

Edinburgh Students fight back against poverty

✘ *ESCAPE is a students group campaigning against poverty.*

In 2013 -2014, Trussell Trust food banks gave 913, 138 people a three day emergency food parcel in the UK.

These numbers are increasing every day. Only five years ago, Trussell Trust had five food banks opened across Britain. Today, that number stands at more than 400, and these statistics are increasingly evident within our local community.

As a member of ESCAPE, (Edinburgh Students' Coalition Against Poverty), I am part of an active group that aims to provide immediate relief to those suffering from food poverty. Initially creating ESCAPE as a grassroots group on the University of Edinburgh campus during May 2014, we came together with a common aim of providing practical solutions to domestic poverty. In collaboration with Trussell Trust food banks, we have set up a monthly food bank collection point at the University Chaplaincy. Our donations have increased throughout the year, with our December collection point accumulating 225kgs of food, enough for Trussell Trust to provide immediate help to 21 couples, providing three nutritionally balanced meals to last for at least three days.

As a group, ESCAPE recognises that food banks are not a long term solution to UK poverty levels. Therefore, we are active in extending our reach to a political level, in order to campaign for positive change. We have met with various MSPs in Scottish Parliament to voice our concerns of rising poverty levels, and have established contact with the city of Edinburgh Council.

After attending a Council meeting in December, ESCAPE's aims

for the New Year centre on strengthening this relationship, and assisting the Council through one of its key aims of reducing stigma surrounding poverty. One key way we aim to achieve this is through encouraging the city of Edinburgh Council to undertake a public poster campaign which raises awareness of which benefits citizens are able to claim.

Alongside our monthly collection point and political aims, we continue to highlight the importance of raising awareness of UK poverty levels. As a group, we have achieved this through public events held on campus, through which students and citizens can inform themselves of current issues. A key example of this was our well received Panel Discussion on the links between UK poverty levels and our Criminal Justice system, held in December 2014 with speakers from Families Outside and the Violence Reduction Unit.

Entering the New Year, ESCAPE hopes to use 2015 to continue our monthly food bank collection point, held on the first Wednesday of every month from 12-2, and increase political campaigning for a UK that doesn't require UK citizens to regularly visit food banks in order to survive.

Submitted by [Lucy Stevenson](#)

