



Food for thought

When did you start the role and how are you finding it?

I started on the 4 January 2021. It's like being part of a big family here. There are the obvious challenges of working through lockdown and making sure we are adapting as quickly as the guidelines come out. There's a 'can do' spirit that carries you along. I took over from Alan Robinson who has massively inspired me. It's the best hand-over I've ever had. He has an incredible heart of service.

What is your background?

I've worked in the charity sector previously and I very much enjoyed helping people come back towards employment. I took a brief break from that working for Royal Borough of Greenwich.

What made you want to take on this role?

The fact that food poverty is such a glaring issue which shouldn't exist. It came out of conversations that my wife and I were having about food and food poverty, and with other friends. One sent me through this job and said, "here's a way that you can do something about it".

What are the main issues facing foodbanks?

Food poverty shouldn't exist within this country. There's no reason except for the way in which money and resources are allocated. That's essentially the issue that we've got.

Grace Boyle interviews the new CEO of *The Greenwich Foodbank*, SE9's Jamie Ginns...

Do you work alongside any other charities and organisations?

We operate as part of *The Trussell Trust* although we're an autonomous charity in ourselves. I am in constant contact with Royal Borough of Greenwich with whom we have a fantastic relationship. They are massively supportive of us. I will be making sure other agencies of a like mind are working alongside us.

What are the main aims of the foodbank?

They are twofold. One is to ensure that we are feeding the people that need the food. The other is to work with *The Trussell Trust* to provide statistics for them of what kind of issues we are facing so that they can take those statistics to the government to show them the scale of the problem.

What are the reasons that people suffer food poverty?

The reasons are varied. You will have read headlines of qualified nurses having to use foodbanks, despite the fact that they are holding down a vital role within the community. Immediately when you hear that, you understand this a complex issue. It's not simply, 'foodbanks are for people with no money'.

What are the main financial struggles for people?

Most would be able to survive on their income if they weren't also paying off debt. Another reason that people come to us is because of gaps in *Universal Credit*. If you have a pause in your income, you can find yourself having to seek money through credit cards and payday loans. But then you are instantly incurring debt. By the time your *Universal Credit* is set up, financially speaking you are actually behind. That means that you have to pay things

off to keep your credit score going, which means you end up short on the food that you need for you or your family.

How has Covid affected your operations?

We are having to make sure that we aren't overcrowding our buildings. We are trying to extend our opening hours to allow for volunteers to be more spaced out over a longer period of time. We are taking measures to make sure that all of our stock is as Covid safe as possible.

Are people still coming into welcome centres to collect their food?

In the previous lockdown, we went straight over to delivery because our volunteer base was depleted to the extent that we couldn't run them. In this lockdown, as and when we can't run welcome centres, we are moving over to delivery again. The welcome centres are operating in a Covid-safe way. Instead of coming into a welcome centre, people get to the front door and maintain social distance whilst someone will hand over the relevant crate. You take your food, in bags, out of that crate and that's the whole process. We aren't able to have as extensive conversations with our clients as we have had in the past.

What is a typical working day for you?

For me, as CEO, a typical day is ensuring we are Covid-safe at all times and that our operation is able to adapt to whatever guidance is out there. I am constantly talking to volunteers. The other big role that I have at the moment is drawing



Jamie with some Foodbank volunteers at the Shooters Hill depot

together those vital statistics that I can take to *The Trussell Trust*.

What policy would you introduce to decrease food poverty in this country?

We need a benefit system that is actually based on the practical needs of the people that are using it. This country is amazing in terms of providing anything at all – there are plenty of countries that don't – but the system doesn't quite work in practice. It's supposed to be a welfare system, but at the moment, it doesn't provide welfare quickly enough.

How can people get help if they need it?

If you need help, we have got a number of places that you can go to say, 'I need food'. They are able to refer you to us and then everything goes from there. We can get food to the nearest welcome centre for you to pick up.

Where are the referral centres?

It depends on who is being referred. At Greenwich University, if a student phones up their welfare officer, that welfare officer will be able to allocate them with a food voucher and referrals. If you have a social worker engaged with your family for other reasons, they are able to offer vouchers. If you are known to a local

Church, many of those places are able to give you a referral.

Where can SE9 citizens contribute?

You can donate food at *Co-op* in Well Hall Road or *Sainsbury's* in Eltham.

How else can people help?

At the moment we have a surplus of food because of the generosity so many people that have seen the need and responded. If people want to do anything to help now, they could send money instead of the food. You can find out how on our website. That will allow us to buy the food when it's needed. That is for now. Once we have cleared the surplus, we will be doing a big drive to get more.

What food parcel options do you offer?

We do several. A single person, a couple or single parent with one child, a family with two children or a family with three plus children. There will be three days' worth of food in those parcels.

What is your main goal as CEO?

My long-term goal is to impact food poverty in the Royal Borough of Greenwich so effectively that we no longer need a foodbank.



Grace Boyle

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