

Poverty & Homelessness Action Week 2011: Who Counts?

How many events?

This year, there were a total of 211 events taking place as part of Poverty & Homelessness Action Week. These were made up of 174 events registered on the Action Week map, 23 events mentioned in the feedback survey and 14 events mentioned in email feedback. Figure 1 shows the growth of reported Action Week events over the years since 2008, while figure 2 shows the breakdown of different types of events.

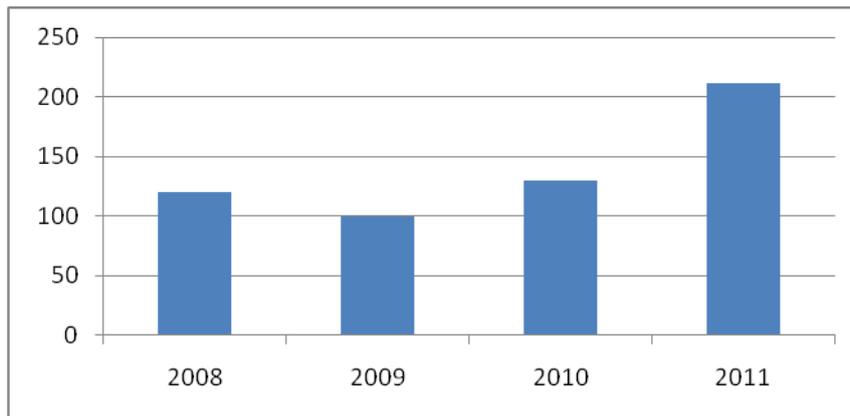


Figure 1. Number of reported Action Week events, 2008-2011

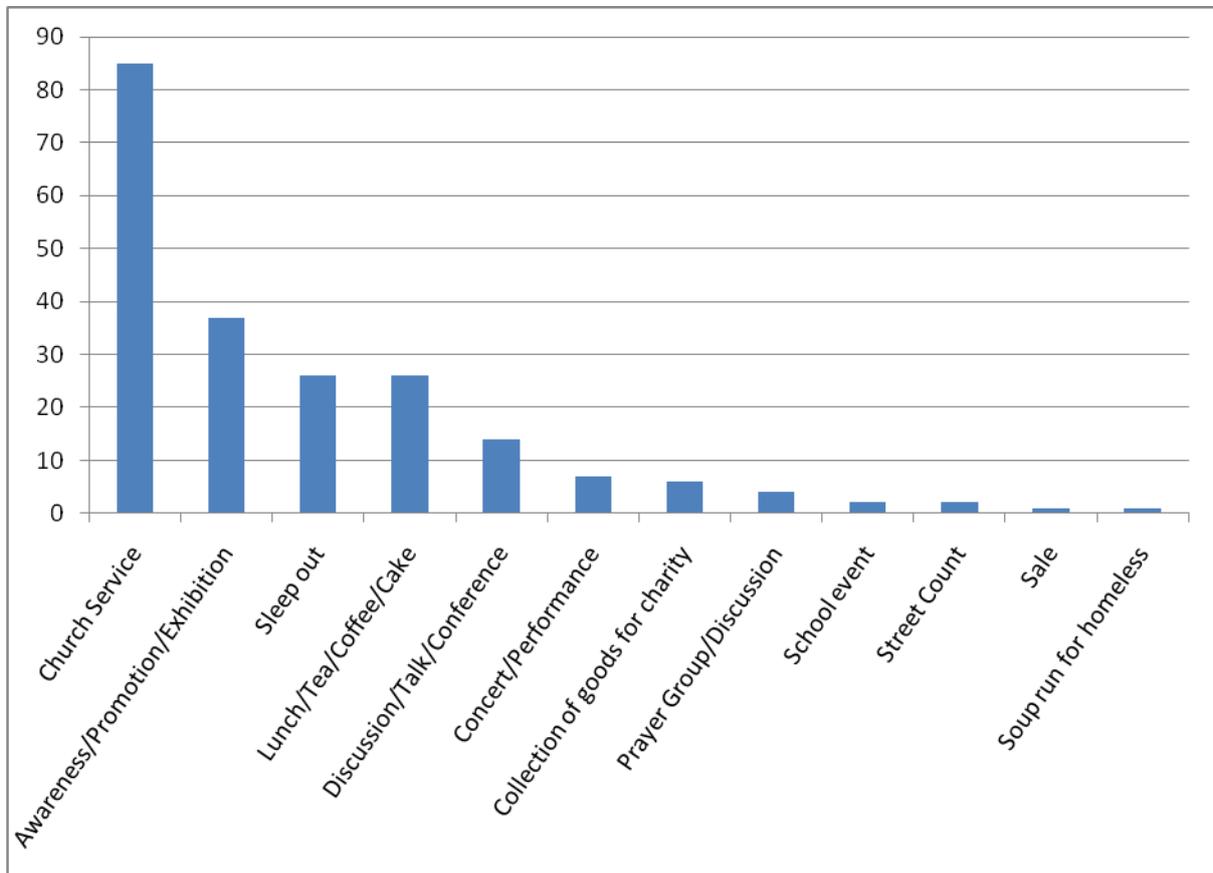


Figure 2. Number of Action Week events by type

By looking at the events that took place, it was possible to identify 55 events that stated they would be raising money. Only 12 of these stated that they were raising funds specifically for Action Week. This left 14 events raising money for other organisations and 29 events that were unclear about where funds would go.

Fundraising

Online donations were accepted through justgiving.com for the first time this year. Including prayer calendar donations, payments for resources, and other general donations, we raised £938 online. In total, nearly £3,800 has come into Church Action on Poverty as donations for Action Week. This total is larger than the money raised across all three organisations last year. Not including online donations, Church Action on Poverty received £1,143 as a payment for resources. This is already over twice as much as last year. The Cup of Tea appeals were conducted separately by each organisation, with £1,800 being raised for Church Action on Poverty.

Prayer Calendar

The prayer calendar was a new feature of Poverty & Homelessness Action Week 2011. As well as praying with the calendar, supporters were encouraged to give and act as well. Not everyone liked the “give” aspect of the calendar, with one person on the online feedback questionnaire mentioning that they liked the calendar in principle “without the appeal”, and another person writing in to say:

“The Action week is a worthy and worthwhile cause - indeed, it is such a good cause that I find it a particular pity that you have thought to insert the multiple pieces of advice on giving “8p for every person you know who earns above a living wage” etc. in your Who Counts leaflet.

“Firstly, that sort of trite superficial advice trivialises what you are trying to do. Secondly, by what right do you set the tariff on people’s domestic financial or social circumstances? If I was not consoled by the thought that you meant well, I could actually be quite offended. I do not believe I am particularly sensitive or easily offended, so you might conclude that this leaflet has the potential to alienate quite a number of your possible donors.”

However, there was also positive feedback about this aspect, with one supporter approving of the give, act and pray format during a telephone conversation and the London Jesuit Volunteers leaders praising the design and content of the calendar. Four people praised the format on the feedback questionnaire, praising the “quirky” actions, that “give/act/pray” was all included, and that it “combined the practical with the prayer”. Supporters were asked if they preferred the new prayer calendar to the prayer cards used previously and the results are shown in Figure 3. It should be noted however that a substantial number of people did not answer this question, either because they did not use the prayer calendar or had not seen the prayer cards before.

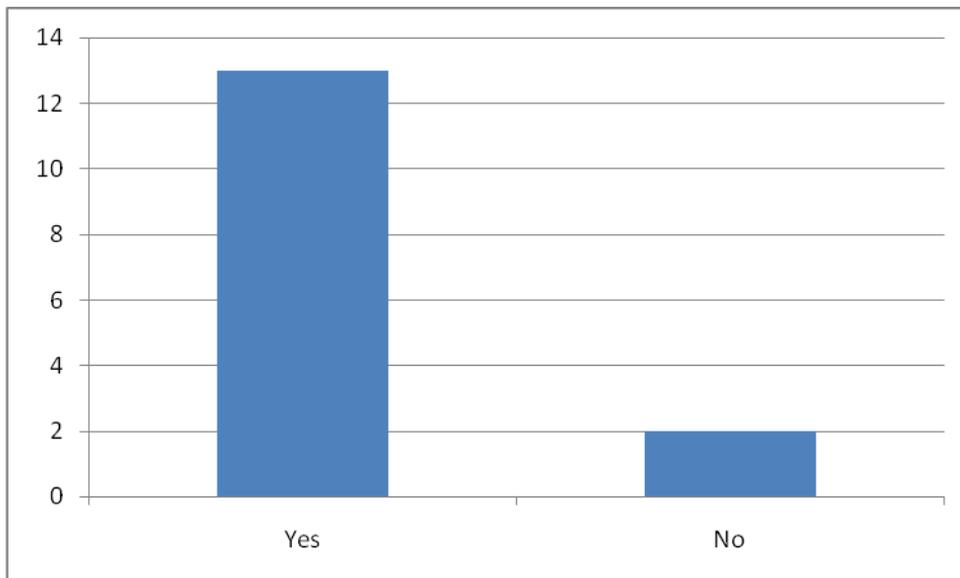


Figure 3. Do you think the prayer calendar was an improvement on the prayer cards used in previous years?

Supporters could access the prayer calendar in three main ways: by printed leaflet, by email or through the website. Respondents to the questionnaire most frequently accessed the prayer calendar by email, as shown in Figure 4. It should be noted however that this would be expected given that the request to fill out the questionnaire was sent electronically to supporters – by email, Facebook and Twitter.

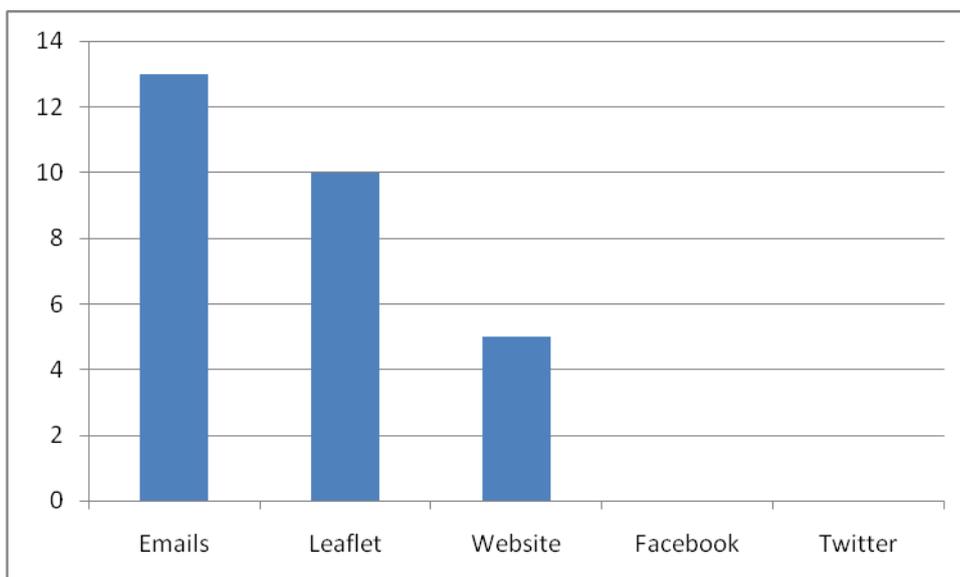


Figure 4. How did you follow the Action Week prayer calendar?

Looking at the details for the Prayer Calendar, the most popular videos were that of days one and two, “shelters and rough sleepers” and “young people seeking sanctuary”. Numbers decline after this, perhaps due to the novelty wearing off. Emails sent in January, in the run up to and at the start of Action Week, were the most popular in terms of the percentage opened. During the week, 164 new people were added to the contact database, with 108 people requesting to be removed.

Resources

Figure 5 shows the results for the resources people used in planning their events, while Figure 6 shows which resources they found most useful. Given that worship events were the most common type of event during Action Week, it was perhaps not surprising that the worship guide was the most used and most useful resource according to the questionnaire feedback.

- Most people were very happy with the resources, with 12 people leaving positive comments varying from “you have it just about right” and “just fine as a structure to develop and work from” to “your resources were great”.
- Two people left feedback in the questionnaire about the resources for young people, one person saying there should be more for primary school children, and another saying they felt that the census story was too complicated for the age range suggested.
- One person commented on the videos and the difficulty that had been encountered in using them, and there was also one person who had similar difficulties and requested a script that could be read out offline.
- Three people left comments about the worship materials, saying “intercessory prayer could be more imaginative and stronger”, “more hymn suggestions, commissioned pieces, liturgical responses” and “more ideas for stories, poems and hymns”.
- One person was bewildered by the amount of different resources on offer and another wanted to return to prayer cards (apparently suggesting a different one for each day).
- Two people left feedback about the PowerPoint, one who found the colour scheme difficult to read and another who felt that the PowerPoint should be different next year.

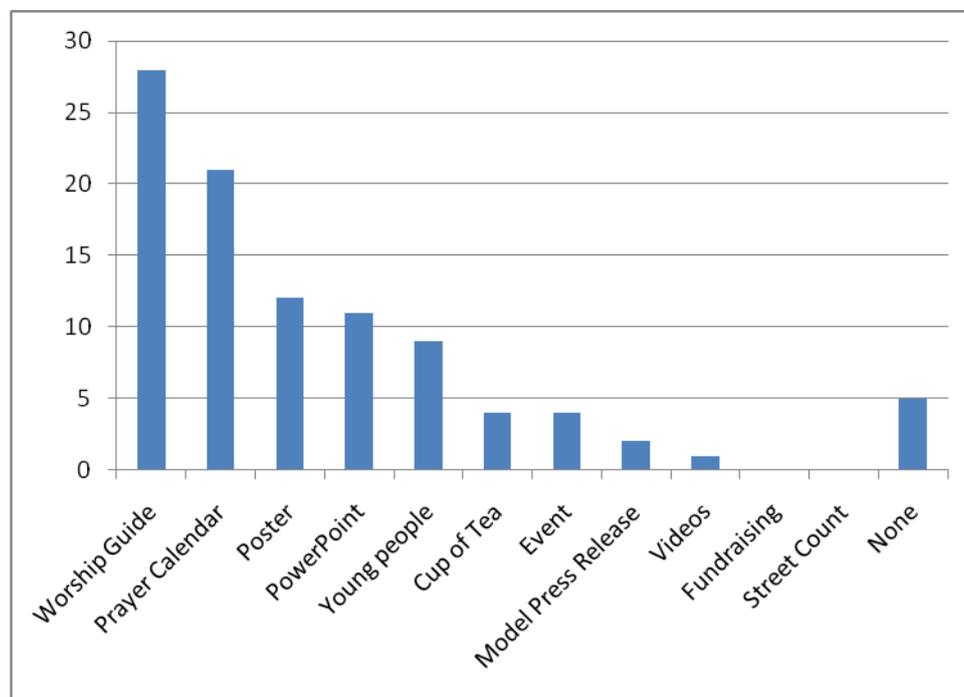


Figure 5. Which of our resources did you use to plan and run your event?

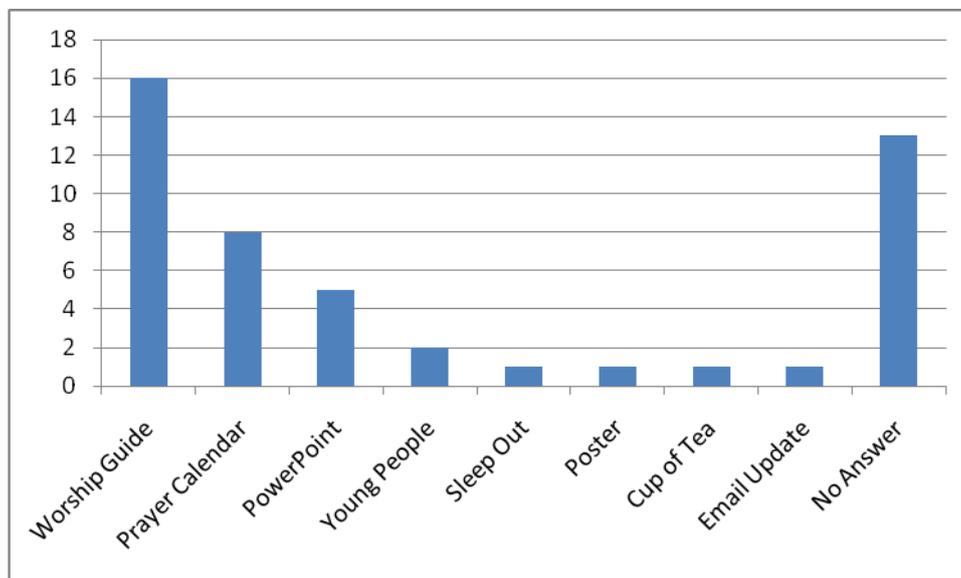


Figure 6. Which of our resources did you find most useful?

Theme suggestions for 2012

The following is a list of suggestions left for themes for next year's Poverty and Homelessness Action Week.

1. Lifting the veil of secrecy on what people earn – helping people realise how affluent they really are
2. Learning from the homeless – they might have insights we could benefit from
3. Why are people homeless? Realising we are only a few steps away from being in their shoes
4. Inclusion. Who is my neighbour? Comparative lifespans and why?
5. Rural deprivation
6. Failed Asylum seekers and families on low income
7. Challenging those who are comfortable to see the humanity of those who are homeless
8. Pensioner poverty / youth unemployment / individual response to the issue
9. Tax havens/fiddles for the rich
10. Impact on the young and their future prospects in education
11. Homelessness among the mentally ill/teenage pregnancies
12. The hidden aspect of homelessness and how this might be encountered outside of large cities
13. The problem of rural homelessness
14. Access to housing, rough sleeping, personal debt
15. The difference between roofless and homeless
16. Effects of the cuts
17. Inequality affects us all
18. Youth homelessness and why people become homeless
19. 'No-one's perfect'

From this list, the common themes seem to be why people become homeless (3, 18), rural areas (5, 12, 13), seeing more clearly the humanity of the homeless (2, 3, 7, 19) and inequality (1, 4, 9, 17).

And finally...

There have been many pieces of feedback which re-enforce the importance of Action Week.

Included below is a selection of these:

- "We're involved in the establishment of a night shelter for rough sleepers in Westminster and we will be hosting one night... (Poverty & Homelessness Action Week) encouraged us in this."
- "I think you are doing wonderful work in raising our awareness of the amount of poverty in this country."
- "A gentleman told his story of how he had found himself homeless and how the support of our Homeless programme had helped him come back to a place of strength and that he did count and this had a profound effect on our congregation."
- "Many thanks for raising awareness, God bless you."
- I am a volunteer outreach worker with a totally unfunded church ministry that feeds, clothes, offers showers, medical care, mental health assessments and laundry... I wanted to share with you my experience in church on 27 January... I asked my pastor if I could get up and say a few things to our congregation and he agreed. I was unprepared for the actual responses I have since received... I got almost a standing ovation! Very weird and totally embarrassing! ... Since doing the presentation I have had lots of offers of help... Our Lord is an awesome Lord.