deprivation levels are high, more food support will be needed with the cost of living increasing so dramatically that the capacity of these organisations is unlikely to be sufficient. In addition, it seems that southern areas in Sheffield such as Gleadless Valley, and more northern areas towards Hillsborough do not currently have adequate support that meets the needs of the area both geographically and socially. Both organisations have one Trussell Trust Foodbank (S20 and S6 respectively) to meet the needs of the area. This has implications for who can use these services in terms of accessibility, eligibility, and cultural taste.

## 3.2 The spectrum of food services available.

Ten of the projects that we interviewed were food banks, offering a free food parcel of mainly ambient, non-perishable items lasting between 3 and 7 days. Access to all Trussell Trust based foodbanks was through a referral process (section 3.2). Many of the independent food banks had their own referral process, but were often more flexible in terms of eligibility and length of access (section 3.2). Five of the Foodbanks had religious intentions for their food

provision and many others were based out of church buildings. The extent of this in backing motivation varied significantly between the organisations. For example, New Hope Food Bank's main intention is to get people close to God. Conversely, Fir Vale Food Bank and PXI are based in churches but have no religious intention. It is important that this is recognised when considering the future of food provision in the city, as motivation clearly affects the extent to which organisations are willing to develop their forms of food provision through the Food Ladders model.

Of the other ten projects interviewed, many were motivated by principles of community and mutual aid, often formed from grassroots community members proactively responding to the needs of their community. These projects include Foodhall, Food Works, L4G community pantry, PXI, St Mary's Social Supermarket and Shipshape Health and Wellbeing Centre. These projects were already higher up the Food Ladders model through their community pantries and cafes and often seemed more passionate to progress up the 'rungs', and support the rest of the city in doing so.

The disparities in both motivation and practice between Trussell Trust food banks, independent food banks and more community-focused grassroots food projects in the city are significant. It was clear from discussions that there was tension between the different groups, as they have quite different politics; and future aims and directions. The varying size of projects and their 'power' within the city was frequently discussed. In particular, many of the smaller independent food banks in the city felt uneasy about their relationship to S6 foodbank. The size of their operation (see column M, Fig 1.2) means they should be considered to have a hegemony of emergency food parcel provision in the city. Many small food banks were concerned that S6 could take over their operations, which would compromise the needs of their small community being met by those that understood most. In addition, one Foodbank part of the S6 network felt trapped within a system of food bank provision, which they felt did not meet the needs of their community. Although they wanted to transfer to a food pantry model, they felt ill-equipped to follow this through within the boundaries of the Trussell trust guidelines.

Despite this, the general consensus from 18 of the projects about the future direction of food provision in the city was that a network of community pantries across the city was needed. This was to prevent people from having to resort to a food bank when they may have a limited amount to purchase items at a lower price in a community pantry. Further, as seen at S2 food bank, community pantries also enable users of food banks to be supported gradually out of crisis whilst also enabling dignity, respect and choice. Given the increasing demand for food banks in recent months, community pantries were seen as a more sustainable option that gave communities agency in both the short and long term.

## 3.3 Source(s) of food and weight.

For all of the organisations interviewed, there were 2 main streams of sourcing food:
    1a) Purchasing from commercial providers

1b) Purchasing from alternative food providers such as redistributors (i.e. Fareshare or Food Aware)

2) Soliciting food donations directly from individuals or corporate partners (prime, not surplus)

3) Sourcing through in house food business activities (i.e. redistribution, growing etc.)

The ratio of these varies significantly between organisations. For example, S6 food bank buys 66% of its food directly and has 33% donated as food. Conversely, Food Works gets in around 98% of food as surplus, and only purchases a very minimal amount. Regather purchases or grows all of its food.

Both of these streams are fairly precarious. They rely on the contradictions of the just-in-time food system leading to surplus stock, the good intentions of Sheffield community members and short term funding streams from governmental and third sector organisations. In the context of increasing demand, coupled with increasing prices this precarity is something that should be properly accounted for. This precarity  is related to the financial strategy of the organisations, but remains important  given that most organisations in the city have similar models. Whilst community growing projects through organisations including Foodhall, Food Works and Regather may provide an answer to a small group of Sheffield residents, more long term sustainable solutions must be considered.

Assuming that 1 food parcel supports up to 3 people (ie 3 services) and 1 hot meal is 1 service, according to our interviews there were over 20,000 'services' in Sheffield in February 2022 as seen in column M of Fig 1.2[2]. Considering that the majority of these services are based on significant voluntary efforts, this is spectacular, especially considering the limited resources and capacity of many of the organisations.

Few of the Food Banks were able to reliably distribute fresh food and any ambient items beyond an agreed set list. This was often frustrating for users, particularly those who are not used to the bland White-British palate. Reasons for this were primarily cost, but also a lack of infrastructure to deal with fresh food. This was due to a lack of fridges, and access to space enough days of the week to store less cleanly packaged food. In addition, there are more stringent laws associated with use-by dates on many fresh products as opposed to best-before dates. We know there is a demand and movement for fresh, hyperlocal, agroecology food production in Sheffield, advocated for by Regather, Sheffield Organic growers and others. However, this food needs to be available for everyone. That would mean organisations working to provide food aid provisions through community eating spaces and food pantries should be able to afford this.

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[2] All estimates for food bank parcels as seen in column M of Fig 1.2 were multiplied by 3, accounting for the average number of people each food parcel interviews suggested each food parcel supported. The amount of hot meals as seen in column M was added on. This number was multiplied by 4 for the 4 weeks in February.

## 3.4 Lack of long-term support available for asylum seekers and refugees.

Due to the policies No Recourse to Public Funds(NRPF) (1999) and The Hostile Environment (2012), people subjected to immigration control within migrant groups, asylum seekers and refugees are severely impacted by the availability of food aid. Migrants with NRPF are excluded from policies that aim to address food insecurity in the UK (Jolly, et al., 2021). Data on food insecurity among those subjected to NRPF is unclear but newly emerging UK research indicates that these groups are the most food-insecure demographic (Bishop & Signh, 2022). The majority of people who belong to these demographics are from Black or minority backgrounds, suggesting structural racism as a driver of food insecurity within the UK.

We were able to interview four organisations that actively seek to support refugees and asylum seekers. Open kitchen, City of Sanctuary, Ship Shape Community Centre and The Yorkshire Refugee food bank, which is currently not running due to a lack of an operation site. There is a significant lack of long term availability for food aid outside of the 3 current organisations that aim to provide this. This is not because other food aid organisations discriminate against asylum seekers, refugees and migrant populations but instead is based on multiple factors such as:

1) Location: Refugee and asylum seeker temporary housing is based within the city centre accommodation, so organisations not located within this area physically can't support that demographic.
2) Language: The dominance of the English language within spaces can prevent integration or a sense of safety within food banks when seeking to use service, as well as general language barriers with regards to referral processes and communication.
3) Capacity: All organisations are seeking to support their communities and their complex individual needs such as debt and addiction. Individuals suffering from the food aid discrimination of government policy also require that same support and there is a need to support and create those organisations actively seeking to work with individuals through this.
4) Taste: The contents of most food bank parcels are based around a White British diet, this is often very different to the tastes and cultures of many migrant communities and can therefore prevent utilisation.
5) Information Sharing: The referral process and information extraction from individuals can be a traumatic experience when constantly confronted with this demand for information over time. As a result, it inherently excludes asylum seekers who don't have the right to food parcels within the UK emergency food aid scheme. Open kitchen, City of Sanctuary, Ship Shape community centre and the Yorkshire Refugee food bank were the only organisations we interviewed that specifically aimed to serve asylum seekers within the UK policy framework. Yorkshire Refugee food bank is no longer active, meaning that the provision available for the asylum seeker demographic is further reduced within the city.
6) Representation: Service providers that don't represent user demographics in both

staff and volunteers can become a barrier both in communication and a sense of safety within the space.

What has become clear throughout our research is how the stability of food aid for refugee, migrant and asylum seeker populations with Sheffield is vital and further research is needed to understand how these populations currently manage to survive with so few food resources available. In order to create more access for this demographic, the revival of Yorkshire Refugee food bank must be considered as more than a pandemic response and worked with to create stability of food sources, as a right as opposed to a commodity.

## 3.5 Referral process.

### 3.5a Issues of a fragmented network and concerns of 'food bank tourism'.

A recurring issue among food bank service providers was 'food bank tourism'. This is the concern of food bank users collecting from multiple food bank sources. This specifically became an issue if users were signed up to multiple food banks and missing collections due to having enough food for the week. It was a big concern throughout all 10 food banks that were visited. However, the concern was not that the user was signed up for multiple collection days and was instead the concern that waiting lists and demand for food banks are increasing at such a rapid rate, that new users are being deprived because of this. This is an example of where the concern for food resources between organisations in the city is growing. It highlights the need for more communication and transparency around resource sharing and insight into how different organisations are experiencing the reduction in funding streams and food supply post-pandemic. This concern did not extend to S6 and Spires food bank, which share the same centralised electronic referral system.

### 3.5b Suggestions for improvements to the referral process.

A frequent suggestion to this issue of referral was creating a centralised system. However, whilst this was repeatedly mentioned, its application would require being looked at in greater detail. Each organisation had their own ideology, motivation and purpose, which is reflected in the referral criteria. The methods with which people get referred are also different within each organisation. For example, S20 rely solely on the referrer's judgement as a justification for food parcels, whilst others, such as Norfolk Park and Church on the corner, are accessible through self-referral. There is, however, potential within the Foodbank network, to create a centralised system, provided the data collection measures were put in place to account for this and allow these organisations to remain autonomous.

A reoccurring finding was the desire for food pantries to be referred to from food banks, creating a network that can move users from rung one to two and strengthening community food provision. This would then connect food banks and food pantries to share food and other

resources. The S2 food bank, in particular, follows this model where users are given a certain amount of time to use the food bank before being moved onto the food pantry and able to access debt advice to achieve this, thus guiding users through rungs of the food ladders model with the aim of financial agency gained within a specific time frame. This model works toward dealing with issues of debt and financial anxiety and they now have the space of a council building opposite the church where they can create a community shop, meaning the end result is not mainstream commercial provision but is instead more investment in the community itself. This is an example of investment in good quality, affordable (including free food) and culturally appropriate food available for residents, where community food provisions work to blur the lines between users and providers.

## 3.6 Dominant demographics in food aid.

The lunchtime meal services within the city are predominantly dominated by white men aged 25-65 attending food projects each day. For example, there is the potential to have lunch at the Open Kitchen on a Monday, Parsons Cross on a Tuesday and Thursday and Foodhall on a Friday. Their dominance within these spaces is notable as currently there is a lack of social eating spaces that remain free within a post-coronavirus setting. What has been suggested is the possibility of funding for new 'more than just food' projects that specifically focus on marginalised communities feeling welcome, such as partnership programs that the Yorkshire Refugee food bank had once been able to run. Social eating spaces remain vital for wellbeing and peer-to-peer mental health support.  They provide a cheap and sustainable solution that supports community cohesion and allow access to a nutritious hot meal.

## 3.7 Signposting structures of food projects.

It is clear that all Food Projects in the city, regardless of the rung that they fall on, provide a service that is 'more than just food'. The centrality of food providers for people to access other services in the city was something that came up frequently with organisations across all rungs. For example, S6 foodbank saw the food as an agent to get people in crisis to help themselves by providing easy access to financial, debt, wellbeing and housing advice. Many of the organisations felt that this role was not acknowledged enough by the council and government. Whilst non-exhaustive, organisations mentioned included:

- Citizens Advice
- Housing Officers
- Social Services
- Probation officers
- Health Services (Mental, Physical and GPs)
- Fitzwilliam Centre
- Schools
- Smaller local charities
- Shelter
- Red Cross
- Savit
- Police Community Officers
- Debt Advisors

- Refugee Council
- Assist
- Mind
- Community Centres
- Immigration solicitors

- SYMAGG

Many of the relationships between organisations exist on an ad-hoc basis , with minimal formal contracts. Citizens Advice remains a key actor in Food Provision, particularly for those that need emergency referrals. Many of the food banks (both Trussell Trust and Independent), along with some of the community pantries interviewed had or were in the process of hiring a Citizens Advice worker to support their communities with 'more than just food' issues.

The criteria of what defines rung 1 as catching has been forced to expand in a post-coronavirus context where pre-existing poverty is far more entrenched than it was 2 years ago (JRF,2022). This means that whilst there may be a guise of foodbanks seeming to provide services that may have previously been associated with rung 2, they are still in fact very firmly placed in rung 1. The duty of care has simply been extended to make 'more than just food' services essential, as they are now not reliably provided in other spaces. It seemed clear that for foodbanks in rung 1, the intent to offer these services was out of pure necessity.

# 3.8 Volunteer Infrastructure.

All of the projects interviewed were thoroughly dependent on volunteers to function. The extent of this dependence and the amount of volunteers needed to function varied between projects. For example, Norfolk Park food bank and Fir Vale food bank are run exclusively by volunteers, and need around 10 to function smoothly. At the other end, S6 food bank and Food Works are roughly 95% run by volunteers, but as the size of the operation is significantly bigger there are around 1000 volunteers in their combined extended network. Whilst not all of these volunteers are active, it highlights the scale of the community effort related to food provision in the city. Smaller operations further away from Sheffield City Centre often struggled to recruit volunteers, especially 'experienced ones that could lend a listening ear'. Regather had a lower dependence on volunteers, but relied on them to support farm work.

In many of the spaces across all rungs, the distinction between 'volunteer' and 'service user' was often blurred, especially in hyperlocal community projects. Volunteers often had previously or still received food from the projects. At many of the food banks, the boundary around who receives a food parcel is often quite strict, but many many service users start volunteering when they are in better circumstances. Conversely, for projects in rungs 2 and 3 such as St Mary's Social Supermarket and Food Works, it is very common for volunteers to regularly obtain a food parcel.

Some organisations also had lots of infrastructure in place to support volunteers with personal development. For example, St Mary's Social Supermarket has a 3 stage volunteering process. This allows development from new shoppers to the project to gradually gain responsibility and confidence, and they are eventually offered support with job applications. Similarly, Longley 4 Greens community centre works through asset maps with volunteers when they first arrive, to ensure they can gain as much as possible from volunteering with the project. Many of the projects recognised their purpose as a stepping stone to employment. However, these spaces are also there to promote wellbeing, encourage community cohesion and reduce loneliness. Whilst the measurable output from these aspects of social development may not be as clear, they are nevertheless significant.

## 3.9 Summary: 'More than just food' projects.

As Blake's Food Ladders approach sets out, organisations across all rungs of the Food Ladders model clearly provide 'more than just food'. These aspects make the community spaces unique and significant, differentiating them from the traditional market provisions. As explained in section 3.8 of this report, many food banks in rung 1 may present a guise of fulfilling 'more than just food' aspects associated with rung 2, such as practices to support longer-term housing or financial issues beyond an immediate shock. However, this is merely out of necessity, filling a gap no longer provided in other spaces.

6 of the food banks interviewed were quite clearly placed in rung 1 of the food ladder, and 2 of the community pantries were quite clearly in rung 2. Only Regather was exclusively in rung 3 of the ladder. All of the other organisations interviewed did not fit in 1 arbitrary category, but rather had tendencies associated with 2, or even 3 of them. Social eating spaces including Open Kitchen, Foodhall, The Archer project, Shipshape health and wellbeing centre help extremely vulnerable community members out of crisis by providing a hot meal, aligning with rung one of the model. The extent of more 'formal' social provision in these spaces varied significantly- from Shipshape Health and Wellbeing centre working with health and social care services in the city, to Open Kitchen volunteers sometimes helping asylum seekers with written forms. However, these social eating spaces are also important spaces of social cohesion and community development meaning they should not be considered to lie exclusively within rung 1 or 2.

St Mary's Social Supermarket, Fir Vale Food Bank and Food Works have characteristics of all three rungs of the Food Ladders Model, meeting the needs of many different groups of society at all times.

Examples of 'more than just food' projects include:
- Mental health support at Spires Food Bank,PXI, New Hope Food Bank and Shipshape Health and Wellbeing centre.
- Employment support at St Mary's Social Supermarket.
- Community growing projects at Food Works, Regather, TARA,  PXI and Foodhall.
- Support from Citizens Advice and debt advisors at S6 Foodbank,S20 Foodbank and Shipshake Health and Wellbeing centre.

- English Lessons at Shipshape Health and Wellbeing Centre, Open Kitchen, City of Sanctuary and TARA.
- All organisations interviewed provided a cup of tea and a 'listening ear'.

# 3.10 Changing Landscapes of Food Provision.

On multiple accounts, organisations felt that the emergency aid money that had been distributed throughout the coronavirus 19 pandemic was slowly running out, due to the increase in people using the service, as well as many of the funding streams no longer being available. There is a fear of how the need for food parcels and food pantries is predicted to increase within the next year and more specifically the winter of 2022/2023.

In a pre-pandemic context, there had been spaces across the city that aimed to specifically meet the needs of particular demographics, for example, marginalised genders, ethnicities and single mothers. However, given the current scale of the issue, many of these groups are being marginalised by those where the need is obvious and immediate. Whilst there is an increase in the white British male demographic, there is also equally an increase in the number of families that are reliant on food banks, which need to be accounted for in research after this report, specifically when looking at child poverty and the gender gap in parental care that is predominantly held by mothers.

The stigma associated with food banks throughout the pandemic has shifted, where they had often been associated with shame, they are now ultimately integral to feeding people within the cost of living crisis as universal credit is not enough to support individuals' food necessities. The right to food is a necessity, as highlighted in Sheffield City Council's recent motion. Therefore, support for the organisations that provide this service must be increased as they aim to provide food security where the state fails to do so for the most vulnerable.

The organisations we spoke to recognise that they are providing this service where the government is failing to do so. What has become a particular concern is the growing demographic of women and children. All food banks reported an increase in the number of families using the service, particularly mothers and children. Where there had previously been a stigma associated with low-income women's ability to feed their own children (Power & Small, 2021), the normality of food aid instigated by the pandemic now shows signs of the severity of this patriarchal gap in food insecurity. This will likely increase without more understanding and provisions put in place around parental and child-focused food aid projects: the concern of growing child poverty was heavily stressed throughout organisations.

## 3.10a Growing Fear of Child Food Poverty.

Speaking with multiple organisations, there is a huge lack of understanding of how vital schools are in distributing food parcels throughout families and if/where this is taking place.

Following this, there is a concern about what services will replace school meals within the summer holiday month without funding from Marcus Rushford donation schemes. The extent to which child food poverty has been explored within our research is minimal, but the concern for this is incredibly significant. It's clear that findings from Ord and Monks 2021 research, which explains the extent to which youth work is at risk of becoming an extension of the food poverty welfare system are also a concern within the food aid organisations themselves in Sheffield. Low-income family households are currently misrepresented in research around food poverty, where findings often suggest the problems are based on behavioural or individual paternal causes, without fully considering structural drivers such as poverty and geography (Power et al., 2021). The pandemic saw a 107% increase in food parcels donated to children nationwide (Sandhu, 2020) and mass support and government pressure to feed children throughout the pandemic.

We know the council currently provides food vouchers of £15 per child per week for families eligible for benefits related to free school meals, reliant on hardship funding from the government. However if/when the hardship funding ends, the high number of families reliant on these vouchers will suffer if they stop, coupled with the cost of living crisis. Families that are in hardship but slightly above the threshold for free school meals are not entitled to these vouchers.  These schemes also exclude children and families who have NRPF. We know that the holiday activities and food programme provide children with both food and social spaces for children in receipt of benefits related to free school meals, however, this is not taken up by all eligible families.

Our understanding of the extent of child food poverty within Sheffield can only be reflected in the fear echoed by those organisations that are seeing this increase. We highly anticipate that for more understanding of the extent of this issue, further research is needed in conversation with schools within Sheffield.

# 4.0 Recommendations

Many of the organisations interviewed shared a collective dream of a network of community food spaces in the city. These are cafes to provide a hot drink and meal, but also social supermarkets where anyone can get access to fresh, low-cost food. The aim of these spaces is not progression to mainstream commercial provision but is instead more investment in the community itself. We must move thinking towards a new narrative of abundance in which people don't use services, but are instead part of communities that provide them (Tendler,2022). Our recommendations set out to make this dream reality.

## 4.1 Support the implementation of a network of community pantries.

It was clear from the majority of interviews that there was a desire for the council to support strategies that enable a natural progression 'up' the food ladder model. Some organisations interviewed were eager to move from a food bank model to a community pantry model but lacked knowledge and/or money. As highlighted in our findings, community pantries have significant impacts both socially and economically and provide significant spaces for community peer-to-peer support. Further, these spaces effectively (re)build community in an inclusive and cohesive way, changing 'service users' into 'community members' (Tendler,2022). Given that they are relatively easy to establish and have low overhead running costs, this should be a priority of Sheffield City Council for the next financial year.
These community pantries should be accessible to everyone, for an unlimited time frame, at the lowest possible cost- i.e not profit-driven. From a public health nutrition perspective, there should be a focus on providing fresh as well as ambient food.

## 4.2. Ensure that the Food Ladders model remains a supportive network in Sheffield.

The participatory nature of this research has formed a valuable web of relationships between food organisations 'on the ground' in Sheffield that should not be taken for

granted. There is real potential for this network to enable cross-city support, resources and advice. To achieve this, the Food Ladders project should be supported to become an unregistered, yet well-established network in the city. The focus should remain on social rather than financial resources (hence the unregistered nature of the network) to prevent possible conflicts and uneven distributions of power/agency. However, support would be needed from Sheffield City Council to ensure that the financial sustainability of organisations part of the Food Ladders Network is not compromised. The network should work alongside the Food Bank Network and Together for Sheffield to make sure as many views as possible are accounted for.

## 4.3. Expand social eating spaces.

The Food Ladders approach allows the 'more than just food' aspects of these projects to be properly accounted for. It is clear from our research that these spaces provide significant services for many vulnerable people in Sheffield. In order to prevent an even greater dependence on more formal types of social provision in the city, this must be recognised by Sheffield City Council. In addition to these spaces providing lots of financial support (ie CA, housing support and debt advice), they are also significant social spaces that support wellbeing and prevent loneliness and poor mental health. Organisations such as Foodhall, Open Kitchen and the Archer Project are key examples of this. It is essential that these spaces are invested and expanded given the significant social (as well as nutritional) provision that they provide.

## 4.4. Active mapping and recording of Food projects.

This project is not the first time that there have been attempts to map and record the network of food provision in the city. It is important that this directory remains active and up to date. This is to allow ease of access, support referrers, provide up to date data of the extent of food insecurity in the city and also allow the Food Ladders network to be current and representative of all the work of different communities in Sheffield. Given that most of the foundations have been laid for this, we suggest that this is followed through by VAS who have databases that will support this kind of work.

## 4.5. Assessment needed on the extent of child hunger.

To fully understand the extent to which child food poverty is currently and likely to increase within Sheffield, we suggest research be conducted within School. Organisations we spoke to already currently have these School to Food aid relationships and would be able to give guidance on where research would need to start and progress. It is vital to understand how children who don't have access to free school meals survive. We know there is some support in place, but what is unsure is whether

there is awareness of these schemes and barriers to eligibility. There needs to be work done within schools to assess both the success of schemes taking place and further understand where the gaps in provisions are, especially regarding children with NRPF.

## 4.6. Recognition of gaps in provision for minority groups, women and minority genders.

Gaps within food aid provisions for minority groups regarding access, availability, utilisation and stability must be recognised. Moving forward, work to create and support more services able to refugees, asylum seekers, migrant populations and minority groups must take place with those organisations already actively focusing on this, such as Ship Shape community centre, City of Sanctuary, Open kitchen and the Pakistani Muslim Centre.

Accompanying this, there needs to be a focus on women's and other marginalised genders' food provisions throughout the city to create community networks. This can mean specific times or groups run solely for these genders to eat together, or specific outreach programs that seek to support these groups. In addition, our research did not have capacity to account for those with caring responsibilities. Given the additional barriers associated with being a carer, this should be considered in further research.

## 4.7. A further consideration for systematic change to the referral process.

A conversation about a city-wide referral system needs to be discussed between all organisations that use referral systems. That has to include discussing what information is necessary for the logistics of provision and how to maintain data security. This can then resolve the issue of 'food bank tourism' and monitor the number of food provisions a person has access to within a given time frame, regardless of circumstances. With established funding streams and sharing of resources in conjunction with this, the narrative of scarcity instead can be replaced with one of abundance (Tendler,2022).

## 4.8. Expand the hyper-local food system.

We recognise and support the movement for locally grown, fresh produce in Sheffield. However, this food needs to be available to everybody, especially those on low incomes and users of food aid. Therefore funding streams that allow purchasing to take place, that do not compromise the cost of production and further the demand and support of local growth must be considered when planning for a holistic Sheffield focused food system. These projects should be community based, to allow more of the social and

wellbeing benefits of growing to be experienced. Considering the current precarity of supply to many organisations in the city, investing in hyper local growing could ensure a more stable supply of food (which is healthier) to some of the most vulnerable in the city.

## 4.9. Sheffield city council must acknowledge its responsibility for implementing a Right to Food strategy in the city.

Although this is more ideological than practical, many of the organisations felt that the council was not taking enough responsibility for the extent of food poverty in the city, and rather turning a blind eye. Considering the size of the issue, and the limited resources of many of the key organisations in the city, their work should be celebrated and encouraged as it removes significant direct responsibility from Sheffield City Council. A clear way to make this happen is to outline a 10 year plan to end the need for food bank use in the city, an obvious route given that Sheffield city council has passed a motion to the right to food.  Whilst national government policy may make this difficult to achieve, many organisations felt that the council was not taking enough responsibility for a systemic issue. Our first eight recommendations outline the steps towards this.

# 5.0 Research acknowledgements

**Registered research bias:**
> Both researchers work for Food Works in Handsworth. Selina has previously worked for Foodhall and the National Food Service.

# 6.0 Glossary

- **Community pantries -** Community owned and run low-cost food purchasing and provision, often through a membership model. Alternative to mainstream supermarket food sources to strengthen the resilience of a community.
- **Social eating spaces-** community-based food service that provides opportunities for everyone to eat together in local spaces at minimal costs, often using surplus and/or locally grown food.
- **Food aid** - help in the form of basic items of food given to a country or region suffering from a food shortage.
- **Food justice** - Food justice is a holistic and structural view of the food system that sees healthy food as a human right and addresses structural barriers to that right. (FoodPrint, 2021)
- **Food insecurity** - the inability to acquire or consume an adequate or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so. (Dowler, Turner & Dobson, 2001)
- **Food bank** - a place where stocks of food, typically basic provisions and non-perishable items, are supplied free of charge to people in need.
- **Agroecology** - An ecological approach to agriculture that priorities people's knowledge, social justice and environmental protection within food production.

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# 8.0 Appendix

1.1. Original Questionaire from VAS
1.2. Food Ladders questionnaire created by Selina Treuherz and Lydia Leather here
1.3. Consent form
1.M Food Ladders Map