Chair’s Report: Independent Food Aid Network Annual General Meeting

London, 21st September 2019

Introduction

IFAN’s last AGM was held on 7th February 2018 in Stockport. This AGM was an opportunity to elect new trustees, and thank those who were stepping down, discuss IFAN’s progress since the launch of the network in May 2016 and to develop the StoryBank project with attendees.

20 months later, our second AGM provides an opportunity to look back at what we have achieved since February 2018 and to consider our plans going forward. This report provides a summary of our activities since February 2018 as well as our plans and vision going forward.

Research

On behalf of IFAN, our coordinator Sabine Goodwin has led a ground-breaking joint project with A Menu for Change documenting the scale of independent food bank use in Scotland. The research revealed that from April 2017 through to September 2018, 84 independent food banks across Scotland distributed 221,977 emergency food parcels; added to Trussell Trust figure of 258,606 this brings the combined total to nearly half a million. This data received widespread media coverage and has been cited in the House of Commons, within a House of Commons Library briefing and in the Scottish Parliament.

Sabine has also continued to work on a list of independent food banks which by now number over 800 meaning that at least 40% of UK food banks are independent, the Trussell Trust network representing the remaining 60%. This research continues to be referred to by academics, journalists, food aid providers and service users. It has also provided the starting point of a large-scale study of independent food banks led by Dr Rachel Looopstra based at King’s College London working with Professor Jon May, Dr Andrew Williams, Dr Hannah Lambie-Mumford and Sabine (working independently of IFAN).

We have continued to support independent research projects with a view to raising awareness of and promoting a collective voice for independent food aid providers as well as to support this work in general. Sabine has also been interviewed numerous times in relation to academic papers on UK food insecurity.

IFAN’s research has recently been mentioned in the HRW report Nothing Left in the Cupboards: Austerity, Welfare Cuts, and the Right to Food in the UK; Guildford Council’s food poverty report and the BMC Public Health publication - Food bank operational characteristics and rates of food bank use across Britain.
Providing a voice for and advocating on behalf of independent food aid providers and campaigning while promoting the voice of people living with food insecurity

As previously mentioned, IFAN’s research has further raised the profile of independent food aid providers with politicians, policy makers, and journalists. We are regularly approached by journalists for contributions on food insecurity in relation to independent food aid providers, or to facilitate access to our members and other independent providers. Our coordinator Sabine Goodwin has been interviewed and has provided numerous comments for news articles and blogs over the last 18 months. Our co-chair of trustees Dee Woods has also been interviewed on radio and television. You can find out more in the In the News section on our website.

Back in March 2018 we published a statement on the news that the Trussell Trust and FareShare had signed an £20 million partnership with ASDA.

IFAN’s Professor Jon May and Sabine Goodwin collaborated with End Hunger UK colleagues to curate and produce the ‘Behind Closed Doors’ exhibition, exhibited at the Houses of Parliament of 16th October and in multiple locations across the UK including at our Rethinking Food Aid Conference in Chester.

During 2018 we continued to work on the StoryBank project but other priorities and the changing landscape in respect of the representation of experts by experience meant that thanks to Lush the remaining minimal funding for this project was transferred to IFAN’s running costs.

Several IFAN member organisations were represented at a special meeting held at Bristol University on the challenges of rural poverty with Philip Alston, the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights as part of his visit to the UK in November 2018. Our submission to the UN Special Rapporteur can be found here.

IFAN’s trustees and its coordinator were among 58 academics and campaigners who signed a key letter to the Guardian at the time of the Global Foodbanking Network Food Bank Leadership Institute conference in London at the end of March. Please find the letter and accompanying article by Patrick Butler in The Guardian.

Trustee Dee Woods recently represented IFAN at the annual meeting of the Global Network on the Right to Food and Nutrition in Jakarta, Indonesia as we develop our work to advocate for the Right to Food in the UK. Dee also contributed an article to the 2019 Right to Food and Nutrition Watch.

IFAN continues to represent independent food aid providers during sessions of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Food Banks convened by MP Neil Coyle.

As time has gone on we have been able to develop a more powerful voice within wider alliances. IFAN is a core partner of End Hunger UK coalition (Sabine is a member of the EHUK board) as well as a member of Sustain - the alliance for better food and farming, the Scottish Food Coalition, the Global Network for Right to Food and Nutrition, A People’s Food Policy, the UK Food Poverty Alliance and the Fight Inequality Alliance.

As a core partner of the End Hunger UK coalition we have recently submitted evidence to the House of Lords Food, Poverty, Health and Environment Inquiry.

Collaborative working has been an important part of our campaigning work and campaigning success, including:
1. The EHUK Fix Universal Credit Campaign helped lead to a reduction in the Universal Credit wait time from six to five weeks.
2. As a result of joint campaign work on food insecurity measurement, from April 2019, the Department for Work and Pensions has included the ten adult questions from the US Government’s survey on household food insecurity within the UK Family Resources Survey.
3. Partly as a result of campaign work alongside our joint data release with A Menu for Change, the Scottish Government announced the implementation of a significant child income supplement in June 2019.

In June 2019, Dee, Kemi Akinola and Sabine worked on an IFAN submission for the Labour Party’s Sustainable Food Policy forum. Dee attended a subsequent Labour Party National Policy Forum consultation meeting on the Right to Food.

In June 2019, Dee attended 2 meetings in London and Bristol on behalf of IFAN with the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food. As a result of the second meeting on work and the UK food system in particular, Dee went on to meet with Henry Dimbleby and others ahead of the forthcoming National Food Strategy Inquiry. This provided an opportunity to present a letter referring to findings on workers and the UK food system.

Also in June 2019, Kemi represented IFAN at a first Famished workshop in Leeds looking at the interactions between food waste, surplus and hunger.

Recently Sabine and Dee have been working alongside Sustain, the Trussell Trust and FareShare to raise our significant concerns about the impact of a no deal Brexit on those already vulnerable and living with food insecurity as well as on the emergency food aid providers, already struggling to cope with increased demand, in terms of food supply. In particular, through meetings with civil servants, briefings and conversations with journalists we have been calling for a central hardship fund to support those in need directly.

Following IFAN trustee Dr Kayleigh Garthwaite’s conference in Birmingham last November - Charitable food provision as an emergency response: sharing evidence from Canada, the USA and the UK – Sabine and Kayleigh co-organised a Chatham House rule UK Food Poverty Alliance meeting in London involving key conference participants over from the USA and Canada and UK-based academics and representatives of organisations tackling food insecurity. Since then, Kayleigh, Sabine, Maddy and Dee have been working alongside colleagues in the UK, the United States and Canada to develop a global alliance focussed on addressing the root causes driving hunger and charitable food aid use. A first face-to-face meeting took place in Raleigh, North Carolina in early September following the Closing the Hunger Gap conference - Roots, Justice, Resiliency at which both Kayleigh and Dee were able to represent IFAN.

**Member support and sharing best practice**

In an effort to share best practice, provide member support, and encourage discussion between different food aid providers we have run three national events since February 2018:

1. The IFAN Rethinking Food Aid Conference in Chester in September 2018 involving workshops run by IFAN’s trustees Professor May and Chris Sunderland as well as from Scotland by Pete Ritchie of Nourish Scotland and Polly Jones of A Menu for Change.
2. A workshop on community food retail projects held at the University of Coventry particularly for those involved with this growing sector run by IFAN trustee Robin Burgess in partnership with Dr Lopa Saxena.
3. A series of workshops focused on rural food poverty at Bristol University in June 2019 in partnership with Sustain’s Food Power programme and the Bristol Poverty Institute. You can read the resulting briefing here.

Our coordinator Sabine Goodwin continues to connect and support members on particular concerns and issues raised principally through connecting members and facilitating mutual support and the sharing of best practice.

Together with IFAN’s volunteers Sabine puts together a regular IFAN newsletter which is sent out to members and supporters.

In partnership with IFAN, Nourish Scotland is running Dignity in Practice workshops and follow-up support with IFAN members in the North England. Main workshop sessions are running in Chester and Carlisle in September. We are grateful for the funding for this project from the Evan Cornish Foundation and the help and support of Stephanie Ellis-Beacham and Rachael Rodway of IFAN member the Carlisle Foodbank.

In partnership with the Global Network for the Right to Food and Nutrition and WhyHunger, we have coordinated a series of webinars on the Right to Food. The webinars are as follows: Undermining the Right to Food: The Rise of Food Charity in North America and Europe; The Right to Food and Emerging Strategies of Resistance; Living with Food Poverty & Hunger while Advocating for the Right to Food in North America and Europe and The Interconnection between the Right to Food and Food Sovereignty in North America and Europe. You can find links to these webinars on our website.

IFAN has also recently developed a partnership with The Equality Trust to connect member organisations with The Equality Trust volunteers to campaign locally for the payment of The Real Living Wage.

**Membership**

Continuing increase in membership: we now have over 200 members.

At the invitation of the Hereford Diocese, Sabine Goodwin made a visit to Shropshire and Herefordshire to meet independent food bank managers and volunteers in November 2018.

Many of the independent food banks in Scotland participating in our joint data collation project with A Menu for Change have joined our network in recent months.

**Changes to organisational structure and board**

Our organisation has recently acquired charitable status and we hope that as a result that we’ll be able to develop funding plans to better support our members, to undertake further research and to continue to advocate on behalf of independent food aid providers across the UK at this critical time. Sabine Goodwin continues to work as IFAN’s coordinator for the most part on a pro bono basis and we are trying to seek funding to support her vital work.

Chris Sunderland has stepped down from his position as Treasurer, which has been taken over by Robin Burgess. Dee Woods and Kemi Akinola have been invited to join as trustees. Professor Jon May has stepped down as Chair but remains an active board member; Dee Woods and Dr Maddy Power have taken on the role as co-chairs. Dr Kayleigh Garthwaite also remains an active board member.
Stephanie Ellis-Beacham kindly took on the role of charity secretary and has continued to look after our accounting but will need to stand down as of 21.1.19. We need to appoint a new charity secretary.

We are very pleased to be joined this year by USA-based Andy Fisher, author of Big Hunger, and Alison Cohen of Why Hunger as advisors.

We are very grateful for the help and support of the following volunteers since February 2018: Lucy Cullen, Dr David Beck, Ashleigh Comber, Katy Gordon, Ren Piercy and Sharon Ball. Ashleigh continues to support Sabine on a weekly basis and will shortly take on accounting responsibilities from Steph while Katy coordinates new member applications.

As IFAN continues to grow, we welcome any help with our work that members may be able to offer. We are always very keen to hear from anyone who would like to become a volunteer for IFAN.

**Priorities going forward from September 2019**

We will continue to support and connect our members as well as advocate on their behalf as described above.

Sabine Goodwin will again be collaborating with A Menu for Change to produce further statistics from independent food banks operating in Scotland to be published later this year. We hope to replicate this independent food bank data collation format in Wales, England and Northern Ireland in the near future.

Sabine will continue to work on the database of independent food banks she has produced on behalf of IFAN.

IFAN will continue to participate as a core partner within the End Hunger UK coalition as lobbying re political party manifestos becomes critical.

Sabine is working with Sustain’s Right to Food Coordinator Imogen Richmond-Bishop to develop a project to share learning on the Right to Food with IFAN members.

Dee Woods will represent IFAN at the Labour Party Conference at two events focussed on the Right to Food.

We will be working on a submission to the National Food Strategy Inquiry due in at the end of October 2019.

We hope to secure funding in particular for core costs and a salary for Sabine in the very near future.

**Our vision**

IFAN’s vision is of a UK where everyone can eat good food and food aid is no longer necessary.

To fulfil this vision, IFAN has three main aims:

- to connect members to each other to share best practice and ideas;
- to connect members, researchers, journalists and members of the public to provide a variety of learning opportunities, support current research, shape future research and strengthen advocacy efforts;
- to call for the structural changes needed for food aid to be reduced and eliminated in the long-term.

Underpinning these aims, IFAN is driven by two key principles:
● A recognition that food poverty, or food insecurity, is the result of a complex set of structural issues relating but not restricted to problems of insecure, inadequate and expensive housing, insecure and low paid employment, insufficient social welfare provision, poor health, and environmentally unsustainable and socially unjust food production and distribution system.

● A recognition of the importance of good food and wellbeing and that growing food, taking food beyond the cash economy and connecting with nature contributes to individual and community health and provides space for wider civic engagement.

As both IFAN and the wider emergency food aid sector has continued to grow, for the sake of clarity of our working principles, we have now added a 3rd principle:

● A recognition that although seeking to bring an end to food insecurity in the long term, IFAN recognises that there remains a need for emergency charitable food aid in the short term. IFAN exists partly to help support and develop the most effective and least stigmatising forms of emergency food aid provision while it is needed, but in ways that do not further embed or institutionalise what should be a short-term solution.

To fulfil our aims and achieve our vision, IFAN organises its activities in three broad areas:

● Building understanding of the causes, scale and potential solutions to food insecurity amongst members, key stakeholders and policy makers, and the wider public.

● Working directly with members and connecting members to each other to share examples of how best to address problems of food insecurity in the short term, and to build the necessary alliances to bring about the structural changes needed and achievable at local and UK-wide levels to end food insecurity in the longer term.

● Contributing to campaigns designed to highlight issues of food insecurity and bring about the necessary changes at both national and international levels to bring an end to food insecurity in the UK.