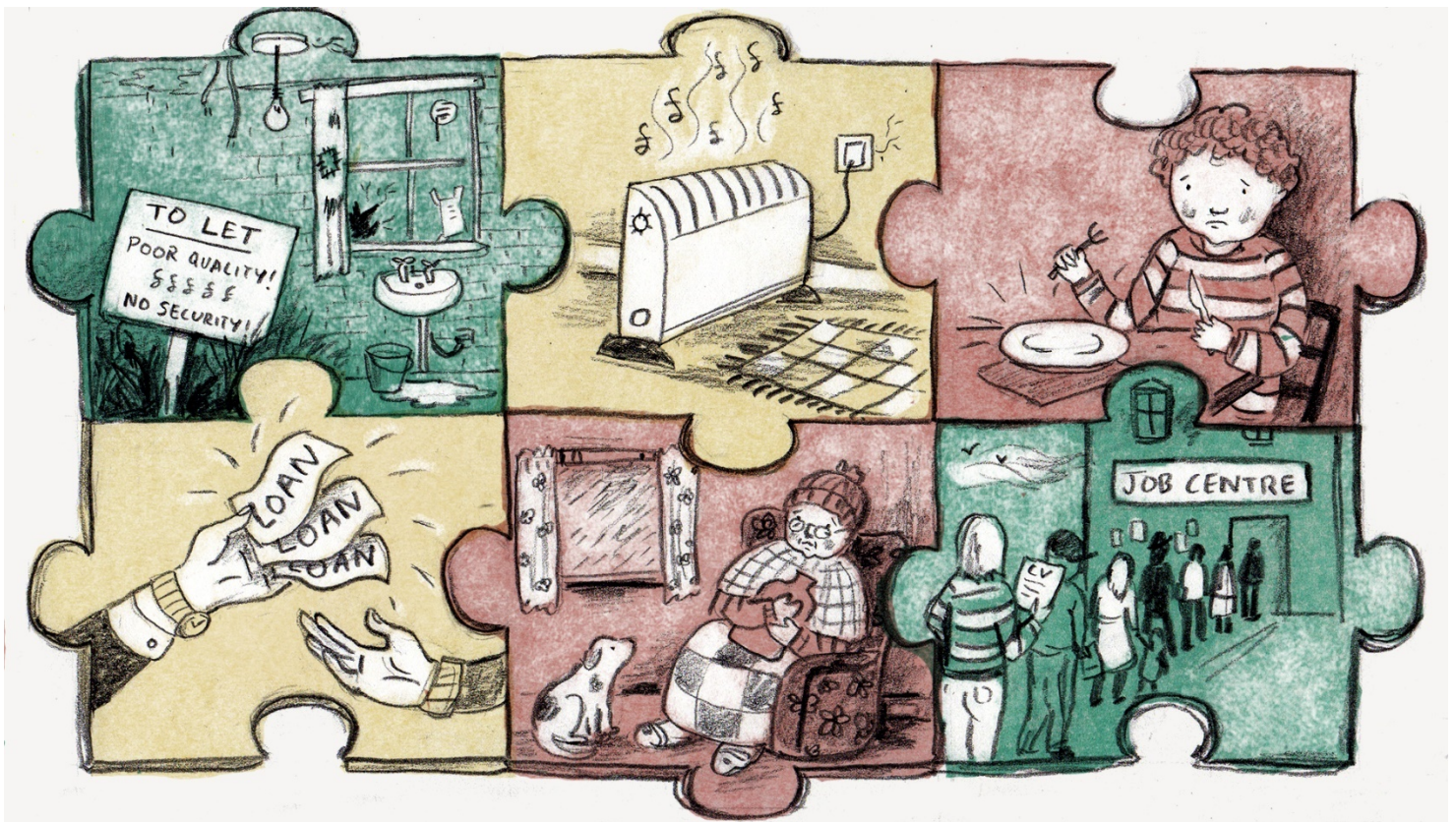


Life on the Breadline: Christianity, Poverty and Politics in the 21st Century City

A Report for Policymakers in the UK



Research Centre
Trust, Peace and
Social Relations



The University of Manchester



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across disciplinary boundaries and draws on political theory and philosophy as well as Christian theological traditions.

Preface

Since the emergence of large towns and cities following the industrial revolution in the nineteenth century the Church has been at the forefront of struggles to meet the challenges posed by the growth of urban poverty. Whilst the institutional Church has, on occasions, justified and even sanctified inequality it is also the case that many local churches and Christian NGOs have provided invaluable pastoral care for people who are experiencing poverty - 'feeding the hungry' and 'clothing the naked'. Furthermore, many Churches have moved beyond caring for people in need to work in collaboration with others to 'transform structures of injustice'.

This tradition of Christian social action has sometimes been challenged as the role of the Church in civil society politics has been questioned by some political leaders. However, two things are clear from our research. First, without exception, the national and regional Church leaders whom we have spoken to since the 'Life on the Breadline' project began in 2018 have been articulate in their assertion that, whilst Christianity may be a personal faith, it has profound public implications and that all Christians are called to build an inclusive and just society where all people can flourish and none are left behind. Second, whilst there are debates about attendance at Sunday worship, the Church remains a key player in civil society politics because of its deep roots in almost every local neighbourhood across the UK. It is clear that most local churches retain significant levels of social capital because of these relationships, placing them in a strong position to stand alongside people experiencing poverty in local communities up and down the land.

Since the 2008 global financial crash, consequent recession and the onset of a decade of austerity policies following the 2010 UK General Election the Church has been in vanguard of responses to growing levels of poverty and inequality. Beginning in 2018, and supported by the Economic and Social Research Council, the 'Life on the Breadline' project is the first in-depth, UK-wide, evidence-based research project by academic theologians to analyse the nature, reach and impact of Christian responses to austerity age poverty. As such the project breaks new ground, provides fresh data and original insights about the impact of Christian engagement with poverty, raises new challenges for policymakers and provides new resources capable of enabling the development of more effective anti-poverty policies.

As this report makes clear, the 'Life on the Breadline' project has identified, mapped and analysed a range of different Christian responses to contemporary poverty. Our extensive fieldwork in a variety of locations, our ethnographic case studies, interviews with national Church leaders from the four nations of the UK and survey of regional Church leaders underpins the recommendations with which this report closes. The work of the 'Life on the Breadline' team has, in some senses, just begun. It is our hope that the work we have done since 2018 might play some part in the struggle to 'make poverty history' and build a society where nobody is left out or left behind.

Executive summary

- Beginning in 2018, and supported by the Economic and Social Research Council, the 'Life on the Breadline' project is the first in-depth, UK-wide, evidence-based research project by academic theologians to analyse the nature, reach and impact of Christian responses to austerity age poverty. As such the project breaks new ground, provides fresh data and original insights about the impact of Christian engagement with poverty, raises new challenges for policymakers and provides new resources capable of enabling the development of more effective anti-poverty policies.
- The Life on the Breadline project has identified, mapped and analysed a range of different responses to contemporary poverty across the four nations of the UK through interviews with national Church leaders, an online survey with regional Church leaders and six local case studies.
- A key lesson for policymakers to draw from this report is that Christian social action engages with the complex intersectionality of poverty. The nature of poverty is intersectional, and so poverty cannot be divided into neat disconnected categories such as food poverty, housing poverty, or fuel poverty.
- Our engagement with national, regional and local Church leaders and Christian groups has shown that Christian responses to poverty span across caring, campaigning, advocacy, social enterprise, education and resourcing. These are not distinct approaches. Churches and groups often engage in a variety of responses to poverty in the UK.

- Our Life on the Breadline research has highlighted a growing critique amongst Christians of the unequal impact of austerity in the UK, which many believe is an unjust government policy that deepens existing structural injustice.
- Christian social action responds to structural injustice and the causes of poverty as well as its symptoms. The impact of Christian responses to poverty in the UK is therefore far reaching in not only alleviating the symptoms of poverty, but also working to reduce levels of poverty. This impact is most clearly shown in our Life on the Breadline case studies.
- As a result of its ongoing localised social capital, the Church remains a key player in civil society politics. Life on the Breadline shows how important it is for local, regional and national policymakers to gain a deeper understanding of the extent, value, variety and impact of Christian engagement with poverty in cities, towns and villages across the UK. If they are open to learn from such Christian social action local, regional and national political leaders will be better placed to fashion more effective policy that is capable of reducing levels of poverty in the UK.
- The report concludes with 6 recommendations for local, regional, and national policymakers in the UK. The 6 recommendations, to be read alongside the 16 accompanying actions in section 6 of this report, are:
 1. Church leaders and policymakers need to work together in order to address the causes of poverty in the UK at all levels of leadership (local, regional, and national) as well as supporting people experiencing poverty.
 2. Policymakers should make use of the Life on the Breadline research resources on the project website <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/>
 3. Policymakers should spend more time with people experiencing poverty so they can develop a better understanding of the reality and daily struggles faced by people on low incomes.
 4. Churches and Christians should encourage policymakers to develop structural reforms to tackle post- Covid-19 poverty rather than simply filling the gap left by welfare reforms and spending cuts.
 5. The criteria used to award funding for community projects should focus the presence of assets in local communities and not just on deficits. Policymakers should learn more about Asset-Based Community Development to learn about

what can be achieved by focussing on developing people's gifts rather than stereotypes about people on a low-income.

6. The link between poverty and poor housing needs to be broken to enable the building of cohesive and inclusive communities where all people can flourish. The problem of unsafe poor-quality social housing needs to become a top policy priority if attempts to address the inequality of housing provision are to be successful.

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1. Introduction

Life on the Breadline¹ is a three year (2018-2021) research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. The project has analysed the nature, scope, and impact of Christian engagement with urban poverty in the UK in the context of austerity since the 2008 financial crisis. It is the first academic theological analysis of Christian responses to UK poverty in the context of austerity that draws on detailed in-depth empirical fieldwork across the UK in the form of interviews with national Church leaders, an online survey with regional Church leaders, and six ethnographic case studies.

The purpose of this report is to present and discuss the implications of the Life on the Breadline research for national and regional policymakers in the UK in order to enhance their understanding of Christian engagement with poverty and facilitate more holistic government policy.

Key terms in this report:

- **Poverty:** when people do not have enough resources to meet basic needs and take part in society².
- **Austerity:** an economic policy to reduce government debt, which impacts upon people's everyday lives. The most recent period of austerity in the UK began in 2009 following the global financial crisis³.
- **National Church:** in the Life on the Breadline research we have defined a national Church as a denomination that adheres to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and that has a clear national presence in more than one geographic city or region in the UK.
- **National Church leader:** in the Life on the Breadline research we have defined a national Church leader as a senior leader in their national denomination/church in the UK.
- **Regional Church leader:** in the Life on the Breadline research, regional Church leaders in the UK were defined through areas used in national Church structures, for example dioceses, districts, and divisions. The research recognised the importance of the individual nations within the UK and so unless this was reflected in a national Church's structure, the research did not refer to nations within the UK as regions.

¹ For more information about the Life on the Breadline research visit <http://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/>

² JRF (2021) *UK poverty 2020-2021*, accessed at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2020-21>

³ See <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/resources/austerity-timeline-2/> for key austerity policies over the last decade.

Poverty in the UK is often defined as living on a household income (adjusted for household size) that is less than 60% of the UK average income.⁴ This definition is focussed solely on income. The Social Metrics Commission has developed a broader definition of poverty that considers all material resources, inescapable costs (for example from disability), and housing adequacy⁵. This broader definition better reflects our 'Life on the Breadline' findings. In addition we follow the work of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) to define poverty as when people do not have enough resources to meet basic needs and to take part in society⁶. In doing so, we note that living in poverty affects people's daily lives: it is not simply a statistic, but affects the choices that people have, or do not have.

If definitions of poverty are based solely on income it can be argued that in statistical terms levels of poverty in the UK have seen little change in the last decade, with over one in five people living in poverty⁷. However, this masks the damage that austerity has done to communities across the UK over the last decade as we show below. As the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic continue, levels of poverty in the UK are likely to worsen, and inequalities to increase. By December 2020 unemployment had reached 5.1%, rising from 3.9% a year earlier⁸. Whilst levels of poverty have not dramatically changed, levels of destitution have increased significantly. Destitution as defined by JRF is when people lack two or more essentials over a month, essentials being: shelter, food, heating, lighting, clothes and footwear, and basic toiletries, and/or when a household experiences extremely low or no income⁹. Households in the UK who have experienced destitution increased by 35% from 2017 to 2019 - 2.4 million people in 2019 of whom 550,000 were children¹⁰.

⁴ Government (2021) *Households below average income (HBAI) statistics*, accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/households-below-average-income-hbai--2>

⁵ Social Metrics Commission (2018) *A new measure of poverty for the UK*, accessed at <https://socialmetricscommission.org.uk/MEASURING-POVERTY-SUMMARY-REPORT.pdf>

⁶ JRF (2021) *UK Poverty 2020/2021*, accessed at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2020-21>

⁷ JRF (2021) *UK Poverty 2020/2021*, accessed at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2020-21>

⁸ ONS (2020) *Unemployment*, accessed at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/unemployment>

⁹ JRF (2020) *Destitution in the UK 2020*, accessed at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2020>

¹⁰ JRF (2020) *Destitution in the UK 2020*, accessed at <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk-2020>



Figure 1: A Christmas food bank. Credit: *Life on the Breadline* research, artist: Beth Waters

In the next section of the report we explain how the Life on the Breadline research was undertaken. Then, in sections 3 to 5 we outline our key findings: The complexity of poverty in the UK; Christian responses to poverty in the UK; and The impact of Christian responses to poverty in the UK.

2. Researching Life on the Breadline

The Life on the Breadline research has drawn on three main methods: interviews with national Church leaders, an online survey with regional Church leaders and six case studies spread across Birmingham, London, and Manchester. The detail of each of these is given below in sections 2.1 to 2.3.

All research participants were fully briefed on the research, gave formal consent to take part, and were given the option of anonymity. In this report, names are used with people's quotes where consent was given to do so, and their roles are referred to as correct at the point of the interview or focus group. The research gained ethical approval from the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University.

During the course of the research we spoke to 16 national Church leaders in the UK, 104 regional Church leaders in the UK, and formally spoke with 70 people living in or responding to poverty across our six case studies in London, Birmingham, and Manchester. This gave

a total of 190 formal research participants. However, as a result of the participant observation we undertook during fieldwork we had extended informal conversations with approximately a further 350 people, whom we refer to as informal research participants.



Figure 2: The Life on the Breadline fieldwork elements

2.1. Interviews with national Church leaders

Interviews were carried out with 16 national Church leaders in the UK. We defined a national Church as a denomination that adheres to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and that has a clear national presence in more than one geographic city or region in the UK, and a national Church leader was defined as a senior leader in their national denomination. The national Churches represented in these 16 interviews were:

1. Cherubim and Seraphim Church
2. Church of England
3. Church of Scotland
4. Church in Wales
5. Evangelical Alliance
6. Independent Methodist Church
7. Irish Council of Churches

8. Methodist Church
9. Newfrontiers/Jubilee+
10. Orthodox Church
11. United Free Church of Scotland
12. United Reformed Church
13. Wesleyan Holiness Church British Isles

The interviews with national Church leaders were undertaken by Dr Stephanie Denning or Dr Chris Shannahan by telephone or video call, and on average lasted for approximately 40 minutes. The majority of interviews took place in 2019. In total, throughout 2019, the Life on the Breadline team contacted 54 national Churches at least twice by letter and/or email with an interview request for their national Church leader. Consequently, it is important to note that the national leaders of UK Christian denominations not included in the list above either declined the interview request, or did not respond to the invitation. The interviews were in-depth and semi-structured with questions in four parts: 'About you'; 'Poverty and austerity'; 'The impact of poverty and austerity'; and 'Responding to poverty'.

2.2. Online survey with regional Church leaders

A total of 375 regional Church leaders were invited to participate in an online survey that was run between 3rd June 2019 and 31st July 2019. Regional church leaders were defined in relation to the geographical areas used in national Church structures, for example dioceses, districts, and divisions. The research recognised the importance of the individual nations within the UK and so unless this was reflected in a national Church's structure, the research did not refer to nations within the UK as regions. Each regional Church leader was contacted at least twice by email and/or telephone, or national Churches contacted at least twice to enquire about the Church's regional structure. As there is not a definitive list of national or regional Churches, the Church leaders contacted was subject to information that was publicly available in 2019.

104 regional Church leaders from 17 national Churches across the UK completed the survey. Whilst some church leaders were based in more than one nation (thus a total greater than 100%), the responses showed a spread across the UK: 74% England, 19% Scotland, 16% Wales, and 4% Northern Ireland. The national Churches represented in the survey were:

1. Baptist Church (10 responses)
2. Church of England (27 responses)

3. Church of God of Prophecy (2 responses)
4. Church of Ireland (1 response)
5. Church of Scotland (13 responses)
6. Coptic Orthodox Church (1 response)
7. Elim Church (3 responses)
8. Independent Methodist Church (2 responses)
9. Methodist Church (12 responses)
10. Pentecostal/Non-denomination churches (1 response)
11. Quaker (2 responses)
12. Roman Catholic Church (9 responses)
13. Salt and Light (5 responses)
14. Seventh-day Adventist Church (1 response)
15. Synod of German Speaking Congregation in Great Britain (1 response)
16. The Salvation Army (7 responses)
17. United Reform Church (6 responses)

The survey was structured in four sections: 'About you'; 'Poverty in your region'; 'Responding to poverty in your region'; and 'Responding to UK poverty in relation to the government'. The sections combined multiple choice questions, open text box answers, and ranking priority questions.

2.3. Case studies in Birmingham, London, and Manchester

Six ethnographic case studies were completed between 2019 and 2021 in Birmingham, London, and Manchester. Specific criteria were used to select case studies. First, a decision was taken to focus within this project on poverty in large cities, whilst recognising the need for further research in other urban and also rural contexts. Second, the choice of case studies reflected experience and activism in different geographical regions. Third, because part of the aim of Life on the Breadline was to engage with the intersectional nature of UK poverty, case studies were selected in order to reflect this complex reality. Fourth, case studies were chosen in order to demonstrate different types of Christian responses to austerity age poverty. Each case study involved one member of the Life on the Breadline research team spending time with the case study church/group/organisation at their activities, interviewing staff, volunteers, and participants and in the local communities served. Where possible focus groups were arranged. The research team kept informal notes from their visits and interviews and focus groups were transcribed word for word. All case study groups/organisations were offered anonymity as well as individual participants.



Figure 3: The six Life on the Breadline case studies

2.3.1. B30 Foodbank, Birmingham

B30 Foodbank¹¹ is a Trussell Trust foodbank in the B30 postcode area of Birmingham, south of the city centre which at the time of our research ran in Cotteridge Church¹². It is one of the largest Trussell Trust foodbanks in the West Midlands. There were around 150 volunteers at the foodbank, mainly split between the “meet and greet team” (who greet clients, fill in paperwork, and signpost clients to other services outside of the foodbank), the “pickers and packers” (who pack the food), and the warehouse volunteers (who receive donations, sort the food and store it at the warehouse, and deliver it to Cotteridge Church).

This case study was undertaken by Dr Stephanie Denning between February 2019 and June 2019 with 16 days at the foodbank. Interviews were completed with 5 volunteers and 18 clients, and a focus group with photo elicitation on people’s experiences of volunteering at the foodbank completed with nine volunteers. This gave 32 research participants at B30

¹¹ For more information about B30 Foodbank, visit <https://b30.foodbank.org.uk/>

¹² B30 Foodbank later moved to run from the Quaker Cotteridge Friends Meeting House during the Covid-19 pandemic, with an intention to return to Cotteridge Church.

Foodbank, in addition to informal conversations that Stephanie had with other foodbank volunteers and clients. This case study was undertaken prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.3.2. Hodge Hill Church, the Firs and Bromford estate, Birmingham:

The Firs and Bromford estate is in Hodge Hill, East Birmingham. Statistically the estate is in the top 10% of deprived areas in England. On the estate, community workers and volunteers at Hodge Hill Church¹³, Open Door Community Foundation¹⁴ (based on the estate in a building called 'The Hub'), and the charity/social enterprise Worth Unlimited¹⁵ implement asset-based community development (ABCD). ABCD is an approach which focusses on gifts and assets at the neighbourhood level rather than deficits to start from what is 'strong' to then address what is 'wrong'¹⁶.

This case study took place from January 2020 to October 2020, initially with Dr Stephanie Denning spending time in-person on the estate across 7 days, and then fieldwork moved online to participation in several Zoom gatherings due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Interviews were completed online or over the telephone with 9 local residents, and focus groups were completed online with 7 community workers (with photo elicitation), 4 Street Connectors (with photo elicitation), and 7 people planning a food pantry. This gave 22 formal research participants on the estate.

2.3.3. Inspire Centre, Levenshulme, Manchester:

Inspire Centre¹⁷ is a social enterprise and community centre which was established in 2010 through the involvement of Inspire Church in its former, dilapidated church building. The Centre now runs a wide variety of events and has an on-site café which serves as a popular meeting place for locals and offers cheap but nutritious and high quality meals. Locally, Inspire Centre is often referred to as 'Inspire' but in this report we refer to 'Inspire Centre' and 'Inspire Church' (a United Reformed Church) for clarity between the Centre and Church.

¹³ For more information about Hodge Hill Church, visit <https://hodgehillchurch.wordpress.com/>

¹⁴ For more information about Open Door Community Foundation in Hodge Hill, visit <https://hodgihillopenoor.wordpress.com/welcome-to-open-door/>

¹⁵ For more information about Worth Unlimited, visit <https://worthunlimited.co.uk/>

¹⁶ For more information about asset-based community development (ACBD) see Russell C. 2011 *People powered change. Twelve domains that people are uniquely able to change through handmade and homemade solutions*, Nurture Development, https://issuu.com/cormac_russell/docs/12_domains_of_people_powered_change accessed 19/05/2021

¹⁷ For more information about Levenshulme Inspire, visit <https://www.lev-inspire.org.uk/>

This case study was completed from January 2020 to December, initially with Dr Stephanie Denning spending 5 days at Inspire and undertaking multiple informal interviews. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, further visits could not be made, and interviews with 5 staff members took place online.

2.3.4. Church Action on Poverty, Greater Manchester

Church Action on Poverty¹⁸ is a national anti-poverty charity based in Salford. Church Action on Poverty was established in 1982. It works with local churches and people who are experiencing poverty with the aim of tackling the root causes of poverty. This case study differed from others within the project because Church Action on Poverty's work relates to a dispersed network of supporters, rather than being confined to a specific town or city.

The case study was led by Dr Stephanie Denning, Dr Chris Shannahan and Professor Peter Scott and fieldwork took place between February 2019 and January 2021 with Dr Stephanie Denning attending Church Action on Poverty events online, and in Manchester, Birmingham, and Newcastle. These events focussed on the Food Power Network, your Local Pantry scheme, Church on the Margins work, and End Hunger UK. Dr Chris Shannahan and Professor Peter Scott attended the launch of the Poverty Truth Commission in Manchester. Furthermore Dr Chris Shannahan and Dr Stephanie Denning co-created and co-led the National Poverty Consultation with Church Action on Poverty. This gathering of approximately 35 Church leaders and anti-poverty activists met twice during the project, in November 2018 and January 2021. Interviews took place by telephone or online with 5 staff members and 1 local pantry leader, as well as a focus group with photo elicitation with 4 staff members, giving 10 formal research participants in addition to informal conversations with many more people at the events attended and during the National Poverty Consultation gatherings.

2.3.5. Notting Hill Methodist Church, London

Notting Hill Methodist Church¹⁹ in West London in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. The Borough is home to some of the wealthiest people in the UK but is also characterised by stark levels of inequality.²⁰ Notting Hill Methodist Church is situated in North Kensington, where levels of poverty are far higher than in the South of the borough.

¹⁸ For more information about Church Action on Poverty, visit <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/>

¹⁹ For more information about Notting Hill Methodist Church, visit <http://nottinghillmc.org.uk/>

²⁰ See Amelia Gentleman, Grenfell Tower MP highlights huge social divisions in London, 13 November 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/nov/13/grenfell-tower-mp-highlights-huge-social-divisions-in-london>, accessed 28 May 2021.

On the night of 14th June 2017 the 24 storey Grenfell Tower was engulfed in flames as flammable cladding caught light. 72 people lost their lives in the fire which is still being investigated by the official Grenfell Inquiry at the time of writing.²¹ This case study highlights the underexplored link between poverty, austerity and unsafe social housing.

Faith groups remain key players in the public sphere in North Kensington – rooted in and trusted by local people. In the hours following the onset of the fire members of Notting Hill Methodist Church were amongst the first responders, providing people fleeing Grenfell Tower with vital care and support. In light of this intersection between poverty, austerity and low quality social housing the development of a case study focusing on the work of Notting Hill Methodist Church has been a vital part of our ‘Life on the Breadline’ research. The case study has highlighted the link between poverty, austerity policies, inequality and housing justice.

Fieldwork alongside the congregation at Notting Hill Methodist Church ran from late 2019 to early 2020. Dr Chris Shannahan made three visits to the area spending a total of six days in the local community, building relationships with the congregation and volunteers at the Trussell Trust foodbank based in the church. Informal walking interviews were conducted with the Revd Mike Long, Minister of Notting Hill Methodist Church. However, the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic in Spring 2020 made it impossible to conduct further in person visits after March 2020.

2.3.6. Power The Fight, London

Power The Fight²² is a charity based in London which works with families, churches, faith groups and community organisations to equip them to tackle youth violence in general and knife crime in particular. Power The Fight’s emergence in 2016 can be linked with the significant reduction of funding for youth services in London during the ‘age of austerity’, which left already marginalised communities further under-resourced. Power The Fight uses a community empowerment cycle – a cycle of community empowerment, co-designed delivery, community ideas and experience, and strategy, policy, funding, and working with decision makers. In doing so, Power The Fight aims to be a conduit between community and policy makers to work towards structural change. Power The Fight draws much of its support from Black Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches in London and whilst it

²¹ For more information about the Grenfell Inquiry visit <https://www.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk/>

²² For more information about Power the Fight visit <https://www.powerthefight.org.uk/>

continues to focus on supporting people affected by knife crime it has developed other related programmes such as training and workshops on youth violence for national and local organisations, mentoring, personal and group therapy and advocacy alongside political leaders in the Greater London Authority.

This case study was undertaken by Professor Robert Beckford who visited Power The Fight 3 times in 2019. During these day long visits Robert Beckford met with the founder of Power The Fight, Ben Lindsay, and participated in a day event which brought together 20 stakeholders in Southwark (police, church, community activist and local authority) to consider a collective approach to knife crime. The Covid-19 pandemic meant that further in-person visits to Power The Fight were not possible, and so the case study was completed via telephone and online conversations between Robert Beckford and Ben Lindsay. However, the case study has been important in highlighting the relationship between serious youth violence, poverty, austerity policies and inequality in the UK.

3. Key findings: The complexity of poverty in the UK

Although poverty is complex and multifaceted it is often discussed in one-dimensional terms by policymakers, researchers and the media who have a tendency to break it down into seemingly distinct one-dimensional categories such as food poverty, housing poverty, period poverty, or fuel poverty,²³ However, our Life on the Breadline research has demonstrated the intersectional nature of poverty, which cannot be divided into neat disconnected categories relating to single parts of a person's life. The impact of poverty reaches into every corner of a person's life and can influence our experience in different ways at the same time.

²³ For example see Denning (2018) *Holiday hunger 'Fit and Fed' discussion in Parliament*, accessed at <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/2018/12/05/holiday-hunger-fit-and-fed-discussion-in-parliament/>; Government (2020) *Fuel poverty statistics*, accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fuel-poverty-statistics>; Period Poverty (2021) *Homepage*, accessed at <https://periodpoverty.uk/>

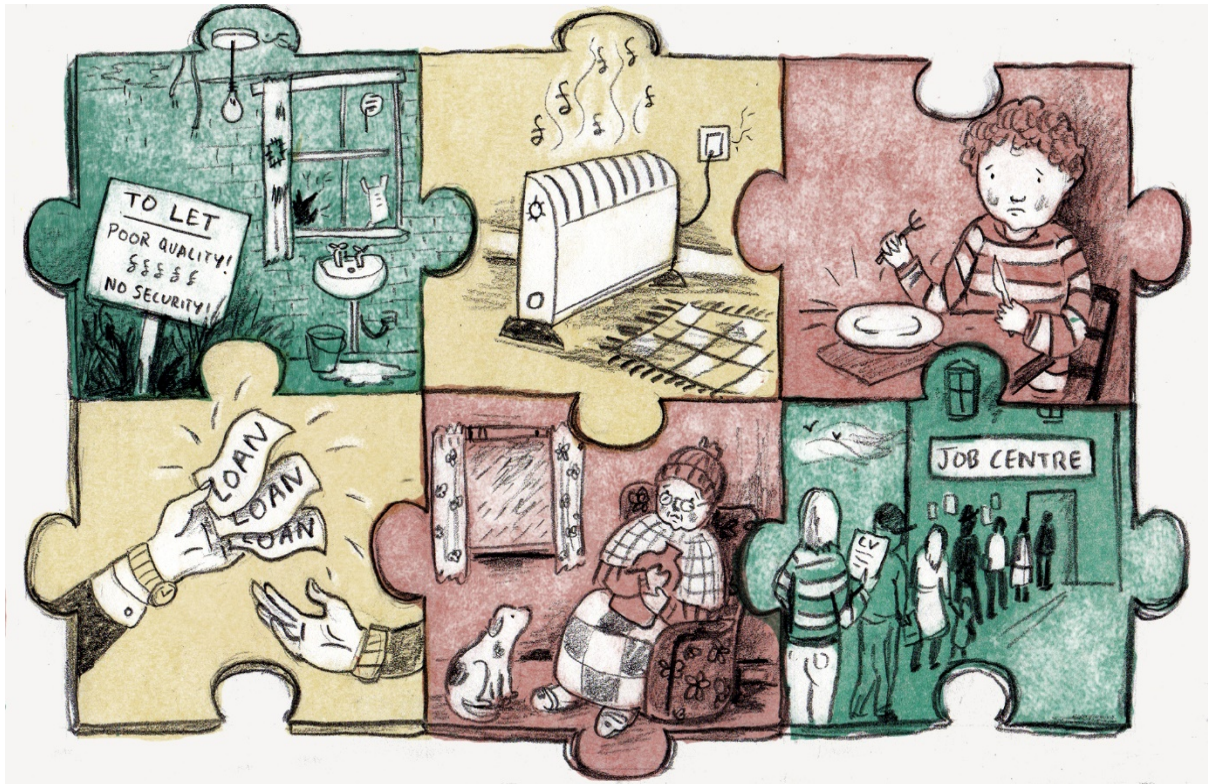


Figure 4: The jigsaw of poverty. Credit: Life on the Breadline research, artist: Beth Waters

3.1. Levels of poverty and need in the last decade

The vast majority of people who participated in our Life on the Breadline research thought that poverty and levels of need have increased in their local community and the UK over the last decade. Some respondents, however, suggested that total poverty levels have not necessarily increased if based on the government’s preferred definition of poverty. Across the different aspects of our fieldwork, people’s responses often intertwined examples of poverty and need in the UK and its causes - these were not always easily distinguishable. However, it was widely suggested by research participants that the visibility of poverty has increased and people’s experiences of poverty have worsened in a number of interrelated areas as indicated in Figure 5 below:

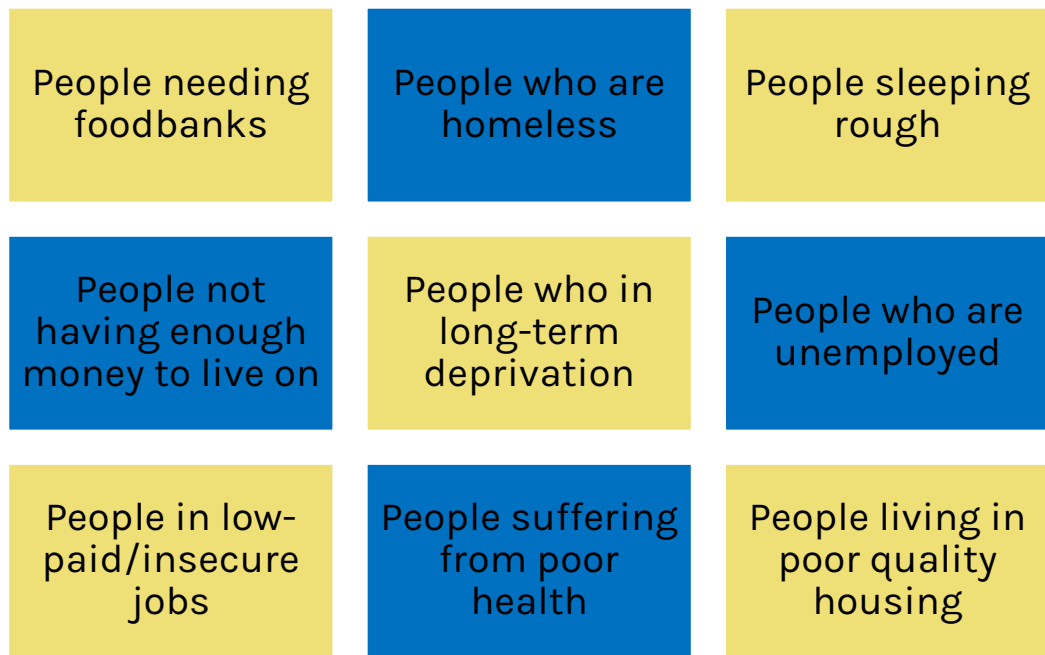


Figure 5: Ways in which research participants believe poverty has worsened since 2010

In addition to the examples of poverty listed above, changes to the welfare state and in particular to the benefit system including benefit freezes, the two child limit, the bedroom tax, and changes to disability benefits were frequently given as causes of poverty:

The changes to the welfare system have had a huge impact on the ability of people in our region being able to make ends meet.
(Methodist regional Church leader, online survey, 2019)

The introduction of Universal Credit was the most commonly mentioned benefit change related to worsening levels of poverty. Samantha, a client at B30 Foodbank explained the impact of Universal Credit in stark terms:

Universal Credit is a big one - people are killing themselves you know bab [sic], and dying. I've contemplated it, why struggle like this for another ten, fifteen years.
(Samantha, B30 Foodbank client interview, 2019)

Samantha was not alone in telling us about the mental health problems she struggled with that were related to her low income and her daily struggle to have enough food to eat and enough money to live on. Other people at the B30 Foodbank shared similar feelings and struggles with us during fieldwork. The specific problems with Universal Credit that people across our fieldwork referred to were the five week wait for the first payment and therefore

not having money to live off during this period, future repayments reducing income if people did apply for an advance payment and the fact that payments are not backdated to when an application is made, and being paid monthly instead of fortnightly.

3.2. Austerity and poverty in the last decade

Austerity was not a word commonly used by most of our research participants. Respondents in our case studies were split between people who did not know what the word meant (although they may have heard it used, for example in the media) and those who defined austerity in terms of cuts to government spending, particularly in relation to welfare spending. All of the national Church leaders interviewed understood what austerity meant, and predominantly defined it as government reductions in spending in order to reduce the deficit. In responding to a question on the meaning of austerity, some national Church leaders reflected on how austerity is more than an economic or political policy because it has impacted unequally upon people's daily lives:

Austerity means that life's been tougher and harder for many people.
(Bishop Paul Butler, the Bishop of Durham, Church of England, interview, 2020)

Furthermore, some national Church leaders spoke about the intersectional impact of austerity, suggesting that churches 'on the frontline' understand this as seen in the following quotation:

So austerity is a real lived cultural, social, economic experience which is understood well
by churches on the frontline.
(Martin Charlesworth, Executive Chief Officer of Jubilee+, interview, 2019)

We did not specifically ask regional Church leaders what austerity meant, and instead in the survey defined it as an economic policy to reduce government debt by reducing spending, which impacts upon people's everyday lives. We also gave this definition of austerity to respondents in our case studies who did not know the meaning of austerity, before proceeding with the interview or focus group.

When asked about the impact of austerity in the UK, national Church leaders reflected on its unequal impact. Most national Church leaders acknowledged that they had not been personally affected by austerity because they were in secure employment, wealthier, and/or older. They suggested that the poorest in society had been most affected by

austerity, particularly as a result of changes to the welfare state. Some national Church leaders also said that their denominations had been affected by austerity because people in local congregations had become less able to contribute to weekly offerings.

Across our six case studies in London, Birmingham, and Manchester, people told us about the negative effects of austerity and spending cuts in their local areas. For example, at B30 Foodbank one client reflected:

Just the poverty, it affects people's moods, everybody seems miserable, depressed, anxious, worried, a lot of debt, struggling for food and you know just the basics really of life, struggling to pay bills.

(Stuart, B30 Foodbank client interview, 2019)

Stuart's reflection echoes the sentiment shared with us by many of the clients at B30 Foodbank of what it is like to live on a low income. Other also noted the impact of cuts and changes to benefits on people receiving state support, plus cuts to local services such as libraries and leisure centres. It is important here to emphasise that not all of the clients whom we met at B30 Foodbank were recipients of state benefits. However, the effects of austerity were still felt in other ways, for example through cuts to local services and transport systems. As part of our case study with Church Action on Poverty, at the National Poverty Consultation in 2018 we asked participants what they thought were key policies in the last decade of austerity. From this and our wider research we developed an austerity timeline, as shown in figure 6.

2009



By the end of 2009, the UK was out of economic recession but in the same period austerity policies were introduced by the government.

The austerity policies involved large scale funding cuts, but it was announced that the NHS and education would be protected.



2010



In May there was a General Election and a Conservative government was formed with David Cameron as Prime Minister.

Cameron introduced the idea of 'Big Society' – where local communities and volunteers play an active role in service provision.

2011



Changes to housing benefits – maximum rents introduced.

Child benefit was frozen for three years (rather than rising with inflation).

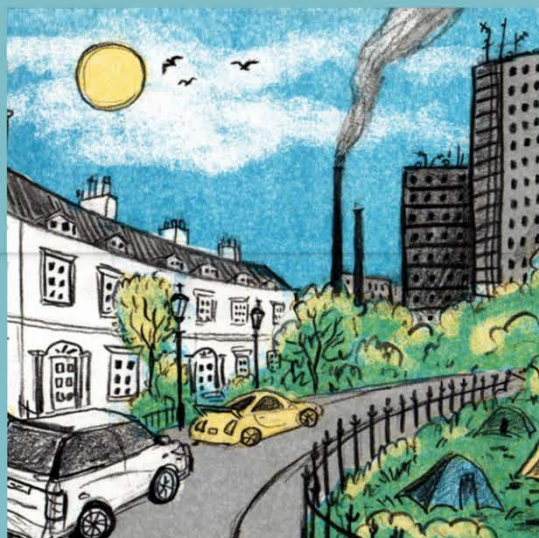
Local Authority services began to be cut back/ended, including youth services, community engagement, and libraries.

Riots took place in several UK cities in August.

The Occupy Movement took place in the autumn.



2012



The age limit for people to be sharing a room under the local housing allowance was increased from 25 to 35 years old.

The [Welfare Reform Act 2012](#) came into practice. This included:

- [Bedroom tax](#): social housing tenants lost up to 25% of their benefit if they had a spare room. To work out if a room was spare, two children of different sexes up to the age of 10 were expected to share, and children of the same sex up to the age of 16 were expected to share.
- Universal Credit was outlined as a new means-tested benefit that turned benefits for people employed and unemployed into a single benefit.
- Personal Independence Payment (PIP) began to replace Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for new claimants. PIP involved more medical testing, and more frequent testing than DLA even for life-long conditions.
- Benefits for households became capped to mean that benefit levels could not be higher than average wages.
- Tougher penalties were introduced for benefit fraud.

2013



There were multiple [welfare changes](#) in 2013:

- [Household benefit cap](#) – the maximum benefits that a household could receive was set so that this was not more than the average weekly wage (after tax and national insurance).
- [Council tax benefit](#) – cuts were made for working-age households to benefit payments that cover council tax. Pensioners were not affected by this cut, and some councils chose to make the payment themselves rather than pass this on to benefit claimants in their areas.
- [Child benefit](#) was no longer paid to households where a person earns more than £50,000.

[Legal aid cuts](#) – resulted in a fall in the numbers of people getting state funded help in benefit cases.



2014



From April, existing benefit claimants began to be transferred to [Universal Credit](#).

The TV series 'Benefits Street' started on Channel 4.

2015



The government announced a consultation on the future of [Sure Start](#) (children's care) which was later cancelled in 2018, and children's centres began to close.

Zero hour contracts became more prevalent.

Around 2015, food banks could be found in areas that ordinarily would be considered wealthier areas of the UK.



2016



Brexit vote – result was to leave the EU in March 2019.

Changes in government: David Cameron resigned as Prime Minister, and Theresa May became Prime Minister. Stephen Crabb, and then Damian Green became Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Philip Hammond became the Chancellor – he continued to aim for a balanced budget, but no longer aimed to reduce the deficit by 2020.

The [Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016](#) was implemented. This included that the benefit cap must be reviewed annually by the Secretary of State.

[Benefits were frozen for four years](#) from April 2016 (instead of rising with inflation).

Universal Credit helpline controversy – calling the helpline cost up to 45 pence/minute (this later became free in November 2017).

The National Living Wage was implemented.

The film 'I Daniel Blake' was released.

2017



In April, a two child tax credit cap was introduced for children born on/after 6th April 2017.

In May, there was a General Election and a Conservative government was formed with Theresa May as Prime Minister. David Gauke became Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Following campaigning and opposition, the number of weeks between a person applying for Universal Credit and their first payment was reduced from six weeks to five weeks.

The government announced £2 million funding for pilot projects in England responding to holiday hunger.

Job centre closures – for example, 50% of job centres closed in Glasgow, mainly in deprived areas.

Grenfell Tower fire, London, 17th June 2018



2018



Esther McVey, and then Amber Rudd (after resigning as Home Secretary), became Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, visited the UK and published his preliminary findings.

The Windrush scandal began – people wrongly detained, deported, and/or denied legal rights in the UK by the Home Office.



Analysis by the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that on average people's real annual wages were £800 lower in 2018 than they had been in 2008. People in their 20s and 30s were particularly affected, whereas pensioners were the least affected.

Welfare spending had fallen by almost 25% in the last ten years, according to figures obtained by MP Frank Field.

Universal Credit continued to be rolled out nationally, albeit with ongoing delays.

Free school meals continued to be means tested, after changes to Universal Credit, as with the previous benefit system around only one in three children in poverty were eligible for a free school meal.

A National Audit Office report on Universal Credit found that:

- Whilst the government claims that Universal Credit will give a return of £34 billion over 10 years, the National Audit Office has argued that the system could cost more to administer than the previous benefits system.
- After 8 years of working on Universal Credit, only 10% of expected claimants are on the system.
- Implementation of Universal Credit must continue because of the number of changes already made in Job Centres.
- "the Department for Work and Pensions does not accept that UC has caused hardship among claimants".
- The Department for Work and Pensions claims that 83% of claimants are satisfied with the service provided.

2019



Amber Rudd (Secretary of State for Work and Pensions) said in Parliament that:

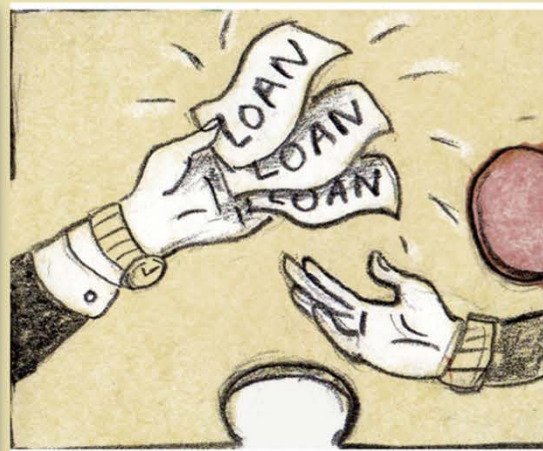
"It is absolutely clear that there were challenges in the roll-out of Universal Credit, and the main issue that led to an increase in food bank use could have been the fact that people had difficulty in accessing their money early enough."

Following campaigning, the government announced that it will introduce a measure for food insecurity.

Amid Brexit uncertainty, Theresa May resigned and Boris Johnson became Prime Minister.

Amber Rudd resigned as Secretary for Work and Pensions, and Therese Coffey took on this role.

Throughout 2019, Brexit uncertainty continues with the UK not leaving the EU by the 31st October 2019 deadline.



2020



On 31st January 2020, the UK left the EU and entered a transition period.

The World Health Organisation declared the outbreak of Covid-19 a pandemic.

From March multiple restrictions were put in place in the UK including the temporary closure of businesses, and restricted movement of people.

In the first quarter of 2020 the UK economy contracted by 2% – the fastest pace since the financial crisis in 2008. By August 2020 the UK had entered the deepest recession since records began as GDP fell 20.4% with Rishi Sunak, Chancellor of the Exchequer, saying "hard times are here".

2021



The Covid-19 pandemic has continued into 2021 throughout the world, including the UK.

By the start of 2021, 5.1% of adults in the UK were unemployed. Unemployment has been affected by the Covid-19 lockdown as businesses have struggled despite the government's furlough scheme.

Food provision for children in the UK to replace free school meals whilst schools are closed has proved contentious throughout the pandemic.



Credit: Clare

Figure 6. Austerity timeline, available at <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/resources/austerity-timeline-2/>

Reflections on the negative impact of cuts to welfare spending and cuts to local services were shared by research participants on the Firs and Bromford estate in Hodge Hill. Here,

however, the timeframe of austerity was questioned by several people who suggested that they lived on a “**forgotten estate**” that had been neglected locally, regionally, and nationally for investment before the start of the most recent period of austerity that followed the 2008 financial crash. Similar sentiments were expressed by people living near Grenfell Tower in North Kensington where the confluence of underinvestment in social housing in poor urban communities and pre-existing structural injustice preceded the onset of the current age of austerity. In Hodge Hill some participants expressed a sense of fatalism, implying that life on a low income was not necessarily linked to specific causes. One interviewee commented, “**I struggle anyway**”, and another said “**People just fall on hard times.**”

Across our case studies in Birmingham, London and Manchester research participants argued that one of the key features of austerity was that its impact was not equally spread in regions and nationally across the UK. This echoes research by Oxfam which showed that between 2010 and 2015 the poorest tenth of society in the UK was the most affected by austerity (net income decreased by 38%), whilst the wealthiest tenth was least affected (net income decreased by 5%)²⁴. This unequal impact of austerity was found in microcosm on the Firs and Bromford estate. The people whom we spoke to who were in relatively secure employment or retired and have been less affected by austerity than those whom we spoke to who were in receipt of benefits. Yet overall as the Firs and Bromford estate is in the top 10% of deprived areas in the UK, people on the estate have been more negatively affected by austerity than their counterparts in wealthier areas. Indeed, whilst those in paid employment reflected that they had been less affected, they could still see the negative effects of austerity in their local community, for example funding cuts in the local schools, and decreased opportunities and choices. Similarly at Church Action on Poverty and the Inspire Centre, staff members reflected on the negative impact of austerity upon employment opportunities in the charity sector, but recognised that people whom they worked with through their projects and initiatives had not all been equally affected by austerity. Within our Notting Hill Methodist Church case study volunteers at the Trussell Trust foodbank based in church building spoke of the impact that the combined effects of austerity policies, welfare changes and the localised spike in homelessness following the Grenfell Tower fire have had on levels of need in North Kensington. Finally, at B30 Foodbank none of the foodbank volunteers were also foodbank clients. There was therefore a split

²⁴ Poinasamy, K. (2013) *The True Cost of Austerity and Inequality. UK Case Study*. Oxfam, accessed at https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/cs-true-cost-austerity-inequality-uk-120913-en_0.pdf

between foodbank clients who had been more negatively affected than volunteers by austerity:

Me personally [affected by austerity]? No. I am very lucky – middle class, middle aged, the right demographic.
(Interview with B30 Foodbank volunteer, 2019)

The foodbank volunteer quoted above reflects that she was “the right demographic” to be less affected by austerity. One of Life on the Breadline’s key findings relates to the unequal impact of austerity. We have not, it seems, all been ‘in this together’; something that needs to be reflected policy responses to poverty as we explain in sections 4 and 5.



Figure 7: Poverty, inequality, and exclusion. Credit: Life on the Breadline research, artist: Beth Waters

Throughout our fieldwork we encountered differing views about the extent to which the unequal effects of austerity was an intentional part of the government policy. In addition to this, our research participants expressed a range of views about how well they thought that the Government understands poverty in the UK. A number of people we spoke to questioned whether government Ministers have direct contact with people experiencing poverty or any personal understanding of the everyday realities of austerity. Such reflections lead us to ask: if poverty is understood, then why does it still exist? Several national Church leaders pointed out that the ‘UK Government’ is not a single entity and so

it is not possible to generalise. Bishop Paul Butler, the Bishop of Durham in the Church of England, reflected that on the whole he felt that the Department for Work and Pensions has a clear understanding of the impact of government policies on poverty, but:

...sometimes there is a divide between the civil service and government because the civil servants might actually recognise there are ways through but it takes political will to make some of those steps".
(Bishop Paul Butler, Church of England, interview, 2020)

National church leaders in Wales and Scotland, on the whole felt that their devolved administrations have a better understanding of poverty than the government in Westminster although this view was not unanimously shared by regional Church leaders.

4. Key findings: Christian responses to poverty in the UK

Churches in the UK have engaged with urban poverty since the work of the Christian Socialists in Victorian London or the ministry of William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury during the Great Depression and Second World War.²⁵ In recent decades a milestone was the publication of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Commission on Urban Priority Areas 1985 *Faith in the City* report was published in response to growing levels of urban poverty. This seminal Anglican report examined the Church of England's role in responding to poverty and injustice, as well as forwarding a detail critique of the urban policies of the then Conservative government. The report was a milestone but it is important to note that it spent very little time discussing non-Anglican social action, thereby offering an important but ultimately incomplete picture of Christian engagement with urban poverty. Shaped by Anglican Social Theology, *Faith in the City* argued that, whilst Christianity was a personal faith, the Church had a responsibility to advocate for the Common Good in the public sphere. Consequently, the report criticised government social policy and Ministers' response to rising levels of poverty during the recession of the early 1980s. The Archbishop's Commission was accused of meddling in politics by some government Ministers who implied that the Church should not intervene in public debates about poverty and inequality. Twenty-one years later the Church of England and the Methodist Church jointly published *Faithful Cities. A Call for Celebration, Vision and Justice*. This ecumenical report was published in a very different socio-political context within which

²⁵ Shannahan, C. 2019. The Violence of Poverty: Theology and Activism in an "Age of Austerity", *Political Theology*, DOI: 10.1080/1462317X.2018.1543820

political leaders like the then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, encouraged faith groups to engage proactively in civil society politics, particularly in relation to poverty and social cohesion. *Faithful Cities* speaks of “a new covenant” between government and faith communities.²⁶ The report affirmed the importance of developing a dynamic economy but suggested that this can have, “the effect of undermining the fragile existence of deprived urban communities.”²⁷ *Faithful Cities* exemplifies a publicly engaged Church characterised by a commitment to partnership-based action on poverty. The report called for inequality in cities to be reduced and social cohesion to be increased. There was a need, suggested the authors for “greater clarity over expectations in partnership relationships between faith communities and public authorities at national, regional and local level.” (2006, 91). Fifteen years later as our Life on the Breadline research draws to a close this lack of clarity remains a problem.

Church responses to poverty in the UK reflect different attitudes towards the state and the role that Christians should play in civil society politics. Theologians and social scientists have written extensively about the relationship between the Church and the state since Augustine wrote his *City of God* meditation on the Roman Empire just over four hundred years after the time of Jesus. Such texts have always reflected varying historical, political and cultural contexts and diverse theological perspectives. Since the early years of the present century analyses of the role that Christians should play in civil society politics have reflected in different ways on what Ward and Hoelzl call “the new visibility of religion” in the public sphere.²⁸ Religion has not withered away as many secularists predicted during the twentieth century.²⁹ Indeed, because of their roots in local communities churches have become increasingly important players in civil society politics.³⁰ How then might churches use their enduring social capital against a backdrop of austerity age poverty? This has been one of the key questions we have explored within our Life on the Breadline research.

²⁶ Commission on Urban Life and Faith. 2006. *Faithful Cities: A Call for Celebration, Vision and Justice*, London: Methodist Publishing House/Church House Publishing, 11.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 36.

²⁸ Ward, G. and Hoelzl, M. 2008. *The New Visibility of Religion: Studies in Religion and Cultural Hermeneutics*. London: Continuum; Dinham, A., Furbey, R. and Lowndes, V. (eds.). 2009. *Faith in the Public Realm: Controversies, Policies and Practices*, Bristol: Policy Press.

²⁹ Berger, P. (ed). 1999. *The Desecularisation of the world: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

³⁰ Baker, C and Skinner, H. 2014. *Faith in Action: The dynamic connection between spiritual and religious capital*. Rochdale: William Temple Foundation.

Much has been written on the relationship between the church and state, and this report does not aim to extensively review that literature. However it has become apparent during our Life on the Breadline research that Christian denominations in the UK articulate a wide-range of perceptions about the state and the relationship that churches should have with it. These attitudes influence the extent to which different national Churches work alongside national or local government in responding to poverty.

A key policy that focused debates about the relationship between church and state in the last decade was the Big Society initiative predominantly under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government between 2010 and 2015, which called for local faith and community groups to play a greater role in service provision. This initiative proved to be controversial and question were asked within academia and the voluntary sector about whether faith and community groups were being used to replace the welfare state and were therefore complicit with what some argued were ideologically motivated welfare budget cuts.³¹

Over the last decade, when senior Church leaders have challenged successive Governments in relation to their austerity policies and levels of poverty in the UK their interventions have been criticised by political leaders. For example, in 2015 the then Prime Minister David Cameron defended the UK political and economic situation in response to a letter from the House of Bishops to members of the Church of England³². Our Life on the Breadline research has shown that challenging structural injustice remains the most challenging form of anti-poverty action for many Christians. However, it has become clear that many Christians feel that Church leaders need to speak truth to power more regularly and with greater clarity in the coming years.

Given that churches have a long history of responding to poverty in the UK, what is different about the ways in which Christians and churches have responded to poverty since the 2008 financial crash? What has been notable in the last decade is the increasing role that Christians, churches, and faith-based organisations³³ have played in welfare provision in

³¹ For example see Ray Gaston & Steven Shakespeare (2010) *Common Wealth: Christians for Economic and Social Justice*, *Political Theology*, 11:6, 793-801, DOI: 10.1558/poth.v11i6.793 or Williams, A. 2012. *Moralising the poor? Faith-based organisations, the Big Society and contemporary workfare policy*. In: Beaumont, J. & Cloke, P. (eds.) *Faith-based organisations and exclusion in European cities*. Bristol: Policy Press.

³² House of Bishops 2015. *Who Is My Neighbour? A Letter from the House of Bishops to the People and Parishes of the Church of England for the General Election 2015*, The Church of England, 1-56 accessed at <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/2170230/whoismyneighbour-pages.pdf>

³³ Faith-based organisations can take a variety of forms. The degree to which religious faith is explicit in the activity of the faith-based organisation varies.

the UK, and particularly where this provision has been used by people experiencing poverty who have few other options for assistance (including from the welfare state)³⁴.

Food banks³⁵ have played a central part in faith-based responses to austerity age poverty and 80% of food banks in the UK being run by a faith group.³⁶ However, our research has shown that Christian responses to poverty are not reducible to food banks. Poverty is multifaceted and complex and church responses to poverty are varied. Common church responses to UK poverty include caring (for example giving food at a foodbank), campaigning (for example on issues of housing justice), advocacy (for example providing guidance or advice on Benefits) and self-help or enterprise (for example social enterprises which are a common response in Black led churches). However, these broad approaches to poverty are not distinct categories because particular responses or initiatives can reflect aspects of all of these approaches at the same time. For example our case study at B30 Foodbank showed that whilst the foodbank gave direct care in the form of food parcels, it was also involved through the Trussell Trust in collecting data on the causes and nature of poverty which is used in campaigning. Figure 8 below depicts the six Christian approaches to poverty that we uncovered during our Life on the Breadline research. In the following pages we explore these responses in more depth.

³⁴ As discussed across the social sciences and theology – for example see Cloke, P., Beaumont, J. & Williams, A. (eds.) (2013) *Working Faith: Faith-based organisations and urban social justice*. Milton-Keynes: Paternoster; Muers, R. & Britt, T. (2012) Faithful Untidiness: Christian Social Action in a British City. *International Journal of Public Theology*, 6, 205-227.

³⁵ Following convention in the UK, this report refers to ‘food bank’ for independent food banks and to refer to food banks in general, and ‘foodbank’ to refer to Trussell Trust foodbanks.

³⁶ Loopstra, R., Goodwin, S., Goldberg B., Lambie-Mumford, H., May, J. & Williams, A. 2019. A survey of food banks operating independently of The Trussell Trust food bank network. IFAN, accessed at <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/independent-food-bank-survey>

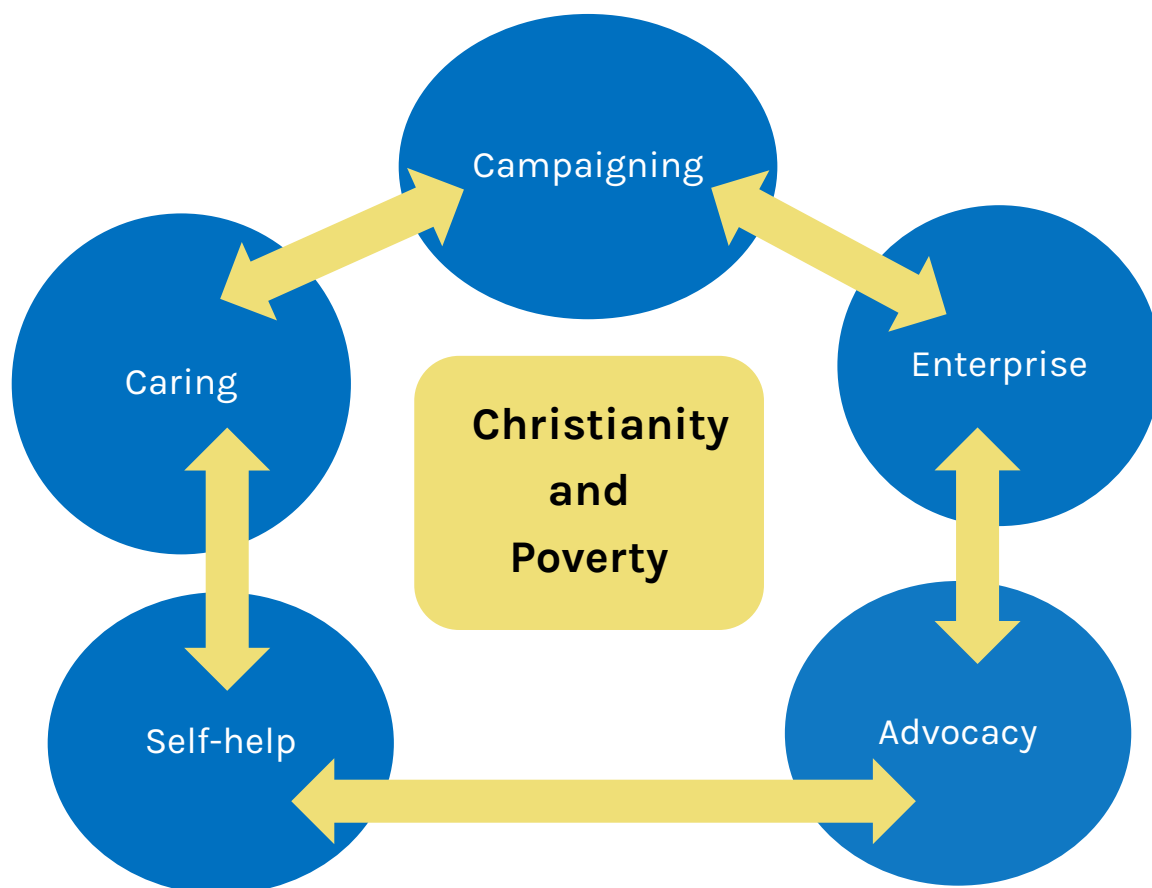


Figure 8: Christian responses to austerity-age poverty

4.1. The values that shape Christian responses to poverty in the UK

During Life on the Breadline we asked national Church leaders, regional Church leaders, and church/project leaders, staff, and volunteers at our six case studies what motivates their responses to poverty. Their answers can be loosely categorised into four main areas, each of which overlap to varying degrees.

First and most commonly across responses from national Church leaders, regional Church leaders, and people working locally in our six case studies, people were motivated to help people in poverty because of an ethic of social responsibility that was rooted in Christian teaching and the example of Jesus about loving your neighbour, showing compassion for the poor, and caring for people in need. The District Superintendent of the Wesleyan Holiness Church British Isles summarised this when she said: *“Love God and love people. That’s the whole basis of Christianity.”* (Interview, 2019). It could be suggested that such general ethical ideas are universal humanitarian principles. However, as we discovered during Life on the Breadline caring and compassionate responses to poverty were viewed

as a way of living out one's Christian faith. For example, one volunteer at B30 Foodbank described the activity of the foodbank as "true Christianity in operation." (George, B30 Foodbank volunteer, focus group, 2019). It has occasionally been suggested during our research that Christian action on poverty can sometimes be linked to evangelism (encouraging people to become Christians). We have not encountered this approach during our Life on the Breadline research. When national and regional Church leaders have referred to evangelism and social action they have all that church responses to poverty must always be unconditional expressions of Christian teaching which are offered without expectation of any further action by the recipient in terms of their religious faith or religious participation.

Secondly, Church leaders and case study participants told us that their faith led them to move beyond 'caring' to 'campaign' for social change that addresses the root causes of poverty and injustice. People talked about their commitment to challenging structural injustice in society – one of the 'Marks of Mission' adopted by many UK Churches.³⁷ This approach is shaped by a Christian tradition that tends to prioritise work for social justice over social welfare. Examples of structural injustice that we encountered during Life on the Breadline include the disproportionate impact that austerity has had on poorer people, BAME communities, people with disabilities, and young people, and 'poverty premiums'³⁸ such as the higher energy costs for people on energy meters compared to those accepted by energy companies to pay for their energy by direct debit. In her interview with us in 2020, Dr Nicola Brady, General Secretary of the Irish Council of Churches, suggested that Christians are called to tackle the root causes, as well as the symptoms, of poverty because of Biblical command to work for justice alongside caring for people in need. Alongside care and compassion, a commitment to social justice was frequently referred to as a motivation in responses to the survey by regional Church leaders from across the four nations of the UK. Another example of this fusion of 'caring' and 'campaigning' Christian action on poverty is drawn from our Notting Hill Methodist Church case study. Just a few hundred yards from Grenfell Tower in North Kensington, Notting Hill Methodist became the hub for immediate and urgent pastoral care in the hours after the blaze took hold of the flats on 14th June 2017. As the Minister at Notting Hill church, the Revd Mike Long, told us, the congregation did not just offer food, a shoulder to cry on and a place to sleep but long

³⁷ The five 'Marks of Mission' were first adopted in 1984. More information can be found at <https://www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission.aspx>

³⁸ See Joint Public Issues Team (2013) *The lies we tell ourselves: ending comfortable myths about poverty*, accessed at <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Bible-passages-on-TL.pdf>

term solidarity, campaigning for housing justice together with the homelessness charity Shelter and advocacy alongside local residents. Furthermore, combatting structural injustice is central to the work of our case study Church Action on Poverty who have run national campaigns on issues including tax dodging, the living wage, and benefit sanctions since it was established in 1982:

...a big part of our understanding... is that we need to talk about the root causes of poverty, that it's not enough to do local social action.
(Liam, Church Action on Poverty, interview, 2020).

Thirdly, commitment to the values identified within liberation theology was referred to as motivation shaping Christian responses to poverty. In particular the assertion that God has a preferential option for the poor, which Christians are called to embody in their personal and communal lives was important to many of our participants. A vast amount has been written about the emergence of liberation theology in Latin America during the 1970s and the impact that this theological movement has had worldwide.³⁹ We do not intend to comment on this in any depth in this report. However, in order to grasp why liberation theology has gained traction in the UK during the 'age of austerity' it is important to recognise the two interconnected ideas upon which it rests. First, liberation theologians demonstrate that the Bible clearly demonstrates that God has a preferential option for the poor - not because wealthy people are all sinners and poor people are all saints but because poverty contradicts the nature and will of a loving creator who values all people equally. Second, liberation theologians argue that the Church is called to reflect this and embody a preferential option for the poor in its life, structures, mission and community engagement. Against the backdrop of austerity age poverty these twin values have taken on a renewed importance for many Christians in the UK, as we discovered in our Life on the Breadline research.

References to liberation theology or a bias towards the poor were made in responses to the online survey by regional Church leaders from denominations including the Baptist Church, the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church, Salt and Light and the United Reformed Church. National church leaders who specifically referred to this as a motivation for responding to poverty included those from the Methodist Church, the Church of England, and the Church of Scotland. Whilst he did not

³⁹ See for example Gustavo Gutierrez 1974. *A Theology of Liberation*. London: SCM Press; or Clodovis and Leonardo Boff 1987. *Introducing Liberation Theology*. Kent: Burns & Oates

use the language of liberation theology, Bishop Paul Butler expressed this sentiment when asked what motivates the Church of England's response to poverty. His response also overlaps with the first motivation discussed of compassion and care:

Compassion. Care for those most in need. Believing that Jesus was always on the side of the poor and always seeking to meet those most in need. That's the main driver.
(Bishop Paul Butler, Bishop of Durham, Church of England, interview, 2019)

For Reverend Dr Richard Frazer, Convenor of the Church and Society Council in the Church of Scotland, this went one step further from a motivation of echoing Jesus' bias to the poor to move from a "sticking plaster approach to handout[s]" to "reframe that discussion to talk about what are the underlying causes [of poverty]". One way in which this has been facilitated in the Church of Scotland is through the development of Poverty Truth Commissions which bring together policymakers and people with lived experience of poverty.⁴⁰ In our work alongside our case study partner Church Action on Poverty we have seen how local churches and Christian NGOs were key partners in the development and launch of the Poverty Truth Commission in Manchester in June 2019. Similar initiatives have been launched in towns and cities across the UK over the last two years.

Fourthly, in three of our case studies – at Hodge Hill Church on the Firs and Bromford estate in Birmingham, for some staff members at Inspire Centre in Levenshulme, Manchester, and at Notting Hill Methodist Church – responses were motivated by an incarnational approach to church and community development. Such a perspective reflects a social action response to the assertion in John's Gospel (John 1:14) that, in the person of Jesus, God 'became flesh' and lived in long-term solidarity with humanity. This incarnational motivation was also referred to by regional Church leaders from the Baptist Church, Church of Scotland, the Coptic Orthodox Church, and the United Reformed Church in the online survey. An incarnational approach is about "being present" (Al Barrett, vicar of Hodge Hill Church, interview, 2020) and having intentional relationships in the local community as a Christian that are unconditional expressions of solidarity and not instrumentalist attempts to convert people to Christianity. Ed Cox, the founder of Inspire, explained this further:

⁴⁰ For further information about the Poverty Truth Commission network see <https://povertytruthnetwork.org/>

od is doing God's mission all of the time. In the café now, in the interactions between people who wouldn't duck in the door of a church. But in the kind of conversations that they have and the way they interact with one another, in the kind of wider method of what we're trying to do here, the Spirit of God is moving... And almost every day when I look around... I can see glimpses of the Kingdom of God at play.

(Ed Cox, founder of Inspire and Minister at Inspire Church, interview, 2020).

A similar perspective was apparent in our Notting Hill case study. Volunteers at the foodbank in Notting Hill Methodist Church spoke in an undemonstrative but clear way of sitting with people who three years after the fire are still in local Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The Minister of Notting Hill Methodist Church, Revd Mike Long, suggested that this ministry of solidarity was central to the local church's understanding of its mission in the face of housing injustice (2020). Through both Hodge Hill Church and its Christian neighbours, and at Inspire Centre, the incarnational approach means that gatherings occurred such as community meals, drop-in advice sessions, and social gatherings for neighbours to meet which were not specifically named as 'poverty' response projects but instead drew on asset-based approaches to building community. Hodge Hill Church's use of asset-based community development is explored further in section 4.3.2 below.

As we have shown our Life on the Breadline research demonstrates that Christian responses to contemporary poverty are shaped by a range of different but overlapping ethical, theological and Biblical values. In order to understand the ways in which the Church has responded to poverty during the 'age of austerity' it is important to recognise the fundamental but often unarticulated importance of these guiding values:

- An ethic of social responsibility.
- The Biblical command to love our neighbour.
- Caring for the vulnerable and excluded.
- Challenging structural injustice.
- Addressing the causes of poverty and injustice.
- The core values of liberation theology.
- Incarnational approaches to theology, community, and poverty.

4.2. Christian responses to poverty in the UK: from national and regional Church leaders

Our interviews of national Church leaders identified three overall categories of response to questions relating to denominational responses to poverty in the UK.

First, the majority of national Church leaders interviewed (responses from Evangelical Alliance, the Methodist Church, Jubilee+, the United Reformed Church, the Church of England, the Church of Scotland, the Church in Wales, and the Irish Council of Churches) suggested that their national Church's response to poverty involved both social action and campaigning or advocacy on issues of poverty. The social action initiatives to which they referred included foodbanks, breakfast clubs, free cooked meals, debt counselling and money management, homelessness projects, night shelters, playgroups, family centres, and projects with refugees and asylum seekers. These projects were often run with other Christian denominations, and/or inter-faith projects. The involvement of denominations in anti-poverty campaigning and advocacy ranged from direct advocacy in the Houses of Parliament in Westminster and with the Devolved administrations (Evangelical Alliance and Jubilee+) and the House of Lords (the Church of England) to letter writing and conversations with local authorities and Government Ministers (Church in Wales). Both the Methodist Church and the United Reformed Church national leaders referred to their involvement in the Joint Public Issues Team (JPIT⁴¹) which is an ecumenical social action network representing the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Church of Scotland, the Methodist Church, and the United Reformed Church in relation to their common work on issues of peace and justice including poverty. In addition to this, leaders from the United Reformed Church and the Church of Scotland spoke of their denomination's specific commitment to working with poorer communities through church related community workers (the United Reformed Church), and an inter-faith commitment **"to being present in areas of urban priority need"** which led to the establishment of the Poverty Truth Commission (Reverend Dr Richard Frazer, Convenor of the Church and Society Council, Church of Scotland, interview, 2019). Reverend Dr Richard Frazer explained how the Poverty Truth Commission was established in Scotland and has since been rolled out across England, with the aim of developing relationships and greater understanding between policymakers and people with lived experience of poverty in order to improve policy making.

⁴¹ For more information about JPIT visit <http://www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/>

Secondly, four national Church leaders from the Wesleyan Holiness Church British Isles, the Independent Methodist Church, the Orthodox Church, and the United Free Church of Scotland suggested that their national Church social action did not focus on campaigning or advocacy. Instead these Church leaders pointed to their support for the provision of cheap meals, playgroups, assistance with housing, tackling isolation, tackling knife crime, money management, and the collection of Alms. For some of these churches the decision not to be involved in advocacy reflected a conscious distancing of their denomination from engagement in civil society politics. Furthermore, the District Superintendent of the Wesleyan Holiness Church British Isles suggested that the Church wanted to develop its anti-poverty campaigning work but faced challenges when it tried to be heard including negative media reports.

Finally, a small minority of national Church leaders acknowledged that their national Church's response to poverty was limited by a lack of capacity for social action (including income, relying on rented spaces for church worship and activities), by the impact of declining church congregations and by not having the voice of larger national denominations. In this context two contrasting outcomes have been evident during our Life on the Breadline research. First, smaller denominations can focus exclusively on sustaining the worshipping life of congregations and withdraw from any meaningful engagement in civil society politics. Second, some denominations respond to this dilemma by engaging in collaborative or networked social action, often through ecumenical initiatives like the Joint Public Issues Team.

The 104 regional Church leaders from 17 national Churches across the UK who completed the Life on the Breadline online survey were asked what activities they knew of that affiliated churches in their region have taken part in to respond to poverty in the UK.

- 99% said local churches ran foodbanks.
- 88% said local churches offered clothing, toys, or non-food provision.
- 82% said local churches ran holiday clubs.
- 40% said local churches ran projects for asylum seekers and refugees.

Importantly, most regional Church leaders suggested that these activities were run collaboratively. 93% of Church leaders said that local church engagement with poverty took places with other local churches. 73% said that these activities were collaborations with faith-based charities, 57% with secular groups and 29% suggested that such social action

took place alongside other local, non-Christian faith groups. Whilst almost all regional Church leaders knew of social action activities taking place through their affiliated churches in their region, less than half of respondents (44%) shared that they knew of involvement in campaigning against austerity policies.

Overall, Church leaders at national and regional level were aware of a wide variety of anti-poverty social action projects, often taking place at a local church level. At a national level the majority of Church leaders were also involved in campaigning and advocacy in relation to poverty, but this was less so at regional Church leader level.

4.3. Local responses by Christians to poverty in the UK: our Life on the Breadline case studies

4.3.1. B30 Foodbank, Birmingham

B30 Foodbank is a Trussell Trust foodbank in Birmingham. The foodbank runs in the ecumenical Cotteridge Church which is a united congregation of the Methodist Church, the Church of England, and the United Reformed Church. The foodbank has a Christian ethos, but there is no religious content for volunteers or clients. In some other faith-based foodbanks volunteers pray together and pray for clients as well as offering food. This does not happen at B30 Foodbank.

The most visible response to poverty by B30 Foodbank is the large amount of food given: in 2020 the foodbank fed 7,972 people. The amount of food given has increased significantly in recent years, with 2,604 people being fed 2013-2014. Everyone receiving food – called a foodbank client – was required to have a foodbank voucher issued by an approved voucher holder such as a doctor's surgery, local job centres, schools, or health professionals. On each visit a client receives three days' worth of food. Clients at B30 Foodbank are asked about food allergies and dietary requirements, but clients do not choose their food at the foodbank other than choosing between tea, coffee, or hot chocolate (which could be a difficult choice for one household). However, there was a 'help yourself table' which was supervised by a volunteer where clients could choose 3 items that were non-standard from the foodbank. Most food was tinned, but there was often fresh bread and pastries which had been donated by Greggs, and cakes/fish and chips until they ran out for clients to eat whilst they waited for their food to be brought to them to take home.

The foodbank followed a similar process for each client who came to the foodbank: upon arrival the client was asked for their foodbank voucher and to take a seat in the foyer. Vouchers were then checked on the foodbank's system for how many vouchers the person has had because with some exceptions, a person is allowed three vouchers in any six month period. Clients sat in the foyer until their name was called out (in order of arrival) and a volunteer came forward to greet the client, offer them a hot drink, and then take them into the main church building to sit and complete the paperwork on the size of their household, dietary requirements, and any preferences for non-food items such as washing and cleaning products.



Figure 9: B30 Foodbank volunteers wait to greet clients. Credit: Bob Jefford, B30 Foodbank volunteer

Volunteers in a separate room then packed the client's food, before bringing it out for the client to take home. As well as providing food, foodbank volunteers aimed to offer a listening ear, and to signpost clients on to other support services whilst they were waiting for their food to be packed. However, the B30 Foodbank volunteers shared with us in 2019 that this extra support has been harder to give as the foodbank has become busier and busier, and we witnessed how volunteers did not always have time to chat with clients in order to move onto completing paperwork for the next waiting client.



Figure 10: B30 Foodbank’s church space set up ‘café style’ for volunteers to sit with clients.

Credit: Marion, B30 Foodbank volunteer

As part of the national charity the Trussell Trust, B30 Foodbank took part in advocacy by collecting data on the causes of people using the foodbank, the number of food parcels given, and the number of people using the foodbank. This data was submitted to the Trussell Trust and played a part in the Trussell Trust’s national campaigning, for example to call for an end to the five week wait from when a person applies for Universal Credit to when they receive their first payment⁴².

4.3.2. Hodge Hill Church, Birmingham

Hodge Hill Church is a Church of England/United Reformed Church local ecumenical partnership that works with other local Christian organisations on the Firs and Bromford estate in outer Birmingham.⁴³ Statistically the estate is in the top 10% of multiply deprived areas in England based on the Indices of Deprivation. The neighbourhood could be viewed exclusively through this lens of deprivation. However, Hodge Hill Church, the Open Door Community Foundation, and the Worth Unlimited children’s and youth project strive to challenge the stigmatising of the estate through their use of asset-based community development (ABCD).

⁴² See <https://www.trusselltrust.org/2019/04/25/record-1-6m-food-bank-parcels/> accessed 23/04/2021

⁴³ See <https://hodgehillchurch.wordpress.com/> accessed 16/05/2021

ABCD is an approach to community development which begins by focusing on the gifts and assets in a neighbourhood – on what is present rather than on what is absent. ABCD identifies what is ‘strong’ before going on to address what is ‘wrong’. The implementation of ABCD on the Firs and Bromford estate focusses on strengths rather than deficits, recognises that everyone has gifts which they can contribute in order to challenge the stigmatising of the neighbourhood and change perceptions about the Firs and Bromford estate whilst recognising that bad reputations can be hard to lose. This approach is summarised by the vicar of Hodge Hill Church, Al Barrett, saying: **“Turning I need into I can”** (Al Barrett, vicar of Hodge Hill Church, interview, 2020), and church member and volunteer Allannah explaining: **“I believe in building people up.”** (Allannah, focus group, 2020). Hodge Hill Church staff, associated community workers, and the Street Connector volunteers were specifically trained in ABCD whilst others were aware of the ethos of ABCD but did not specifically name it as such.

As a result of the implementation of ABCD on the estate, many of the different gatherings here have developed organically out of the ideas and actions of local residents. This report focusses on four gatherings on the estate: the Street Connectors, the Junk Food Café, Drop In/Open Door, and a pantry:

- The **Street Connectors** are local residents and volunteers who go door to door on the estate to foster conversations with residents, listen, and to build community – **“look at the good in the area”** (Clare, Street Connector, focus group, 2020). The Street Connectors found that through new connections, new gatherings developed, for example one group of neighbours came together to transform a neglected space into a communal garden to enjoy outdoor space during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the **Junk Food Café** was a popular weekly gathering in a building called ‘the Hub’ on the estate where volunteers cooked a three course meal that was then served to anyone who attended on a pay-as-you-feel basis. Pete, one of the pantry’s volunteers, explained why this was important: **“we found that people who haven’t got anything didn’t feel that they were being left out because nobody knew who was giving what.”** (Pete, volunteer, interview, 2020). As well as providing a way for people to eat out cheaply with meal cooked with ingredients sourced from FareShare (supermarket surplus food), the café played an important role in tackling social isolation.
- Also prior to the Covid-19 pandemic in the Hub, there was a weekly **Drop In/Open Door** followed by a community lunch. Drop In/Open Door was a free advice and support

session with a solicitor giving free advice once per month, laptops and phones were available for anyone to use, and volunteers were on-hand to help with understanding and writing letters, CVs, and similar queries. The atmosphere at the session was relaxed and without eligibility vouchers or a formal queuing system. This was reflected in the social space also available with people gathering to chat with cups of tea and coffee to offer informal support to each other, and a time to catch up. The Drop In/Open Door session was followed by a community lunch, again on a donation only basis, serving sandwiches and cakes donated by a local Greggs branch - “it became a gathering of friends” (Penny, volunteer and local resident, interview, 2020).

- During Life on the Breadline fieldwork in 2020, a new gathering was being planned to be hosted in Hodge Hill Church which is situated nearby but not on the Firs and Bromford estate. The new gathering to be launched in 2021 was a **food pantry** through the Church Action on Poverty franchise. The pantry would be a membership scheme where members pay around £4 per week in return for around £30 worth of food, with a social café aspect as well as food laid out supermarket style in a way that emphasised choice, and that this was not charity (making this different to a food bank). Volunteer Allannah explained the importance of this: “people not just receiving but actually being” (Allannah, volunteer and church member, focus group, 2020). The pantry would be open to any local residents in order to reduce the potential perceived stigma of joining the scheme.



Figure 11: A distanced street party on the Firs and Bromford estate during the Covid-19 pandemic. Credit: Lucy, Community Support Development Worker

The work of Hodge Hill Church reminds us that the models of Christian action on poverty identified in this report are not fixed categories but fluid and evolving traditions. Hodge Hill does not reflect a narrow ‘caring’ response by simply giving food. Instead, it focusses on people’s gifts as the basis for social action and on changing perceptions about the estate. However, neither is the Hodge Hill approach a straightforward campaigning response to poverty. Rather, as explained in section 4.1, Christians on the estate are developing an incarnational approach to community building and social action, which emphasises long-term engagement and relationship-building rather than the development of stand-alone responses to poverty. This approach consciously resists the use of ‘rescuer language’ which frames the Christian as an outsider who comes to ‘rescue’ a person on the estate from their situation (often with money), before leaving. Instead, an incarnational, long-term approach revolves around developing positive relationships, focussing on people’s gifts and through this seeing people flourish. This approach was not explicitly evangelical and did not push Christianity upon people – much work was inter-faith, particularly with the local Muslim community.



Figure 12: A community gardening space on the Firs and Bromford estate during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Credit: Clare, local resident and volunteer*

4.3.3. Inspire Centre, Manchester

The Inspire Centre runs in the former building of Inspire Church, which was gifted to the local community. This United Reformed Church congregation now meets for worship in the Centre's café space. Whilst members of Inspire Church were involved in founding the Inspire Centre and continue to be involved in parts of its management, the staff team at Inspire are a mixture of Christians and non-Christians. As detailed in section 4.1 above, the Christian motivation at Inspire Centre is intertwined with an incarnational theology of being present in people's lives. Similar to work by Hodge Hill Church in Birmingham, Inspire Centre's activity is not framed in the language of responding to poverty but rather has a vision of:

...a place where people from different backgrounds can come together in order to live more whole lives... it's a response to how do we live together in a neighbourhood, rather than how are we going to help poor people.

(Ed Cox, founder of Inspire and Minister at Inspire Church, interview, 2020)

This involves material, emotional, and spiritual well-being through bringing people together, based around building capacity rather than a poverty or charity model. Within this, there are also specific actions that Inspire takes such as in the café - detailed below - to specifically respond to poverty.



Figure 13: Inspire Centre, with the adjoining church tower on the right. Credit: Kristin, local resident

The physical space at Inspire Centre – shown in the photograph above – includes a café, several large meeting rooms, and office space. The café is situated in the heart of the building by the main entrance. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the café was open Monday to Friday, and provided cheap, freshly cooked food and drinks with a changing daily menu, including a discount for people 50+ and a pay-it-forward scheme for people who cannot afford to pay for a drink or meal. There was seating for around 50 people making it a popular social space where people of different backgrounds come together, some coming every day:

...[the café was] a neutral space for people to share... There was a real diverse bunch of people using the café and likewise at community kitchen [monthly evening meal, pay-as-you-feel] it was even more like that.
(Joe, Acting Café Manager, interview, 2020)

...our café is a really great space for people to connect with their friends and I think that the café alone provides so much to people. It's a social prescribing dream, and I can't monetise it, I can't put a label on that café space but it's magic what it does for people.

Another major project running at the Inspire Centre is the Inspired People's Project. This was started by the Centre to engage older people (defined as 50+) in Levenshulme. It still runs from the Centre but is in the process of becoming an independent charity. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, activities included weekly social groups, IT classes, a choir, exercise class, and a communal lunch. The Inspire Task Force developed from this as a committee of older people that focusses on community development and campaigning (for example in relation to access to toilets in shops).

Many of the activities at Inspire Centre are delivered in partnership with other organisations and groups. For example, the Bread and Butter Thing has a weekly base at Inspire.⁴⁴ This is a cross between a foodbank and a food pantry – anyone can join the scheme and pay weekly £3 for an individual, £6 for a couple/family, or £12 for a large family to collect subsidised bags of food including fresh meat, dairy, vegetables, bread, and cakes. During our fieldwork (prior to the Covid-19 pandemic), food was delivered to Inspire on Friday mornings then in the afternoon people arrived in the Inspire reception and are given a number before being given bags of food in order of arrival. There was no choice in the food that people collected, although they could help themselves to 'extras' under volunteer supervision.

The work of Inspire Centre in response to poverty is therefore not simply social action in relation to poverty. Rather, by focussing on bringing people from across the community together, projects focus on community development and also respond to poverty without the stigma of people attending a poverty focussed project.

4.3.4. Church Action on Poverty, Greater Manchester

Church Action on Poverty is a national anti-poverty charity which has been working with local churches, Christian denominations and other NGOs to tackle the root causes of poverty since its establishment in 1982.⁴⁵ Church Action on Poverty is increasingly working with people experiencing poverty because they are the “real experts in poverty” (Liam, Communications and Support Relations Manager, interview, 2020). Whilst not all

⁴⁴ For more information about the Bread and Butter Thing visit <https://www.breadandbutterthing.org/>

⁴⁵ For more information about Church Action on Poverty visit <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/>

members of staff at Church Action on Poverty are Christians, the charity has a Christian foundation and value statement:

Church Action on Poverty was founded as a response to rising poverty and injustice based on Christian values. We believe in justice. We believe in our common humanity. We believe in people exercising power. We believe in speaking truth to power. We believe in active listening. And we believe in commitment.
(Church Action on Poverty's value statement, 2020)

Both social action and campaigning are important to the work of Church Action on Poverty in how it responds to poverty; social action alone is not considered sufficient. Initiatives that Church Action on Poverty has been involved in/led in recent years include:

- Church Action on Poverty was a leading partner organisation within the alliance **End Hunger UK**.⁴⁶ End Hunger UK began in 2016. The alliance campaigned on issues including holiday hunger, food insecurity measurement, benefits, and the right to food.



Figure 14: Church Action on Poverty led a campaign to send knitted food items to MPs as part of campaigning against food poverty. Credit: Felicity, Events and Campaigns Intern

⁴⁶ For more information about End Hunger UK visit <https://www.endhungeruk.org/>

- **Church on the Margins** is an initiative developed recently at Church Action on Poverty around Greater Manchester, inspired by Pope Francis, to look at where church resources are compared to deprivation, to bring churches together, and encourage more equitable resourcing. As well as calling the Church to prioritise support for churches in marginalised communities the Church on the Margins initiative provides reflective resources on the relationship between Christian faith and poverty for use by individuals, small groups and congregations.⁴⁷
- **Food Power**⁴⁸ is an alliance between Church Action on Poverty and Sustain to tackle food poverty and its causes. Work includes with young people at the Child Food Ambassador for Future Food Inquiry, Food Power alliances, Edgelands film⁴⁹, campaigning on right to food, and a strong focus on experts by experience.



Figure 15: Young people in Darwen campaign on food poverty through Food Power. Credit: Ben, Food Power Officer

⁴⁷ For more information about the Church on the Margins initiative see <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/what-we-do/poorchurch/>, accessed 4 June 2021.

⁴⁸ For more information about Food Power visit <https://www.sustainweb.org/foodpower/>

⁴⁹ To watch the Edgelands film visit <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/edgelands/>

- Church Action on Poverty facilitates community organising through **self-reliant groups** and **local pantries**. Self-reliant groups are groups of people (often women, and mostly in Greater Manchester) who form a small enterprise together. Pantries are a membership scheme run through a social franchise model where people pay around £3.50 for over £20 worth of food (fresh and non-perishable) which they choose from the pantry shelves each week. Pantries often involve a social time/hot drinks too. Each pantry decides their membership criteria, and generally run in/through churches with volunteers.

As we discovered during our Life on the Breadline research, Church Action on Poverty's anti-poverty work cannot be confined within a single model. It combines social action, advocacy, social entrepreneurship and campaigning in its own initiatives and by resourcing others to take action. Examples of the way in which Church Action on Poverty facilitates networked anti-poverty activism and awareness-raising that we witnessed during fieldwork between 2019 and 2021 include the work of the National Poverty Consultation and its coordinating role within the Poverty Truth Commissions in Salford and Manchester since 2017. Church Action's co-facilitation of the National Poverty Consultation with Life on the Breadline researchers in 2018, 2019 and 2021, brought together approximately 90 Church leaders and activists from across the UK to share good practice in the field of faith-based anti-poverty activism.⁵⁰ Both pieces of work exemplify the networked anti-poverty activism that Church Action on Poverty has increasingly embraced in recent years. Reflected in conversations Life on the Breadline researchers shared in at the online January 2021 National Poverty Consultation, this development illustrates Church Action on Poverty's commitment to enabling the development of a UK-wide anti-poverty social movement over the next decade that revolves around a commitment to the dignity and agency of people experiencing poverty. This move towards social movement anti-poverty activism, which Church Action's Director Niall Cooper writes about in his 2021 report *Building Dignity, Agency and Power Together*, echoes the sentiments of a number of the regional and national Church leaders with whom we spoke during our Life on the Breadline research and raises questions about the future of Christian engagement with poverty in the coming years.⁵¹

⁵⁰ More information about the National Poverty Consultation can be found on the Life on the Breadline website at <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/resources/> and on Church Action on Poverty's website at <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/page/2/?s=National+Poverty+Consultation>

⁵¹ Niall Cooper 2021. *Building Dignity, Agency and Power Together: Practical Steps to building a grassroots social movement to challenge poverty*. Salford: Church Action on Poverty, <https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Building-Dignity-Agency-and-Power-Together.pdf> accessed 17/05/2021.

4.3.5. Notting Hill Methodist Church, London

The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea is one of the most unequal parts of the UK. The local government ward in North Kensington where Grenfell Tower is situated was amongst the 10% most multiply deprived in England and Wales in 2017 (the year of the Grenfell Tower fire), but just four miles away the neighbourhood surrounding the Kings Road in South Kensington was amongst the 10% most affluent in the country. Analyses of austerity-age poverty have, too often neglected the intersection between poverty, structural inequality and poor quality social housing. However, as our Notting Hill case study has shown research, social actions or policy initiatives that fail to make these connections will never grasp the multidimensional violence of poverty or its intersectional complexity.

At 1am on the 14th June 2017 a small electrical fire started in a flat on the fourth floor of Grenfell Tower in North Kensington. By 3am the flames had engulfed most of Grenfell Tower, spreading quickly because of inadequate inflammable cladding on the outside of the building. The ongoing Grenfell inquiry has learned that there was no working water sprinkler system in the block and that the front doors of people's flats did not meet fire safety regulations. This photograph of a child's painting underneath the West Way in North Kensington depicts the terror of 14th June 2017 and the demand for housing justice in the aftermath of an avoidable tragedy that took 72 people's lives:



Figure 16: A child's painting depicts the Grenfell Tower fire of 14th June 2017

As the Tower still smouldered the poet Ben Okri captured the visceral grief, the anger of abandonment and the demonstrable connection between poverty, austerity and a lack of housing justice in his poem 'Grenfell Tower: June 2017'. Okri wrote, "It was like a burnt matchbox in the sky...You saw it in the tears of those who survived...You heard it in the cries in the air howling for justice...If you want to see how the poor die, come see Grenfell Tower, See the Tower and let a world-changing dream flower."⁵² In the weeks and months that followed the fire it became increasingly clear that it had resulted from years of institutional failure, decades of under-investment and a retreat from a fundamental commitment to the importance of affordable high quality social housing by successive governments and not a faulty fridge. The tragedy of the Grenfell fire reinvigorated debates about housing justice, social housing and homelessness in era of austerity, giving rise to the kind of angry questioning captured by this photograph of a banner of tributes and questions hanging on the railings of a low-rise block of flats a few hundred yards from the Tower as well as the establishment of grassroots campaigning support networks like 'Grenfell United':

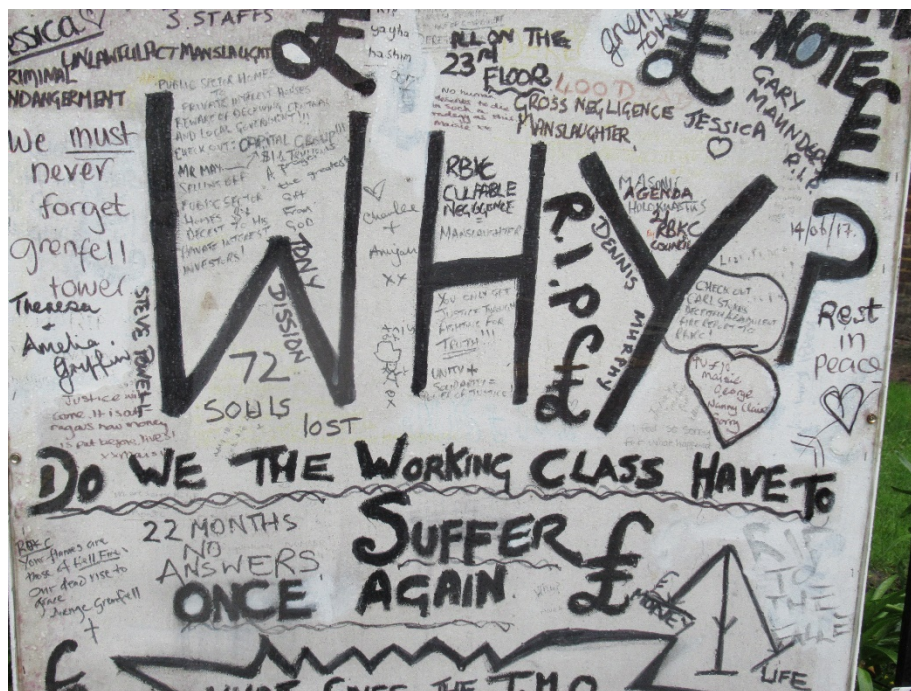


Figure 17: An angry question and an accusation

⁵² Ben Okri, 'Grenfell Tower: June 2017', <https://benokri.co.uk/news/grenfell-tower-2017-poem-ben-okri/> accessed 30 May 2021.

After receiving a phone call from a church member telling him that Grenfell Tower was on fire, the Revd Mike Long, the Minister of Notting Hill Methodist Church rushed to the scene and spent the night sitting with people who had fled the fire and were taking refuge in makeshift re-settlement centres. In the weeks following the fire Notting Hill Methodist Church's building became an informal space of welcome, advice and pastoral support for those whose lives had been shattered by the Grenfell blaze because it is the closest open and accessible public building to the Tower.



Figure 18: Notting Hill Methodist Church with Grenfell Tower in the background

Credit: Chris Shannahan

Whilst the size of the worshipping congregation at Notting Hill Methodist Church is smaller than in the past, its significance in the community surrounding Grenfell Tower has not declined. As in many diverse inner-city communities faith groups remain trusted key players in civil society politics because of the bridging social capital that results from their networks and relationships across the local neighbourhood. Since 2017 Notting Hill Methodist Church has become a focal point for vigils and services of remembrance, as well as a venue for community meetings demanding housing justice in the months that followed the fire. Furthermore, the Revd Mike Long Chaired the 2018 Commission on the Future of Social Housing established by the respected homelessness charity Shelter. The

commission's final report made extensive recommendations relating to the need to break the link between poverty and poor housing across the UK.⁵³

Religious faith remains a central motivating factor in anti-poverty activism in North Kensington as this photograph of a line drawing of Mary the mother of Jesus praying for justice and the quotation from Psalm 71 about a faith in a God who stands in solidarity with the oppressed show. Both images are part of the 'People's Gallery' underneath the West Way which passes close to Grenfell Tower:

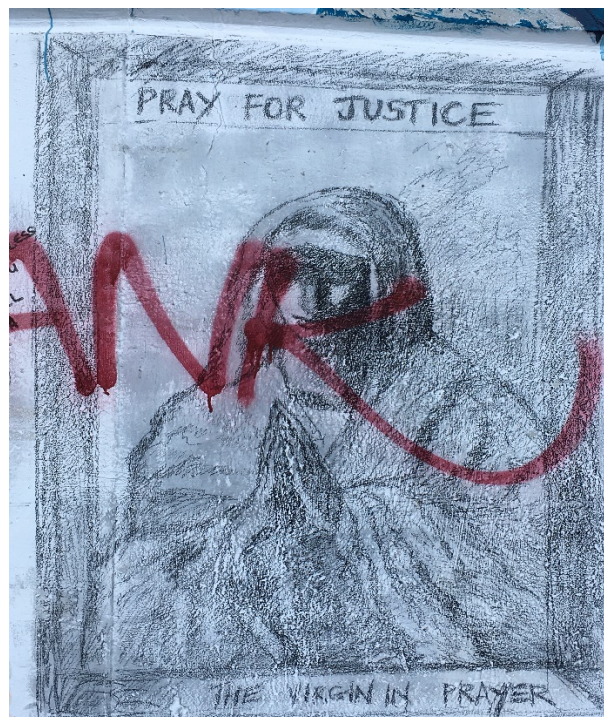


Figure 19: The Virgin Prayer – A line drawing under the West Way

Credit: Chris Shannahan

⁵³ The report of the Shelter Commission on the Future of Social Housing can be found at https://england.shelter.org.uk/support_us/campaigns/a_vision_for_social_housing, accessed 2 June 2021.

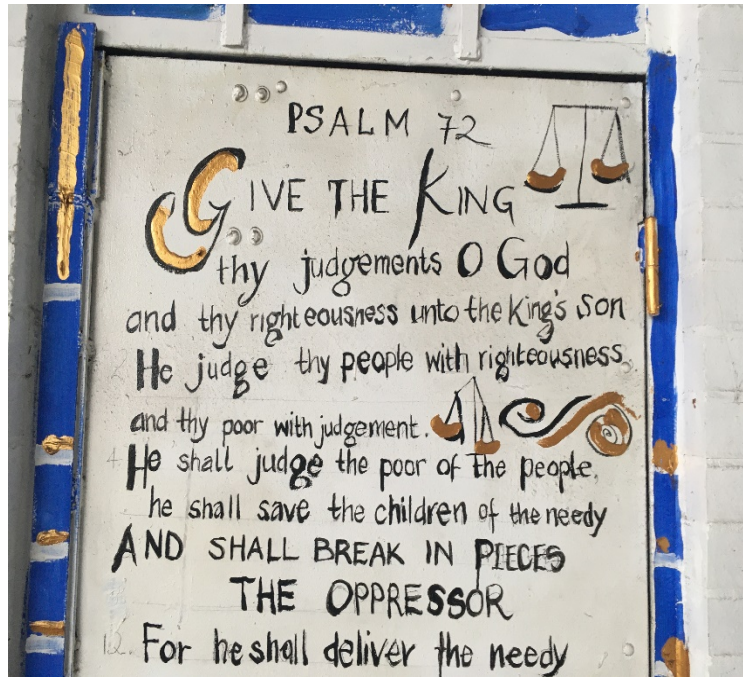


Figure 20: Psalm 72 – ‘He shall save the children of the needy...’

Credit: Chris Shannahan

Notting Hill Methodist Church’s engagement with the intersection between austerity, poverty, inequality, poor quality social housing and a lack of housing justice since the Grenfell Tower fire illustrates the point we made above about the fluid and evolving nature of Christian social action. Our Life on the Breadline research demonstrates that, whilst there are a range of traditions of Christian engagement with poverty these different approaches are fluid and not fixed. It is important for policymakers to recognise that these various modes of Christian action on poverty converge and diverge in different times and places.

Our Notting Hill Methodist Church case study exemplifies the confluence of different models of Christian anti-poverty activism. The church’s opening of a Trussell Trust foodbank in 2019 reflects a ‘caring’ response to short term need, as did the congregation’s emergency support and pastoral care for people who were made homeless by the Grenfell fire. The Revd Mike Long’s involvement with local residents associations, the Grenfell Tower public enquiry and Shelter’s Commission on the Future of Social Housing all embody an ‘advocacy’ approach infused with ‘campaigning’ for long-term structural change and the church’s ongoing standing in solidarity with the people of Grenfell reflects a commitment to long-term incarnational presence alongside people, whom it could be argued, have been forgotten by those with power, as an expression of God’s preferential option for the poor.

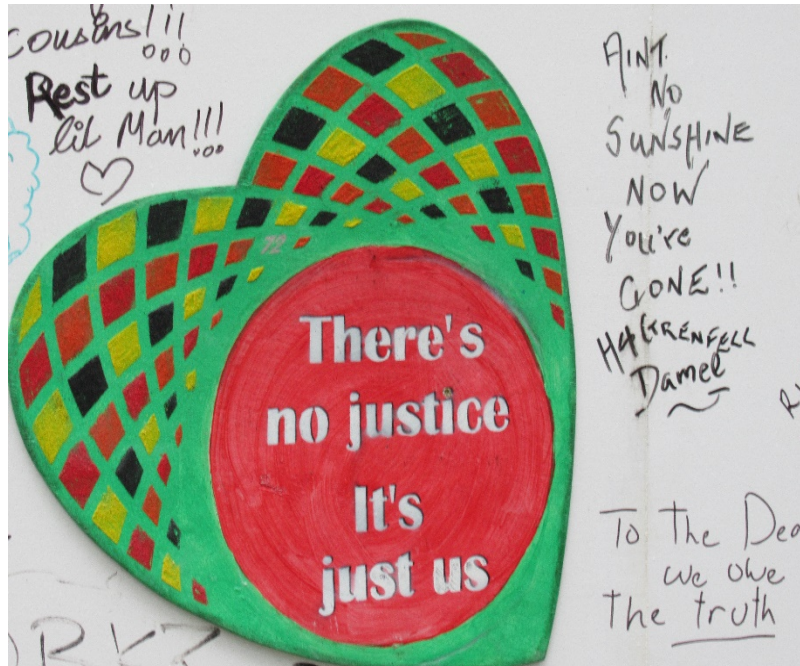


Figure 21: A Cry of Despair and a Call for Solidarity beneath the shell of Grenfell Tower

Credit: Chris Shannahan

4.3.6. Power The Fight, London

The average age of knife crime victims is falling, and the levels of knife crime in the UK are increasing. From their base in London, Power The Fight works with families, churches, faith groups and community organisations to equip them to tackle youth violence. The founder of Power The Fight, Ben Lindsay, talked to us about their work in 2019.

Power The Fight was established following the murder of teenager Myron Yarde in 2016 as Ben brought together both local church and non-church members of the community including policymakers, police, youth workers, pastors and clergy, and parents to foster dialogue around concern at youth violence. Power The Fight developed from this:

Power The Fight was founded out of a deep belief in the value of human life and the importance of community. It is a response to a growing need for all parts of society to take responsibility for one another... Churches, faith groups and community groups, often with their own buildings and access to resources and volunteers, have a unique contribution to make.

(Ben, founder of Power The Fight, <https://www.powerthefight.org.uk/about-us/>)

Ben explained to us that the development of Power The Fight was, at least in part, a response to the impact of austerity cuts to youth services in London, which led to the

closure of youth clubs in inner London and a decline in front-line services. Ben argued that such austerity-aged spending cuts gave rise to increases in serious youth violence. As we have seen, Power The Fight draws much of its support from Black Pentecostal and Evangelical churches in London and provides a vehicle for them to utilise their shared social capital in relation to the growing problem of austerity-age youth violence in the capital. Ben emphasised the potential of churches in responding to serious youth violence through prayer, offering spaces in their church buildings, offering resources, and sharing volunteers. The work of Power The Fight illustrates the effective use of spiritual and religious capital by local churches and highlights the effectiveness of networked Christian engagement with poverty.

Our Power The Fight case study serves as a reminder to local and national Churches that poverty cannot reasonably be reduced to food poverty. Our Life on the Breadline research has demonstrated the extent and variety of Christian engagement with austerity-age poverty. The work of Power The Fights reveals the impact that spending cuts can have on community relations. The organisation provides an example of Christians working together to respond to a particular aspect of poverty and austerity – serious youth violence – through a practical caring, community building, education, advocacy and working for policy change.

5. Key findings: The impact of Christian responses to poverty in the UK

The impact of Christian responses to poverty in the UK is far reaching, particularly in relation to alleviating the symptoms of poverty: from foodbanks to children's holiday clubs; from Winter night shelters to supported housing; from providing emergency accommodation to pastoral care for families made homeless and from support for asylum seekers to language classes. However, the impact is also found in terms of advocacy and campaigning on poverty and its causes. This report and our wider Life on the Breadline research show that Christian engagement with intense levels of poverty and inequality in the UK has grown, diversified and increased in its reach and impact since the 2008 financial crash. Our research indicates that austerity policies over the last decade have stimulated a growth in 'caring' Christian action on the impact of poverty on individuals, their families and the communities in which they live.

Furthermore, as a result of its ongoing localised social capital the Church remains a key player in civil society politics – a fact that many policymakers have not fully grasped. Life

on the Breadline shows how important it is for local and national policymakers to gain a deeper understanding of the extent, value, variety and impact of Christian engagement with poverty in cities, towns and villages across the UK. If they are open to learn from such Christian social action local, regional and national political leaders will be better placed to fashion more effective policy that is capable of reducing levels of poverty in the UK.

It is important to note, however, that our Life on the Breadline research also highlights the growing critique amongst Christians of the unequal impact of austerity, what many consider to be unjust government policy and the damaging long-term impact of structural injustice. Such perspectives reflect a resurgence of earlier forms of Christian witness against unjust systems and structures. Policymakers at a national and a local level, therefore, need to recognise that churches and Christian NGOs that engage with poverty on a daily basis are as committed to working for long-term structural change as they are to meeting short-term need. Churches in the UK, therefore, whilst providing an unrivalled level of support for people experiencing poverty and levels of practitioner expertise that policymakers can learn from, are unwilling to become an informal *dé facto* welfare safety net when the state withdraws. Our research has shown that policymakers can gain an immense amount by learning from the practice of Christian engagement with poverty. They can also benefit from engaging in an open dialogue with Church leaders and Christian activists about deeper, longer-term structural injustice that needs to be addressed if levels of poverty are to be permanently reduced.

Our national Church leader interviews revealed a variety of perceptions about their impact on poverty in the UK. Broadly speaking, the national Churches do not collect quantitative data on the impact of their work on poverty, which is, in many respects, understandable since it is very difficult to quantify the impact that such engagement has on individuals, families and communities. A minority of church leaders were confident about the national impact of their Church's action on poverty in the UK. These tended to be the larger national Churches including the Church of England and the Church of Scotland. Such self-confidence is perhaps not surprising given the established nature of both denominations and the structural relationships and connections that establishment enables. On the basis of this insight it is even more important that policymakers engage with other Christian denominations if they are to grasp the totality of Christian engagement with poverty and not imagine that this is reducible to the practice of the Church of England and the Church of Scotland. In large cities, like London, it is worth noting the Church of England represents

a small minority of Christian presence in the capital. The General Director of the Evangelical Alliance commented that the impact of the alliance's actions shows that:

...the evangelical, Pentecostal, charismatic wing of the church both in the UK and certainly all over the world is certainly not in decline.

(General Director of the Evangelical Alliance, interview, 2019).

The impact of national Churches' responses to poverty in the UK is not limited to local social action projects. They are also active in campaigning and advocacy on the causes of poverty, particularly through the Joint Public Issues Team, the Church of England and its Bishops in the House of Lords, and the capacity building and resourcing of Jubilee+. Other Church leaders were less optimistic and noted that the impact of their church was limited by the small denomination size, as seen, for example, in the case of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church in the UK. Many of the national Church leaders interviewed including those from the Independent Methodist Church, the Wesleyan Holiness Church British Isles, the Orthodox Church, the United Free Church of Scotland, and the Church in Wales, reflected on the scale of poverty in the UK. They suggested their approach in this context was to enable and equip individual church members to work effectively to respond to and reduce poverty. Such an approach is difficult to quantify but, on the basis of the evidence we have seen in our case studies, we argue that its cumulative impact on localised examples of poverty and inequality across many local congregations from a range of national Churches is significant. To illustrate this point we now turn to examples of impact generated by our Life on the Breadline case studies.



Figure 22: Churches have been at the centre of community responses to poverty. Credit: *Life on the Breadline* research, artist: Beth Waters

As a result of the three days food parcels provided by the B30 Foodbank people in South Birmingham did not go hungry: during 2020 the foodbank fed 7,972 people which is nearly three times as many people as were given food 2013-2014.

I have to rely on the foodbank to keep me going for the next couple of days until I do get paid and it's just one big struggle after another.
(B30 Foodbank client, interview, 2019)

However, the impact of the foodbank extended further than simply giving food: it was also a space of care and support:

This is amazing, it really is, I don't know what I would be doing without this place. I really don't. It's direct help and quickly.
(B30 Foodbank client, interview, 2019)

Despite this, there needs to be caution in celebrating the work of foodbanks. As two foodbank volunteers reflected in our case study: “are we just papering over the cracks?” (B30 Foodbank volunteer, interview, 2019) and “all of this could be avoided, there's no reason for foodbanks to exist.” (B30 Foodbank volunteer Lara, focus group, 2019). There can be no doubt that foodbanks such as B30 provide invaluable support for people

experiencing poverty and the food insecurity it generates. However, as our research has demonstrated, it is possible to argue that Christian involvement in foodbanks fails to address the structural injustice that makes them necessary in the first place. Implied in the responses from foodbank volunteers above is the question – ‘Are churches letting government off the hook by running foodbanks?’

The impact of the asset-based community development (ABCD) approach of Hodge Hill Church and its partner organisations on the Firs and Bromford estate provided a different means of care compared to B30 Foodbank. The impact generated in Hodge Hill resulted from a long-term approach to working with the local community that aimed to avoid “rescuer language” of “fixing” people and communities from the outside. Rather, people in Hodge Hill acted out the belief that everyone is equal (people of all or no faith) and that people are not defined by statistics. Local residents reflected on the strength of community spirit and neighbour to neighbour support on the estate: “people in this area cannot do enough for you” (Sahra, local resident and volunteer, interview, 2020). The impact of this was tangible during lockdowns in the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 through the strength of community support and mutual care. Local resident Jo commented on delivering hot meals to vulnerable members of the community:

I thought it's so much more than just going and taking food because this helps my mind as well and I get to connect with people and you know they say it's a hug in a mug, I felt like it's a hug in crate!
(Jo, local resident and volunteer, focus group, 2020)

Through its use of ACBD Hodge Hill Church helps to foster neighbour to neighbour care and relationships that have the potential to generate long-term impact:

Six months down the line you find that as a result of that conversation people have been contacted by somebody and are now doing amazing things on the estate it's just wonderful to see things growing out of a conversation, one connection that grew.
(Penny, local resident and volunteer, focus group, 2020)

Cumulatively, this fed into challenging the stigma of living on the estate and the negative self-determining narratives of life on the Firs and Bromford.

Figure 23: Distanced meal deliveries on the Firs and Bromford estate during the Covid-19 pandemic. *Credit: Jo, local resident and volunteer*

The impact of the work of Church Action on Poverty extends across campaigning, social action, awareness raising, advocacy and support for social enterprises, illustrating the fluid nature of differing Christian approaches to anti-poverty activism and the need for a multi-track approach that addresses the multi-layered nature of poverty and inequality in the UK. Four examples drawn from our work alongside Church Action on Poverty illustrate the different types of impact its work generates. First, between 2016 and 2019 Church Action was a key player in the development of the End Hunger UK coalition of approximately 40 civil society organisations.⁵⁴ In his role as Chair of End Hunger UK Niall Cooper of Church Action on Poverty played an important role in persuading the government to introduce a measure for assessing levels of food insecurity in the UK, running a holiday hunger pilot scheme, and campaigning on Universal Credit. Second, Church Action on Poverty has raised public awareness of poverty, and challenged the stereotypes about poverty by getting more people with lived experience of poverty in the media and through its creative use of short films on key issues, as noted above in relation to child hunger. Third, as a result of its roots in local churches and national denominations across the UK, Church Action on Poverty has generated greater awareness and critical self-reflection on poverty and inequality in the context of Christian worship and small study groups through the resources produced by its Worship and Liturgy group and the materials it produces for the annual Church Action on Poverty Sunday which is marked by local churches across the UK

⁵⁴ See End Hunger UK's website for more details by visiting <https://www.endhungeruk.org/>

every February.⁵⁵ Fourth, Church Action on Poverty continues to generate impact through its Local Pantry franchise, as one pantry leader explains:

They get to know their neighbours and are served like tea and toast in the image of the Kingdom of God. Kind of like a glimpse into what the Kingdom of God could kind of look like on earth. And so even though we might not be articulating that as directly to the members who come, that's something we hope they will feel. We want them to feel loved and welcomed and valued as members of the Pantry community the minute they step into the building. We don't want it to feel transactional or like it's a stereotypical poverty initiative.

(Local pantry leader, interview, 2020)

The impact of Notting Hill Methodist Church's engagement with poverty and inequality is, like that of other local churches and Christian NGOs, difficult to quantify. However, it has been a vital source of communal well-being and social cohesion in North Kensington in the years since the Grenfell Tower fire came close to destroying this community. The immense importance of the vital pastoral, physical and psychological support that Notting Hill Methodist Church and other faith groups in North Kensington provided on the night of the fire and in the days, weeks, months and years since became apparent to us during our Life on the Breadline research and cannot be underestimated. Because it is so close to Grenfell Tower, Notting Hill Methodist Church has become a vital and widely used space of welcome and community gathering and because of his role in supporting the people of Grenfell, the Revd Mike Long's work on poverty and housing justice has had a national impact through his Chairing of the 2018 Shelter Commission on the Future of Social Housing. As we have seen the impact of Notting Hill's work transcends any single model of Christian action on poverty, as it embodies caring, campaigning, advocacy and long-term solidarity.

6. Conclusions and policy recommendations

A key lesson for policymakers to draw from this report is that Christian social action engages with the complex intersectionality of poverty. Addressing the symptoms and the causes of poverty, local churches and Christian NGOs provide immense short-term support for people in need, whilst also generating initiatives that can challenge structural injustice. The impact of such work is difficult to quantify but this does not reduce its importance or social significance. As our research has shown, the impact of Christian

⁵⁵ See <http://www.church-poverty.org.uk/pray/worship/> accessed 18/05/2021.

action on austerity age poverty is not limited to one denomination, approach, region or theological tradition. Spanning the broad approaches Life on the Breadline researchers have identified, Christian action on poverty is expressed through caring, campaigning, advocacy, social enterprise, education and resourcing. The impact of such diverse engagement with contemporary poverty is multidimensional, building the common good from the ground up. Christian engagement with poverty in the UK, therefore, provides a resource and a challenge to all policymakers who are committed to building an inclusive, just and egalitarian society.

Life on the Breadline is the first project of its kind. The research we have summarised in this report, accompanying resources on the project website and forthcoming publications provide policymakers with invaluable original resources, which can inform, enhance and reinvigorate efforts to address the unequal impact of austerity and defeat the intersectional poverty that continues to damage individuals, families and communities. The time has come for fresh ideas. Our Life on the Breadline research has the potential stimulate original thinking and resource increasingly effective policy in relation to the invaluable role that churches and Christian NGOs play in tackling contemporary poverty. In the face of the damage wrought by austerity age poverty it is clear that Christian engagement with poverty can enable the building of a more equal and inclusive society where nobody is left out and none are left behind.

6.1. Recommendations:

Church leaders and policymakers need to work together in order to address the causes of poverty in the UK at all levels of leadership (local, regional, and national) as well as supporting people experiencing poverty.

1. **Action:** The APPG on Poverty and APPG on Faith and Society should co-host and fund a network – facilitated by the Life on the Breadline researchers – for representatives of national Churches to meet with policymakers on an annual basis to report on key issues and challenges that their Churches are facing in relation to tackling poverty in the UK.
2. **Action:** Smaller Christian denominations need to be listened to as well as the larger national Churches. They should be actively encouraged to participate in this network.
3. **Action:** Regional and local policymakers should meet regularly with regional and local Church leaders for conversation and collaboration to foster more effective, long-term responses to poverty in local communities.

Make use of the Life on the Breadline research resources for policymakers on the project website <https://breadlineresearch.coventry.ac.uk/>

4. **Action:** Policymakers should complete the Life on the Breadline CPD training.
5. **Action:** Policymakers should familiarise themselves with the Life on the Breadline Anti-Poverty Charter and meet with local and regional Church leaders to discuss its implementation.

In order to understand the reality and daily struggles faced, policymakers need to spend more time with people experiencing poverty. This is essential not as a support for Christian action on UK poverty, but also in responding to poverty more broadly.

6. **Action:** MPs should arrange to spend time at local social action projects in their constituency that address different aspects of poverty in order to have meaningful conversations with people using these projects and gain a deeper understanding of the breadth of people's experiences of life on a low-income.
7. **Action:** Having gained understanding of the reality of living on a low-income, MPs should use this to inform policymaking.
8. **Action:** MPs should provide regular opportunities for people experiencing poverty to directly shape policy, for example by establishing a Poverty Truth Commission in their constituency/area.

Churches and Christians should not simply fill the gap replacing welfare provision but encourage policymakers to develop structural reforms to tackle post- Covid-19 poverty.

9. **Action:** The Government should fully introduce the **Real Living Wage** across the UK and replace in law the National Minimum Wage. The Real Living Wage should not be differentiated by age of adults.
10. **Action:** The Government should fund a research-led national pilot of **Universal Basic Income** in order to assess its potential reduce poverty and foster improved well-being, mental health, and social inclusion and cohesion in the UK.
11. **Action:** Evidence informed changes should be made to **Universal Credit**, particularly to remove the five week wait between a person applying for Universal Credit and then receiving their first payment.

12. **Action:** Funding streams for youth services should be reinstated to address the negative combined effects on young people of cuts to youth services and limitations imposed upon young people's life chances as a result of austerity and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Asset-Based Community Development shows what can be achieved by focussing on developing people's gifts. However, funding for community projects often focusses on deficits and stereotypes people on a low-income.

13. **Action:** Policymakers and funding agencies need to reframe the criteria of funding streams to emphasise the importance of funding work that builds on local communities' gifts and strengths rather than focussing exclusively on deficits.

The link between poverty and poor housing needs to be broken to enable the building of cohesive and inclusive communities where all people can flourish. The problem of unsafe poor-quality social housing needs to become a top policy priority if attempts to address the inequality of housing provision are to be successful.

14. **Action:** Policymakers need to agree a new Cross-Party long-term funding formula for the building of far more high-quality, affordable social housing.
15. **Action:** People living in social housing should be included in decision making about housing needs their neighbourhood.
16. **Action:** Local, regional and national policymakers need to include social housing tenants in regular meaningful public discussions about housing need.

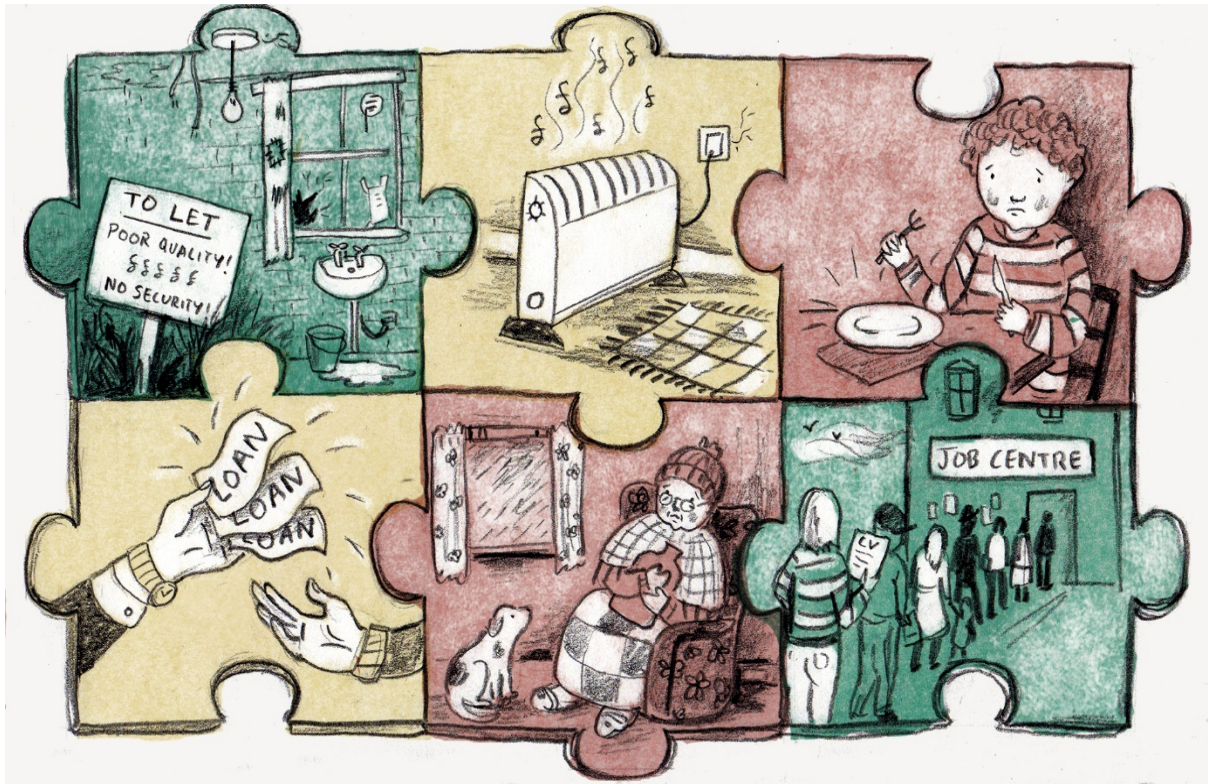


Figure 24: The jigsaw of poverty. Credit: Life on the Breadline research, artist: Beth Waters