

Telling it like it is

At its Prizes and Medals Ceremony on 27 September 2017, the British Academy presented awards to celebrate excellence in a wide range of achievements across the humanities and social sciences. The *British Academy Review* spoke to two of the winners about their work

Kayleigh Garthwaite



Dr Kayleigh Garthwaite is a Birmingham Fellow in the Department of Social Policy, Sociology and Criminology at the University of Birmingham. Her research covers foodbanks, ethnography and welfare reform. She has been awarded the Peter Townsend Prize for her book *Hunger Pains: Life inside foodbank Britain* (Policy Press, 2016). Dr Garthwaite has drawn on over 18 months' experience as a volunteer and researcher at a Trussell Trust foodbank in Stockton-on-Tees to explore the issues of poverty and inequality, welfare reform and austerity in the UK.

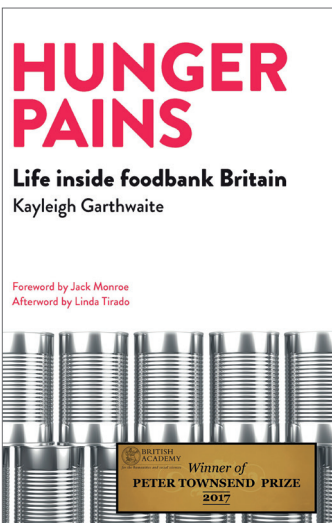
My initial motivation was to challenge the prejudice and stereotypes surrounding foodbanks. After I had spent nearly two and a half years interviewing people at the foodbank and getting to know their stories, one thing was clear: that people were keen to push against that prejudice. They wanted people, particularly politicians, to know what their lives were really like, and they would often ask me if the prejudice would change after the book.

There are a lot of misconceptions surrounding why people use foodbanks. For instance, a lot of the people who use them are in work. And people think you can just turn up to foodbanks and use them; but actually with Trussell Trust foodbanks, you need a voucher from a referring care professional such as a GP or social worker, and it's time-limited support, so people aren't able to rely on foodbanks indefinitely.

So that's one of the reasons I wrote the book in the way that I did: to attract a wider audience and challenge those stereotypes.

Originally, I had no intention of writing a book. I initially set out to do ethnographic research as part of a five-year project I was working on. Actually the foodbank was only what I did on my Friday mornings. The rest of the week I spent in some of the most deprived places in Stockton-on-Tees, investigating health inequalities. But over the course of time, with the stories people were telling me, it became clear that I had so much data, it would have been a shame to just write academic papers that other academics might or might not read. So I decided to put everything into a book.

I took quite an unstructured approach to my work, especially with the ethnographic research. I met a lot of people at the foodbank to begin with, and just sat and listened to them. I think a lot of people were just happy that someone had taken an interest in them and why they were there. If they go to the citizen's advice bureau to get a voucher for the foodbank, they have to be in and out – it's quite a quick, frantic process. Whereas I would sit there for as long as they wanted, and listen. Sometimes it would be for an hour and



a half. I'd then follow up with people in their homes a week or two later to see how their experience of the foodbank had gone, how they'd found the food – that sort of thing. So, I developed relationships over time – relationships I still have now.

Having written the book, my own views on foodbanks are still mixed. Being a volunteer at a foodbank, you feel like you're part of the problem, because foodbanks are tackling the symptom, not the cause. As long as foodbanks are there, it feels as though the government has less incentive actually to deal with why people are using them in the first place. So, there is a bit of a tension there, especially from a critical, academic perspective. And, going forward with universal credit and further changes to the welfare system, it just feels like foodbanks are here to stay.

Hunger Pains has had quite a big impact so far and hopefully will continue to do so. I managed to take the book to Westminster, where we had a launch last year with cross-party representation, despite it being only a few days after the Brexit referendum. I've also been invited to quite a lot of non-academic events, such as bookshop events, sixth-form talks, dinner groups and church groups, to help spread the book's findings. So hopefully it's having some sort of impact.

Politicians and policy-makers have been in touch to discuss my work and its implications. I've been contacted by a number of politicians from different parties to provide key findings and policy briefings based on the book's messages, and I'm hoping to meet up as well with some MPs in the coming weeks to try and again push the book's findings at a crucial time, as we assess the impact of universal credit. I think this is a really important time to try and affect some change.

Looking forward, I plan to conduct similar research into foodbank culture overseas. I want to do some comparative research looking at America and Canada because they're much further on in the foodbank system than we are. I'd quite like to look at whether the UK has now reached that institutionalisation of foodbanks; whether we can come away from it or whether they're here to stay. ■

The Peter Townsend Prize was established in 2011 in commemoration of Professor Peter Townsend FBA (1928–2009), one of the most distinguished global figures in contemporary social policy and sociology, who made an immeasurable contribution to policy-making in the areas of poverty and inequality.

Claudia Hammond



Claudia Hammond is a psychologist, author and broadcaster. She presents *All in the Mind* on BBC Radio 4, the world's longest-running psychology programme. The British Academy awarded her the President's Medal for her work in improving public understanding of psychology through broadcasting and writing for wider audiences.

We're about to start a new series now, and all the time we're discussing ideas. What will work, and will it be the sort of thing everyone else is interested in? We want to inspire people to think that the mind is interesting and that psychology is an important subject. The audience for *All in the Mind* is anyone who happens to be listening to Radio 4 at that moment. So everything we do has to be understandable and of interest to anyone.

I often meet people with mental health problems who say that this is the only half an hour in the week when they feel understood – they feel as though it's their programme. But I also meet lots of mental health professionals and psychologists, who think it's their programme. So if we're pleasing them all, that's really good.

We want to talk about mental health very openly, and get people to talk about it openly. And we want to question which treatments work best, and very much to look at the evidence first. We want people to know that *All in the Mind* is the place where things will be critiqued properly and looked at in a deeper way.

Sometimes not all the research that I may think is interesting is doable in the programme. I really like statistics, but I realise other people might not think they're as interesting as I do. So the question is: 'Is it explainable, and will people relate to it?' For example, talking about 'chunking' in memory research might seem too complex and obscure. But if you start talking about how you remember a shopping list, then people will relate to it a lot more.

Luckily, people are always bringing us stories. One of the advantages of the programme having run for so long is that lots of academics come and tell us about their research. Whenever I interview psychologists,



The British Academy's Prizes and Medals Ceremony was held on 27 September 2017. A full list of the winners can be found via www.britishacademy.ac.uk/prizes

they'll tell me about other psychologists who are doing interesting research. And I do lots of public events and people on panels tell me about the research they're doing. Sometimes the producers joke, 'We need to send Claudia to more things', just to get more ideas. People trust that we'll cover their research properly, so we have a big advantage there.

People often think we'll run out of ideas, but that is never an issue. We're always cursing at the end of each series that we don't have enough time and there's more we want to do.

***All in the Mind* was way ahead of its time.** In 1988, it was the world's first programme about psychology and mental health, and it's still the longest-running show on the subject. Now, there's a lot more about mental health on radio and TV, which I think is great. So I think the programme has had a real impact.

I'd love it if policy-makers were more tuned in to psychology. You'll always see an economist on a committee, but it's much rarer to see a psychologist. Yet there's so much relevant research from psychology that could be informing policy. To be fair, I think that policy-makers often don't know where to get that research. So psychologists need to get it out to them

in another way. Sometimes, though, you'll hear someone say they heard something on our programme and it influenced a particular policy, and that's really lovely – it's amazing. ■

The President's Medal rewards outstanding service to the cause of the humanities and social sciences. It covers a broad range of activities, including insightful journalism contributing to public understanding, use of research in policy-making, and public leadership.

President's Medals were awarded to four other recipients this year: Professor James Stevens Curl (University of Ulster), for his contribution to the study of the History of Architecture in Britain and Ireland; Katie Mitchell OBE, for her work to enhance the presentation of classic and contemporary theatre and opera through innovative new production; Professor Helga Nowotny (ETH, Zurich), for her contribution to the founding and shaping of the European Research Council, and positively influencing the shape of research funding and research policy in the UK and Europe; and Jimmy Wales, for facilitating the spread of information via his work creating and developing Wikipedia, the world's largest free online encyclopedia.