

## Case Study 6

### Food Poverty



While running our programme with a group of parents from an inner city primary school, we met a lovely dad who was raising his three children on his own. His partner had left him after lockdown. He had worked in hospitality and after the pandemic he had been made redundant due to the drastic cut backs by the business.

This had put inevitable stress on the family and his partner had suffered severe bouts of mental illness both during and post lockdown. It was agreed she should return to her parents' home 'temporarily' until she was well enough to take care of her children, rather than causing them added anxiety as she had been doing. Luckily this dad had some support from his sister who lived locally and who also had three small children, and his partner's elderly parents still had a relationship with the children and cared about all their wellbeing.

This dad was very proud and determined that he would be the children's provider. He was able to secure himself a part-time job in a shop with shifts that fitted around school drop-off and school pick-up times. His sister took care of the children during his 5 hour shift on weekends so that he could earn some extra money. However, despite trying as hard as he could to provide for his family, he was now finding it impossible to make ends meet. Even though he had learned to budget very carefully and had previously managed on a very tight budget, with the rises in energy costs and the general rise in the cost of living, his earnings simply wouldn't stretch. He had sadly fallen, like many others, into the trap of having to choose whether to heat or to eat.

Because we knew something of this man's character, and that he preferred to earn rather than rely on benefits, we guessed he would not want to be recommended to a food bank. However, we spoke to him privately about the benefits of becoming a member of a local 'mobile pantry', which he had never heard about. We advised him that these pantries bring healthy food, including fresh fruit and vegetables to local venues. It costs £3.50 per week to become a member, but this entitles you to food with a value up to £20. We persuaded him to give it some thought before we meet up the following week. We suggested he viewed it as temporary support until he could work longer hours or the cost of living came down. We also tried to convince him that there was no shame in the difficulties that he and thousands of others are facing amidst this cost of living crisis.

At the end of the following session he stayed behind and we filled in his application selecting his chosen pantry. This mobile pantry ran every Friday and we agreed to come with him on his first visit as he was feeling a bit uncomfortable, unsure and slightly embarrassed. Thankfully, the experience at the pantry was nothing like he imagined. Rather than a sense of shame, we felt a very warm welcome with music playing and people chatting with each other happily. We experienced community spirit at its best, without a hint of judgement or pity.

The following week I asked this hardworking, proud father if he would like me to join him at the pantry and, true to his nature, he said it wouldn't be necessary as he was now confident that the experience would not be traumatic. And although he was sad that he was in this very difficult position he told us that the pantries were a lifeline for him and the children, and that he no longer felt the stigma he had once attached to food poverty as so many local hardworking people were sadly in the same position as him.

By the end of our 'It's Your Child's Life' programme this dad had helped other struggling families to become members of the mobile pantry scheme, including his sister. He was so pleased to have been able to help others with their struggles. The family's struggles weren't over by any means, but food poverty was no longer the threat it was before.