

# **The Matthew Tree Project (TMTP) response to 'Feeding Britain' report and recommendations from the APPG Public Inquiry into food poverty in the UK.**

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## **Introduction**

TMTP broadly welcomes the report and its recommendations and would like to congratulate the APPG panel for the extensive and thorough work they have done to grapple with this most difficult and complex of issues.

We particularly welcome the wide ranging aspect of the recommendations and that it has sought to address the underlying issues which are driving ordinary people into food poverty as well as look at how food aid organisations work to distribute food to those in need in the best possible way, i.e. promotion of best practice.

The objective to solve the problem of food poverty and not have any food banks across the country by the end of the next parliament is to be highly commended and TMTP are committed to contribute however we possibly can to help achieve this goal.

However, we do have some concerns, relating in particular to:

- (a) the high prominence in the report and its recommendations relating to the use of surplus food (waste) being used as food aid for people in need is disproportionate to the role this plays in the work done to address food poverty and sends a very damaging message to the people we are seeking to help and build up the confidence of. It should be understood that a very, very low percentage of the total food aid distributed comes from surplus food. For TMTP in Bristol this is as low as 0% (of circa. 50 tonnes of food in 2013 alone) although we recognise this is higher in other parts of the country. It should also be acknowledged that the vast majority of food used to help people and families in food poverty is simply donated by the general public. The role of the general public to 'freely' give the vast majority of the food aid needed to feed hungry people in the UK is not recognised fully in this report and this is a dangerous omission. Even though the work of the charities, the churches and the volunteers is very highly acknowledged, without the goodwill of the general public donating food none of this would be possible.
- (b) High amounts of food waste is a major problem in the UK and this absolutely has to be addressed but we do not agree that this should play such a prominent role in how we tackle food poverty. Furthermore, whatever food surplus is redistributed for the purposes of fighting food poverty, should be made available to qualifying charities and organisations without a charge (which is not currently the case) otherwise cost is a potential barrier and this embodies the social injustice we are fighting against, i.e. it is contrary to everything we are trying to do and all we stand for.

- (c) the recommendation for the proliferation of 'social supermarkets' across the country similar to the one in South Yorkshire, we are not able to support. For TMTP, doing all we can to protect and maintain a persons dignity is central to all we do and we see this as a worrying development and not a helpful one. Our objective should be to eliminate the segregation between the poor and the rest of society, not reinforce it by creating supermarkets where only the poor can shop! This does absolutely nothing for a persons dignity and carries the danger of the creation of a two-tier society.
- (d) the recommendation for all food banks across the country to adopt a food bank mark II model which has only been tested as a pilot so far is concerning. Having had the experience of developing these exact same services (and more) via our Food Plus model for the past 3 years we are well aware of the challenges and difficulties to making this work and work really well. The report neglects to recognise the critical role the existing advice and case work organisations play and how vital it is to 'integrate' and work with these other vital support agencies is to stand any chance of success. The recommendations seems to ignore the impact upon the other well established welfare and advice services which will need to be an integral part of any such development and is what we have managed to facilitate very effectively in Bristol and are working towards the same in South Gloucestershire. However, this takes time and TMTP is willing to share this experience and knowledge and assist towards successful implementation of this recommendation, given our extensive experience in this area - if requested. TMTP are working very closely with ACFA (Advice Centres for Avon) and the JPB (Joint Planning Board for Welfare Reform and Advice Services) in Bristol to develop a coordinated and standardised case management system; standardised referral system; and universally accepted KPI's (key performance indicators). This is all targeted to achieve a higher standard of service for a growing demand yet with less money. How to effectively recruit, train and supervise front line volunteers capable of providing an essential contribution is critical and how to integrate this into the wider advice and support services structure of a city or region is fundamental. TMTP have been working on this for the last three years and are making great progress in partnership with others as it is a two-way street. The value TMTP add to the sector locally is now widely accepted and likewise, when TMTP has a deficiency or a need it is able to recognise this, ask for, and receive the required support from the more experienced agencies in the network. Everyone benefits and progress is made in improving working practice and most of all the clients receive a better and more joined up service.

### **Summary**

At the heart of these initiatives has to be how to look at our poor communities and the people who live in them differently. Rather than seeing poor communities and poor people as a problem and a cost to society, we all need to begin to see both as an 'un-tapped' natural resource which can help contribute significantly towards a more prosperous future for the city/region and in the process lift whole communities out of deprivation. This is only possible if we all work together towards this target...really understanding the issues and putting the clients first.

Building relationships over time with those effected. Developing a sense of community spirit amongst the people in the communities in which we work. Understanding the aspirations and potential of an individual person, regardless of what job they have done in the past or how long they have been unemployed is essential.

Then we, as a society, need to ensure a pathway to overcoming the barriers is available and, often very vulnerable people, are empowered and supported well along this pathway to full restoration.

It is upon the ethos of a solid foundation such as this which will inspire citizens of means to come together to help the disadvantaged and enable us all to undertake the work needed to make a difference and sustainably solve the problem of [food] poverty in the UK by 2020.

As an example of this and bearing in mind TMTP is a relatively small local charity, since September 2014 we have received: £31,500 donation from a large corporate employer in Bristol; £50,000 from the foundation of a UK food production corporation; £12,500 from the foundation of a major high street bank; and £19,000 from an investment banker. We believe this funding has been achieved because we take an holistic approach, our work is highly successful at effecting lasting and sustainable change, and all of this 'inspires' ordinary people.

We trust and hope that whoever wins the next general election, will embrace fully this report, its findings and ongoing recommendations and work with 'Feeding Britain' constructively towards a successful outcome.

TMTP are creating a workable and replicable 'blueprint' for this in Bristol and we would be delighted to share it with the whole country given the opportunity through the 'Feeding Britain' or any other similar initiative.



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