

# The Foodbank Dilemma

By James Harrison



When I think about foodbanks now, more than anything else, I think about Louise. Louise was the first person I ever met who talked to me about her experiences of using a foodbank. Six months later, it is still my meeting with Louise I return to time and again. As if making sense of that meeting can somehow help me unravel all the issues that I have wrestled with in the months that have followed, as I have visited foodbanks, talked to the people who run and use them, interviewed food experts, and read books, reports and articles, trying to understand the foodbank phenomenon.

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Hugh [McNeil, Manager of Coventry's Foodbank Network] asks me if I want to meet some of the clients....He approaches a small, slight young woman, who is sitting crumpled and small on a chair in the corner. They talk. Even at a distance, I can tell that his infectious enthusiasm is beginning to win her over. She slowly unfurls, brightening and then, a nod. Hugh beckons me over, introduces me; Louise is happy to have a chat.

"School holidays are the hardest time because you have to feed your children three times a day. That's why I am coming here now," she begins "The foodbank is wonderful. Normally I shop only from the value range and often I go round a couple of different supermarkets for the cheapest bargains so I can make my money stretch. And it's all tinned and frozen stuff – beans, pasta, that kind of thing. No fresh fruit or vegetables"

"Normally I eat porridge in the morning to fill myself up and then often I don't eat at all myself in the evenings. But today is the start of the kids' holidays and so they don't get the school meals, they have to eat all their food at home and I just can't manage, and so the foodbank is a lifeline."

Read the full article [here](#)

# James Harrison: Why I Write



## **How would you categorise the writing?**

I am an academic who has investigated the impact of austerity measures and public spending cuts on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged people in the UK. During my research, people kept talking to me about foodbanks. How can we be the fourth richest country in the world and yet over the last 5 years so many foodbanks have been set up to feed hungry people? This kind of question made me want investigate the issue, and 'The Foodbank Dilemma' describes what I found.

## **Why did you write the piece?**

I didn't want only other academics to read my findings. I wanted anyone who was concerned about the issue to be able to engage with what I had written. So I tried to draw people in by telling the stories of the people I met. Louise's story really struck me. The opening line of the Foodbank Dilemma makes it clear I am going to tell you about Louise. In the full article you then have to wait for several hundred words before you get to hear Louise's story. I hope that people are hooked by the introduction, and are waiting for her story to appear (suspense!).

## **What do you think makes it an effective piece of writing?**

The whole piece is 8,000 words long and contains a lot of detailed factual information about foodbanks, why they have become so prominent, and why so many people are worried about them. But I have tried to keep the reader engaged throughout by telling the story from the perspective of people who use and run foodbanks. For many people, those individual personal stories will keep them reading where dry facts and figures would make them stop. But along the way, I hope that the readers pick up as much knowledge about foodbanks as they would in an academic article on the same issues.