

Factsheet 2 - The Client Experience

The Client Experience

At a conference organised by the Childhood Trust, The London Childhood Poverty Summit 2021, there was a panel on Poverty and Hunger. On that panel, two people with lived experience told their stories. One grew up on social welfare, then became homeless but did not give up and is now in full time employment as an Adviser. The other person is still living in poverty and being supported by the charity PECAN. They both spoke about feeling self conscious when going to churches, food banks and other charities to access help, especially “when you wait in the queue or outside for the doors to open. People are always so kind, but it doesn’t take away the feelings of embarrassment.”

Best practice case study

One of the panel members at the above conference, a Manager of Barking Food bank spoke about ways they are working to create a sense of community and ownership to remove the sense of shame reported by people who access food bank support. People with lived experience are on their Board of trustees, helping to run activities and offered opportunities to serve, share and learn new skills. The Manager spoke about compassion, saying that compassion “for” reflects superiority from our part whereas compassion “with” and “within” is often better, such as sitting with someone rather than packing the parcel and giving it to the person and off, they go. The Manager spoke of one single mother who told their member of staff who had a chat with them that they had not had an adult conversation in the last 2 weeks. In another example, they said that when Barking food bank set up a holiday hub, the team from the hub went to the food bank and schools and said to parents “we need your help sorting food out and packing, etc.”, that way giving parents a chance to offer help as well as receive it.

Offering a place of welcome

Regarding removing the sense of shame and building a sense of community, when the pandemic is behind us, wouldn’t it be lovely to have a [Place of Welcome](#) or maybe a café corner in our food banks, so that people can have a chat inside while waiting to be served? It could increase a sense of community in the church-run project. Together Southwark can also support church-run food banks to fundraise for additional support in form of on-site advice surgery to build people’s resilience, so they are less likely to need a food bank in the future.