



‘Non-food provision’ in The Trussell Trust Network in Scotland

Key Findings

- 92% of the network confirmed that their foodbank provides non-food items alongside the nutritionally-balanced three day food parcel. That foodbanks need to do so gives an indication of the sheer scale of destitution felt by individuals and families across the country. The extent of foodbanks’ response from all 28 local authorities in which The Trussell Trust operates demonstrates that need is widespread.
- Over a third of respondents indicated that it can be difficult to secure the amount of non-food items necessary to meet the needs of those approaching their foodbank for help – 24% only sometimes have enough, while 12% never have enough. Toilet roll, shampoo and soap are the basic necessities most frequently requested by people referred to Scottish foodbanks.
- Feminine hygiene products are provided ten times more often in response to a volunteer’s question than an individual’s request, highlighting stigma surrounding ‘period poverty’.

Introduction

The Trussell Trust supports a network of 52 foodbanks in Scotland based in 119 locations across 28 out of the 32 local authorities. This network is made up of multiple partnerships between The Trussell Trust and charitable organisations, often churches. The network of foodbanks in Scotland provided 76,764 three-day emergency food supplies to people in crisis - including 24,142 for children – during this first half of the 2017-18 financial year.

“Providing non-food items to clients is generally very well received as additional help with everyday items which they are struggling to fund.”

(volunteer at a North East Scotland foodbank)

Each parcel is based on a ‘picking list’ tailored to the size of household. This list includes a range of different foods (such as cereal, pasta, soup, tea or coffee, tinned vegetables and fish) designed to suffice for three days’ worth of nutritionally-balanced meals for each member of the household.

For several years Trussell Trust foodbanks, not only in Scotland but across the UK, have also included in their parcels a number of essential non-food items including soap, shower gel, toothbrushes, toothpaste and nappies. Volunteers had begun to notice that a number of people struggled to afford these basic necessities as much as they struggled to afford food. Indeed Dr Loopstra’s research into the profile and circumstances of people using foodbanks identified that 50% of people surveyed while at a foodbank could not afford toiletries¹. Foodbanks across the country receiving these products as donations subsequently include them in distributed parcels.

Reports from foodbanks and other organisations that women in poverty were unable to afford sanitary products has raised awareness of what has been termed ‘period poverty’, as well as the interventions that these organisations take to tackle it. In particular, the comments² of Major Colin Bradshaw from Darlington Salvation Army in spring 2016 sparked widespread conversation on the issue as he highlighted that some women accessing the foodbank had admitted having to use socks, newspapers and handkerchiefs as they could not buy appropriate protection.

¹ https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/07/OU_Report_final_01_08_online2.pdf

² <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/women-are-using-newspapers-because-they-cannot-afford-tampons-warns-salvation-army-food-bank-a6932111.html>

“Once we had a referral for delivery to a family with 4 children 3 with ages between 11 and 15, sanitary products were requested and we asked how many of the children were girls, the reply was all of them.... that's a fair cost 3 girls and mum all requiring hygiene products could be in the region of £15-£20 per month, every month and if on low income budget can be quite restrictive”

(manager of a foodbank in the Lothians)

The difficulties felt by women and girls on a low income trying to access appropriate sanitary protection has also been raised in, and received interest from, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government. Members of the Scottish Parliament have since campaigned to raise and maintain awareness, discover the many facets of the problem and identify potential solutions.

In July 2017 the Scottish Government launched a pilot scheme through Community Food Initiatives North East (CFINE) – a social enterprise, foodbank and surplus food distributor in Aberdeen - providing this organisation with £42,500 to be used to purchase a range of sanitary products which will then be distributed amongst the charity’s partners. These partners, including community-based organisations and education establishments, have been left to decide the most appropriate method of making these products available.

In August 2017 a consultation was launched on a Bill that aims to ensure that all those who menstruate, including women, girls and trans people who have periods, are able to access sanitary products during menstruation, at no cost, as and when they are required.³

Meanwhile the Scottish Government’s Programme for Government, released in September 2017, cited an ambition to ensure access to free sanitary products in schools, colleges and universities and that the findings of the aforementioned pilot would be used in considerations of further action to assist those on low incomes⁴.

In order to better understand the extent to which people in Scotland face a lack of basic necessities at the point of foodbank referral and to gain a picture of how foodbanks are responding, The Trussell Trust decided in spring 2017 to gather information on the demand for and supply of sanitary products and other non-food items from its network of Scottish foodbanks.

³ http://www.parliament.scot/S5MembersBills/FINAL_Ending_Period_Poverty_consultation_document.pdf

⁴ <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00524214.pdf> (p19)

Research Aim

The overarching aim of this research is to contribute to the on-going conversation surrounding 'period poverty' by providing data - additional to that which will be collected from the existing Scottish Government trial - regarding the extent of need, method of provision and source of supply of feminine hygiene products alongside other non-food items in foodbanks.

It is hoped that the findings and recommendations will be part of the Scottish Government's deliberations on the accessibility of these products for those on low incomes, with particular reference to the most appropriate sources of supply and distribution.

Methodology

The Trussell Trust carried out a survey with its network of foodbanks in Scotland in order to establish an outline of current demand and provision of non-food items (see appendix). This survey was constructed using the online survey platform Wufoo and sent via email to contacts within each project.

50 responses were received, covering 48 out of the 52 currently operating Scottish foodbanks (92%). The feedback from foodbanks covered all 28 local authorities in which The Trussell Trust has a presence, providing a good indication of practice across the country.

- Three foodbanks did not respond while one other indicated that as they had only recently opened, they did not yet have enough experience to provide answers.
- One single entry covers Edinburgh Central, Edinburgh North West and Edinburgh East foodbanks, which are all incorporated in one organisation under the banner Edinburgh Food Project.
- Four foodbanks responded twice – in these cases both sets of answers have been included as it is often the case that two different volunteers have responded and have provided additional perspectives.

Non-Food Item Distribution in Scottish Foodbanks

“[H]ow can one present for a job interview unshaven, [in] dirty clothes or having not washed with soap. [L]ooking at children in school it is imperative to attend well kept - even when things are tough financially.”

(manager of a Glasgow foodbank)

1. Need – how and when are non-food items provided?

Foodbanks operate in different geographic and demographic contexts so local need varies. For example, one foodbank that operates out of a family centre highlighted that this location means that they serve a lot more women and subsequently experience a high demand for sanitary items and nappies.

1.1 Method of provision:

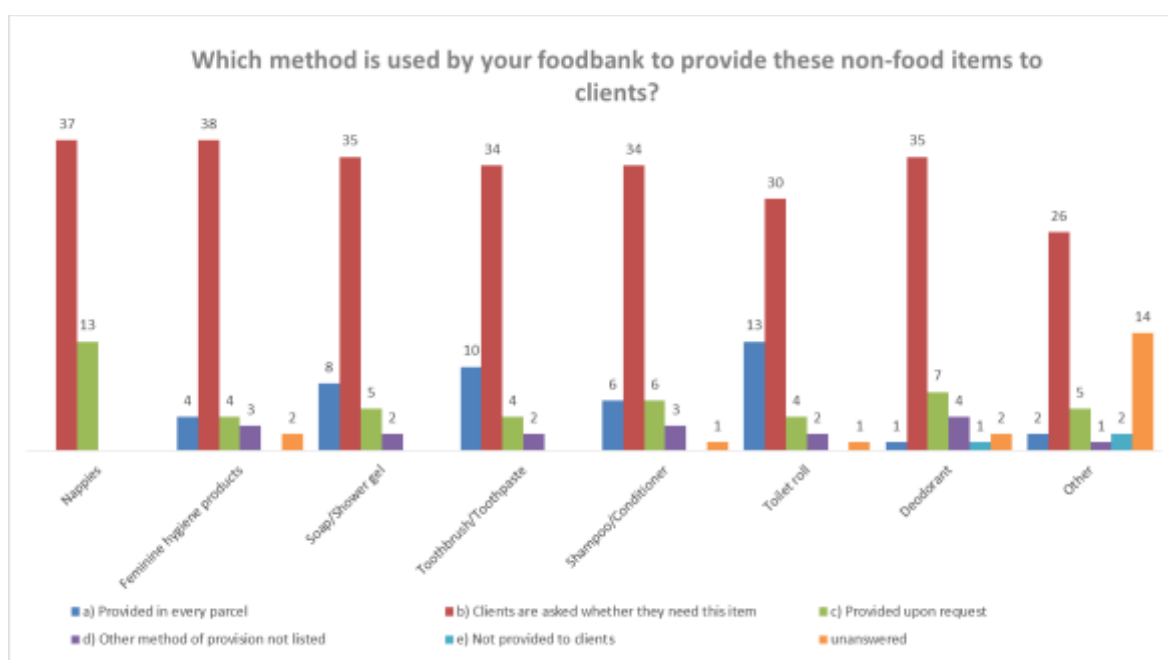


Figure 1

The majority of respondents noted that volunteers at their foodbank will ask the person who comes to collect the parcel whether they require specific items. Products used by everyone, such as toilet roll and toothbrushes/toothpaste, will be more commonly provided in every parcel (subject to availability of stock). However more rural foodbanks, which primarily distribute pre-packed Emergency Food Boxes amongst a large number of partner agencies throughout the area, face increased barriers to offering a more tailored parcel depending on the individual’s circumstances.

One respondent stated that their volunteers place these extras in a ‘choosing box’ from which people can take the required items. Another foodbank in the north of Scotland is working with local schools to ensure that pupils have access to feminine hygiene products.

1.2 Items requested:

The item which most foodbanks receive requests for very often (at least once per foodbank session) is toilet roll, followed by shampoo/conditioner and soap/shower gel.

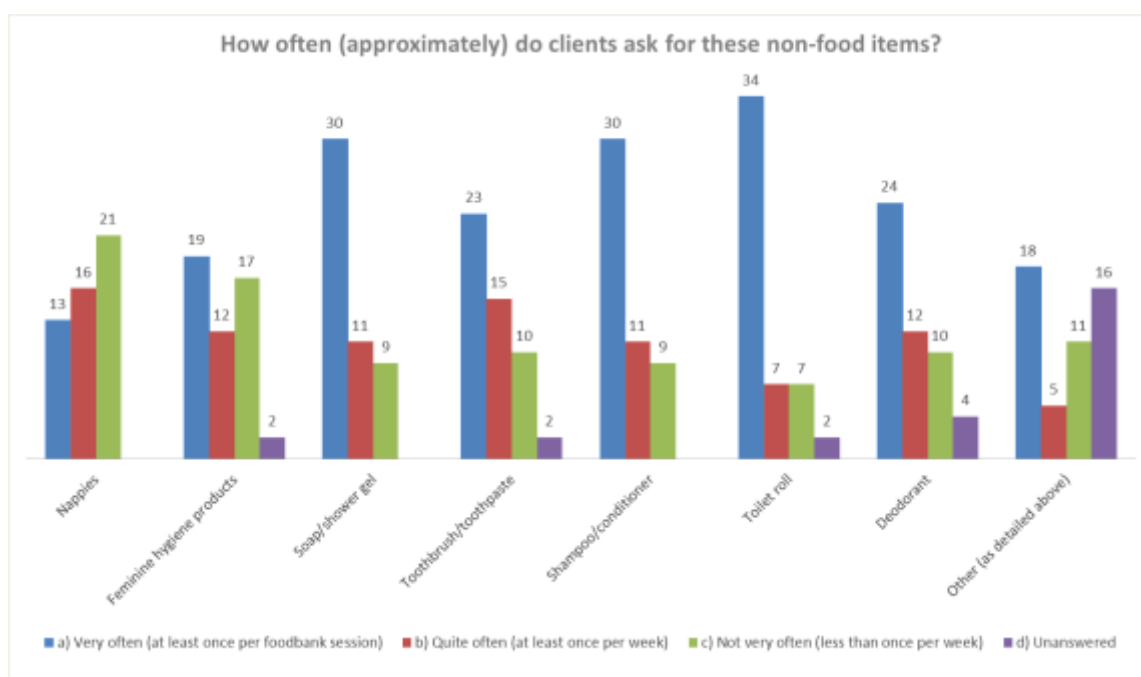


Figure 2

Feminine hygiene products are the second least requested item. However it must be noted that it is common for single males to make up the higher proportion of foodbank referrals. Additionally the question asks ‘how often (approximately) do clients ask for these non-food items?’ Given the social embarrassment surrounding feminine hygiene products, it may be expected that less people will ask for these. Indeed Figure.1 demonstrates that feminine hygiene products are provided almost ten times more often in response to a volunteer’s question than the individual’s request (respectively 38 responses compared to 4).

“It is difficult enough for people to come into the foodbank without having to ask for toiletries or sanitary products”

(volunteer at a Highland foodbank)

These factors make it difficult to use this data to determine the true level of need for feminine hygiene products, especially in comparison to other items which are not subject to the same stigma, nor are as gender-specific. They also suggest that tackling the root causes of ‘period poverty’, namely insufficient incomes, would be the best way to ensure women and girls can afford sanitary products themselves.

1.3 Recording provision

Trussell Trust foodbanks record their stock by weighing in donations in bulk, then weighing out each three-day emergency food parcel.

Foodbanks were asked whether they specifically record distribution of non-food items and if so, what the relevant figures were from 2016. In general, respondents indicated that they do not keep separate database records of food and non-food items provided but rather take only the weight of the full parcel, in keeping with The Trussell Trust model. Thus it is not possible to give a precise figure demonstrating the need for or provision of each of the items listed above.

However, several respondents mentioned that volunteers will note on the reverse of the picking list the extra items provided and others were able to provide rough estimates:

- Falkirk Foodbank includes feminine hygiene items in every parcel for households with a female (more than one packet for additional females) as well as toothpaste/toothbrushes with every referral (extra for children). They estimate to have provided approximately 2000 packets of feminine hygiene products and 4000 tubes of toothpaste/toothbrushes in the timescale given.
- South Ayrshire Foodbank records the weight of toiletries separately under ‘notes’. Between 1/6/16 – 31/12/16 they distributed 591kg of toiletries, representing 1.8% of the total 32,988kg distributed.

The Trussell Trust is currently investigating ways in which we can further support foodbanks which are providing more than the standard emergency food parcel.

2. Provision– which items are provided?

“Until I started with the Foodbank I simply did not realise how much non-food items were required. It is an essential service and clients have said so.”

(volunteer at a Highland foodbank)

100% of respondents (92% of the network) confirmed that their foodbank provides non-food items alongside the nutritionally-balanced three day food parcel. Further questions examined what these items are, in order to give a broader idea of what foodbanks - and the members of the public that donate to them - feel are essentials that would be appreciated by those who approach them for help.

90% of the foodbanks represented provide nappies, feminine hygiene products, soap/shower gel, toothbrush/toothpaste, shampoo/conditioner, toilet roll and deodorant. 71% also provide additional items beyond those listed. These ‘other’ items include household cleaning items, personal hygiene items, baby items, and kitchen items. The top five additional items were:

1. Pet food
2. Cleaning products
3. Washing powder/soap/detergent
4. Shaving foam
5. Razors

“I've had a lady sitting in front of me (who was old enough to be my mother) ask for fairy liquid, because she could use it for 1) washing her hair 2) washing her body 3) washing her clothes 4) washing her dishes”

(manager of a foodbank in the Lothians)

That foodbanks need to provide such a range of items, from tin openers to toilet roll, gives an indication of the sheer scale of destitution felt by individuals and families across the country, unable to afford the basics⁵. There is widespread recognition that these items are essential to a person’s sense of dignity and ability to participate normally in social life.⁶

⁵ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/destitution-uk> and see also <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/minimum-income-standard-uk-2017>

⁶ <http://www.poverty.ac.uk/pse-research/pseuk-reports>

3. How are foodbanks responding?

It is evident that while people seek help from the foodbank when they are unable to afford food, at this point they are likely unable to afford other non-food essentials. Foodbanks also offer additional help and do what they can to accommodate local need mainly through signposting, but in some cases also through providing additional services onsite. This can include the provision of fuel vouchers, cooking and budgeting classes or immediate access to advisors from other organisations who can give targeted advice to help people address the underlying causes of crisis more quickly.

However for the most part what they are able to give is dependent on their resources and what is donated to them. Indeed 60% of respondents said that their foodbank secures its stock of non-food items via donations from the public. Over one third reported that they rely both on donations and purchasing these items using their own funds, which suggests that these foodbanks recognise that basic toiletries and other non-food products are as important as food to their clients and are determined to ensure they are available.

Of the 92% of respondents that indicated their foodbank asks for donations of non-food items, the methods of requesting these were revealed to be:

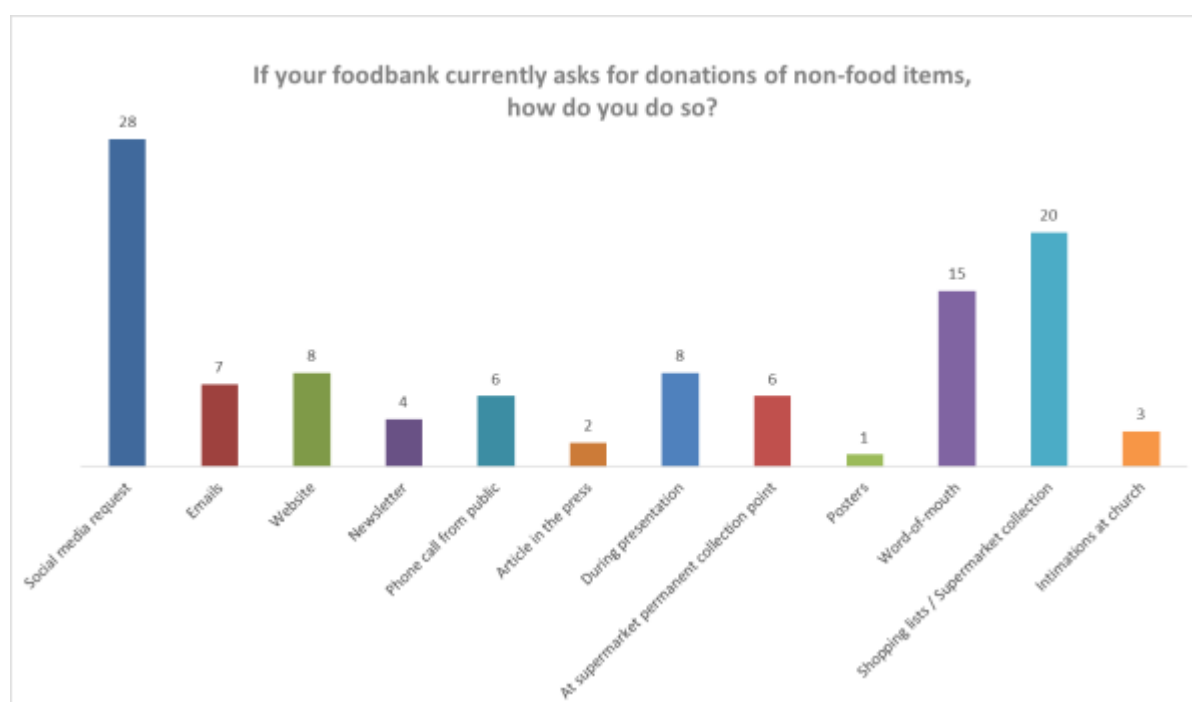


Figure 3

Donations of non-food items do not appear to be sufficient for the majority of foodbanks: while 16% of respondents said that donations always cover the amount of items given out, 46% said they mostly receive enough to cover outgoings and importantly, over a third of responses indicated that their foodbank receives donations which never or only sometimes do so (12% and 24% respectively).

The survey revealed a very mixed picture of the items that foodbanks are short of, reflecting again the diversity in local context, donations and need. For example, while a respondent from a Highland Foodbank expressed the need for “more personal items like sanitary products”, another near Glasgow noted that they always have plenty. Potential reasons for a disparity in donations could be the latter’s proximity to a city in which several well-publicised campaigns encourage the public to donate feminine hygiene products to foodbanks and homeless shelters, and where the items can be accessed more cheaply to buy and to donate. It may also reflect a situation where cheaper items are more accessible for people who therefore don’t need them from the foodbank.

Conclusion

‘Period poverty’ cannot be disconnected from poverty and deprivation, so more must be done to make sure women and girls have sufficient and stable incomes so they can afford essentials such as sanitary products.

Foodbank volunteers have highlighted that for people who are unable to afford food and other household essentials, the relatively high cost of feminine hygiene products will pose a challenge for many low income females. The additional stigma surrounding the topic of menstruation means that although many stock the required products, it is sometimes difficult to ensure that these reach the women and girls that need them.

Foodbanks are seeing and responding to a significant need for both food and non-food items. However, they are reliant on varying levels of donations, have limited resources and despite efforts to reach as many people as possible, are aware that there are still some who do not access their service for diverse reasons. Therefore, it is clear that foodbanks and their volunteers cannot alone ensure that people’s essential needs are met.

Recommendations

- A. That so many people are having to turn to foodbanks not only to feed themselves and their family, but also to ensure adequate basic hygiene, highlights that **government at all levels should prioritise research into and implementation of methods to increase the income of households to such a level that they can afford to buy essential items.**
- B. The University of Oxford’s ground-breaking work on foodbank use found that price rises were affecting people, as well as low levels of income from benefits or part-time/insecure work, with disabled people, lone parents, and people with long-term health conditions

particularly in need of foodbanks. **Making sure that these vulnerable groups have sufficient incomes, either through benefits or employment, would help ensure that the most extreme forms of destitution can be avoided.**

- C. Benefit delays and changes also continue to be a key reason for referral to a foodbank, so tackling maladministration and offering more short-term, affordable and flexible, financial assistance is key to making sure people don't fall into crisis and can afford essentials.
- D. We welcome the research that the Scottish Government is currently doing around 'period poverty' and the commitment already made to provide access to free sanitary products to students in schools, colleges and universities. **We strongly encourage policy-makers to extend this commitment beyond the academic system to women, girls and trans people who have periods, whose low incomes make it difficult to afford the necessary protection.**

Appendix

This survey will help us to gather evidence on the level of demand and supply of non-food items at Trussell Trust foodbanks. We will use the data collected to feed into policy-related discussions with the Scottish Government as well as our own team's support for the network.

Knowing how busy you are, we greatly appreciate you taking the time to answer these questions and want to thank you, as always, for all of the work that you do to provide care, compassion and support to men, women and children experiencing crisis.

Foodbank:
Your name:

1. Does your foodbank provide additional non-food items?

- Yes
- No

1.1 *[If answered 'No']* Is there any particular reason why you do not provide these items
Please specify

2. Which method is used by your foodbank to provide these non-food items to clients? Please tick all appropriate options.

Item	Method of provision				
	Provided in every parcel	Clients are asked whether they need this item	Provided upon request	Other method of provision not listed	Not provided to clients
Nappies					
Feminine hygiene products					
Soap/Shower gel					
Toothbrush/Toothpaste					
Shampoo/Conditioner					
Toilet roll					
Deodorant					
Other item not listed					

2.1 *[If answered 'Other method of provision not listed']* Please specify which 'Other method of provision' is used to provide the item(s) selected.

2.2 *[If answered 'Other item not listed']* Please tell us what this 'Other' non-food item is.

2.3 How often (approximately) do clients ask for these non-food items?

Item	Frequency of request
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	a) very often (at least once per foodbank session)	b) Quite often (at least once per week)	c) Not very often (less than once per week)
Nappies			
Feminine hygiene products			
Soap/shower gel			
Toothbrush/toothpaste			
Shampoo/conditioner			
Toilet roll			
Deodorant			
Other (as detailed above)			

3 Are these non-food items:

- a) Donated by the public
- b) Financed by the foodbank
- c) Both donated by the public and financed by the foodbank
- d) Other

3.1 Do donations of these items easily cover the amount you provide to clients?

- Always
- Mostly
- Sometimes
- Never enough

3.2 Does your foodbank currently ask for donations of non-food items?

- Yes
- No

3.3 How does your foodbank ask for donations of these items?

3.4 Is the distribution of these items recorded?

- Yes
- No

3.5 Please tell us how you record the distribution of these items and if possible provide the relevant figures, for each item, from 2016.

3.6 Are there any items that you feel your foodbank lacks?

4. Do you have any further comments / anecdotal evidence regarding the issue of improving access to non-food items for households on a low income?