

Engaging the Small Business Citizen: Foodbanks and Beyond

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For charities to use business techniques to further their missions is not new, neither is it new for existing businesses to adopt a charitable purpose - the first academic reference to 'corporate social responsibility' was found in the 1950s - but in an era where the public spotlight is focusing ruthlessly on those companies which appear to be less than socially responsible in their practices there is pressure for businesses to actively demonstrate that they are 'forces for good'.

Indeed a new term has established itself in the last forty years: the social enterprise. In Britain this is a registered company that has adopted a not for profit (more accurately a 'not for dividend') approach in order to prioritise the delivery of a socially or environmentally positive mission, in much the same way as a charity would. Within the world that exists between the proudly for-profit model of traditional capitalism and the organisation essentially funded by public subscription and donation, the 'pure' charity, there are many legal and hybrid forms. One of these is - or, to be more accurate, several of them are - being utilised by foodbanks.

A foodbank's basic function is to provide emergency food aid to households with very low incomes at no cost to the recipient. This can only be done if the food is donated by third parties; and where the bulk of the hours of the workers who deliver the service are given voluntarily. A comprehensive analysis of the statistics, politics and drivers of British foodbanks has been carried out by the House of Commons library (Downing and Kennedy, 2014).¹

In this paper I will explore:

- the nature of the foodbank business
- how it relates to conventional business and social purpose
- collaboration between conventional business and foodbanks
- some ways of expanding or building upon the foodbank model.

The business of the Foodbank family

A foodbank is the archetype of a not-for-profit organisation; essentially its role is to give away food to those suffering food poverty. Is a foodbank a business? Essentially, yes: it needs to meet its customers' needs in a way which does not create an unacceptable net drain on incoming resources. These are largely acquired through donated food and other gifts in kind (such as free use of premises), voluntary labour, limited service hours and reliable external sources of funding.

The Trussell Trust is a Christian charity delivering 445 franchises through church groups, accounting for more than half of the nation's foodbanks in 2015. Starting in 2008 with just 29 outlets, the number doubled each year for three years and has continued to rise since. In 2013-14 Trussell Trust foodbank users topped one million for the first time, with a typical user calling on their services twice during the year. A growing number of users are the in-work poor.² There is political debate as to whether the growth in numbers has been caused by tapping into a previously unmet demand or whether demand is actually growing; in the latter case there is speculation as to how changes to the benefit system since 2010 might have exacerbated a need that undoubtedly

¹ <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/SN06657>

² <http://www.trusselltrust.org/resources/documents/Press/Trussell-Trust-foodbank-use-tops-one-million.pdf>

existed.³ We know that the period 2010-14 is the only five year period on record in which UK living standards fell,⁴ whilst income inequality has continued to rise. There are those, even within the Church of England, who question whether foodbanks are helping to hide a problem rather than address its causes.⁵ But what is the alternative?

Essentially, a conventional British foodbank collects large amounts of donated, non-perishable food, stores it, divides it into balanced food parcels and distributes it to those in need as identified by statutory and other agencies - police, social services, Citizens Advice and others - who issue vouchers of entitlement. Typically a person is given three days of food supply for themselves or their household, which may be repeated only once in any six month period (a measure intended to prevent dependency). Variations and additions to this essentially transactional model exist, which we will explore later.

In the world of food retailing perfectly good products with slightly misprinted or misaligned labels can end up as seagull food on the local tip. It has been questioned:

‘... whether the food bank's dependence on food business inefficiencies, such as overproduction and incorrect packaging, is an appropriate way to ensure food security’ (Warshawsky, 2011)⁶

...and this is a valid concern. However, if we regard foodbanks as a crisis measure, a precursor to taking steps towards food security, then it is a legitimate exercise on a ‘needs must’ basis. There is a danger, in theory at least, that foodbanks become so effective and in such demand that sources of surplus food run out and levels of donated food fall short of what is needed. That is unlikely in the foreseeable future, but nevertheless foodbanks should never be seen as a long term alternative to establishing food security or the relief of poverty.

Every business has to perform a number of functions: it must generate income and manage expenditure, keeping the two in a manageable balance; it must manage premises, supply chain and workforce as well as meet regulatory requirements, such as that which requires that even donated food must be disposed of before its sell-by date. The foodbank must market its services, targeting those most likely to use them. It may need to invest and must live harmoniously with its neighbours, suppliers and clients; and each of these functions requires a different skill set. Even though ‘profit’ is not a word that passes the lips of foodbank managers, each foodbank is undoubtedly numbered amongst the UK’s 5 million small businesses, together making up 99 per cent of the country’s private sector economy.

Meeting multifarious requirements for skills and experience is a challenge for every small business and managing a largely volunteer workforce, where individuals can ultimately choose whether to be there or not, can be particularly demanding. However, volunteers show high levels of commitment and loyalty to their chosen causes and are often well motivated, and not simply by altruism alone; some may be striving to gain the skills that will equip them to fare better in the business world at a later date. That volunteers tend not to be available on a full-time basis is not a problem for foodbanks which are likely to be open for just a few hours each week but nevertheless the right skills need to be available in the right places at the right times: leadership, administration, manual skills, driving, customer-facing skills and so on.

³ The UK Government maintains that ‘there is no link between policy on benefit entitlement and food bank use’ and that ‘demands on food bank use have grown in response to growing supply’; the Scottish Government, amongst others, attributes the rise in food bank use to changes in UK benefit policy and longer delays in starting to pay new claimants.

⁴ <https://www.tuc.org.uk/economic-issues/public-spending/labour-market/economic-analysis/living-standards-suffer-first-five>

⁵ <http://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/food-banks-undermining-governments-duty-7670834>

⁶ <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03057070.2011.617947#.VcJa-3i77yo> - asked in respect of Johannesburg foodbanks, though the question is universally valid

Many Trussell Trust foodbanks go beyond the transactional model: providing a hot drink or snack to visitors, counselling, non-judgmental befriending and signposting to other services are common and two new services are being trialled, prior to roll-out nationwide. These are 'Eat Well, Spend Less', designed to help people with cooking and nutrition on a low budget and 'More than Food', a professional debt advice and management service designed by the Money Saving Expert, Martin Lewis. Delivering such initiatives further taxes the business acumen of managers and demands access to trained, reliable and expert volunteers.

A significant proportion of foodbanks are independent of the Trussell Trust. Of these, some operate a similar voucher system but many do not. In Luton, a co-operative enterprise was initiated by a group of political activists working for the local Council in the belief that an overtly secular foodbank was more appropriate to the town than a Christian one, given its large Muslim population (Boothroyd, 2014).⁷ Part of its purpose is to 'help people resolve the problem which led to the visit' and up to 70 per cent of the food donated comes from collections in local schools, which are also significant fundraisers and sources of volunteers. Eastleigh Basics Bank is an ecumenical Christian operation which is independent of the Trussell Trust but mirrors its operation closely. It collaborates with neighbouring foodbanks, is open for 10 hours per week and will exchange vouchers for up to 5 days supply of food per person.⁸

Fareshare is a charity which frequently partners with the Trussell Trust although it was established independently 20 years ago. Fareshare sources around 7,000 tons of food per year directly from manufacturers and major retailers which would otherwise have gone to waste, thereby reducing landfill costs and methane emissions as well as feeding the hungry. From around 20 distribution centres it services almost 2,000 charities who provided over 15 million meals last year to clients who are homeless or otherwise vulnerable.⁹ Unlike with a franchise model, Fareshare enjoys an economy of scale which allows (if not requires) it to employ professional managers although the client interface is usually through the medium of volunteers.

FoodCycle runs 20 projects around the country at which surplus kitchen capacity, surplus fresh, vegetarian food from supermarkets and teams of volunteers come together once a week to provide a communal meal free of charge for a disadvantaged community.¹⁰ To date it has delivered 125,000 meals in six years at a net cost of just £2 per head (raised through fundraising).

Soup kitchens are well established in Britain. Often they are run by religious organisations such as the Salvation Army with their own independent sources of funding. They help all comers; their clientele is principally homeless people, often with other needs such as addiction or mental health problems, people who often have a distrust in statutory services and a disinclination to engage with them. The Pavement is a web site that acts as a directory for soup kitchens and related services by location.¹¹

Milton Keynes is home to another independent foodbank, one that has targeted the local SME (small and medium sized enterprises) community effectively.¹² Its Business Buddy scheme asks businesses to donate cash on a regular basis and to organise the collection of food and cash in the workplace. Regular employer supported volunteering (ESV) is also encouraged. In return, the foodbank provides opportunities for positive publicity for the company, including having their logo displayed on the foodbank's van.

⁷ <http://leftunity.org/how-to-start-a-foodbank/>

⁸ <http://eastleighbasicsbank.co.uk>

⁹ <http://www.fareshare.org.uk>

¹⁰ <http://foodcycle.org.uk>

¹¹ <http://www.thepavement.org.uk/services.php?facility=&service=13&city=>

¹² <http://mkfoodbank.org.uk/how-to-help/business/>

Penny Lane Pantry is not a foodbank but a shop - with a difference. Established by Stockport Homes, the local housing authority, and run by volunteers, it opens for nine hours each week for local residents from two estates who can receive foodstuffs up to a shop value of £15 each week in return for a £2 per week membership fee. The food is obtained through Fareshare and a social enterprise growing fresh food locally, as well as by donations from public and business.¹³ Its companion store at nearby Brinnington is slightly different: membership is £2.50 per week, paid through the local credit union, which entitles the bearer to 10 items of an average combined value of £15; and all new members receive a free financial health check.

Company Shop claims to be the UK's biggest purveyor of surplus food and has a Queen's Award for Enterprise for its 40-year record of operating from food manufacturers' own premises, where its members-only clientele is restricted to employees of the host business plus workers in the NHS and the emergency services.¹⁴ Members can access cheap food (whether they need a subsidy or not) and there is a small financial return to the manufacturers - these are clearly goals worth achieving. Company Shop's partners, which include most major supermarkets and department stores, attest to its professionalism (and its lack of competitive threat in the market place). If this membership model is not targeted at the poorest people then its 2013 offshoot, Community Shop, certainly is. Working through community centres in Rotherham and Lambeth (so far) a similar model to the Company Shop is emerging with a broader purpose:

'Members of Community Shop can shop for good food at great prices – easing pressure on family budgets – but also gain access to professional, personal development programmes, to kick-start positive change in their own lives.'

Members of Community Shop have to meet three criteria: they must live in a specified local postcode indicating an area of high deprivation, must be in receipt of certain poverty-related benefits and must want to change their lives for the better. They stress that they are not a budget store (though prices are about one third of retail) and nor are they a foodbank. Community Shop and Company Shop are businesses with employees and infrastructure, social enterprises in that their primary goal is not the generation of profit for its own sake but the delivery of a community service for those in need and the reduction of food waste.

The generic term 'community shop' is commonly applied to a community-owned (or run) not for profit facility often based in an area, such as a village, often where a traditional for-profit model has proved unviable. 'Food co-operatives' also exist in many forms, from informal buying clubs (where members jointly buy products in bulk to obtain quantity-related discounts from suppliers) to market stalls, shops and home delivery services, sometimes as an adjunct to a larger organisation such as a school. These are often aimed at convenience and efficiency and operate on at least a commercial break-even model, based on the purchase of the goods sold, and administered by volunteers. They are not necessarily targeted at low income households or the fight against food poverty; 479 such institutions were registered on the Sustain web site in 2012 (although this ceased to be updated when Lottery funding for the initial project expired).¹⁵

Hisbe (How It Should Be) in Brighton is a recent example of a social enterprise shop which buys health foods and healthy foods in bulk in order to sell them on to customers who would not otherwise be able to access them due to their relatively high prices. The store opened in 2013 and hopes to franchise its model out to other communities.¹⁶

What all of these models have in common is the use of the tools of business, with greater or lesser degrees of sophistication, over and above the essentials of buying and selling, to deliver a social purpose. For-profit businesses are not generally established with a primary purpose focused on

¹³ <http://www.stockporthomes.org/main.cfm?type=PENNYLANEPANTRY>

¹⁴ <http://community-shop.co.uk/company-shop/> and <http://community-shop.co.uk/community-shop/>

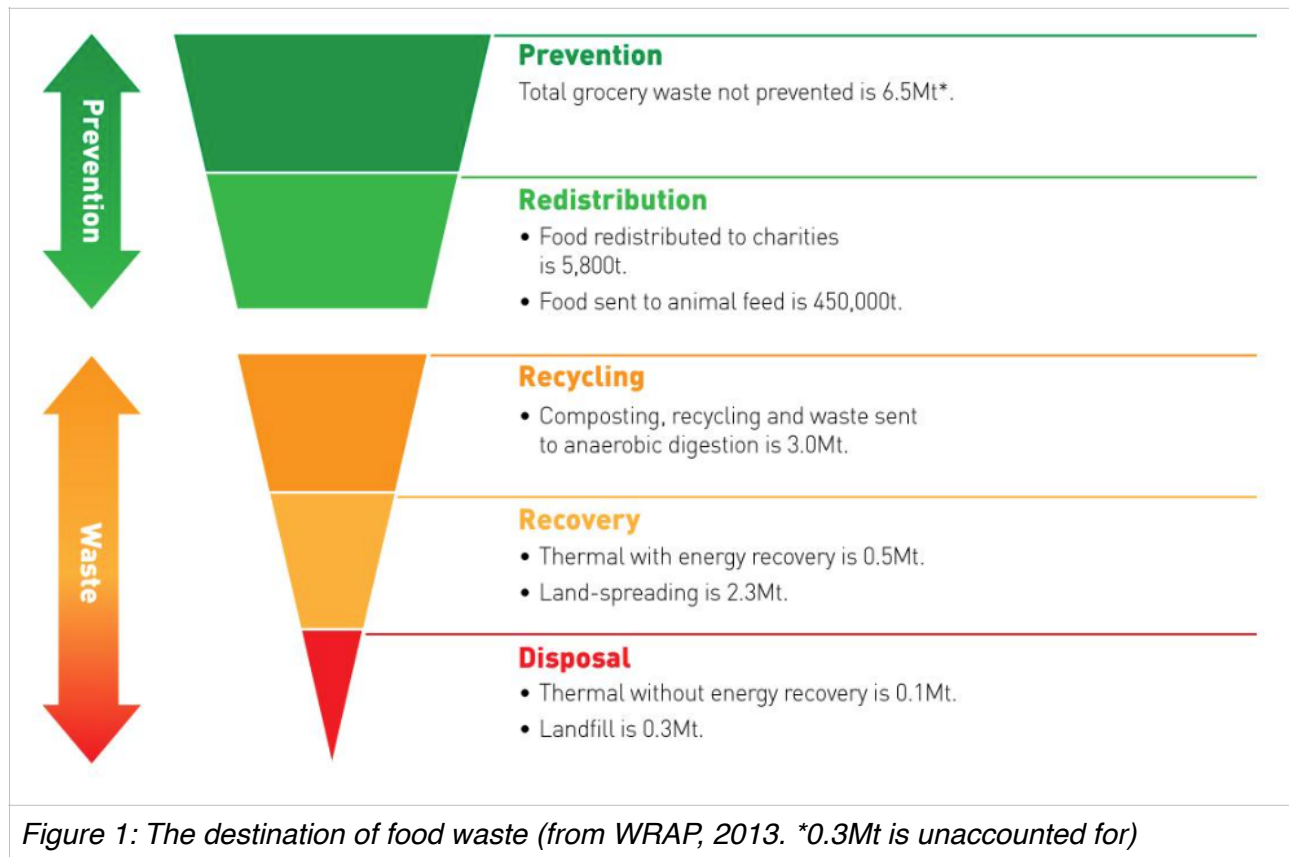
¹⁵ <http://www.sustainweb.org/foodcoops/>

¹⁶ <http://hisbe.co.uk>

community needs but why should a for-profit business not adopt a secondary social purpose above and beyond its commercial raison d'être?

There is every reason why it should.

About two thirds of waste from food industries emanates from manufacturers rather than wholesale or retail sources although the industry as a whole is reducing waste by about 5 per cent per year. Half of all such food waste is recycled and a third is spread on land (See Figure 1, where the hierarchy represents ideal priorities for the management of waste).



Of course, not all waste from the food industry is suitable for human consumption and it is generally held that the same regulations that apply to those selling wholesome food also apply to those giving it away. It is estimated that two thirds of the food industry's 6.5 million tons of waste is food (much of the rest is packaging) of which only around 0.1 per cent (less than 6,000 tons) is redistributed to charities for human consumption (Whitehead et al, 2013).¹⁷

The Case for a Mainstream Business Having a Social Purpose

The business case for a conventional, for-profit company to engage with community organisations and charities in support of their goals is manifold:

- it enhances the reputation and brand image of the company
- it attracts a better class of applicant to work there
- broadening an employee's experience can stimulate new ways of thinking and help them hone their skills or generate new ones, with consequent benefits to product or service design
- it gives employees a greater sense of purpose and this enhances engagement
- it can promote collaboration and cost-efficiency.

¹⁷ http://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/Estimates%20of%20waste%20in%20the%20food%20and%20drink%20supply%20chain_0.pdf

One of the ways in which the corporate social responsibility (CSR) 'brand' itself has been damaged in recent years is the emphasis on the first of these reasons at the expense of the others: CSR has become a box-ticking exercise when it should be a human process. To many businesses it is worth being involved in community and charity work for employee engagement purposes alone: various research projects over the years have shown that employees who are supported in engaging with communities and charities in company time have a greater sense of wellbeing and purpose, leading to greater loyalty, longer term commitment, less time off sick and even improved productivity. It has long been the case that co-operatives and social enterprise employers give lower rates of pay to their workers than their private sector counterparts do; doubtless the development of a strong sense of social purpose in their work is an element of non-pecuniary reward for these employees.

In big corporates these values are sometimes the responsibility of the CSR or public affairs department; but values are arguably more real, sustainable and convincing if the HR department has jurisdiction over them. Longer term commitment, changing employer less often and taking less time off sick are characteristics of the engaged employee, who sees a greater purpose to his work than making money alone, and together these lead to reduced costs for the company. The British government has suggested that every employee of private sector companies over a certain size should be entitled to three days of volunteering leave per year but whilst this undoubtedly reflects an acknowledgement of the business benefits of volunteering it neglects, to date at least, the organisational and motivational challenge of maximising the benefits of ESV to employers and communities.

Such arguments are academic in most SMEs, whose small size cannot justify the existence of a bespoke HR department (let alone one for CSR) and the whole gamut of management activities is shared between but a few - sometimes very few - individuals. Research which I carried out with funding from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2012¹⁸ suggests that a strategic approach to community engagement in companies employing fewer than 250 people is rare indeed; bear in mind that the vast majority of such employers fall within the range of 2 to 20 employees. Where community engagement does happen it tends to be superficial (donating raffle prizes), employee-led (fundraising) and is unlikely to be linked to the company's business mission or purpose. Formal employee volunteering in SMEs is rare, as available employee time is neither as flexible nor as great as it is in their larger cousins; where it does happen within working hours it tends to be skills-related (auditing a charity's books) and white collar (ditto) rather than time-related. As companies get bigger, time volunteering (low-skilled activity) becomes more prevalent than skilled volunteering not least because, I believe, the company exploits the advantages of team volunteering to team building in the company, perhaps unconsciously rating it as more important than the benefits that skilled ESV can bring to a community or, indeed, the company.

Another conclusion I reached in *The Social SME* was that two thirds of SMEs believe that business should play a positive and direct role in community life whilst only one fifth disagree; and most SMEs believe they could be engaging more than they currently do.

Most corporates and some larger SMEs continue to organise employee engagement and ESV activity on traditional lines: it is possible to hold a fundraising cake bake, sponsored walk or three peaks challenge without learning anything about the social purpose of the beneficiary organisation. A sharp focus and high degree of planning are required to deliver a volunteering programme aimed at skills enhancement, often requiring a suite of opportunities and considerable flexibility in timing to be available compared to the relative simplicity of the 'one off' team volunteering day.

Progressive employers in this regard acknowledge that a 'volunteering day' can be very disruptive to company routines whereas allowing employees to spend up to three days per year on 'good causes' on an ad hoc (not 'disorganised') basis is much less disruptive. Here are some examples of how a single employee can utilise around three days per year in this way:

- 15 minutes per week (48 weeks) spent on a planned telephone call building up a relationship with an elderly, housebound person for Age UK's A Call in Time programme (plus admin time)

¹⁸ <http://sector4focus.co.uk/home/smes-in-the-community-my-jrf-report/>

- one hour per week for two 12-week terms visiting a local primary school to listen to a child learning to read
- creating a customised web site for a local charity over a period of weeks.

Sometimes the volunteering day can be put to good use whilst recognising that volunteers have different aptitudes, skills and interests: in Swindon a company ran a sports day for a school for children with learning difficulties - organising the events and logistics, refreshments, publicity, entertainment and other aspects, so releasing teaching and other staff who know their students well to provide 1:1 support for the young people. Over a period the staff of a motor manufacturer gave a local Cheshire charity a complete makeover: a new web site, a new corporate ID, a full financial audit and help to create a new business plan as well as good, old fashioned, fundraising.

All of these exercises require planning, coordination, knowledge and a degree of expertise in volunteering matters; again this combination of skills is unlikely to develop spontaneously within an SME and nor is there often the time available to address this.

In some communities in Britain this challenge is being resolved. In the west country six corporates came together ten years ago to create Involve Swindon,¹⁹ in effect pooling their ESV opportunities. Working with umbrella bodies for local good causes, and subsequently with public sector providers too, the network grew and a strategic approach was developed. Once the network was working there was no good reason not to invite SMEs to join it and every reason to do so. Another network, Tameside 4 Good, had the advantage of external funding to kick it off in 2012 since when it has focused predominantly (and successfully) on engaging with SMEs in that community.

Over the years a number of collaborative models designed to share ESV pools between companies have emerged in parallel; I recently published *The Company Citizen* (Levitt, 2015),²⁰ a study of some 14 local business networks in communities in England which engage, or have the capacity or intent to engage, SMEs with the fabric of society. No two have the same combination of origin, history, modus operandi, target, financial structure and external funding record. Only one highlighted engagement with a health institution and none of these networks, on the evidence I saw, engaged directly with a local foodbank; perhaps this is because companies often shy away from organisations they see as (nominally) partisan and most foodbanks profess a Christian ethos.

I started this section by looking at the arguments as to why business should engage with communities and concluded that there were several good ones, all of which could be seen in terms of the self interest of the company. There is another, broader argument for why business should engage in the public campaign for the relief of poverty as exemplified by foodbanks; and it is the same reason which has motivated business in Africa over the last 30 years to invest in creating capable and sustainable communities. It is this: poor people make poor customers.

Time and talent are not the only commodities that companies, even SMEs, have to offer: one man's waste is often another's valuable resource and with landfill costs providing a disincentive to traditional forms of waste disposal it is useful for business to have other outlets. Charities such as Globechain, Global Hand and In Kind Direct redistribute surplus physical goods from manufacturers to charities and similar destinations, operating a sort of Freecycle for business.²¹ Whereas three of these enterprises provide localised, small scale opportunities to re-use materials otherwise bound for the tip, albeit on a national basis, In Kind Direct is a true giant: over the years 1,000 companies have donated 13,000 tons of non-food household products which have been redistributed to 7,000 charities registered with the organisation, which is one of the Prince of Wales' suite of charities. Goods include clothing (as new), footwear, kitchenware, cleaning, office supplies, DIY, toys and health and personal care items.

¹⁹ <http://www.involveswindon.co.uk>

²⁰ <http://sector4focus.co.uk/the-company-citizen/>

²¹ <http://www.globechain.com/login.aspx>, <http://www.globalhand.org/en>, <http://www.inkinddirect.org>, <https://www.freecycle.org>

The experience of foodbanks has shown that the idea for a redistributive model can grow if it has the elements of opportunity, awareness and partnership; and that the foodbank collaborative model, whilst having its idiosyncrasies, is applicable to other needs of people in communities too. In some respects partnerships between voluntary groups and corporates are easier to organise than those with SMEs, which are the most numerous of all businesses by a very long way, doing so can be worth the effort - not least because they are often co-located within the very communities where the need is to be found.

Partners in Care: Cross-Sector Collaboration

Major supermarkets donate food to foodbanks - Tesco, Sainsbury, Waitrose, Asda - as well as to Fareshare and, along with M&S and Ocado, they support Company Shop also. The companies avoid the costs of landfill or other disposal of surplus food and they avoid being tainted with the image of dumping food whilst people go hungry. The benefit for the company is clear - but does the donation of a product you can't use and no longer need constitute a relationship? Probably not.

The involvement of the private sector is crucial to both Fareshare and FoodCycle. Clearly there is an advantage to a supermarket to have someone take away food that would otherwise have been dumped, at a cost; but supermarkets are in an 'arms race' on community engagement so there is also a CSR incentive to engage. Tesco is particularly active in supporting the Trussell Trust although all the major supermarkets are involved to some extent. Fareshare receives much of its supply directly from manufacturers, such as the mammoth Nestlé, as well as supermarkets. Fareshare also enjoys a sophisticated network of ESV partnerships with non-food corporates as diverse as Sodexo and BNY Mellon.

Nine out of ten Pret a Manger branches donate three million food products between them per year, mostly fresh sandwiches which cannot be retained to sell the next day, to hostels and similar institutions serving homeless people, women's refuges and institutions supporting other vulnerable groups.²² Throughout London they make a daily collection from their branches with appropriate arrangements elsewhere. This service is independent of the foodbank network as conventional UK foodbanks do not deal with date-sensitive fresh food. Pret also has a strong record of deliberately taking on as apprentices homeless people, ex-prisoners (through charities like Working Chance) and others with a similar record of disadvantage. Pret has thus built a more sustainable relationship with disadvantaged communities than some of the others we have considered here, because of the context: there is no clear commercial benefit to their employment of ex-prisoners - other than that group's reputation for loyalty - and the kudos of clearly doing something selfless and 'good', which no doubt inspires staff (and those customers who are aware of it).

Few companies shout about their commitment to the rehabilitation of former prisoners for perhaps understandable reasons: Timpsons is probably the best known for employing them to mend shoes and cut keys and they also provide a free dry cleaning service for unemployed people needing a good looking suit for a job interview. The facilities giant Interserve has a long record in this regard too, whilst Boots has led the way in campaigning to 'Ban the Box', to remove arbitrary questions on criminal records from job application forms. Companies like BT, National Grid and Interserve again go out of their way to recruit former military personnel who can find transition to civilian life daunting and difficult - sometimes using freely available tools like Transition Force to match potential such recruits with appropriate mentoring and coaching.²³ Elsewhere a host of companies sponsor skills training plus a whole raft of catering and hospitality outlets within the prison environment - Wates, the builders, was a pioneer in both of these fields.

Transition Force was developed by the social enterprise Good People. Three years ago Good People undertook to work with the businesses in The Shard in Southwark, London to recruit 300 unemployed locals into sustainable work over a three year period - and they achieved their goal

²² <http://www.pret.co.uk/en-gb/pret-charity-run>

²³ <http://transitionforce.com>

eight months early, at 20 per cent less cost per head than the Government's Work Programme, and with a massive two thirds of all recruits still in their post after six months. This was achieved through the building of relationships rather than relying on shallow transactions that had no emotional buy-in from jobseeker or employment advisor; volunteers from the existing workforce within the Shard quarter were recruited and trained as coaches and mentors to work with the jobseekers before, during and after the recruitment process in a way which was fulfilling and motivating for both parties.

In the previous section we learned that in some localities businesses are working together to pool opportunities for meaningful volunteering. In one of the 14 networks studied, Darlington Cares, an initiative called Minded to Help brings employers together with mental health professionals to help identify workplace risks and mitigate them. Through sharing best practice, for example, they learn how to support employees with mental health problems back into the workplace following absence for this reason. In this way the impact of mental health problems on absence and under-performance can be reduced, as can the stigma attached to this common but little addressed issue, and the lives of those with such problems can be improved.²⁴

Excluding outsourcing and commissioning, true cross sector partnerships remain difficult to find. Yet they do exist: one of the most successful must be that five-year old partnership between the health, beauty and pharmacy chain Boots and Macmillan, the cancer charity. Through trained pharmacy staff cancer patients are identified and referred to Macmillan for support and, where necessary, care. Boots and its employees raise considerable funds for the charity and their ESV work is often focused on cancer, too, such as providing makeovers for terminal cancer patients. In this way it has been calculated that the proportion of new cancer patients put in touch with Macmillan in this way has risen from one in three to two in three; and the company's reputation as a caring pharmacy is, of course, enhanced.

Replicating and Diversifying the Foodbank Model

As we have seen, the foodbank can be seen as part of a family of community activities based on the free donation of goods, services and labour by those with spare capacity, subjected to a strategic framework and implemented through the deployment of the tools of business (if not businesses themselves) to produce a positive social impact.

Close relatives are the volunteer-run community cafés and other models of food co-operative whilst more distant family members might include the recycled furniture workshop which utilises the labour of unemployed or otherwise disadvantaged people to reduce the disposal of furniture to landfill, develop useful skills and provide cheap rejuvenated furniture for needy families. The specialist charity shop dealing with furniture re-use, the mainstream charity shop and the online re-use and resource-sharing communities are ever more distant cousins, though generating the level of involvement of mainstream private sector business as foodbanks do is rare.

The donation of surplus medical drugs and equipment for use in Africa is well established. InterCare, a Leicestershire-based charity, shipped £700,000-worth of goods donated by patients and general practitioners to half a dozen countries in sub-Saharan Africa in 2014 alone.²⁵ Figure 2 illustrates the sorts of items used to supply African clinics in this way.

In the United States \$700M-worth of useable medicines are sent for destruction every year and a further \$4Bn-worth is dispensed and then goes unused or destroyed domestically each year; whilst one in four prescriptions, mostly those issued to low income families, goes uncollected. Since 2011 the social enterprise SIRUM has provided a route for surplus pharmaceutical products from manufacturers (but not from members of the public) to be sent to volunteer clinics serving poor and

²⁴ <http://www.darlingtoncares.co.uk/minded-to-help/>

²⁵ <http://www.intercare.org.uk> - 1,400 GP practices in Britain are registered with this charity although recent changes to regulations now prohibit the use of any product donated directly by patients

uninsured people in the deprived communities of California.²⁶ A recent change in US law, the so-called Good Samaritan Act, encourages the donation of medicines by providing legal indemnity for donors although World Health Organisation guidelines (on 'use by' dates, for example) still apply.

Medicines	Surgical Items
Antibiotics and antibacterials	Hand instruments ('as new')
Antifungals and antivirals	Swabs, gauze, dressings, plasters
Antiretrovirals for HIV (please ask for current requirements)	Theatre drapes, shoes, masks
Sulphonamides	Bandages (all types)
Bronchodilators, including unused inhalers	Plasters (all types)
Iron and vitamin medicines	'Butterflies'
Analgesics (excluding dihydrocodeine, morphine, etc)	Giving sets and Cannulae
Antacids and ulcer healing drugs	Sutures (all types)
Antihypertensives and diuretics	Airways / tracheostomy tubes
Antihistamines	Naso-gastric tubes
Steroid tablets and creams	Maternity / sanitary pads
Ear & eye drops and ointments	Delivery forceps
Antidepressants and antipsychotics	Neck collars / wrist braces
Nitrates and Digoxin	Thermometers, stethoscopes, sphygmomanometers (not mercury)
Local anaesthetics	Kidney dishes
Creams and ointments	Measuring cups / spoons
Oral anti-diabetics	Gallipots
Anti-epileptics and anti-malarials	Spatulae
	Gloves (especially latex)
	Scissors
	Weighing scales (lightweight only)
	Needles and syringes

Figure 2: Medicines and equipment approved to be supplied through InterCare

A recent report contends that in the Portuguese capital, Lisbon, which has two million inhabitants, a fifth of people live below the poverty line and almost half of these have either been unable to buy pharmaceutical products where needed or have delayed their purchase due to lack of affordability; at 160,000 people this is double the usage of the city's foodbanks (Martins, 2013).²⁷ In the city a

²⁶ <http://www.sirum.org>

²⁷ <http://run.unl.pt/handle/10362/9778>

social enterprise is being established to collect pharmaceutical products from subscribing pharmacies when they reach six months before expiry for redistribution. This model provides medical support to those who cannot afford it and eliminates a significant amount of costly waste from the system. Organisations receiving the drugs for distribution can only issue them to the public with the authorisation of a qualified (volunteer) pharmacist and, again, all legal constraints must be observed. Wholesale space is donated by a commercial wholesaler. As the process relies on the preparation of individual doses (smaller portions than the original packaging) relabelling by trained volunteers must be overseen very carefully. The mission's target is to deliver 50,000 units through 100 accredited institutions each year. Pharmaceutical banks of this kind already exist in Brazil, Italy and Spain.

Many companies have 'Charity of the Year' relationships with major charities; these are principally fundraising relationships and frequently do not reflect a common mission between company and charity. Although more sophisticated blended models have emerged in recent years the transient nature of these annual funding-fests means that deeper relationships are rare and thus the Charity of the Year model is not an important part of this review. However this transience suits one charity, the Anthony Nolan Trust, which as well as fundraising recruits volunteers from amongst its partners' employees to join the donor registers for stem cells, umbilical cords and bone marrow. The law of diminishing returns determines that after a year in partnership with one company such recruitment is maximised by moving on to a new one. It's an unusual justification for transience in these relationships but a potent one.

Where might the foodbank model go next?

Charities and voluntary organisations are coming to terms with the fact that the era of significant amounts of public sector funding, from both central and local government, is over. A few of Britain's 160,000 registered charities have engaged with big business on a significant level and more have done so in a superficial way, yet the challenge of engaging with the resources of SMEs in terms of time, skills and products, remains relatively unmet.

Politicians, especially in local government, are increasingly looking to new and cost effective ways of delivering services and 'social value' - there is even legislation allowing them to maximise the social value generated through otherwise conventional tendering processes. It is now taken as read that charities have a role to play in formal avenues of service delivery and, more controversially, specialist outsourcing companies are also here to stay, especially on bigger contracts. 'Collaboration' and 'co-production' are established concepts but both are in their infancy in practice.

We have already seen that the foodbank model takes goods from where they are available in surplus and delivers them to 'customers' who are unable to purchase them using the traditional operation of the market. The process is assisted by the fact that it is cheaper for the donor to contribute in this way than to dispose of the goods in other ways. But the model which is best known in respect of food allows replication into other commodities (we have seen examples of medicines and furniture) and also in development from a transactional to a relationship model as illustrated in Figure 3.

At the same time businesses are starting to co-operate on engagement within communities and, through sharing networks of opportunities and ideas, are developing away from transaction-based engagement and towards building relationships.

In this new economic environment no resource can be wasted and those values of collaboration and co-production will be much in demand, breaking through traditional sector borders. At the same time companies will better appreciate the value of community engagement to their businesses and new models of support for socially excluded people will emerge. These models, being community based, will, like foodbanks, be based in localities where they will be closest to their targets. One weakness of present informal support structures is that they exist in silos (this is not just an attribute of government) and charities in particular can be insular and atomised.

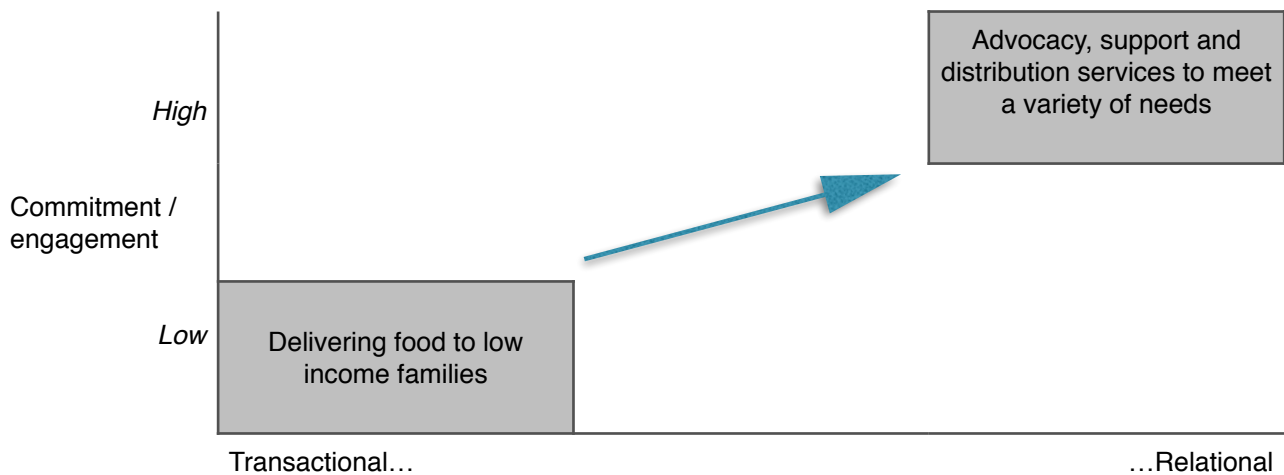


Figure 3: Moving from transaction to relationship in a foodbank context

Let us take the case of a person with complex needs: perhaps leaving care or leaving prison, unemployed or on low income, with young children, prone to depression or mental health problems or with a physical disability or a substance abuse issue; potentially the object of discrimination; and living in a rural area or one otherwise suffering physical exclusion.

At present that person could have problems receiving the variety of transaction-based services, each intended to tackle a different element of their complex pattern of need (see Figure 4).

Silo	Issue
Money / Poverty	High utility and housing bills; poor access to fair credit; referral to foodbanks; debt management advice; housing insecurity
Benefit system	Insufficient transaction time at Jobcentre Plus; low awareness of independent benefit assessment advice; delays in receiving benefits
Health / Disability	Difficulties accessing GP services; dietary and other issues such as smoking; cost of medicines; support for long term and chronic conditions; substance abuse
Mental health	Inadequate mental health support; local charity support unreliable and hidden; risk of discrimination and isolation; loneliness
Work-life balance	Access to affordable child care; antisocial working hours; cost of and access to transport to work; irregular hours; multiple simultaneous employments
Employment	Insufficient transaction time at Jobcentre Plus; low pay; lack of sustainable employment; access to opportunities to develop soft and hard skills
Exclusion	Poor access to transport / cost of transport (especially in rural areas); social exclusion through poverty; other discrimination (ex-offender, gender, race, etc.)

Figure 4: Silos of need

Whilst all of these issues can be addressed (and historically are attempted to be addressed) by short term, individual transactions, it is likely that all would be better addressed if a holistic approach to the complex needs of the individual were adopted. A number of emerging trends suggest that this may be starting to happen:

- We have seen that some foodbanks are moving away from the transactional approach, to address some pertinent issues at source and in combination with others, through signposting and relationship building.
- Foodbanks have a natural affinity with food retail, wholesale and manufacturing businesses; this footprint can be expanded.

- Foodbanks are strategically placed to serve more deprived communities, where the needs of individuals can be complex and are not restricted to food poverty.
- Changes achieved through building relationships in communities are more sustainable than those achieved through transactions; traditionally charities are better placed than public or private bodies to provide the time, patience and individual focus which relationships within service delivery need in order to thrive.
- Voluntary organisations which have partnerships with business have found that creating capacity, improving positive impacts and writing and implementing business strategies are the sort of skills that they can develop in the right relationship.²⁸
- Businesses are starting to better appreciate the business case for being meaningfully involved in the community, not least when employees appreciate the values, purpose and outcomes of such activity. Where businesses eschew a transactional approach to ESV / CSR and adopt a relational approach to working with communities through their workforce the employee engagement benefits can be profound.
- Businesses are starting to organise together within localities to pool opportunities for engagement; where this is happening it can involve SMEs, the majority of businesses, in a meaningful way, perhaps for the first time.

From this I conclude that foodbanks are part of a broader cross sector engagement movement in communities whose model offers huge potential for businesses and civil society organisations (voluntary sector, charities and faith groups) to collaborate for mutual benefit and to produce:

- innovative solutions to social and societal problems
- sustainable models of service delivery based on relationships
- new opportunities for employee engagement within business and
- inroads into the SME community as a source of capacity and resources for good causes.

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²⁸ See the capacity-building charity Pilotlight's Impact Report for a good example http://www.pilotlight.org.uk/static/assets/misc/docs/PILOTLIGHT_IMPACT_REPORT_2015.pdf

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