

A Day in Dominic Watters' Fieldwork

I arrive at the same foodbank that my daughter and me were receiving food packages from only a few years before – and during COVID-19. Uber's don't collect fares from my part of the estate, so I got the bus to the Wetherspoons and ordered a taxi to the foodbank HQ from there. It's in an industrial estate about 4.5 miles away. I now have the ability to claim back for travel, as a community researcher, but I have a slight learning difficulty that makes me not even want to attempt to fill out complicated online forms – this made Universal Credit even more of a nightmare than it was designed to be. As I approach the foodbank I see people busy stacking the shelves and the manager is inside smiling at me. I feel welcome.

We go up the stairs to the operations office. I remember to put my phone on DnD, (Do not Disturb) and turn on (record) VoiceMemo – not doing so has led me to miss some vital and unifying insights in the past, just a week before. In the office I feel ok. This is a manager of the foodbank, featured days before in The Guardian newspaper that knows me, his eyes aren't removed from my struggle. We discuss the dramatically increased demand on their service, the same that MP Rosie Duffield had just noted in the House of Commons. We openly reflect on the reasons underpinning the misuse of the food-aid due to what I suggest is rooted in a snobbery and contempt for the poor. He offers an important piece about the change in people's circumstances. How some might have lost their job, become carers, not be able to cope with the costs of living.

The conversation is rich, we discuss the challenges, the contents of each package, the distribution method, even the outreach he supported me with about a year before – through my West African church and him we had helped people I know are poor but would not reach out to a foodbank. (Is this part of the stigma I often hear them talk about?) He is impressed, no not impressed but expresses a calm delight when hearing I am part of the Citizen Advisory Counsel for the National Food Strategy. We talk about food system resilience issues, even down to the expectation of having a three-day, preparedness food supply at any one time, and my prayer to over come the lack of access to fresh food in my food desert council estate. In our shop you get blueberry vapes, but no blueberries. While we are acknowledging each other's heart and drive people busy meeting the demand are knocking on the office door and some even say, "oh wow Dominic how are you". It feels amazing the reception I get from people who heard me on the radio or who just recognize where I am from. After I pause the audio recording the lady sharing the office reaches out to communicate her support for what I am doing.

The demand on the foodbank is 47% higher than it was 5 years ago¹, and as I leave there is no way to ignore the amount of people, teamwork, and passion to address inequality that is at work here. He hugs me. As I walk out the warehouse I feel a happiness, a deep sense of achievement. Not one that comes from buying a Rolex or a new car – not that I'd know, yet – but one that derives from being a small vehicle in delivering on a purpose that connects with unheard people, people with lived and living experience² of food insecurity, like my neighbours.

¹ <https://www.trussell.org.uk/news-and-research/latest-stats/end-of-year-stats> last accessed 22nd Dec 2025

² Watters, D 2021 Social Distance in Social Work: Covid Capsule One, UK



Photo: Dominic Watters, the staff, volunteers and trustees of the local foodbank

Dominic Watters, 2026