**Salford CVS Conference**

**14th September 2022**

**Workshop notes**

**The Truth About Poverty (am)**

**Room:** Press Lounge

**Workshop Facilitator:** Michael Carroll

**Note taker:** Helen Johnson

**Panel speakers:**

Sarah Whitehead, Community Pride

Jack Barton, Mustard Tree

Jennifer-Ann Smith, Salford Loaves and Fishes

Sarah Whitehead is Co-Director of Community Pride, a social enterprise based in Salford and is also lead facilitator of Salford Poverty Truth Provision, being the lead on mental health. Community Pride are focusing on new ways to communicate with communities based on trust, in hope to change the way the Council deals with people. They have already agreed a commitment to no longer use bailiffs and forceful demands which can bring trauma. Community Pride go out into the communities and speak to people face to face rather than doing surveys.

Jack Barton is the Communications Manager for Mustard Tree. Mustard Tree is more than a homeless organisation now, they also deal with poverty and equalities and have 3 hubs across Salford and Manchester, Eccles, Little Hulton and Ancoats. Mustard Tree also run community shops which offer low cost furniture and gift half to people in need via housing vouchers. The food club (pantry) is £2.50 and can be used twice a week. Mustard Tree also deliver the freedom project which focuses on life and employability skills to build confidence and improve economic wellbeing.

Jennifer-Ann Smith is the CEO of Salford Loaves and Fishes. Salford Loaves and Fishes support the need and have 2 centres. The drop in centre is currently registering 100-120 people daily, and this is a quiet month. There are support workers and chefs on site who provide food and drink all day. There are also places to sit and an NHS inclusion team on site. Salford Loaves and Fishes run groups and sessions during the week using an holistic approach. There is also a food bank twice a week and they further offer emergency food parcels, shower and laundry facilities. Salford Loaves and Fishes mainly supports homelessness and the isolated in Salford.

**Q&A**

**Q: What alternatives have your found to get levels of engagement without using surveys?**

A: Sarah – We focus on meaningful engagement and exploring barriers to the Council. Salford City Council changed the ‘brown envelope’ which normally meant bailiffs or charges and have now removed the designated colour to take away the fear. It’s also about training local people to be ethical researchers so it isn’t just left to the organisation with no support.

**Q: Poverty can have barriers to accessing services. Are there any barriers that you’ve not considered before?**

A: Jack – The pandemic has driven some barriers. Some of our hubs are accessible, for example Eccles can be reached by bus, train, tram etc but Little Hulton isn’t as easy to get to, with the nearest train station being Walkden. If clients can’t commute then this is a real barrier. However, each of our hubs are in deprived areas and the Little Hulton hub is for that community.

Jack – Accessibility to tech is another massive issue. Mustard Tree stayed open during the pandemic to keep the food club running and to respond to crisis. The hubs offer access to phones, computers and printers so post-pandemic we now deliver a computer confidence session which also includes things like budgeting. All of our activities are based on user feedback e.g. barriers. Being in temporary accommodation may reduce access to tech.

Sarah – Salford Poverty Truth Provision also work with Joseph Rowntree for lived experience knowledge. Barriers can include things like bus fairs, phone calls and even accessing certain spaces, how they are used and lay out. We speak to people and work with them to reduce the stigma and fear of coming forward.

Jennifer-Ann – Statutory organisations put people off. Housing in Swinton is only now going back to face to face, digital exclusion is a barrier. The Job Centre send people to Salford Loaves and Fishes for help. We are core funded so this adds extra pressure. The tech knowledge gap is getting worth with more services going online. Statutory organisations are meeting on our premises so that people are feeling safer. We offer one to one digital support. Some people don’t have smart phones to use in order to bid for housing, access benefits etc. Systems are also changed and people aren’t then trained how to use them, so we’ve found that they come to us for help.

Jack – Free tech/hardware access, e.g. from Salford Council, is great but teaching people to use them isn’t widely available and this creates a gap. We started out computer course as a drop in to find any barriers.

Sarah – We are addressing poverty with lived experience. APEL collective is a national campaign which works with communities who experience this. Join your organisation to this campaign and share lived experience.

**Q: Schools in Salford were offering children laptops pre-Covid, do you know if the schools are still doing this?**

A: Jack – this is massively important. We support families with this by loaning or even gifting tech. Parents don’t always know how to use this though. I’ll enquire about schools.

**Q: Are there specific demographics you see regularly with the computer classes? Elderly people may miss out services due to it being online and struggling with tech.**

A: Sarah – Through the pandemic we shifted from community empowerment to crisis support. The elderly are a very vulnerable group including people int heir 50s with severe health conditions. We reached out through managers of sheltered buildings. It is a strong opportunity for more to be done with older people in these spaces. Sheltered buildings have facilities but not the staff.

Michael – Age Friendly Salford run a Tech and Tea course. They are at Gateways and sheltered housing and are up to delivering courses anywhere. If you are interested get in touch with me or ICT.

Jack – Older people are being disenfranchised and are being left behind. The biggest demographic for our food club is older people. It’s easier to get everyone in one room to work out how to use/function things together.

**Q: Mental health is an additional group of people who haven’t experienced poverty before and the stigma and those who are going to get into deeper welfare issues and fears. Under 18s are taking on lots more responsibility in households. Do we need to come together with sources to become more concrete so we can refer to each other and to people who know what they’re talking about in different areas?**

A: Sarah – There is pressure of working in a silo and doing everything is impossible. It is about creating spaces. Some meetings and forums are disconnected from communities – howe can we connect together?

Jennifer-Ann – We go out to community groups but we don’t want to repeat work that others are doing in the community. During Covid, Salford Mutual Aid Coalition formed. We have people coming to the centre to use the phone to call the electricity company but they don’t understand the crisis. Everything is going to get worse. Networking is very important – if we know what you offer, we can refer.

Sarah – The Mutual Aid Coalition is about grassroots coming together to share resources and space.

Jack – Partnerships are key. There are tech gaps in voluntary sector too. Fundamental issues are communication. No one has chance to do actions from boards and meetings due to having emergencies on the doorstep.

**Other comments**

No recourse to public funds is real poverty – can’t access education, can’t speak English so can’t always work. It’s difficult to support people who only have a roof over their head and a food voucher. Not enough support is in place.

Poverty means something different to everyone, there can be more extremes than others. We don’t always focus on poverty other than the sort you can see in front of you.

We need to work at pace to get decisions made quickly.

Mustard Tree delivers ESOL classes, as does Caritas. We can advocate for people and teach them how do them for themselves.

Never give up, just keep on going. Doing it together we can reach where we want to get to. Maybe one day things can change.

**Actions**

* Bringing services together e.g. advice, information, welfare, knowing what’s there – at the front line
* Think from a strategic vision, like a business
* Breaking barriers of immigration. Spaces where we can come and meet together