

“It is becoming very difficult for people to survive”: Workers at UK’s Bradford Central Foodbank speak on rising cost of living

Our reporters
4 May 2022

Reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* recently visited Bradford Central Foodbank, one of the largest in West Yorkshire.

Based at the Jubilee Centre, the city-centre food bank provides much-needed support to the most deprived communities in a city where some 30 percent of children are in families living below the poverty line.

The Bradford Central Foodbank works with a team of volunteers who sort through the various food items coming mainly from individual donations collected at several points across the city, and pack them into boxes ready for distribution. A network of 100 partner agencies, such as doctors’ surgeries, health visitor departments, social workers, and the Jobcentre, identify those in need and issue a voucher to access the food bank.

Josie, who manages the Jubilee Centre, said that prior to the pandemic they were feeding around 500 needy individuals and households a month. As the virus took hold, this went up to 2,500 and stayed high for several months, eventually dropping back down to about 1,000 a month.

During the initial stages of the pandemic, the group of people using the food bank changed to include those who had been made redundant and others who were furloughed.

“Now, with the cost living going up, it is becoming very difficult for people to survive on their income.” Josie said it was hard to predict how things might develop, and that the cost-of-living crisis could also result in people making fewer donations which, if the government did not increase its support, would make things even harder for those on the lowest incomes.

She was very worried about what conditions might be

like when next winter comes around, especially as energy prices are set to rise drastically for a second time in October.

Zainab, from Sierra Leone, came to the UK 20 years ago. She lives alone and is reliant on Universal Credit (UC). This was the first time she had come to the food bank. “I have just moved to a new place, and I am a bit stranded for money. My work coach at the Jobcentre suggested I come here. I have been on Universal Credit benefit since 2019.”

Like all UC social welfare recipients, Zainab received an extra £20 weekly payment during the pandemic but that was stopped by the Johnson government last October. Although a relatively small amount, the extra money made a big difference to those reliant on UC. A recent study shows that almost half a million children were lifted out of poverty in the first year of the pandemic because of the benefit boost. The ending of this payment, now coupled with the sharp rise in inflation, is forcing more and more people to rely on support from food banks.

Zainab said she now receives just £243 a month, but “cannot live on it for a whole month. I have to pay council tax, water rates, electric, gas and any transportation costs. After that I am left with hardly anything to pay for food.

“If I want proper food to live on, I have to spend £80 to £100 a month. If you go to the shops, they don’t have much affordable there. Before I used to go to the Pound Shop and pay £1 for a jar of honey. Now they don’t have it. So many things have gone up in price.”

John, who has been a volunteer at the food bank for three years, explained that the number of food donations over the last six months has plunged, he

estimated by around 20 to 30 percent. “There was a time when we had mountains and mountains of beans and other items, but the stock has just plummeted.”

On the other hand, the demand on the food bank had shot up because of the impact of the reduction in UC and inflation. John expressed concerns with how the pandemic might develop and with the war in Ukraine, which raised the threat of a third world war.

Sitting with John in the centre’s cafe was **George**, on his first day as a volunteer. He said the centre had helped to get him back into work after being homeless for six months. He had ended up on the streets following a broken marriage. Thanks to the centre providing him with a mobile phone, he had been able to get back into work and stabilise his life.

He described the dilemma facing the homeless. “Without an internet connection or a bank account it is impossible to make a claim for benefits. When you are on the streets and don’t have an address, you can’t even use the internet facilities at the local library to fill out forms.”

It was through a friend’s recommendation to approach the Jubilee Centre that he was given a mobile phone. Access to the internet had turned his life around and he was able to return to the job as a plasterer he had held before his marriage broke down.

Peter, a retired lab technician who also volunteers at the food bank, said there were just five permanent staff at the centre along with around 90 volunteers who had to sort and prepare all the food boxes.

Demand for food parcels in and around Bradford is so great that some 31 food banks and “social supermarkets” have sprung up to meet the need. Unlike food banks, which generally prepare a parcel of food for collection, social supermarkets offer their clients the opportunity to purchase between £20-£30 worth of food, which they can select themselves at a cost of £5.

The picture in Bradford is reflected throughout Britain. According to the Trussell Trust, which supports a nationwide network of food banks, including the Jubilee Centre, 2.1 million food parcels were distributed throughout the UK in the past year, including 830,000 provided for children.

The charity says it is witnessing an accelerating crisis across the country, with the need for emergency food increasing dramatically in the past six months. The surging level of inflation particularly affecting food and

energy costs has led to a 22 percent increase in the number of those seeking support from the Trussell Trust network in January and February this year compared to the same period in 2020, before the pandemic began.

The charity reports one food bank manager saying, “The people who come in are telling me they’re scared. People are beside themselves about what the next six months will bring.”

Already, one in three people receiving UC are regularly skipping meals so they can feed their children, according to Emma Revie, Trussell Trust CEO. “How can this be right in a society like ours? And yet food banks in our network tell us this is only set to get worse as their communities are pushed deeper into financial hardship. No one’s income should fall so dangerously low that they cannot afford to stay fed, warm and dry,” Revie said.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact