Chair’s Report: IFAN Annual General Meeting, Stockport, 7th February 2018

Introduction

IFAN began with an event in Manchester in March 2016 which brought together 40 independent food aid providers from across the country to discuss the possibility of setting up a new UK network. An inaugural steering group, made up of interested participants from the Manchester meeting, met in May 2016 to formalise IFAN and launch the network.

One of the steering group’s first actions was to survey potential members to ask what they would like IFAN to do, and to help formulate the network’s aims and principles (set out on our webpage - http://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/). Chief amongst these aspirations for IFAN were to: provide mutual support and share resources amongst food aid providers; share best practice so as to improve provision for, and access to, people in need of food aid; work with and promote the voices of people in need; support independent research into food poverty; provide a forum and a collective voice for independent, grass roots food aid providers; and campaign for change. The steering group established IFAN as an Unincorporated Charitable Association (allowing us to apply for and hold funds, and pay for services) and appointed a first Board of Trustees (made up of members of the steering group, but to be elected by IFAN members every two years thereafter), to oversee its work.

A little over 18 months later, this is our first Annual General Meeting; providing an opportunity to look back at what we have achieved so far and what we would like to do in the future. This report provides a brief summary of our activities thus far.

Mutual support and sharing best practice

In an effort to share best practice, provide mutual support, and encourage discussion between different food aid providers we have run three national events: Share, Learn and Connect at the Above Bar Church, Southampton in March 2017; Growing Strength (Resilience Training), at the Dandelion Community, Wythenshaw, March 2017; and Big Hunger – a lecture by US author Andy Fisher and panel discussion on the politics of food banks and hunger, at Tooting United Reform Church, in November 2017.

Promoting the voice of people in food poverty

To more closely work with and promote the voices of people in need, in May 2017 we applied for and were awarded £4000 from the LUSH Community Pot to set up StoryBank – designed to provide a space for people receiving food aid to tell their own stories, and to provide a resource for members to draw upon to help recruit volunteers, when applying for funding, and in campaigning and advocacy work. The first stories were collected in Chester in December 2017, and we hope today’s event will provide an impetus for more members to get involved in the project.

Research
We have also completed a number of research projects, using these as a vehicle to raise awareness of, and promote a collective voice for, independent food aid providers and in our broader campaigning work. Through the Spring of 2017 our research lead, Sabine Goodwin, worked to build the first comprehensive map of independent food banks in the UK, identifying more than 650 across the country. We released the results from this work to the Guardian in May 2017, attracting coverage in most of the major UK newspapers and more than twenty other outlets. Over the summer of 2017 we worked with the Trussell Trust to compile the first assessment of the number of volunteer hours needed to support the UK’s food banks (over 4 million), with coverage in the Daily Mirror and more than 300 local print and web based news media; and over the winter of 2017, working as part of End Hunger UK, we commissioned YouGov to conduct a survey of household food insecurity in the UK (with coverage in the Guardian, Independent, Huff Post and others) to highlight the 2nd reading of Emma Lewell-Buck’s (Shadow Minister for Children and Families) 10 Minute Rule Bill on establishing a statutory measure of food insecurity. In addition, two of our Trustees have served as advisors to local authority reviews of food insecurity and food aid (in Brent, and Guildford), and we have been liaising with researchers from a number of Universities regarding research they might undertake on behalf of IFAN, and posted a list of research projects we think would be useful in the fight against food insecurity on our website so other researchers may come forward.

**Providing a voice for independent food aid providers, and campaign work**

The most obvious result of these various research projects has been to raise the profile of independent food aid providers with politicians, policy makers, and journalists, and IFAN represents independent food aid providers on the new All Party Parliamentary Group on Food Banks, convened by MP Neil Coyle. We are also now regularly approached by journalists working on food aid stories for comments on food poverty from the perspective of independent food aid providers, or to facilitate access to our members and other independent providers.

This work has in turn also enabled us to have a more powerful voice in wider food poverty campaigns. IFAN is a member of the UK Food Poverty Alliance, actively supporting the Alliance’s End Hunger UK campaign – alongside Child Poverty Action Group, FareShare, the Fabian Commission on Food and Poverty, Magic Breakfast, Sustain, the Trussell Trust, Oxfam and others – and a signatory to their recent *A Menu to End Hunger in the UK*, published in December 2017, and *Step up to the Plate: Towards a Food and Poverty Strategy* launched in Westminster in January 2018. IFAN is also a signatory to *A People’s Food Policy*, a manifesto outlining a people’s vision for food and farming in England, supported by over 80 organisations, and we have been strengthening links with international organisations that share similar vision and values. We have been in regular contact with the *Closing the Hunger Gap* network in the US, as well as *Community Food Centre’s Canada* who operate the Good
Food Organisations network. In October 2017 IFAN members were the first in the UK to be given the opportunity to join this international network.

We are currently working with Oxfam and End Hunger UK on a multi-media exhibition to highlight problems of food insecurity, and challenge stereotypical representations of people in food poverty, to be taken to the constituencies of key MPs over the summer of 2018, with a final show at the House of Commons in the autumn of 2018.

Membership

Over the past 18 months IFAN’s membership has grown from 50 members at our launch to over 150. Importantly, our members represent a range of food aid organisations from across the UK. We have members from Housing Associations, Food Banks, Food Growing Cooperatives and Social Supermarkets. All our members can be found on our map in the 'Members' section of our website.

Changes to organisational structure

To facilitate this activity, IFAN’s organisational structure has evolved to give a clearer role to our volunteers Steph Ellis, Seb Mayfield, Sabine Goodwin, and Ren Piercey, and we have developed formal Volunteer Agreements for anyone volunteering with IFAN. Steph is now responsible for Volunteer Staff Management, and Finances; Seb, Communications and Administration; Sabine, Research, Campaigns, and Press Enquiries; and Ren, Events and Membership.

As IFAN continues to grow we welcome any help with our work members may be able to offer. Whilst we will be electing our new Board of Trustees today, we would also be very keen to hear from anyone who would like to become a volunteer for IFAN.