

Food bank use in the UK:

When is research
evidence good
enough?

Jane Perry
SRA – 14/12/15



THE FOODBANK

2010



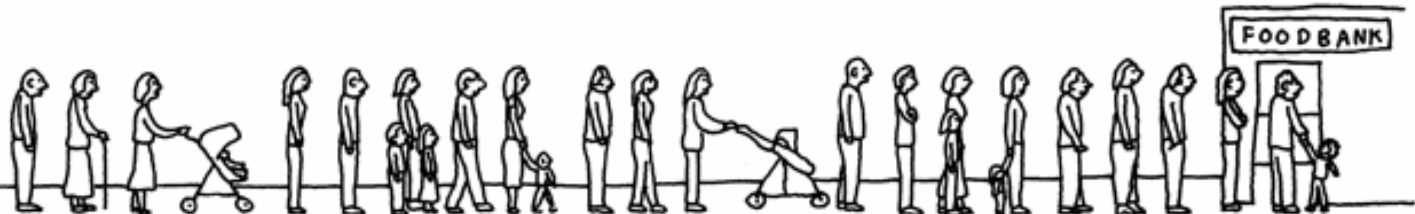
2011



2012



2013



PERHAPS WE NEED TO ASK WHY THIS IS HAPPENING

@davewalker / davewalker.cc

“Food from a food bank is a free good and by definition there is an infinite demand for a free good.”

Lord Freud (July 2013)

“We saw a clear and strong link between benefit changes and benefit delays, and people needing help from our food banks.”

Chris Mould (Aug 2013)

“There is no reliable evidence that welfare reforms are linked to increased use of food banks.”

Mark Hoban MP (Sep 2013)

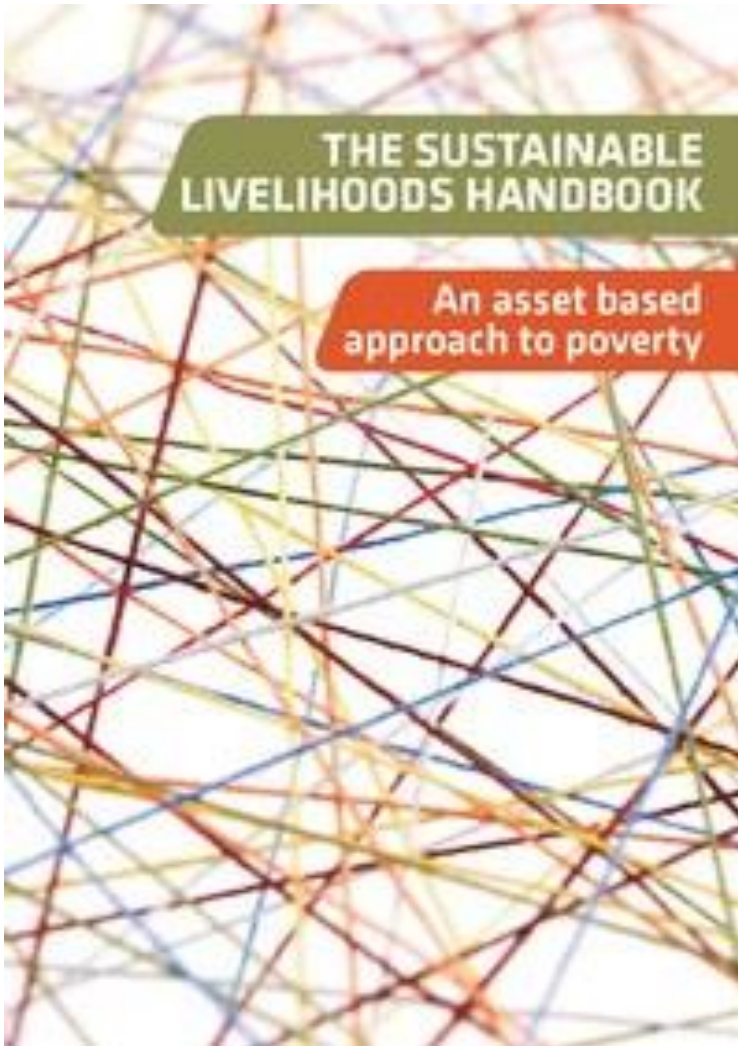
Research Questions

1. Why do people use food banks?
2. How do food banks fit with wider coping strategies?
3. What would help reduce the need for food banks in the future?

Research Design

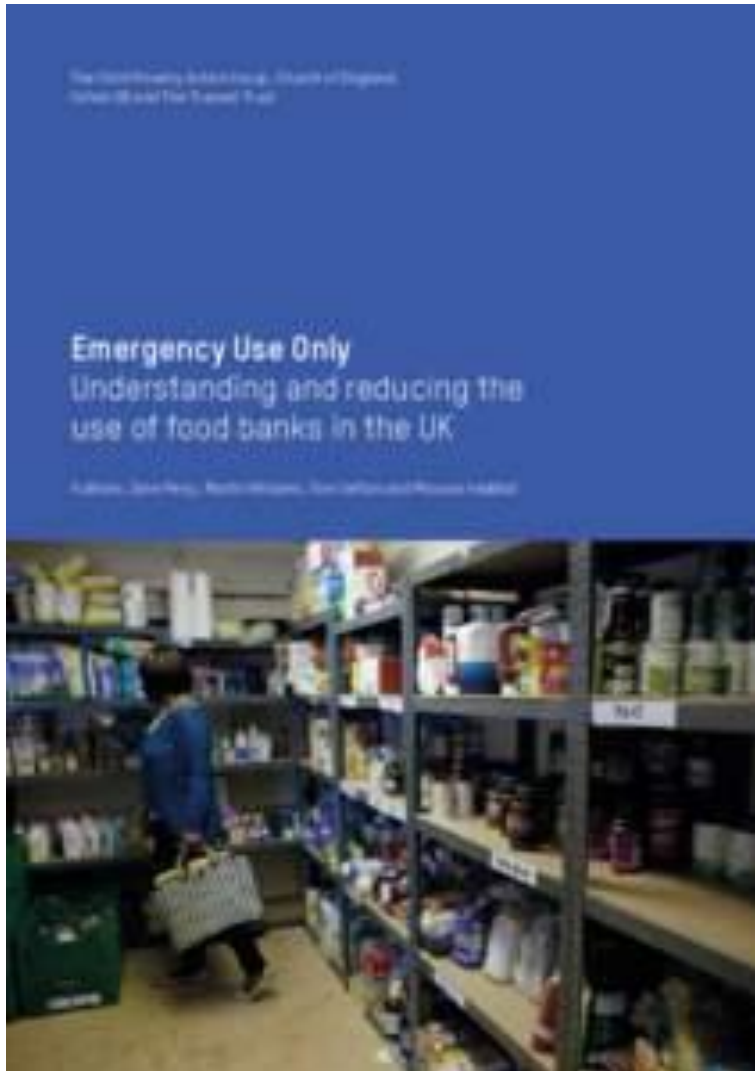
- A. 40 in-depth interviews with food bank users
- B. Additional administrative data
 - 900+ food bank users at 3 food banks
- C. In-depth caseload analysis
 - 178 clients seen by welfare rights adviser, Tower Hamlets Foodbank

Sustainable Livelihoods Approach



- ❖ *typically a response to a 'last straw' 'acute income crisis'*
- ❖ *in the context of 'cumulative and compounding' life-shocks*
- ❖ *together with vulnerabilities that were 'the legacy' of earlier life-shocks and/or ongoing financial pressure*

Sustainable Livelihoods Approach



What did we learn from communicating the findings?



Food banks

Government dismisses study linking use of food banks to benefit cuts

Research calls for changes to Britain's increasingly threadbare social security system to stop people falling into poverty

Patrick Butler, social policy editor

Wednesday 19 November 2014
13.09 GMT



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At least half of all food bank users are referred because they are waiting for benefits to be paid, the study found. Photograph: Murdo Macleod/Guardian



Food banks

Government dismisses study linking use of food banks to benefit cuts

“The report itself concludes it can’t prove anything – it uses self-selecting data and recognises there are complex underlying issues. We have a strong safety net in place.....”

DWP spokesperson



Jonathan Portes

@jdportes



Follow

Food banks. Reading between lines here, clear DWP officials are not in fact questioning validity/quality of study theguardian.com/society/2014/n...





Jonathan Portes

@jdportes



Follow

“I can't see anything to suggest this isn't at least as good quality as the many qualitative research reports DWP commission and publish.”

Ask for Evidence Blog, 20 Nov 2014

Who is shaping the discourse?

Researchers

Practitioners *Policymakers*

Campaigners

Public opinion *Press* *Politicians*

**CHILD
POVERTY
ACTION
GROUP**

**CHILD
POVERTY
ACTION
GROUP**
in SCOTLAND

 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND


OXFAM

 the
trussell
trust

Is it reliable? Is it useful?

- Quantitative » Prevalence
- Qualitative » Understanding
- Stories » Connection

In conclusion:

Research quality matters

» But so does communication

“Do you have a message for people in power?”

“For God’s sake, listen to real people...”

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