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FEEDING COMMUNITIES

IMPROVING THE SOCIAL GOOD OF SURPLUS FOOD

In the UK, 8.4 million people are struggling to afford to eat. The chronic stress associated with this can affect relationships, the ability to make decisions and it can contribute to social isolation. This makes communities and individuals less resilient to the shocks associated with limited food choices.

Despite this, 1.9 million tonnes of food is wasted in the UK annually, of which a good proportion is still edible. By better understanding how to redistribute surplus food from across the supply chain to consumers, and adopting a new approach to food insecurity, we can combat food waste and build more resilient communities.

Dr Megan Blake, a Researcher at the University of Sheffield's Department of Geography, works with a network of surplus food redistribution charities, including FareShare and Community Shop. The aim is to improve how food is distributed to maximise its social good and change community-based approaches to the problems of food insecurity. This is how Megan has helped FareShare and Community Shop.

FareShare: understanding our charities?

FareShare is a UK-wide charity that receives surplus food from major retailers, like Tesco and Waitrose, and food producers like Refresco and Birdseye. They redistribute this food to charities and community groups supporting vulnerable people. The food they redistribute is the weight equivalent of 45 million meals a year. But delivering food is just one component of redistributing food. To maximise social good FareShare needed to better understand the needs of the charities they were working with.

How Megan has helped FareShare:

Megan has reassessed the data profiles of the 11,000 charities FareShare work with.

Before the reassessment FareShare had an idea of how they were supporting groups and charities:

“We knew we worked with many food using organisations and we gave them surplus food and they ran a service for people. But we were quite limited in what we understood about the groups we were supporting.”

David Brown, Systems & Support Manager, FareShare.

Through Megan’s work on the data profiles, FareShare has been able to overhaul the way they understand the organisations they work with and how they use food. Now, FareShare knows how and when their organisations use food, receive funding, focus services and address social challenges. This allows them to match food to organisations more intelligently:

“Megan has been instrumental in the way that we use data to inform decisions around how we work with charities – what type of food they need and how we can help charities increase their capacity or ability to take more food.”

Kris Gibbon-Walsh, Head of Network Partnerships, FareShare.

The Food Ladders approach

FareShare is adopting Megan’s approach to food security and community resilience: Food Ladders. The community-scale interventions, advocated by Food Ladders, aim to build local resilience in the face of food insecurity. Every 12 months FareShare re-evaluate the charities they work with to ensure they fit their criteria.

This specification is now being reframed to align with Food Ladders as a way to mitigate the wider effects that poverty has on health, wellbeing and community cohesion.



Community Shop: proactive thinking

Company Shop itself takes surplus food from over 900 stocklines including Cadbury’s, Tesco and Unilever and redistributes it to Company Shops where it’s sold at 30% of the retail price to its members working in the manufacturing supply chain.

With the infrastructure already in place to redistribute surplus food, Company Shop established Community Shop, designed to help low-income communities overcome the challenges of poverty. Community shops stock the same lines as Company

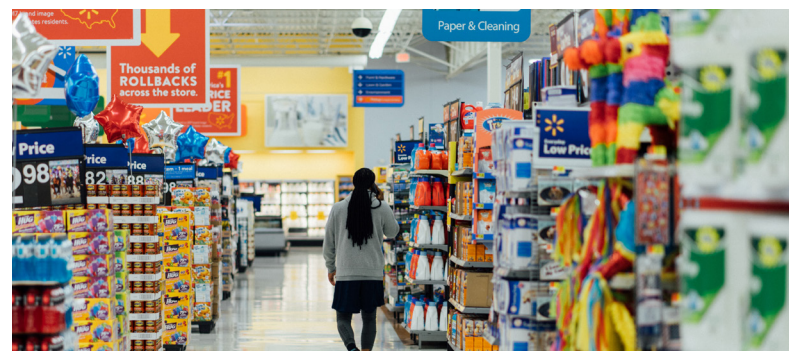
Shop but targeted at low-income communities. However, the shop offers more than just food, there are mentoring schemes in the associated community hubs and community kitchens that serve breakfast and lunch

How Megan has helped Community shop:

Megan initially worked with Community Shop to write the foreword to their impact report in 2018. This rapidly evolved into a discussion with Gary Stott, the Social Enterprise’s Director, about how Community Shop could maximise their positive impact on communities they work with.

“Megan has challenged our thinking about the activities we promote, the language we use when talking about food and poverty, the programmes we deliver and the way we interact with our members and communities to change the way we act so we can do as much as possible in terms of impact.”

Gary Stott, Director of Community Shop.



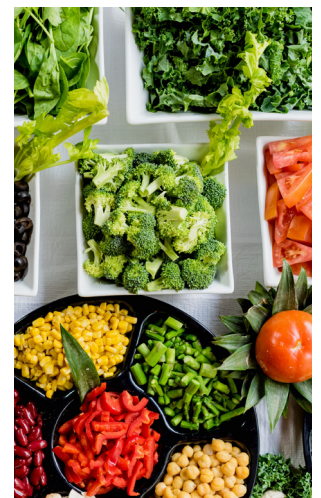
Based on work with Megan, Community Shop have also evolved a way of thinking which focuses on the values of Food Ladders.

“There’s a need to understand the multiple levels of intervention both in the food system and the ways individuals engage with it. It’s an approach that could be applied to most communities to help build resilience at times of food insecurity.”

Gary Stott, Director of Community Shop.

Approaching food insecurity

Poverty related food insecurity is a problem as is food surplus. The work Megan has done with FareShare and Community Shop maximises the social good that can come from surplus food. By going one step further and implementing a Food Ladders approach charities, individually or in collaboration, can do more than give provisions – they can help communities and individuals move up the ladder.



If you’d like to know more or if you’d like to work together to increase social good within food redistribution please contact:

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