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TEDxExeter to examine why 500,000 children go to school too hungry to learn

By Exeter Express and Echo (<http://www.exeterexpressandecho.co.uk/people/Exeter Express and Echo/profile.html>) | Posted: April 03, 2015



Carmel McConnell who is speaking at TEDxExeter

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At least half a million children in the UK go to school each day too hungry to learn. One of the key players trying to address this will speak about her work at this year's TEDxExeter conference on 24 April.

Carmel McConnell is founder of Magic Breakfast, a charity that delivers free, healthy breakfast food to 430 schools in England, giving over 17,000 children fuel for learning each school day. In her talk she will be asking "Can we end child hunger in the 6th richest economy?".

"A hungry child can't concentrate and can be disruptive to the rest of the class," she says. "It is estimated that, on average, 66 million minutes of teaching time are lost every morning dealing with hungry children.

"I believe we can end child hunger and the testimonials we receive from Magic Breakfast partner schools strongly suggest we are going about it in the right way. As one of the teachers in a Magic Breakfast partner school recently commented: 'These kids only have one chance at childhood, and one chance at education. Education is going to be their best way out of poverty. By feeding and valuing them, Magic Breakfast makes a practical difference to these children every single day'."

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A Magic Breakfast consists of porridge, healthy cereals, bagels and fresh orange juice. With the support of funding, food and logistics partners, each breakfast costs the charity just 22p a day per child. It focuses on schools where more than 35% of pupils are on free school meals.

Schools in Exeter and the rest of Devon are not immune from this problem, and there are two in Devon on Magic Breakfast's waiting list of 270 schools around the UK. It plans to expand its services into the south west from September this year.

Concentration, behaviour, attendance and attainment all improve as a result of a hearty breakfast according to head teachers at the charity's partner schools. Breakfast clubs also have other benefits on top of providing fuel for learning. They provide a safe and happy environment where children can talk to friends and staff and get ready for the school day.

Teachers also see the breakfast clubs as a 'pressure valve' where they can solve potential issues before they become real problems. Just by having a few minutes to talk to a child over a bagel, they have an opportunity to offer additional support to those who need it.

Magic Breakfast has grown fast. Last year it was feeding 8,500 children a day in 252 schools. Now it is feeding 17,500 in 430 schools. This growth is thanks to funding from the Department for Education gained in 2014. However, the charity is keen to continue its growth and to reach the 270+ schools on its waiting list requesting urgent food aid, including schools here in the south west.

Carmel McConnell is one of 15 speakers at this year's TEDxExeter conference who will share their ground breaking work in areas from the death penalty to magna carta to saving the Amazon rainforest. The theme for the day is Taking the Long View.

Claire Kennedy from TEDxExeter says: "We are delighted to be able to offer Carmel the opportunity to share Magic Breakfast's pioneering and powerful vision at TEDxExeter." While tickets for the event at the Northcott Theatre have sold out, you can click on the link from the Echo's home page to watch the event live online. Four weeks after the conference videos all of the talks will be available via the TEDxExeter website (<http://tedxexeter.com/> (<http://tedxexeter.com/>)).

Also addressing food poverty at TEDxExeter will be Exeter Foodbank which will have a stall in the breakout space in the University's Great Hall. Like Magic Breakfast the foodbank has grown significantly over the past few years. Started in 2008, it grew steadily until the welfare reforms in 2013, and has grown much faster since. Last year it helped 4,781 people here in Exeter.

Exeter Foodbank provides three days of emergency food for people in crisis who have been assessed to be in immediate need by social services, the benefits team or one of a range of charities. It depends on donations of food, and is run by a team of more than 100 volunteers.

"We are thrilled to be invited to TEDxExeter, and to be able to give a voice to the people who use our

service," said Ann Govier, one of the volunteers on the management team of Exeter Foodbank. "In the press we get one view of people using foodbanks – there are myths that they are scroungers and lazy. They don't get heard and their views aren't requested or examined. It's exciting that we can help people to find out the true situation."

TEDxExeter organisers are encouraging everyone in the audience to bring an item to donate to Exeter Foodbank when they come to the event on 24 April. It is currently short of sponge puddings, long life fruit juice, loo rolls, noodle snacks and basic toiletries such as soap, toothpaste and toothbrushes. It can also use cash donations to buy items it is short of.

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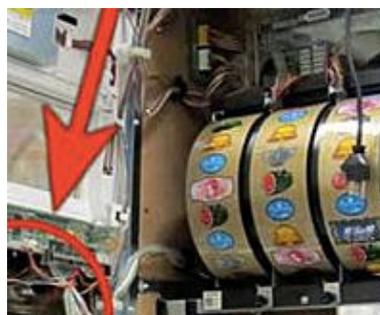
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