

Beyond the Food Parcel

How We're Helping Families Break Free from Poverty

For twenty years, Narthex has handed out thousands of food parcels to families in crisis across Birmingham. But we've learned something important: **feeding people today doesn't stop them being hungry tomorrow.**

That's why we're changing everything.

The Lightbulb Moment

Sarah's Story

Sarah came to our food bank drowning in debt. Her energy company was demanding £2,389 and threatening debt collectors. She couldn't read the bills because English isn't her first language, and she was terrified.

Instead of just giving Sarah a food parcel and sending her on her way, our advisor sat down with her. Together, they discovered the bill was wrong—it was an estimate, not based on actual usage. After submitting real meter

readings, the debt dropped to £1,195. Then we helped Sarah apply for a grant that wiped out the remaining debt entirely.

"I can't believe the difference the help has made. I was extremely distressed and worried about how I was going to manage."

— Sarah

Sarah hasn't needed a food parcel since.

From Sticking Plasters to Real Solutions

This is happening every day now at Narthex. An elderly Pakistani couple discovered they were entitled to benefits they'd never heard of. A father learned how to navigate the benefits system so he'd never face sanctions again. Real people, getting real help, changing their lives permanently.

We call it our **"Journey to Change" strategy**. Instead of just giving people food when they're desperate, we're tackling the reasons they need food banks in the first place.

The Results Speak for Themselves

£2.4M

Put back into families' pockets

1/3

Fewer people returning to food banks

£4-7

Value created for every £1 invested



What Actually Happens Now

When someone comes to Narthex today, yes, they get the food they need. But they also get something more valuable: time with an advisor who speaks their language and understands their situation.



Energy Bills

Challenging wrong estimates and helping families access grants to clear arrears



Benefits Support

Ensuring families claim everything they're entitled to, not just basic support



Council Tax

Securing reductions that can save families over £1,000 per year

Our advisors don't just signpost—they sit with people, make the phone calls, fill out the forms, and fight the battles that families can't fight alone.

The Ripple Effect

Here's what we've discovered: when you solve someone's financial crisis, you solve so much more.

Children sleep better when parents aren't lying awake worrying about debt. Relationships improve when the stress of poverty lifts. People start thinking about the future instead of just surviving today.

And something beautiful happens: **the people we help become helpers themselves**. Former service users are now volunteering, mentoring others, leading community groups. They're not just getting out of poverty—they're pulling others up with them.

GB Why This Matters Beyond Birmingham

Sparkhill isn't unique. Every town and city in Britain has families trapped in cycles of crisis, visiting food banks month after month, year after year. The traditional model isn't working—not for the families, not for the services trying to help them, and not for society.

Our approach proves there's another way. **Instead of managing poverty for people, we need to focus on supporting them to manage it for themselves.**

The Hard Truth About Change

This transformation isn't easy. It means training staff differently, working with partners differently, measuring success differently. Some people prefer the simplicity of handing out food parcels and feeling good about helping.

But we've seen what happens when an energy debt gets written off, when someone discovers they're entitled to £200 extra each month, when a family moves from crisis to stability. Once you've seen that transformation, you can't go back to sticking plasters.

What's Next

Community Campaigns

Organising residents to tackle systemic issues together

Peer Leadership

Training former service users to become community advocates

System Change

Working with local authorities to transform how support is delivered

Community Event

February 2026: Stories of transformation in residents' own words

The Choice We Face

Every community faces a choice. We can keep running food banks forever, watching the same families struggle year after year. Or we can do something different.

At Narthex, we've made our choice. **We're not just feeding people—we're freeing them.**

Because everyone deserves more than survival. Everyone deserves the chance to thrive.

Be Part of the Journey

When you support Narthex, you're investing in people's potential, not just their immediate needs. You're helping families become the authors of

their own change—writing stories of independence, resilience, and hope.

Support Our Mission

Narthex has been supporting communities in Sparkhill, Birmingham since 2003. Our "Journey to Change" strategy launched in 2024, supported by strategic grants from the Trussell Trust and other partners committed to sustainable change.

About the author: Patricia Coleman-Taylor is CEO of Narthex. For more information about our work and impact, visit www.narthex.org.uk