



# The Rise of Christian Social Franchises: Responding to UK Poverty

A Report for Voluntary Sector Leaders

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Credit: Beth Waters

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## About the Author

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Faith-based organisations (FBOs) are playing a key role in responding to poverty in the UK, but the question of how UK FBOs have grown so rapidly has not been addressed. In response, this report seeks to understand the rise of Christian social franchises responding to UK poverty over the last two decades.
- Social franchising is a model that operates like commercial franchising, but in a not-for-profit context for societal benefit.
- This report is written for voluntary sector leaders (of FBOs and otherwise) to analyse the role of social franchising in organisations' growth. It is based on research with five Christian FBOs in the UK.
- The report concludes that social franchising has been vital to the growth of Christian FBOs responding to poverty in the UK since 2000 because it has provided a means of quality assurance for replication, thereby providing the means for a tailored local response to be replicated nationally.
- In doing so social franchising has also provided the opportunity for organisations to gather local data on the causes and existence of poverty in the UK and to use this data for national campaigning, including to influence national UK government policymaking.
- People and place have been key to the operational characteristics of successful faith-based social franchises, in particular: the founders' visions with their Christian faith and determination for success, the importance of a strong staff team, and the value of church networks and word of mouth for franchise growth.
- The report concludes with 4 implications for voluntary sector leaders and practitioners (explored with recommended actions in section 5):
  1. Post Covid-19 pandemic, there is a question over **partner and volunteer retainment**, particularly in facing challenges of the 'cost of living crisis' following over a decade of austerity with volunteer burnout.
  2. There is an issue around **funding** for faith-based social franchises and their partners. This financial need is an increasing issue in the context of austerity, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the current 'cost of living crisis' as charitable donations are falling and budgets are increasingly stretched.
  3. There is the question over **market saturation** for churches and social action initiatives. As one research participant questioned, will churches individually and collectively reach a point in which they are at capacity for the number of social action projects that they can run?
  4. This research has shown the efficiency of social franchising for responding to poverty in the UK, and yet also a challenge for organisations and their staff and volunteers in responding to **rising levels of poverty**.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Faith-based organisations (FBOs) are key actors in responding to poverty in the UK (Cloke et al., 2013), with Christian organisations forming a significant element of this response (Shannahan & Denning, 2023). The number of Christian FBOs has grown significantly in the last two decades. For example, the majority of independent and Trussell Trust food banks in the UK are run by Christians (Loopstra et al., 2019). However, a question that has not been addressed is:

*How have Christian FBOs grown so rapidly since 1990, and what are the implications of this for their future growth and sustainability?*

This is important because attention needs to be given to the *mechanism of growth* of FBOs as well as the results of their social action (for example the giving of food parcels and debt counselling) to learn lessons for future growth and responses to poverty. In response to this question, this report focusses on the growth of Christian FBOs in the UK over the last two decades through social franchising. Social franchising is a model that operates like commercial franchising, but in a not-for-profit context for social benefit (Naatu & Alon, 2019).

The report is based on research with five Christian FBOs in the UK. The research took place at Coventry University in 2022-2023 and was funded by the Royal Geographical Society with the Institute for British Geographers. This report is written for voluntary sector leaders (of faith-based organisations and otherwise) to analyse the role of social franchising in organisations' growth.

The remainder of this report is formed of four sections. First, **Section 2. The Context** examines the role of FBOs in UK society and outlines the concept of social franchising. **Section 3. Methodology** details how this research was undertaken, the organisations which took part, and the senior leaders who were interviewed. **Section 4. Key Findings** presents findings around how Christian social franchises have grown in the UK since 2000, their key operational characteristics, organisational short and long-term visions, and challenges for growth and sustainability. Finally, **Section 5. Conclusions and Implications** draws the report together, arguing that social franchising has been vital to the growth of Christian FBOs responding to poverty in the UK since 2000 because it has provided the means for a tailored local response to be replicated nationally.

## A note on language:

The organisations involved in this research all operate on what is essentially a social franchise model. However, the majority of the organisations did not use the language of franchising externally, and most but not all used this language internally. More commonly they used the language of **partnering** and/or being part of a **network** or **movement**. All of the organisations in this research charge a fee for being part of the network/franchise and have a partnership or franchise agreement/contract.

## 2. THE CONTEXT

### 2.1. The role of FBOs in UK society

Poverty levels in the UK have reached 13.4 million people (JRF, 2023), with the number of people living in poverty set to rise by over 3 million in 2023-2024 (Corlett & Try, 2022). The welfare state is no longer sufficient to keep people out of poverty (APPG on Poverty, 2023) and so the voluntary sector is playing an increasingly important role in responding to poverty in the UK despite experiencing decreasing resources including a decline in the number of people volunteering (NCVO, 2021). The challenges that the voluntary sector are facing have been exacerbated by operating in the context of over a decade of austerity, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the current so called 'cost of living crisis' (NCVO, 2021; Shannahan & Denning, 2023).

In this context, Churches and faith-based organisations (FBOs) have been key responders within the voluntary sector (Denning et al., 2021). Due to their prominence this report focusses on Christian FBOs, whilst recognising the role of other faiths in responding to poverty in the UK. For example, the Cinnamon Network's 2016 National Audit found that there are around 210,000 Christian social action projects in the UK reaching 47 million beneficiaries through 1.8 million volunteers. This is evidence of the strong social capital that faith groups and FBOs hold in UK society (Shannahan, 2010) and that contrary to the secularisation theses of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (for example see Bruce, 2002), faith remains an active and integral part of society (for example see Cloke et al., 2019).



**The role of faith in society. Credit: Life on the Breadline and Beth Waters**

This report's approach to research is framed in the social sciences, particularly human geography. Whilst geographers – and across the social sciences – have examined the voluntary sector's response to food poverty, this has often neglected the role of FBOs. Exceptions include geographers of religion who have given attention to the role of FBOs

in relation to the role of religion in people's daily lives and volunteering experiences (for example Denning, 2021; Hopkins et al., 2015), and the role of FBOs in society and in relation to the welfare state (for example Cloke et al., 2019). However, geographers – and the social sciences more broadly – have not given attention to *how many* Christian organisations have rapidly grown during UK austerity. This is important to understand so that voluntary sector leaders, practitioners, and academics can learn lessons for organisations' future growth and responses to poverty.

## 2.2. Social franchising

This report focusses on the growth of FBOs through social franchising. Social franchising is an emerging area of research which requires further attention (Crawford-Spencer & Cantatore, 2016). This focus has been chosen because of the prominence of social franchising amongst Christian FBOs, for example evidenced by the Cinnamon Network<sup>1</sup>.

There is not a universally agreed definition of social franchising, but in the *Social Franchising Manual*, Temple (2011, p. 4) defines it as:

*Social franchising is the use of a commercial franchising approach to replicate and share proven organisational models for greater social impact.*

Much of the literature on social franchising is based within Marketing and gives attention to the differences between commercial and social franchising, and the practicalities of establishing and running a social franchise (for example Cumberland & Litalien, 2018; Naatu & Alon, 2019). Whilst there is some literature on social franchising by voluntary sector researchers, there is little engagement with the issue in the social sciences. Drawing from social and cultural geography, this report takes a different angle to examine the role of social franchising in the growth of Christian FBOs responding to poverty in the UK.

### **What is the difference between FBOs using social franchising and a social enterprise?**

A social enterprise is a business with the aim of profit primarily for societal benefit (Department for Business and Innovation Skills, 2011). Some social enterprises use the method of social franchising. FBOs using social franchising also have the aim of societal benefit, but they are charitable organisations rather than businesses. The key difference here is therefore that FBOs using social franchising are charities, whilst social enterprises are businesses (although they may be affiliated with a charity or be a Community Interest Company).

<sup>1</sup> See <https://cinnamonnetwork.co.uk/>

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Five national Christian faith-based (or faith inspired<sup>2</sup>) organisations whose work focusses on responding to poverty in the UK were involved in the research:

Christians  
Against  
Poverty (CAP)

The Trussell  
Trust

MakeLunch

Transforming  
Lives for Good  
(TLG)

Kids Matter

These organisations were chosen for their breadth; they included organisations that were founded two decades ago as well as more recently, and whilst all of the organisations operate nationally, they varied in size. This report focusses on Christian social franchises rather than other faiths due to their dominance in the UK.

All of the research participants were fully briefed about the research and gave their consent to take part. It was optional for all organisations and people to take part in the research. People and organisations' real names are used in this report with their permission. People's roles are referred to as correct at the time of the interview. The research gained ethical approval from the Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations at Coventry University. Table 1 summarises key information about each organisation involved in the research from document analysis of their websites.

The qualitative methodology was formed of two parts:

- 1) **Online interviews with senior leaders of the five organisations**
- 2) **Document analysis of the five organisations' websites**

Interviews were conducted on Zoom with nine senior leaders at the five organisations:

1. **Matt Barlow** (former UK Chief Executive of CAP) – interview took place in February 2023.
2. **Lyn Weston** (Director of Church Engagement and Network at CAP) – interview took place in February 2023.
3. **Patrick and Carol Henderson** (the founders of the Trussell Trust) – interview took place in February 2023.
4. **Danni Malone** (Director of Network Programmes and Innovation at the Trussell Trust) – interview took place in January 2023.
5. **Rachel Warwick** (founder and Director of MakeLunch) – interview took place in January 2023.
6. **Lindsay Graham** (patron of MakeLunch) – interview took place in January 2023.
7. **Chris Blackham** (Director of Programmes and Impact at TLG) – interview took place in January 2023.
8. **Eli Gardner** (co-founder and Executive Director of Kids Matter) – interview took place in February 2023.
9. An anonymous **leader at Kids Matter** – interview took place in January 2023.

<sup>2</sup> The Trussell Trust now identifies as an organisation which is “rooted, guided, and shaped by Christian values” (Danni Malone, interview, 2023) rather than as a Christian organisation.



**Interviews** lasted on average 50 minutes and were semi-structured covering their role at the organisation, the start of the organisation, the growth of the organisation, and finally the sustainability of the organisation. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

**Document analysis** was also completed of the five organisations' websites including their publicly available resources. The document analysis themes included location, staff and trustee details, vision and mission, activity undertaken, religious faith connection, partnership details, evaluation, impact, and finances. Analysis of the interviews and document analysis was undertaken thematically in NVivo around the project's research questions.

Organisation	Founded	Focus	Activities	Christian faith
CAP	1996	Debt	CAP Debt Centres, CAP Money Course, and CAP Life Skills.	A 'Christ-centred' <sup>3</sup> organisation with over 800 people having 'made a response to Jesus since 2010' <sup>4</sup> .
TLG	1998	Struggling children	Early Intervention (mentoring in schools) and MakeLunch.	Christian organisation that partners with local churches.
Trussell Trust	2000	Food poverty	Food banks giving three days of emergency food provisions (called a food parcel).	Now identifies as an organisation which is "rooted, guided, and shaped by Christian values" (Danni Malone, interview, 2023) rather than as a Christian organisation.
MakeLunch	2011	Holiday hunger	Holiday clubs for food and play. Became part of TLG in 2018.	Christian organisation that partnered with local churches serving children of any or no faith.
Kids Matter	2017	Parenting skills	Parenting programmes: Kids Matter in the Community, Babies Matter, and Kids Matter in Prison.	Christian organisation that partners with local churches serving parents of any or no faith.

**Table 1: The five organisations involved in the research**

<sup>3</sup> See <https://capuk.org/about-us/our-vision>

<sup>4</sup> See <https://capuk.org/about-us/our-impact>

## 4. KEY FINDINGS

The key findings are formed of four parts; how Christian social franchises have grown in the UK since 2000; their key operational characteristics; short and long-term visions; and challenges for growth and sustainability.

### 4.1. How Christian Social Franchises Have Grown in the UK Since 2000

Each of the five organisations had a key founder(s) whose particular life experiences caused them to found their organisation. Each organisation has responded to a societal need through social action (shown in Table 1) and often with an element of campaigning, and their founders intended the organisation to have national growth. Each therefore started locally then grew nationally through a franchise/partnering model.

TLG, CAP and Kids Matter developed several programmes over time, whilst the Trussell Trust and MakeLunch have/had one primary response to their chosen issue. Table 2 shows the growth of each organisation from its founding to the present day. Each was founded in the context of the founder's Christian faith.

Organisation	Growth	Current size in 2023
<b>CAP</b>	S shaped growth curve, the number of debt centres has been static around 300 since 2016 primarily due to CAP's system capacity. CAP Money courses have continued to grow.	Over 400 staff, and over 1300 projects and courses in 2021.
<b>TLG</b>	Education Centres from 1998, then Early Intervention Programmes from 2013, and MakeLunch from 2018. Education Centres closed in 2023.	250 partner churches.
<b>Trussell Trust</b>	Huge increase in number of foodbanks until 2014, then stable since then although the number of food parcels given continues to rise massively.	Over 1200 foodbank centres, accounting for around two thirds of UK foodbanks.
<b>MakeLunch</b>	3 MakeLunch kitchens in 2011, and almost 100 by 2018.	Now part of TLG.
<b>Kids Matter</b>	Mainly grown in the south and Midlands, and negatively affected by Covid-19 pandemic. Now looking for intentional growth in north of England.	15 staff, 102 facilitators, and 63 partners.

**Table 2: The growth of the five organisations who took part in the research**

All five organisations have used franchising since their inception or early on in their growth, with CAP and the Trussell Trust some of the first and now largest Christian social franchises in the UK. An important reminder on language: whilst most organisations use the word 'franchising' to varying degrees internally, the majority

externally more commonly use words such as ‘partnering’ or referred to their ‘network’ or ‘movement’. Chris Blackham at TLG summarised what franchising means for them:

*It's essentially a programme in a box that we can equip a local church to run. 'Chris Blackham, TLG interview, 1-12(*

Several points can be drawn out from Chris' quote which apply across the interviewees' discussion of the role of franchising in their organisations' growth. First, franchising provided a tried and tested model that can be replicated by other churches. Secondly, resourcing the Church was important and central to the mission of many of the organisations. Thirdly, the word 'equip' shows that this did not aim to be a paternalistic relationship, but rather one of resourcing and enabling, with individual churches having ownership of their project.



**A MakeLunch project. Credit: Stephanie Denning**

Similarly, Danni Malone at the Trussell Trust shared that the Trussell Trust has moved away from large internal assessments of their partners towards self-assessment and more emphasis on local contexts (Danni Malone, Trussell Trust interview, 2023). Patrick and Carol Henderson, the founders of the Trussell Trust, explained the Trust's initial growth in the early 2000s:

*Carol: we learnt the importance of local doing a local thing<sup>9</sup> So I think we then had a bit of an idea about that others might, other areas might be involved and then we started getting enquiries and so on.*

*Patrick: And then once we did that we started to design on a petal basis, so we were the centre of the flower and the outside of the flower were all the petals<sup>9</sup> so it started to radiate out like a flower*

*and we were [in the centre]. Well we had never conceived on day one that we were going to go to that [Trussell Trust's current] size.' Carol and Patrick Henderson, Trussell Trust interview, 1 =1 2(*

Franchising and partnering was therefore key to the Trussell Trust's growth, with the Trust ultimately becoming one of the largest social franchises responding to poverty in the UK. The Trussell Trust emphasises that its foodbanks are part of a network.

Interviews with MakeLunch add another dimension on the importance of franchising:

*Franchising showed a 'measure of quality and standard' 'Lindsay Graham, MakeLunch interview, 1 =1 2(*

*'<sup>9</sup> so what franchising meant was it was safe for us and the church to do it.' 'Rachel Warwick, MakeLunch interview, 1 =1 2(*

Franchising meant that standards were in place including for safeguarding, health and safety, food hygiene where applicable, and insurance. This provided assurance for the organisation centrally that appropriate standards were being met across their network, but also meant that each project locally did not need to reinvent the wheel to identify how they should be running. To set out and ensure that standards are met, each organisation has a franchise or partnership agreement. In addition, each has a membership fee and often ask for a particular level of engagement, for example Kids Matter asks partners to run two programmes a year, each lasting six weeks, and to engage with parents in-between.

Overall, franchising allowed the seed idea of an inspired individual with a tried and tested response to poverty to replicate the idea nationally, but with keeping emphasis on local relationships and connections and without the need to be solely or legally response for each individual initiative.

## 4.2. Key Findings: Key Operational Characteristics

People and place are key to the operational characteristics of the faith-based social franchises and are drawn out by the geographical approach that this report takes.

Foremost, the **founders' visions, determination** for success (in terms of organisational growth and responding to poverty), and **their personal stories** of how the organisations were founded show the importance of individual people for the organisations and their franchises. For example, Rachel Warwick founded MakeLunch after watching the television documentary *Poor Kids* which showed the extent of child poverty in the UK, including the impact of not having free school meals in the school holidays. Rachel was affected by the documentary and with her background in education looked for charities that were responding to holiday hunger. When she found that none existed, that led to the founding of MakeLunch (Rachel Warwick, MakeLunch interview 2023). In different circumstances, each founder has an equally personal story of how they founded their organisation, including the impact of their Christian faith.

**Christian faith** has shaped all of the organisations, and all work with churches with the Trussell Trust the only organisation in the research who partners with groups who are not churches/Christian partners. At CAP all staff members are Christian with Lyn Weston explaining that the Christian faith was “like our DNA”:

*It [Christian faith] isn't something on the side, it is our everything and it is our sole purpose, is to bring more people to know the love for Jesus through helping them with material poverty, but we are also very focused on spiritual poverty as well. <sup>9</sup> it's like our DNA. 'Lyn Weston, CAP interview, 1 = 1 2(*

She added that CAP helps people of any or no faith, and Matt Barlow former UK Chief Executive of CAP noted that although people receiving CAP services were offered prayer, they were free to decline this (Matt Barlow, CAP interview, 2023). Amongst the other organisations in the research there was variety over whether all of their volunteers were Christian (TLG) or of any or no faith (the Trussell Trust, Kids Matter, MakeLunch), with variety again for volunteer leaders. What was key for all of the organisations was how Christian faith has shaped their visions and directions, for example at TLG there is the belief that the Church can show children that they are loved by God and can change the negative narratives that society tells them (Chris Blackham, TLG interview, 2023).



**A Trussell Trust foodbank. Credit: Stephanie Denning**

Stemming out from founders, the interviewees all shared to varying degrees how the **right staff team** has been key to their growth, and how the leader (who is not necessarily the founder) has been key to the vision and direction of the organisation. For example, Patrick Henderson’s experience in the army was influential for the Trussell Trust’s development of organisational structures including the food parcels which were similar to army rations (Patrick and Carol Henderson, Trussell Trust interview, 2023). When Emma Revie became CEO of the Trussell Trust in 2018 the Trust’s vision explicitly shifted to ending the need for foodbanks although this did build on previous work of

the Trussell Trust (Danni Malone, Trussell Trust interview 2023). However, several interviewees noted a challenge in wanting to have more diversity and inclusion in their volunteer teams and leaders, for example to have more leaders from the communities in which projects are working and responding to/serving.

An interview with a leader at Kids Matter shows the importance of place for the organisations' growth, success, and franchise:

***9 we believe this is the mandate of all Christians to be able to serve their local communities. 'Leader, Kids Matter interview, 1 =1 2(***

There are several points to draw out from this quote which show the importance of place within the organisations' key operational characteristics. First, **churches are found in every local community of the UK**, including where there is deprivation – and the organisations in the research including Kids Matter have purposely worked with this for organisational growth through **church networks**, and often through personal connections and **word of mouth** in church communities. The Kids Matter Leader also shared in their interview that *„relationship building is key“* for growth with new partners rather than “cold calling” (Leader, Kids Matter interview, 2023). This was in common across the organisations. Secondly, the quote draws out the importance of **local**: franchising allows a focus on local context and need which is replicated through the franchise for national growth and coverage and national social impact on poverty. Linking people and place, interviews showed the huge importance of the local in fostering successful relationships for organisational growth and success, particularly in terms of having local partners with on the ground experience, and responses being to local need. Lindsay Graham, patron of MakeLunch, illustrates this point:

***The beauty of MakeLunch was it was local people helping the local people who knew where things were, who knew what agencies to refer to, who recognised what kind of dietary needs that people might have. 'Lindsay Graham MakeLunch interview, 1 =1 2(***

Thirdly, both the interviews and the organisations' websites show how franchising **joined up local places to gather data and stories for national campaigning** on the causes of poverty. For example, the Trussell Trust successfully campaigned with others to reduce the six week wait for the first Universal Credit payment<sup>5</sup>, MakeLunch was involved in Frank Field's holiday hunger bill formally called the School Holidays (Meals and Activities) Bill (Lindsay Graham, MakeLunch interview, 2023), and CAP has successfully campaigned on ending unfair prepayment meter charges<sup>6</sup>.

Overall, the relationship between people and place has often been key to the organisations' growth, and through this franchising provides the means for the local to be replicated nationally.

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/04/Early-Warnings-Universal-Credit-and-Foodbanks.pdf>

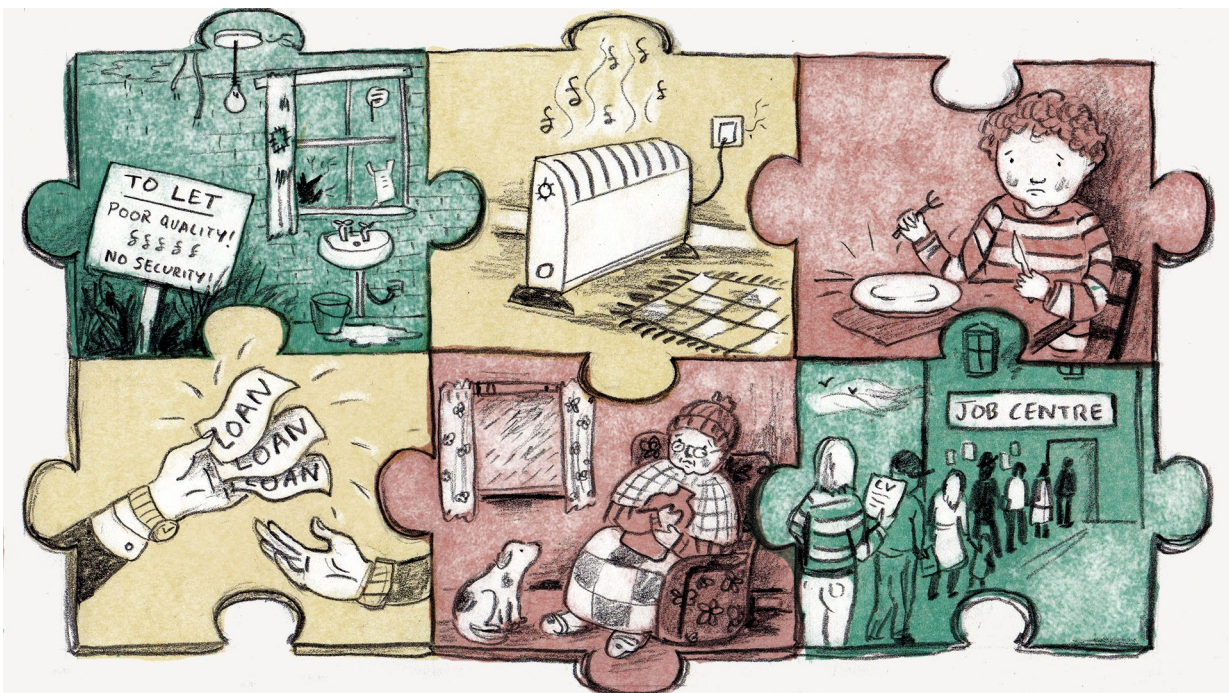
<sup>6</sup> See <https://capuk.org/about-us/policy-and-research>

### 4.3. Key Findings: Short and Long-Term Visions

Each organisation has a vision in terms of their mission (the change that they want to achieve in society), and then often also in terms of their growth or reach in the short and long-term, or the introduction of a new programme.

For example, the initial vision of TLG was to be an education charity to help children excluded from mainstream school. Through the development of its Early Intervention Programme and MakeLunch (and the closing in 2023 of the Education Centres Programme), the short-term vision is now to reach 10,000 children/year (they are currently reaching around 5,000 children/year and during the Covid-19 pandemic reached around 8,000 children/year). Chris Blackham at TLG explained that this is a short-term vision because the number of children in need is much greater. Their long-term vision is therefore to resource churches in towns and villages across the UK to make a difference for struggling children and families, and for TLG to partner with churches and other organisations to do this. In doing so, TLG has shifted from being an education charity to being a children's charity (Chris Blackham, TLG interview, 2023).

What role does franchising play within the organisations' visions? First, franchising is key within these visions because **franchising is the mechanism** by which the programmes/projects are developed and then are delivered, and that growth happens through churches/groups partnering. Secondly, franchising has also been important in the inclusion of **national campaigning** on the causes of poverty within the visions of the organisations. This is because franchising has provided a means to join up the local and national with local partners providing data and impetus into the central headquarters of the organisations for strategic national campaigning. Thirdly, franchising has **influenced the organisations' visions** by learning on the ground at local projects to gain understanding of both local and national need, and how to effectively respond to this need through social action and campaigning.



The jigsaw of poverty. Credit: Life on the Breadline and Beth Waters

## 4.4. Key Findings: Challenges for Growth and Sustainability

We have established that franchising has been integral to the organisations' growth, and that people and place have played a key role. However, this is not enough to guarantee success in terms of continued growth and sustainability. What other factors have played a role? Four main areas emerged from the leader interviews.

First, the **Covid-19 pandemic** presented both challenges and opportunities for the organisations, with the swing largely depending on the programmes that they run and whether these could be adapted to pandemic restrictions, and the size of the organisation when the pandemic hit. For example, Kids Matter was in its relative infancy compared to the other organisations in this research and did not have the same strength of organisational base to fall back on, so the pandemic negatively affected their growth (Eli Gardner, Kids Matter interview, 2023). In contrast, whilst the pandemic did pose challenges for TLG and overall negatively affected their partner numbers, their MakeLunch programme grew during this period as it adapted with Covid safe measures (Chris Blackham, TLG interview, 2023). Post-pandemic there has been a challenge that nationally volunteer numbers have fallen (NCVO, 2021), with increased concern from interviewees that volunteers are experiencing burnout of continually responding to crisis. If organisations' partners do not have enough volunteers, then their programmes and projects cannot adequately function.



The 'cost of living crisis'. Credit: Hidden Hardship and Beth Waters



Secondly, **funding** is a challenge for all of the organisations to varying degrees, with several leaders raising that there is a lack of funding for medium sized charities compared to start-ups and larger charities. For example, the founder of MakeLunch, Rachel Warwick, shared that she had always intended to hand over the running of the organisation at some point, but that funding ultimately was the primary reason that MakeLunch was absorbed into TLG (Rachel Warwick, MakeLunch interview, 2023). TLG has a finance model with rental income from serviced offices, which helps its financial sustainability (Chris Blackham, TLG interview, 2023). However, post-pandemic with declining church attendance the income of Churches has often fallen, and in turn the donations that Churches give to charities has fallen, as has the amount donated from the general public to several of the organisations in the current 'cost of living crisis'.

Thirdly, **franchise growth** itself has also presented a challenge due to the number of Christian FBOs that there now are in the UK making it to some degree a saturated space to operate in; with Eli Gardner at Kids Matter reflecting that there is "only so much the church can do":

*I think since we've started, so in the last 0- years, it's quite a saturated space so there are quite a few really good programmes<sup>9</sup> that are wanting the Church to do this and we all believe, 'The Church should be doing more in this space, the Church should be doing more for the lonely and more for the families and children', and there's only so much the Church can do. 'Eli Gardner, Kids Matter interview, 1 =1 2(*

This raises a question over whether the number of Christian FBOs can keep growing, and whether all franchises can keep growing, or whether Churches have a maximum operational and volunteer capacity. This will have an affect on the sustainability of Christian FBOs and franchises.



Poverty in the UK. Credit: Hidden Hardship and Beth Waters

Fourthly, organisations have been challenged by the **levels of poverty in the UK** that they are responding to. Matt Barlow, former UK Chief Executive of CAP raised in his interview the problem that CAP is increasingly facing that if people's incomes within their budgets are simply too low then they cannot be supported out of debt (Matt Barlow, CAP interview, 2023) in addition to Lyn Weston sharing that the 'cost of living crisis' is the current biggest single challenge that CAP is facing (Lyn Weston, CAP interview, 2023):

*A big challenge they face is that they've got a lot of what we call broken budgets<sup>9</sup> I think it's 3=/ or 4=/ or something like that of budgets they sit down with people<sup>9</sup> their essential expenditure is greater than their income<sup>9</sup> whereas it used to be<sup>9</sup> rare you'd get a budget you couldn't balance in some way... And so that whole feeling of like it being a total lost cause, and that's challenging for churches, it's challenging for centre managers, it's challenging for head office staff. 'Matt Barlow, CAP interview, 1 =1 2(*

Danni Malone at Trussell Trust reflected that it is a challenge when reality moves in the opposite direction to organisations' visions, and that in the organisation's history it is unusual that some foodbanks are now needing to buy supplies to have sufficient stock to meeting rising demand for foodbank parcels (Danni Malone, Trussell Trust interview, 2023).

Overall, whilst franchising has been key for the rise and growth of Christian organisations responding to poverty in the UK in recent decades, it is not immune to challenges posed by poverty levels themselves and the wider voluntary sector landscape. The implications of these challenges are discussed in section 5.1.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In conclusion, social franchising has been vital to the growth of Christian FBOs responding to poverty in the UK since 2000 because it has provided a means of quality assurance for replication, thereby providing the means for a tailored local response to be replicated nationally. In doing so this has also provided the opportunity for organisations to gather local data on the causes and existence of poverty in the UK and to use this data for national campaigning, including to influence national UK government policymaking. This has been important for social action providers not only to be responding to people's needs, but also to be working towards reducing and resolving the existence of poverty in the UK.

People and place have been key to the operational characteristics of successful faith-based social franchises, in particular: the founders' visions with their Christian faith and determination for success, the importance of a strong staff team, and the value of church networks and word of mouth for franchise growth. In this way, franchising has been the mechanism by which the organisations' visions have been implemented including the advantages for joining up the local and national for campaigning on poverty and making use of local insights for national visions on both campaigning and programme development.

This crucial role of social franchising for the voluntary sector response to poverty in the UK through Christian organisations looks set to continue into the future. Four main areas emerged in the research findings as challenges for growth and sustainability: the Covid-19 pandemic, funding, franchise growth, and the levels of poverty in the UK. The implications of each of these with associated actions are discussed below.

### 5.1. Implications

1. Post Covid-19 pandemic, there is a question over **partner and volunteer retainment**, particularly in facing challenges of the 'cost of living crisis' following over a decade of austerity with volunteer burnout.
  - 1.1. Further research is required on this issue to improve the sustainability of faith-based organisations relying upon volunteers to respond to poverty in the UK.
2. There is an issue around **funding** for faith-based social franchises and their initiatives. This financial need is an increasing issue in the context of austerity, the Covid-19 pandemic, and the current 'cost of living crisis' as charitable donations are falling and budgets are increasingly stretched.
  - 2.1. For the social franchise organisations themselves there is an issue of having sustainable funding. Research participants particularly identified a lack of external funding opportunities and providers for medium sized charities compared to start-ups. It would be beneficial for this to be addressed across the voluntary sector.
  - 2.2. For organisations' individual partners to be part of the franchises there is a financial requirement and commitment first to join the franchise networks, and secondly to run the programmes and activities. One response to this to

encourage long-term sustainability is to follow the example of Kids Matter in having price points depend on the church's income.

3. There is the question over **market saturation** for churches and social action initiatives. As one research participant questioned, will churches individually and collectively reach a point in which they are at capacity for the number of social action projects that they can run?
  - 3.1. It would be beneficial for more partnerships between faith-based organisations to further increase co-operation between organisations and to decrease unnecessary competition as social action providers seeking church and volunteer resources.
4. This research has shown the efficiency of social franchising for responding to poverty in the UK, and yet also a challenge for organisations and their staff and volunteers in responding to **rising levels of poverty**.
  - 4.1. In response to this, there is an opportunity for more joined-up and collaborative campaigning on the causes of poverty because bringing together the local initiatives of the wide variety of faith-based social franchises (and indeed across the voluntary sector) would provide strong evidence for national campaigning.



The spiral of hardship. Credit: Hidden Hardship and Beth Waters

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