

JACKIE DICKINSON DCL

Chancellor Dharker,

At Newcastle University, our core values of social justice, equality, diversity and inclusion inform everything we do. As a civic University, we recognise and embrace the proud history of campaigning for social justice that runs deep in our region, and we are proud to recognise those who share our values. Our honorary graduand today, Jackie Dickinson, is the manager of the Bay Foodbank in North Shields. The foodbank was established in 2012 to support hungry people who turned up at her local Church. At the time, it was a very small-scale operation, though vital to those who needed it. Over the last ten years, the foodbank has grown exponentially and now delivers almost ten thousand food parcels a year to individuals, couples and families, providing a practical lifeline to local people when they are most in need.

The majority of the Bay's clients are working people, but they are employed in low-income jobs, often on zero-hours contracts, with all of the uncertainty that brings about continuity of work and income. Some have recently been made redundant and are caught in what is sometimes described as the "fresh air gap" where they have no means to feed their families for several weeks, until their benefits come through. With inflation in UK food prices running at more than 18%; gas prices that have increased by 36% in the last twelve months and electricity prices up by 17%, it is easy to see why people are struggling. Many of those who are referred to the foodbank have never been in this situation before and can feel anxious, ashamed, despondent and vulnerable. Staff at the Bay are acutely sensitive to these feelings and treat their clients with exceptional care and dignity. There is no foodbank branding on the parcels themselves or the vans that deliver them. Jackie's friend and colleague, Lynne Gowland, has a powerful yet simple description for what they do: she told me they provide "love in a box."

Jackie Dickinson was born in 1959, in the East End of Newcastle and is the eldest of four girls. Growing up in Walker, theirs was not an affluent household so her empathy for those who turn to the foodbank for help is informed by personal experience. Upon leaving school, Jackie had a succession of office jobs. She married her husband Alan at nineteen and once their two boys arrived took on the role of a school dinner lady because of the child-friendly hours. She loved being amongst children and was delighted when she secured the role of Cook at Monkseaton Primary School, where she remained until a back injury forced her to give it up. Thereafter she focussed her energies on raising their sons, Gordon and Andrew, whom we are delighted to have with us today.

What sort of person takes on the running of a foodbank? It's been a pleasure to do the detective work of finding out (Jackie is far too modest to give much away herself.) She has been described to me as unique, inspiring, compassionate, tenacious, caring, committed and steadfast. Having shared these words with you, I imagine that Jackie is now itching to say something, which I'm told is her catchphrase: "Aaw, Shurrup Man!!". For those unfamiliar with our Geordie dialect, this loosely translates as: "Stop saying nice things about me because I feel embarrassed!" Dear Jackie, you'll have to be patient, because there are a few more stories that those who admire and love you have been kind enough to share with me and I feel I must do them justice.

As you can imagine, running a foodbank makes truly significant demands on time and energy. Clients are referred from multiple agencies – Social Services, the Police, GPs, schools. On the day that I visited, the phone never stopped ringing. A continual supply of cash and goods is essential for the foodbank to function. Managing and organising these resources is a colossal and never-ending task, as is making up bespoke food parcels to take account of dietary and religious preferences and the adequacy of the client's cooking facilities. Little wonder that Jackie's husband Alan wryly observes, "running the foodbank is more than a job, it's a lifestyle". Fortunately Jackie has a wonderful group of dedicated colleagues to help her, several of whom I have had the pleasure of meeting, including Alfie, Jackie's labradoodle, a key member of the team since he was a puppy.

Maggie Walker, a Trustee at the foodbank, told me that Jackie's warm and compassionate nature means she is always willing to go the extra mile. She described an occasion when a referral came in for an elderly lady who had no food and who hadn't had a cup of tea for more than 24 hours. Jackie took the call and decided that she would deliver the food parcel personally. There was something she had picked up from the lady's voice that made her feel she needed to see her for herself. When Jackie got there, she realised the old lady was not only hungry, she was lonely and needed emotional support, so she made her a cuppa and stayed for a chat.

What else can I tell you about Jackie? She's a loving Nanna to Dexter, Ted, Libby, Lila and Lynais and enjoys playing in the park with them. She's partial to a glass (or two!) of Prosecco. She has an unfulfilled ambition to be a member of the Army Catering Corps. Oh and she's a famous film star. That last point may require further explanation. The film director Ken Loach visited the Bay Foodbank whilst researching his film, "I Daniel Blake." Jackie didn't recognise him and assumed he was the director's assistant. In spite of this misunderstanding, they got on like a house on fire and she was surprised and delighted to be offered a part in the film.

I would like to close my citation with a few words from Jackie's husband, the Reverend Alan Dickinson." Because of my work, there have been many occasions when I've been the one on the platform and Jackie's been down in the pew. Today, it is my turn to be in the pew, a very proud husband, while Jackie deservedly takes her turn on the platform. I cannot think of anyone more fitting to receive this honour. "

Chancellor Dharker, in recognition of her caring, compassionate and steadfast support of those in need, and for exemplifying the values that a University with Social Justice at its heart is proud to be associated with, I am honoured to present Jacqueline Dickinson, for the award of Doctor of Civil Law, *honoris causa*.

Jill Taylor-Roe

Senior Public Orator