Toolkit: Running Safer Food Banks

Part 2: People

Why do food bank guests merit special consideration?

Food bank guests, and those attending other "open door" ministries such as warm spaces, drop ins and community meals are inherently vulnerable.

While economic insecurity is the most obvious aspect of this, some guests may be facing additional challenges. As food banks provide essentials to anyone in need, they sometimes serve those who may not otherwise spend time in public. This includes victims of modern slavery and domestic abuse, the safeguarding of whom is the focus of this toolkit.

While there are no stereotypes for people experiencing slavery or domestic abuse, there are visible signs to look out for that indicate guests may be victims. By being aware of the signs and knowing how to respond, food bank staff and volunteers can act as stepping stones to specialised support for those at risk.

> *N.B. This document's focus is safeguarding victims of modern slavery and domestic abuse. Please refer to part 1 of the toolkit ("Policy & Procedures") for notes on safeguarding policy more broadly.*

Issues to be aware of: Modern Slavery

In 2018, the Global Slavery Index report estimated that 40.3 million people were enslaved across the world – that's more than at the height of the slave trade. Modern slavery takes multiple forms, including sexual exploitation, forced labour, domestic servitude, organ harvesting and criminal exploitation, including county lines and cuckooing. Men, women, and children can all be slaves, and many in the UK are British nationals.

In Britain, modern slavery is most prevalent in London. Cases have been reported in every borough, and these numbers are rising year on year. In 2023, **Westminster**, **Barnet** and **Haringey** were in the top four boroughs for reported incidents of adult enslavement.

There are many signs to indicate that someone may be a victim of modern slavery – some of which would be obvious in a food bank setting. Organisations such as Unseen, Hestia, Crimestoppers, and the Gangmasters & Labour Abuse Authority provide guides to recognising signs of slavery in varying contexts.

Broadly speaking, the Clewer Initiative advises looking out for the following:

- **Physical appearance** - signs of malnutrition, being frightened or withdrawn, having injuries, being unwashed, wearing the same clothes every day.

- **Few or no personal effects** - having few or no personal belongings or documentation, no money, little or no food, little or unsuitable clothing.

- **Isolation and control** – people who are rarely on their own and appear under the control or influence of other people, who: speak on their behalf, interpret for them, present their documents, or take them to and from work.

- **Reluctance to seek help** – people who avoid eye contact, appear afraid to talk, are generally fearful, or reject help when offered.

For more information about spotting the signs of modern slavery, which can occur across any of our community ministries, and even within our church communities, please see the more detailed toolkit: "Modern Slavery Awareness".

Issues to be aware of: Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is a widespread issue. It is not limited to any one section of the population, or determined by gender, ethnicity, or religion. Domestic abuse is typified by coercive and controlling behaviour, and takes the forms of psychological, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and financial manipulation.

Domestic abuse most often takes place in heterosexual relationships, where women are victims and men are perpetrators; however, men and those in LGBTQI+ relationships can be victims too. Abuse can also be inter-generational. A number of organisations including the National Centre for Domestic Violence, Women's Aid, and the Home Office, provide information about recognising the signs of domestic abuse.

Domestic abuse includes family violence – predominantly against women and girls – in the form of forced marriage, "honour"-based abuse, and female genital mutilation (FGM). These are most prevalent within diaspora communities from South Asia, the Middle East, and North and East Africa, and they should not be confused as legitimate cultural / religious practices – they are crimes under UK law.

Recognising the signs of domestic violence as an outsider is not easy – indeed, it can be hard for victims themselves to recognise when they are being subject to abuse. However, having an awareness of the issue could ensure that any signs do not go unnoticed. Domestic abuse victims are most likely to speak up if asked about their wellbeing, rather than proffering the information. They are also more likely to confide in a friend, or someone close to them, rather than going directly to the police or professional services – so trusted confidents need to know how to respond. You can foster a safe space for victims by knowing how to contact your local domestic abuse services and by displaying relevant information in the building.

What should I do if someone reveals they are a victim of slavery or abuse?

The 4Rs can help you remember how to respond to the disclosure of abuse:

- **Recognise** – Accept and take seriously what is being said, letting the person tell their story in their own words. Don't interrogate them or push for more information. Be alert to the signs of abuse.

- **Respond –** Reassure the individual that they are right to share the information. Do not promise to keep secrets. Rather, tell them what you will do with the information and reassure them that they will be kept informed. Do not investigate the matter further or approach the alleged person abuser.

- **Record** – Write down exactly what was seen, said or heard, and make clear where you have added your own views or interpretation. Include details using the four Ws: WHO was involved? WHAT happened? WHEN did it happen? WHO have you referred the issue on to?

- **Refer –** Pass the information to the Safeguarding Lead or Diocesan Safeguarding Advisor within 24 hours. If you are unsure about the person's consent and confidentiality, you can get advice from your Parish Safeguarding Officer without necessarily disclosing people's names.

Safeguarding responses: key contacts

If you have immediate concerns about someone's safety, you should contact the police and your local authority Children's or Adult Social Care Services.
In the case of a modern slavery disclosure – or if you suspect exploitation – you can call the Modern Slavery Helpline on 0800 012 1700. You can also report concerns via their online portal.

If you are concerned that a child or adult has been harmed or may be at risk of harm, please contact the Diocesan Safeguarding Team. They can be contacted Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, via email (safeguarding@london.anglican.org) or by telephone (020 7932 1224).

Outside these hours, please contact the thirtyone:eight helpline on **0303 003 1111** and select option 2. The Diocesan Safeguarding Team receives notification of any advice they give.

Complex mental health challenges

Where slavery and abuse victims have experienced trauma, they may be navigating mental health challenges.
This is also true for the wider food bank community, where the stress of economic instability takes an enormous psychological toll.

While staff and volunteers are **not** required to provide expert support – this is for NHS specialists and social workers to do – it is worth having an awareness of the kinds of challenges food bank guests may be facing, and some tools and understanding to provide basic support.

- Mental Health First Aid training is a useful (typically paid) resource, for providing first line support.

- Mental health charity, Mind, offers tips on supporting people with anxiety, PTSD, paranoia, and more.

- If you have more time, the Sanctuary course, provides powerful testimonies from Christians living with a range of mental health conditions, including depression, schizophrenia, psychosis, and more.

- Thrive London provides resources on trauma informed practice and wider mental health topics.

Where can I find out more?

Modern slavery

- The Clewer Initiative offers a wealth of information – including a flowchart outlining how to respond to suspected slavery. It has also designed a bespoke training for churches, available on the CofE portal.
- In this video (53 mins), Dr Julia Tomas, Anti-Slavery Coordinator at homelessness charity, The Passage, outlines how to spot the signs of modern slavery in food banks and warm spaces.
- Adult victims of modern slavery can access specialist support by contacting the Salvation Army. They have a free and confidential 24/7 helpline: 0800 808 3733.

Domestic abuse

- There is a bespoke training for churches, "Raising Awareness of Domestic Abuse," on the CofE portal.
- Refuge is a domestic abuse charity for women and children. They have a 24/7 free helpline (0808 2000 247) and can advise on access to refuge accommodation and community support services.
- The Mankind Initiative specifically supports male victims of domestic abuse.
- The Home Office's Forced Marriage Unit provides a survivor's handbook for victims and those at risk.
- The Bright Sky app gives practical support and information on how to respond to domestic abuse.