

Whitchurch

foodbank



Newsletter

February 2021

Dear Friends

Our early Spring newsletter usually begins with offering our best wishes to everyone for the New Year. This year it could not be a more heartfelt wish as everyone is so hopeful for what lies ahead for us in 2021. This time last year we were reporting a huge increase in demand from the Foodbank and in 2020 we fed more than three times the number of people than the previous year, a total of 2810 adults and children. We have also passed another milestone with more than 1000 referrals since the start of the first lockdown last March. Another notable statistic is that we have now distributed more than 100 tonnes of food since we opened in 2013.

Undoubtedly, we would not have managed the challenges of COVID 19 without the huge efforts of many, many people and organisations.

Donations

The response to our mission to support those in need during the pandemic was greatly helped by the huge rise in donations to the Foodbank. It would be impossible to name everyone but we must mention the supermarkets (Whitchurch Tesco, Sainsbury's and B&M and the Co-op in Wem), local food producers, local retailers who gave us food that otherwise would have been wasted, churches and schools and many individuals, couples and families. The total weight of food donated since last March is now close to 30 tonnes.

It is pleasing to note that many donors of food are referring to our website to check which items we are most in need of (www.whitchurchfoodbank.org.uk) and we are very grateful to Vic Trigg for managing the site for us.

It would also be impossible to mention all those who have made the most incredible number of financial donations. This has enabled us to make important purchases of food and storage items. Our sincere thanks to these donors and as always, to those who regularly donate each month.

Sainsbury's campaign to 'Help Brighten a Million Christmases' brought us the huge sum of £3856.70. The supermarket converted the public's donations to cash and together with donations made through the tills, raised this total of money. Many thanks go to Sainsbury's and to everyone who donated during the 14 days of the campaign.

COVID 19 Operations

As mentioned in our last newsletter in July last year, we had to make substantial changes to the way we operate the Foodbank. All referrals continue to be made by e-mail by our referrers and food continues to be delivered to the homes of clients. To date, this amounts to nearly 23 tonnes of food distributed. Thanks to St Alkmund's Church, we have been able to make full use of Bargates Hall where our volunteers can handle the checking, storage, selection and distribution of food with the required social distancing. This is how our operation will look for the time being.

Summer Food

There has been a great deal of activity regarding the provision of support for families who may struggle to provide food for children during the long summer break and other holidays. Although the Government reversed its decision to provide food parcels or vouchers to these families last July, we had been prepared to fill the gap. Instead, we asked our local schools to let us know if there were any families who would not receive this help and we were pleased to support a small number.

Christmas 2020

For the last four years the Foodbank has arranged for families to receive additional support at Christmas and we were pleased to provide 84 Christmas parcels in December. All the families were selected by local schools and they were provided with a picklist from which to choose the items they required. The list included turkeys (kindly supplied again by Aviagen), fresh vegetables (supplied by Tesco) as well a whole range of other items including donations from, Four Ways, Drink Stop and Hopscotch and Skittles. We were also able to provide new toys thanks to the generosity of our supporters.

As there was a huge rise in the number of families put forward, our manager liaised with Whitchurch Town Council for the hire of the market hall for a few days. All the goods were transported there and picked ready for distribution to the widespread local area on 22nd December.

This proved to be a highly successful operation and extended thanks go to all those who helped especially Zoe Dean the Civic Centre manager, all the volunteers and the teams of drivers who delivered nearly 2 tonnes of food that day.

As well as these Christmas parcels, we also provided our usual stream of clients with additional goods including mince pies, chocolate etc with their food leading up to Christmas.



Referrers

We now have more than 70 referral agencies linked to us and we are grateful to them for the way they accepted our new way of working. Because of the pandemic we have been unable to see our referrers face to face but we have enjoyed the opportunity to support each other with phone calls and of course the weekly e-mails.

We recognise that there have been many changes of personnel over the last few months and we would urge you to keep us up to date with details of new colleagues and contact details. A form is attached and we would appreciate the return of this so that we can keep our records up to date,

Trussell Trust

We continue to be supported by the Trussell Trust and we have recently been joined with Cheshire and other Shropshire foodbanks to form a local forum under our new Area Manager Jane Emery.

Trussell have been generous in helping us to obtain additional funding for storage and by providing us with two Huawei tablets for when we start to use electronic vouchers.

We have recently completed our annual stocktake of food which we report annually to Trussell. Thanks go to everyone who helped with this arduous task as we have to record the weight of every item of food we hold! Our thanks to Tony Livesey for his careful control of stock. Once again the level of difference between actual and recorded stock is minimal at 1.86%. Our congratulations to all our volunteers for their diligence when receiving and issuing stock.

Volunteers

At each stage of this pandemic we have needed to address whether we have enough volunteers to continue with the work and never have we had to doubt that our loyal team will do all they can. We have always respected any individual's response and made safety our priority. Roles have shifted and friends and partners have got involved to make it happen safely and within all the Government rules. We are so grateful to all.

Thanks must go to approximately 10 or so people who have consistently kept operations flowing at Bargates Hall. Others have collected food from Supermarkets, stocked the shelves, answered the phone and replied to emails. All referrals are done by e-mail. The Management Team (all volunteers too) have also become quite adept at 'Zoom' meetings, training sessions and acquiring PPE! Many others encourage us with a word a promise of prayer or even a cake!

Some have needed to shield for family or health reasons but we anticipate them returning soon advantaged by the vaccine which most of our volunteers have had – one positive of ageing!

When we know more of what Foodbank can look like and we have fixed dates, we will almost certainly need a period of training and recruiting.

Throughout the year we have reported regularly and kept all our volunteers informed. We even met a couple of times when allowed with 'legal' socially distanced re-union events which we all enjoyed very much.

A significant change in our operations has been the need to deliver safely the food to all our clients as no one is seen at Bargates. For safety reasons drivers must work in pairs and once again we have been grateful to those that have so cheerfully carried this out each week. At Christmas time some 20

driving teams helped us to deliver to the 86 homes. The level of food each family gets has increased significantly and now always includes fresh fruit, vegetables, bread and eggs which we are so pleased to be able to offer through the assistance of a grant supplied by 'Food Power for Generation COVID'. We will need to consider whether we are able to continue offering this fresh food once the grant ceases.

Getting us this far through COVID has been a joint effort by all our volunteers and friends. We have learnt a lot and need to put all this valuable experience into our future plans. Well done everyone.

Sky Dive



Do you fancy the thought of jumping out of an aeroplane in support of Whitchurch Foodbank?

We have received a very kind offer from Skydive Tilstock Freefall Club, courtesy of chief instructor Alex Busby Hicks for up to 10 free tandem skydives during 2021 to **anyone in the local area** who would like to raise funds for Whitchurch Foodbank. Normally charities are asked for their jumpers to raise a minimum of around £500 of which £230 goes toward the cost of the skydive and the remainder to the charity. However, as they are providing the skydives for free this means that all funds raised will go to the foodbank.

So, if the prospect of jumping out of a plane appeals and you think you could secure sponsorship for such a brave venture then please let Alan know by contacting him at info@whitchurch.foodbank.org.uk it might encourage him in taking the plunge!! You must be over 16 to be accepted so only your health and not your age affects your suitability for this adventure. Please indicate what level of sponsorship you would hope to raise as due to the limitation on numbers that may be a deciding factor.

Whitchurch Christmas Scarecrow Trail

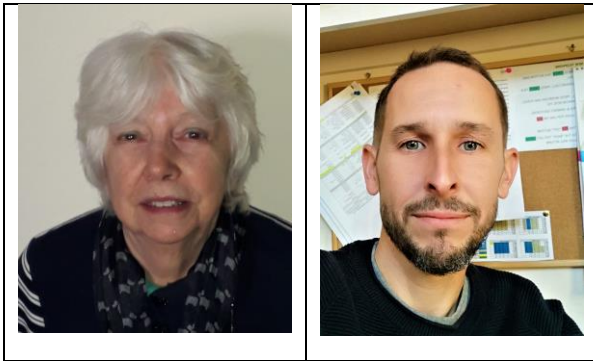
Whitchurch's 'Helping Hands' support group who have done marvellous work during the pandemic, decided to invite people in the town to put a scarecrow in their gardens to add a little Christmas cheer! The Foodbank volunteers decided to take part and Anna Turner created 'Anastasia' who in her Foodbank uniform survived the worst of the winter weather outside St Alkmund's. She even managed to gather a few donations of tins! There were over 30 scarecrows on display in the town including representatives of the Royal Family and of course Father Christmas in many guises. Thank you, Anna, for your efforts!



New Trustees

We have recently bid farewell to two of our trustees who have been with us from the very beginning in 2013. Judy Bellingham who represented St Alkmund's as a trustee, has given many years of service as secretary and Philip Kenyon who has diligently performed the role of our 'independent' trustee. Our sincere thanks go to both of them for their loyal service and support. Judy has been replaced by Pauline Stokes who is Whitchurch born and bred. Pauline worked as a nurse in the town and as the vergier at St Alkmund's. Her many voluntary activities include acting as a school governor and town councillor and working at the Foodbank!

Philip has been replaced by James Underwood who is currently deputy manager, Wellbeing officer and café manager at the Beechtree Community Centre. We are very thankful to them both for their willingness to serve in this capacity and wish them well in their roles as they join our board of Trustees. Pauline will assume the role of Secretary.



What does the future hold for us?

Like so many others we are unsure about the answer to this. As we await each of the latest Government updates, we know that we have many situations to consider. We are however, preparing to explore what possible outcomes and solutions there may be and we will endeavour to keep all those involved with the Foodbank up to date.

For example, we currently have the continued use of Bargates but we may have to re-consider its use bearing in mind the inevitable return of clients, hopefully not before too long. We may have to face an increasing demand for food as recently released figures indicate a 93% increase in those claiming Universal Credit since November 2019. We have grave concerns about the well-being of many clients as we have had no real contact with them and signposting is almost impossible. We are however, hoping to make contact with more of them by phone in the near future. Our links with our referrers also needs review and we would urge them all to complete the form attached to their copy of this email and return it to us. Also, we are still planning our move to introducing the use of e-vouchers by our referrers. This will be a phased introduction and may not be appropriate for all our referral organisations.

Finally, of course our volunteers who are the heart of our organisation. We may have lost some but look forward to seeing others return before too long.

We wish all those connected with the Foodbank a happy and healthy 2021 and look forward to when we can meet again in person.

Our sincere thanks for all your support.

Kind regards

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If you do not wish to continue receiving this newsletter, please contact the Foodbank.