



**Sheffield Church
Action on Poverty
Update - June 2020**

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*You are welcome to share this update with
your Church/Networks*

At a National CAP Zoom meeting the following questions were asked. They are questions which are valuable in discussing in our groups, networks, and Churches. The third question centres on the issue should we just be looking at the economy when we move out of the present situation or should we take a much wider view and include environmental issues.

1. What things do you hope change because of this time? Locally, nationally, and globally?
2. What part do you think you and your church can play in reshaping our society?
3. Finally, considering how we have mobilised as a Church and as nations in recent months, how do you think we could respond to the climate crisis - the greatest threat to life on earth that we currently know - with the same urgency as this pandemic?

Alongside are some National Responses.



Sheffield Church Action on Poverty
Facebook page.

Details of campaigns and updates are put on this page regularly and can be shared with your networks, friends, and Churches. **If you haven't already done so and you are able, please go to the page and like it.**

Stay Alert to Justice. COVID-19 has brought huge changes to all our lives, but inequalities mean that some people have been hit even harder than others.

That is why people from across the Baptist Union, Methodist Church and United Reformed Church have come together, to call on us all to **Stay Alert to Justice**.

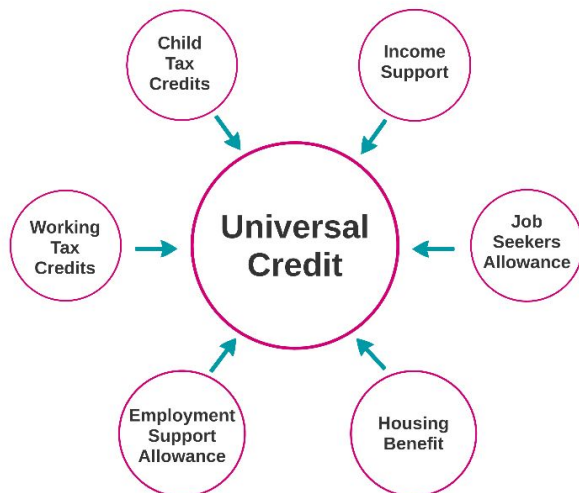
A just response to the pandemic means that everyone gets the support they need, and that inequalities are addressed - now, and in the future. **If we Stay Alert to Justice today, we can move together towards a future where everyone can thrive.**

To read the full report go to www.jointpublicissues.org.uk/stayalert/

National Church Action on Poverty and many of their partners have been finding new ways to ensure we sustain community, and even build new relationships that will outlast the coronavirus outbreak.

Carlie, and Charlotte, from Parson Cross in Sheffield shared their insights on the National CAP Web page.

Go to-
www.church-poverty.org.uk/staying-connected-3-stories-from-sheffield



Universal Credit update from our Local Group.

The present crisis has led to 20,000 UC claims in Sheffield in March/April. People have been able to get help with their claims through the service provided by Citizens Advice, which since the lockdown started has been phone based. A voluntary sector representative (from SOAR) said that he had had clients who had used this service and had found it really good.

As you may know, the Government sent out instructions to local authorities to get rough sleepers off the streets and into hotels. We were told that the Council in partnership with projects in the City had done 'an amazing job' in following this up. There were problems in getting rough sleepers to claim UC because of difficulties in getting a bank account, but we are told some way round this had been found.

However, the funding for this initiative runs out at the end of June and there is some concern that support may be removed.

Nationally-The national background is that the Government anticipated that the lockdown would put strains on the UC system and introduced some changes, such as

- upping the monthly standard rate – e.g, from £317.82 to £409.89 a month for single people aged 25 or over.
- Removing the 'minimum income floor', to help self-employed people whose income has fallen,
- Increasing the allowance for private renters who need help with housing costs.
- Reducing the checks on the identity of claimants - this has caused an increase in fraud.
- No longer requiring people to be actively seeking work.

Concerns-It is hoped that some of the changes introduced may stay permanently.

One major contention with UC always has been the treatment of under 25s and this continues in the present situation. Centrepoint put out the following appeal.

*MPs need to understand the reality – **young people are most likely to lose their job during the coronavirus crisis. Yet under-25s receive less Universal Credit to help with food and bills. Without family support, many face hunger and homelessness. Please consider contacting your MP.***

We welcome updates from other sources for consideration of publication, but opinions expressed in these may not necessarily be those of Sheffield Church Action on Poverty.

Simon Duffy from the Centre for Welfare reform writes

The UK entered the COVID Crisis with high levels of poverty, inequality and welfare reforms that have unnecessarily increased the misery and fear experienced by millions on low incomes. The economy, artificially depressed by the Government's Austerity programme, had barely struggled to recover from the 2008 crash and the use of food banks has grown every year. Our Government promised Brexit, which promises to further depress the economy, but beyond that it was not clear exactly what else would follow. We know that popularity is the central goal of the current leadership and sadly we know that popularity and justice do not go hand in hand.

We now know that the Government has managed the COVID Crisis very badly and that many people have died unnecessarily. Food bank use has increased even further, and many millions are experiencing large drops in income, unemployment and will be very fearful of the future. Inequality will also accelerate as these circumstances also create many investment opportunities for the super-rich, who can buy assets at knock-down prices. The deaths in social care reflect poor management, the low status of disabled and older people in our country and a history of building too many large congregated care homes.

Amidst this gloom there has been light. Many of us have discovered we like being neighbourly and the Centre for Welfare Reform is now working on a project to advance Neighbourhood Democracy in Sheffield and beyond. Many have woken up to the need to transform our economy and the case for a basic income has never been stronger (we have even had some backing from the Pope). Much of the work to put this on the national agenda started with our partners at UBI Lab Sheffield, who first proposed an Emergency Basic Income. So perhaps one way we may snatch justice from the jaws of defeat is to think again about what we can do locally. **Perhaps the Church has a special role in helping people move beyond sterile party factionalism and we can look at building a Sheffield that would welcome and support everyone.**

emergency basic income blog - <https://www.ubilabnetwork.org/blog/a-proposal-for-a>

[n-emergency-universal-basic-income-ubi-during-covid-19](#)

SHEFFIELD FOOD BANK NETWORK

The reaction of this network of food banks to the coronavirus crisis has demonstrated resilience and co-operation.

At first there was an exhausting period when managers grappled with lack of finance, scarcity of food and having to lose the help of some volunteers, while the numbers seeking food parcels rose dramatically. Many food banks had to change to a delivery model, most had to change their days of operation and some had to move premises as churches were closed.

The current picture is more encouraging. With food aid from the Council, generous donations from business, voluntary agencies and the public, they feel in a stable position at present, although demand for parcels from most of the food banks has increased 3 or 4-fold.

It is significant that this has been done in co-operation with other food-giving agencies and the Council and has been co-ordinated through Voluntary Action Sheffield. About 1 in 140 households are now receiving food aid each week.

However, the network understands this high level of need will continue for some time, but donations of money and food may well tail off. How to operate in the future remains to be decided.

For details of Sheffield foodbanks go to: www.sheffieldfoodbank.org.uk/food-bank-list



These gatherings, every Tuesday at 2 pm. Join on Zoom to connect with people across the country to hear each other's stories, discuss issues that we are facing and share advice.

Go to National CAP webpage for the link. Also on the webpage there is a summary of the previous week's discussions and stories.

www.church-poverty.org.uk/gathering-on-the-margins-2-june/

Big Issue North

Since our last update, the Big Issue North has continued to support vendors who have been unable to sell, during the Coronavirus outbreak. This has taken many forms, including staying in touch to try and reduce isolation, assisting with setting up benefits and obtaining food, and through payments from our Hardship Fund. We are extremely grateful to everyone who has supported these efforts, through continuing to buy the magazine online or in various supermarkets, donations, or through contacting us or vendors to enquire about their wellbeing. We frequently hear that vendors are keen to get back to selling the magazine, both to start earning and income and supporting themselves financially, but also as they have missed the interactions with their valued customers. We need to ensure this is done safely and have been planning for how and when this can happen. We are looking to begin a phased return to vendors selling the magazine from the 15th June, to coincide with a number of high street retailers re-opening. This will initially be solely for people who are able to register to use contactless payments, in the interests of protecting the health and welfare of vendors and members of the public. We will be providing contactless payment machines to vendors, as well as PPE, and supporting those who currently do not have the necessary things in place, such as a bank account and ID, to register for these. As the situation around Coronavirus develops, there will be a number of vendors who aren't

able to sell initially, whether due to shielding as a result of health conditions, or not having the above in place. We will continue to support these people through the hardship fund, so please continue to look out for the magazine online, in shops or from a vendor. More information can be found at www.bigissuenorth.com. Thank you for all your support.'

Viral Song

Unseen, undetected, a virus invades,
with hideous potential for suffering and pain.
From human to human the pest makes its raids:
will all be infected in Being's great chain?
We cry out, O God, in our anguish and stress.
We seek understanding. We need you to bless.

Though many are fearful, yet some do not care:
they want to continue their life as before.
no evil can happen to them, they declare,
asserting their freedom, they'll flout any law.
O Father, bring hope for the world in its sin:
may all see the signs of your kingdom begin.

Can this be the truth we're unwilling to call:
the human, self-centred, refusing to share?
Is that the real virus, in one and in all,
which silently poisons what might have been fair?
How can we, O God, purge this ill from the earth?
How can we all flourish without a new birth?

And yet, in a crisis of desperate need,
the summons goes out for each person to hear,
and many respond, help their neighbours with speed,
forgetting themselves, bringing practical cheer.
By actions of love, whether many or few,
your Spirit, O God, starts what Jesus would do.

In those who are willing to help with a smile,
defeating this sickness with boldness and grace,
and willing to travel an extra-long mile,
the virus of evil's pushed back in its place.
We cried out, O God, in our anguish and stress,
And now you have shown us that you can still bless.

Nick Jowett

March 2020