



A grass-roots approach to reducing Food Poverty in Middlesbrough

Middlesbrough Food Poverty Alliance, final report, April 2019

Putting more money in people's pockets and more food on their tables

Middlesbrough Food Power alliance have been working as a multidisciplinary team to create a robust and grass roots solution to the growing food poverty situation in a very large town, with a population of 138,000. After collating and analysing a broad range of data, it was decided that a grass roots approach was the best course of action. It was agreed that maximising household income and improving access to free and low-cost food was the most logical approach to begin with.

Maximising income: Alliance members, Citizens Advice, Affordable Warmth and Middlesbrough Council have been providing unclaimed benefit check and advice sessions, very successfully, for several years. Mapping undertaken by the Alliance identified wards which had no access to free or low-cost food, and no access to support services. Alliance member Pennyman Primary Academy, which is in one of these 'food desert areas', provided a base to host several unclaimed benefit sessions.

"£20.1m of unclaimed benefits have been identified as unclaimed on both static community-based advice and roving/peripatetic unclaimed services since 2013. Pennyman Primary School and The Hope Centre sessions recently identified £240,000 between them."

Phil Hodgson, Middlesbrough CAB

Surplus food: In Middlesbrough many of the free and low-cost food services operate at unsociable hours and are unsuitable venues for children. Much of the clientele are habitual users and erratic, making the environments vulnerable to volatility and unsuitable for families. The local Food Power coordinator and Veg Cities coordinator have been working to develop alternative methods of food distribution. The Veg Patch (A Teesside University Partnership) and surplus food stalls (facilitated by FareShare NE) are hosted as pop-ups in several primary schools on a Friday, giving families access to low cost food for the weekend.



Newport School Surplus Stall



The Veg Patch at Teesside University

This activity was assisted by financial support and other advice from Food Power.
www.foodpower.org.uk

Our challenges and learning

In Middlesbrough there is a vast and varying community, some communities have excellent engagement, others have very little. Food Power Alliance members in Middlesbrough have been trying to bridge the gap between these communities.

There is much legislation regarding the redistribution of surplus food and with varying levels of community engagement it was essential that The Veg Patch and Surplus Food Stalls were tailored to the individual schools and its families. This was often difficult, nevertheless a flexible model has been developed to support implementation and roll out across interested schools. The projects are led by a dedicated member of staff supported by a team of pupils, and can be used as an enterprise scheme, allowing pupils to earn a pot of money towards a chosen goal. These goals are flexible, but some suggested uses are school enrichment sessions, holiday provision and reducing the cost of school field trips for parents.

The enterprise being managed by the pupils encourages support from parents. They are also operated on a suggested donation or pay as you feel basis, which can be money, time, skills or passing the message on to ensure all can participate.

“We have opened the doors of our 'ECO' shop for the first time tonight. We have had a superb response and all of the stock was sold immediately.”

Julia Rodwell, Park End Primary Academy

Our next steps

Maximising income: The unclaimed benefits campaign is currently supporting additional advice sessions needed at North Ormesby Community Hub. Sessions move to Park End Primary school in April, Unity café/Trinity Methodist in May, and Priory Woods SEN School in June. These are all High IMD wards with a great level of need.

Surplus food: There are currently three schools and one university signed up to The Veg Patch and two schools operating surplus food stalls. This will hopefully be developed and rolled out into hubs and local community access points in the future.

Our key achievements and impact

- £240,000 of unclaimed benefits have been identified in food desert locations.
- Three schools and one university signed up to The Veg Patch.
- Over 330kg of food has been intercepted from going to land fill for The Veg Patch.
- 64 trays of surplus food from Fare Share redistributed and two schools operating surplus food stalls.