



# Empowering young people to shape the response to food poverty

Blackburn with Darwen Food Poverty Alliance, January 2018

## Getting the word out!

[Blackburn with Darwen Food Alliance](#) and Food Power worked with young people in Darwen to understand and raise the profile of food poverty, and by association, child poverty in the Borough. Conversations and relationships had been built over a number of sessions in a school; an opportunity arose to support the FEED DARWEN group, by generating materials to encourage giving food to foodbanks. We grabbed the offer to make [a film of conversations with young people about food poverty](#) – and that went nationwide!

As the Food Alliance, we promised the young people a platform to campaign for change. They came up with the strapline for a social media campaign #DarwengetsHangry. We had a week of activities in October – a young people's conference, workshops to encourage them to campaign and a session in Darwen town centre to encourage people to talk about food poverty. This was followed by the Blackburn with Darwen Conference for Civic and Voluntary Community and Faith Sector Leaders– again promoting the film, the #DarwengetsHangry campaign and giving the young people a further platform to interview (and film) these leaders.

We have also presented to a National Citizenship Service Group who then decided to do a Walk of Poverty for 5 miles from Darwen to Blackburn. The group presented letters to councillors (the leads for children's services and public health) at each Town Hall (see photo). Nightsafe, the hostel for young people, worked on an allotment and raised beds, which was another aspect of developing the young people's food movement.



We had national, local coverage as a result of the films – including [Channel 4 news](#); local radio (several times), and much profile in the communities (geographical, community and faith) as a result of the walk. As a result, there has been more exposure on Channel 4, involvement in the [Children's Future Food Enquiry](#) and a presence at further conferences. Critically, the council lead members and offices for children's services and public health have committed to reviewing all policies to assess impact on child poverty, and supporting the development of the Food Alliance. The Young People's movement is now gaining pace and traction through the Youth Empowerment Forum and Youth Parliament.

***The fact that young people were at the heart of our campaign made the message more compelling – they spoke truth to power. Committing resources to the film production was a risk worth taking.***

Gillian Beeley, Together Lancashire

This activity was assisted by financial support and other advice from Food Power.  
[www.foodpower.org.uk](http://www.foodpower.org.uk)

## Our challenges and learning

The profile of the Darwen young people has certainly helped to galvanise the wider civic and faith communities into accepting that food poverty is an issue. There is nothing like the articulation of issues by those with lived experience to make people sit up and listen. Much of the wider work being undertaken by the Blackburn with Darwen Food Alliance will be built on these experiences.

It is challenging to work with young people who are to some degree understandably constrained by school priorities. This has meant our programme has had to be flexible where it directly involves young people. This raised the issue of spreading the load across a greater number of young people; we are working to involve more young people who can also advocate, and other groups are beginning to get involved.

Fortunately, we did not encounter any 'trolling' of the young people – such exposure given adverse experiences of social media could have needed management. We were extremely aware of safeguarding issues, and are ready to counter any problem which arose.

## Our next steps

The Youth Movement will be supported going forward, and the issue of food and child poverty will be the central theme. The Youth Parliament has now taken food poverty as a theme. We will keep refreshing the campaign, and continue to provide platforms for the young people to amplify their concerns.

Blackburn with Darwen Council is now very much aware of the impact of food poverty, particularly in children, and is working towards their food policy Committee becoming the overarching group and brand Blackburn with Darwen Food Alliance. The council have undertaken to review all their policies regarding their impact on child poverty, and to undertake innovative approaches to local responses to food poverty.

***When you work as a group, saying you want to change things, more adults listen. We want to do more things, like going to Westminster, to raise awareness to help people realise what food poverty is.***

Tia Clarke, Blackburn with Darwen Youth Empowerment Forum, on Channel 4 News

## Our key achievements and impact

- We have given those with lived experience a voice, made links with civic leaders who are in a position themselves to influence and respond, and helped the young people to spread the word nationally, as well as locally.
- We hope that schools in particular will understand the impact of food poverty and respond. We will continue to press for culture change to remove stigma and improve the wellbeing of children and young people.
- We have a good base from which to build momentum to develop the Youth Empowerment Forum – a movement of young people challenging for change.