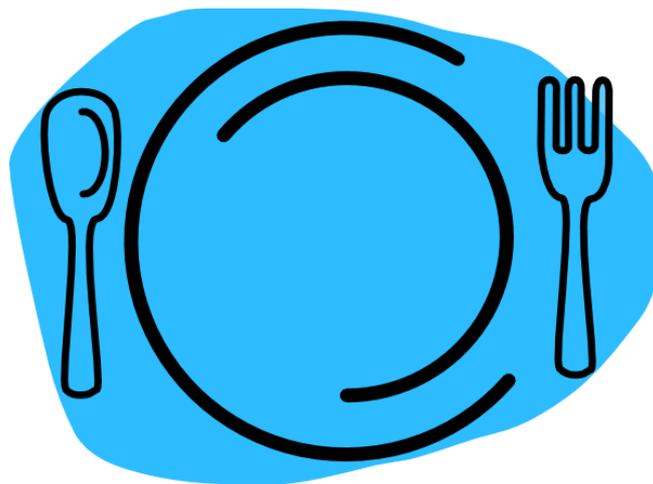


# Breaking the taboo

## Going hungry in Orkney



<http://cliparts.co/clipart/3822171>



## Forward

**This short report explores food poverty in Orkney by examining the statistics of the use of the Orkney Foodbank and some case studies from Orkney Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). By looking at the statistics produced by the Foodbank and the case studies from the CAB, we can get a better insight into why individuals and families go hungry in Orkney.**

This report came about after some of the CAB's advisers read comments on Facebook about why people seek the help of the Foodbank. The posts were in response to an appeal from Orkney Foodbank asking for donations and they shocked us. Many people denied that there was hunger in Orkney and stated, wrongly, that the people who received food from the Foodbank did so because they had spent their money on drink or drugs. However, most of comments from the people of Orkney were much more compassionate and understanding of why people may find themselves in difficulty.

People on low incomes are quite capable of making bad choices in life but so are people on medium and high incomes. Our experience at the CAB is that those on low incomes are far more likely to make wise choices about how to make their money stretch further than the rest of us. However, we felt it was important that we examine what the evidence has to say, rather than just rely on assumptions.

Orkney has a great tradition of charitable work. This work is often led by people who have had personal experience of hardship, such as an illness or a disability that has affected their family. They raise money so that others who face the same challenges receive more help and support. However, when it comes to low income, people either feel themselves that they are partially at fault or that others will think that they are to blame. One thing we found difficult in writing this report is that those who are struggling on a low income to make ends meet do not like to talk about it. Consequently, all the case studies are anonymous. The attitudes of those who posted the cruel remarks might well be shared by others in Orkney and that may be a big part of why people are reluctant to speak about their problems.

This report demonstrates that in most case, people need the help of the Orkney Foodbank because of reasons outside their control but not outside the control of society. If we act together, we can remove the need for foodbanks.

**CAB Trustee Board - 12 April 2018**



## Orkney Foodbank Statistics



Orkney Foodbank relies on specialist agencies like the CAB, Housing Advice, social services, the NHS and Orkney Women's Aid, to identify people who need help and these agencies make referrals to the Foodbank. Consequently, the information the Foodbank collects is 'high level' and does not tell individual stories of the people who receive their help. Nevertheless, the breakdown of the Foodbank's activities in 2017 (Appendix below) can be summarised:

- Benefit changes and delays are a major cause of food poverty.
- Often mothers need help feeding their children and themselves because they have fled domestic violence.
- Debt is a major factor.
- Some families struggle during the school holidays when free school meals are not available.
- Homelessness is often a related factor.
- Debt means people cannot afford to buy food.

These often, but not always, represent a short-term crisis and the Foodbank can help people cope till they can get out of their financial crisis. The rule of thumb recommended by the Trussell Trust is that three vouchers, each for three days of food, in a six-month period can support folks through a short-term crisis. This can give the CAB the time to help people claim the benefits there are legally entitled to, children going back to school after the

school holidays, or that people's finances are generally in a better shape. However, the biggest issue is simply low income which can either mean that a family is struggling to live off benefits or they are working, and the wages are not high enough. 70% of children in poverty in Scotland are in households where at least one person is working.<sup>1</sup> Over a third of vouchers in Orkney were issued to parents with children (Appendix Two).

## **Stories from CAB clients**

The following case studies from Orkney CAB are typical of the types of problems faced by the clients that the CAB refer to Orkney Foodbank. All the cases studies have been anonymised.

### **John's story (all the names are fictitious)**

John is in his 20s, he was working full time and earning a good income until his mental health significantly deteriorated and he was signed off work by his GP. He was not entitled to any contractual sick pay and was struggling to meet his financial commitments because his only income was Statutory Sick Pay of £89.35 per week.

John had expected to return to work in the near future so had taken out ten payday loans which he used to pay his bills. However, John's mental health did not improve. He remained signed off and was soon receiving demands from his creditors and was also accruing rent and council tax arrears meaning he was at threat of eviction.

John was referred to CAB by his landlord by which time he had no money at all, no food and no power.

CAB immediately referred John to the Orkney Foodbank, where he received a food parcel and electricity top up. John was advised that he was entitled to two further food parcels which gave the CAB enough time to assist him to apply for his unclaimed benefits entitlements which stabilised his financial situation and meant he could set up sustainable repayment plans with his creditors.

### **Diane's story**

Diane is in her 40s and has mobility issues. Diane had been in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) for a number of years. However, because DLA is being replaced by a new

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<sup>1</sup> Poverty and Income Inequality in Scotland in 2014/15, Table A7 In-work Poverty (relative AHC) in Scotland 1998/99 to 2015/16; <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0051/00515392.pdf>

disability benefit, Personal Independence Payments (PIP), Diane had to make a new claim for benefits.

Following her application for PIP, Diane's DLA payments stopped and the DWP informed her that her application for PIP had been declined. Because the PIP application had been turned down, Diane's entitlement to the disability element of Working Tax Credits (WTC) also ended.

Diane came to the CAB who helped her to appeal the PIP decision. Because Diane had been relying on her DLA and WTC to meet her financial commitments, she found herself choosing to pay her bills rather than eat. This was particularly concerning because Diane's pain medication should not be taken on an empty stomach.

The CAB made a referral to the Orkney Foodbank and Diane received three food parcels plus electricity vouchers whilst CAB assisted her with her PIP appeal.

Diane's PIP appeal was successful and she was awarded Standard Rate Daily Living of £55.65 per week and Enhanced Rate Mobility of £58 per week. Cases like Diane's are typical, more often or not, the appeal for PIP submitted by the CAB succeeds which means that the DWP has caused a great deal of stress to some of our most vulnerable citizens. 68% of PIP appeals have succeeded.<sup>2</sup>

### **Karen's story**

Karen is in her 20s, she has two children aged four and one. Karen came to the CAB soon after she had separated from her long-term partner who is the father of her children. Karen's partner had moved out of the family home leaving Karen with no income because she looked after the children and the house while her ex-partner had worked full time. Maintenance arrangement had not been set up, although Karen hoped this could be arranged because she and her ex-partner are on reasonably good terms.

The CAB helped Karen to apply for Income Support, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Reduction and Child Tax Credits. The CAB also referred Karen to the Orkney Foodbank and she received three food parcels which ensured that she and her children had food and power before her benefits were in payment.

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<sup>2</sup> First six months of 2017/18, 68% of PIP appeals succeeded, The Scotsman, 12 February 2018.

## Conclusions

The stories of these three CAB clients show that the reasons why they were struggling to feed themselves and, in Karen's case, her children, were beyond their control. The breakdown of a relationship, mental health problems and a change in income are things that could happen to any of us. These changes in our circumstances can quickly bring us to a crisis. In these cases, Orkney CAB were able to help these clients increase their income but that takes time. In the meantime, the support these clients received from Orkney Foodbank was essential. One concern is that the biggest cause of referrals to the Foodbank are incomes that are permanently low, a problem Orkney CAB very often cannot solve.

## Possible next steps include

1. Further study: how low-income affects the ability of individuals to feed themselves and their families, including: the impact of benefit delays, Universal Credit and 'benefit reforms', domestic violence, the lack of free school meals in the holidays, debt, homelessness, sickness and low wages.
2. Consideration to be given to promoting the Scottish Real Living Wage.
3. Can free meals be provided for children on non-school days – see: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/free-school-meals-poor-families-holidays-weekends-scotland-council-plan-a8213821.html>
4. Support for Orkney Foodbank, Orkney CAB, Orkney Women's Aid and other agencies who help people facing difficulties is recognised as a priority.
5. Agencies come together to discuss and action plan to begin to break the silence around low incomes and poverty in Orkney. This could be associated with the work that will need to be done locally to implement the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act.

## Appendix One: useful resources

Child Poverty Pack – how schools can tackle food poverty produced by EIS

<http://www.eis.org.uk/Child-Poverty/PovertyPack>

Local Contributions to Tackling Poverty and Inequality in Scotland: February 2018

[https://policyscotland.gla.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Local-Poverty-Report-Feb\\_2018.pdf](https://policyscotland.gla.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Local-Poverty-Report-Feb_2018.pdf)

Scotland Household Survey 2016 – Orkney

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0053/00531164.pdf>

## Appendix Two: Orkney Foodbank Summary of Activity in 2017

Vouchers by Ward	Number of Vouchers	Adults	Children	Total	Population
Canal Ward (home base Glasgow not Orkney)	3	6	0	<b>6</b>	n/a
East Mainland/South Ron/Burray	28	31	23	<b>54</b>	3,560
Kirkwall East	99	127	60	<b>187</b>	4,610
Kirkwall West/Orphir	96	104	36	<b>140</b>	4,140
No Fixed Abode	21	25	13	<b>38</b>	n/a
North Isles	13	18	15	<b>33</b>	2,200
Stromness/South Isles	32	38	30	<b>68</b>	2,850
Unknown	32	38	10	<b>48</b>	n/a
West Mainland	31	44	34	<b>78</b>	4,500
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>355</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>652</b>	21,850

Crisis Types	Number of vouchers	Adults affected	Children affected	Total
Benefit Changes	46	54	38	92
Benefit Delays	51	59	23	82
Child Holiday Meals	10	16	29	45
Debt	30	32	6	38
Delayed Wages	4	4	0	4
Domestic Violence	22	22	24	46
Homelessness	33	39	8	47
Low Income	122	155	71	226
No recourse to public funds	2	2	4	6
Other	20	24	9	33
Sickness	15	24	9	33
<b>Totals</b>	<b>355</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>652</b>

Age profile	Adults 17-24	Adults 25-64	Adults over 65	Adults unknown age	Children 0-4	Children 5-11	Children 12-16	Children Unknown age	Total
<b>Number</b>	86	330	10	5	94	79	43	5	<b>652</b>

Family Size	Couple	Family	Other	Single	Single Parent	Total
<b>Voucher Total</b>	33	31	6	204	81	<b>355</b>

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