



West Northumberland

# FOOD BANK

**Project Report Year 6  
2020**

# Project Manager's Report

– Sam Gilchrist

**Levels of poverty in our communities have risen every year since we opened in 2013.** However, last year's 50% increase in demand, with a staggering 220 households coming forward for help for the first time and the roll out of Universal Credit (UC), was a huge challenge to our small independent charity.

When our project year 6 started in October 2018, we knew zero-hour contracts were the new normal and more children would start their lives in poverty as a result of the Two Child Policy. We also knew we had to immediately gear up to face the challenges of Universal Credit, which was about to be fully rolled out in our area. At that point, 9% of visits were from people claiming UC, but around 80% were from people claiming benefits that would be replaced by UC and we needed to get ready to help.

With the help of The National Lottery and Tyne and Wear Community Foundation, we recruited 15 new volunteer Targeted Support Workers – building our team to 30 – and launched a training programme on Welfare Rights, Debt Management, Mental Health Awareness and Counselling. We also trained our volunteers on signposting, referral and advocacy – how to work with and on behalf of people disempowered by poverty and feeling voiceless when contacting other agencies.

Within just two months of the UC roll-out, a quarter of the requests we dealt with were from people in receipt of this new benefit and experiencing poverty.

I am proud to report that we were able to meet increasing call volumes, whilst maintaining our ethos of promoting solidarity without being judgemental.

50%

Increase in food bank demand on last year

220

New household requests

80%

Benefit claims would be replaced by Universal Credit



**“I couldn't live without these people. They really are a lifeline”**

## Visitor Experience

*Tony fell on hard times when chronic migraines and depression forced him to stop working. While he said neurologists and doctors backed up this claim, he was declared 'fit for work' by government officials, and, on top of losing all income, he was denied benefits.*

*He now relies on the food bank, which he accesses by hailing lifts from people travelling to Hexham as he can't afford the £5.20 bus fare each fortnight.*

“I couldn't live without these people. They really are a lifeline. I have worries in my life but I can always eat because of the food bank.

“As I walk in here, it breaks my heart to see young families coming in needing nappies and baby milk for their young children.

“I used to sneak in here, but now I hold my head up with pride because the people here are so amazing. Here, we have a fantastic service and people shouldn't be ashamed to admit they're struggling and need help. If people are in that situation, they need to use this fabulous food bank.”

# Who comes to the Food Bank

Last year, our team of Volunteer Targeted Support Workers dealt with around 400 requests for help per month and helped over 1,200 people experiencing poverty visiting us in Hexham, Prudhoe, Haltwhistle and through outreach support.

They did an incredible job supporting people with debt and benefit problems as well as distributing food and other household essentials.

Our data also reveals stark health inequalities: at least 435 people our Volunteer Targeted Support Workers helped last year were receiving treatment for their mental and/or physical health.

**70% of those that visit us for the first time use our service between 1 and 5 times over a short period of time.**

Due to: *Unexpected bills, holiday hunger, school uniform expense, benefit changes, employment changes.*

**10 – 15% visiting for the first time use the service between 5 and 12 times, possibly over a number of months across the year.**

Due to: *Benefit change, bereavement and associated expense, period of unemployment, relationship breakdown, seeking asylum and needing further support.*

**15 – 20% visiting for first time use the service more than 12 times and become regular visitors whom we support as long as necessary.**

Due to: *Homelessness, long term physical or mental health issues, escaping domestic violence, escaping modern slavery, long term benefit assessment appeals, historic debt issues, isolation within their own communities.*

In 12 months, our volunteers helped:

**523** Households  
236 Families, 205 Single Adults & 87 Other. Totalling:  
**745** Adults  
**484** Children

**73**  
Households in low paid work



**45**  
People who are homeless



**118**  
Households with debt



## A Volunteer's View

"I've been a volunteer at WNFB for 5 years and an advocacy and support worker for the last 4.

That in itself is shocking, as when I started I thought the need for a food bank would not be long term, but that our work would become obsolete. Of course, sadly, the need remains and our work continues to be vital.

That fact is the reason I continue to volunteer. Every shift reveals how important WNFB is as a resource for West Northumberland. We provide food but we also provide succour. That's an old-fashioned word but it expresses something more than giving help. When someone walks in the door at the food bank they are welcomed as if they were coming into one's home. Everyone is treated with respect and as an equal. Whether it's as simple as a kind word or gesture and listening attentively, or making sense of a letter from a debt

collection agency or DWP, helping with a telephone call or filling in forms, sharing information about benefits, energy costs, and community resources, everything we do as volunteers can make a massive difference.

It's a role not to be taken lightly because when there is an opportunity to make a massive difference in life, we have to take it. For that reason, it is a privilege to volunteer at WNFB.

And, as volunteers, we benefit from fantastic support. Apart from the immediate camaraderie and friendship amongst fellow volunteers – such a lovely bunch of people – there is huge support from Sam, Owain and John, and the best and most relevant training I've ever experienced (and I spent 30 years in my professional life giving and receiving training so I can make the comparison!)."

# A Year in the Life

## October

Great turn out for our Volunteer Support Worker Information Session, where new recruits came along to find out more about the role and meet the team.

## November



The Special Rapporteur hears from experts on rural poverty in Bristol – © Bassam Khawaja 2018

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Professor Philip Alston, was on a fact-finding visit to the UK to investigate Government efforts to eradicate poverty and we were invited to meet him. We explained our concerns about the rollout of Universal Credit, the levels and impacts of child poverty, our experience of rural poverty and the potential adverse implications of Brexit.

**“We chose the food bank because we’re very aware that with Universal Credit being rolled out, there’s a good number of families who rely on the food bank to put food on the table.”**

## December



All hands on deck for our annual Christmas Appeal, starting with our annual Tesco Event which raised £1,571 and lots of extra food. Groups, churches, business, families, the Salvation Army, Sure Start Children’s Centres and Social Services rallied together to provide festive food hampers, toys and gifts to families in hardship throughout West Northumberland. We gave Christmas presents to some of the single adults we’ve been helping throughout the year who may not receive gifts.

## January



Local printmaker Carol Nunan donated 30% of the proceeds from the sale of her artwork to WNFB.

## February

A cheque for £771 followed the Rotary Club’s Christmas collection, and was presented to WNFB by Rotarians Jim Yeomans and Roy Dallison.

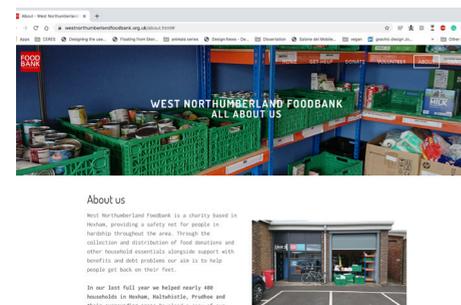
## March

Jo Walker, our lead Support Worker, left us for pastures new. She had led the way, instilling kindness and compassion throughout our work.

## April

The Northumberland Food Aid Network was launched.

## May



We successfully launched our website, [westnorthumberlandfoodbank.org.uk](http://westnorthumberlandfoodbank.org.uk).

**“It really is very very difficult, and I think it’s shocking that in Hexham, in Northumberland, and in the country people have to rely on food banks.”**

## June



Alan Bell with team leader for Targeted Support Workers, Owain Bennett. Photo: HX351924

Long term volunteer Owain Bennett was recruited to the staff team to lead and develop our team of volunteer Targeted Support Workers.

## July

The launch of our annual Holiday Hunger appeal. Summer is a hard time for some families who rely on free school meals. It’s lovely to be able to help families in that position, but sad to think that a happy time of year for some, is the most difficult six weeks of the year for others.

## August

We attended a conference with Nourish Scotland. This helped us develop our services for people using the food bank to enable; a sense of control, value and ability to contribute and take part in their community, to feel supported and involved in decision-making.

## September

As the summer holidays end and parents start to prepare for the new school year, many turn to us for help as the cost of school uniforms and essentials cause even more financial hardship.



**“I’ve noticed such a difference in them since we found the food bank”**

**Visitor Experience**

*Gemma was stuck in a physically abusive relationship and struggled to make ends meet. She was at rock bottom and was feeling depressed she couldn’t provide for her children.*

*Fast forward 12 months, Gemma escaped her violent partner and travelled hundreds of miles to live with her father in Tynedale. With the help of West Northumberland Food Bank, the quality of life for her and her children has improved considerably.*

“I’ve been to rock bottom and I have had a hard life, but it feels like we’re starting over again and changing that. The food bank has been amazing and it’s changed our lives so much. I used to think life wasn’t worth living, but now I love my life and my children are so happy. I’ve noticed such a difference in them since we found the food bank; they’ve gained weight, are doing well at school and their behaviour has improved.”

**Communities where we have supported people:**

Acomb	Chopwell	Haydon	Matfen	Rowfoot
Allendale	Corbridge	Bridge	Melkridge	Seghill
Allenheads	Eldson	Heddon	Mickley	Slaley
Bardon Mill	Falstone	Hexham	Newbrough	Stocksfield
Barrasford	Fourstones	Humshaugh	Otterburn	Wark
Bellingham	Gilsland	Kielder	Ovingham	Whitfield
Blaydon	Gunnerton	Kirkwhelpington	Prudhoe	
Brampton	Haltwhistle		Riding Mill	

**“This can really make a difference to people’s lives”**

**A Volunteer’s View**

“About 40 of us gathered one November morning for an introductory session on the activities, policies and procedures of the WNFB. What an eclectic bunch we were, from different parts of West Northumberland, with different backgrounds and different working lives. What had brought me here was a mix of anger, disbelief, shame and compassion.

It soon became clear why food banks are so needed in the UK, when the work really started a couple of weeks later and we gathered again to have our brains stuffed full by two welfare rights trainers. They engaged us in a series of stimulating discussions, debates and activities designed to shed some light on the bewildering landscape that is the benefits system in the UK... and the multiple problems and challenges faced by people who depend upon it.

Within a short week or so, we new recruits were pitching in with an introductory session down at the food bank. No sooner had I got my bearings than the first visitors started arriving. I teamed up with Ann and Owain for insight into how we can most effectively engage with visitors, to see if we can offer any further help, advice or information beyond some food items, a warm drink and a chat – though these are all hugely important in themselves. It felt quite daunting to be wanting to offer every possible help, but with little knowledge and experience at this early stage.

But, with experienced volunteers on hand, as well as the likes of Owain, Sam and John, plenty of good advice and guidance is always right there. Still, as I walk away from my shift, I replay some conversations in my head and wonder if I could have done something different, something better. It’ll probably be like that for a good while to come!

# Public Generosity

**This support shows how much people care about each other in our West Northumberland communities.**

WNFB recognise that low pay, rising costs and benefit cuts can pull people into the grip of poverty, often leaving people feeling disempowered, ashamed and isolated, unable to afford to eat properly, drowning in debt and with little hope of having a decent standard of living.

We believe that people experiencing poverty should never be made to feel it's their fault and should be met with

kindness and treated in ways that promote solidarity and restore dignity and empowerment.

Thankfully, this belief is endorsed by the generosity and compassion of people throughout our communities who share our values of caring about each other and looking after each other.

At least £116,000 worth of food and other essentials and over £44,000 in cash and Gift Aid has been donated through the year from local people, community groups and businesses.



## A special thanks to some of our local businesses and community organisations



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- Tynedale Jive,
- Inner Wheel of Hexham and Tynedale
- St Mary's Guild
- West End Methodist Church,
- St Andres Fellowship
- Hexham Middle School
- Priory School Hexham
- Mortal Fools Theatre Company
- Riding Mill Scouts
- Stocksfield Scouts
- Parish of Haydon Bridge
- St Marys Slaley
- Corbridge First School
- Haydon Bridge Nature Club
- Corbridge Middle School
- Haydon Bridge High School
- Prudhoe COOP
- Karbon Homes
- St Oswins Wylam
- Stocksfield Methodist Church
- The NHS Northumbria Healthcare
- Northumberland Mark Benevolent Fund
- The Smith Trust
- Wayne's Xmas Lights
- PCCA
- Tynedale Lions
- Waitrose
- The Specials Laboratory
- Wor Local Pub in Prudhoe
- The Tannery
- The Baboons
- Carol Nunan Prints
- Beltingham and Henshaw Church Council
- Gasring
- Acomb Methodist Church
- Queen Elizabeth High School
- Tesco
- Land Factor
- Allendale COOP
- Allendale Chemist
- The Dale Salon, Allendale
- Bardon Mill Village shop
- SQ1 Law
- Eden's Lawn Garage
- Network Rail

44,000

Pounds in cash donated in the year

116,000

Pounds worth of food and essentials donated in 2019



**You can get in touch with West Northumberland Foodbank on:**

**Telephone:** 01434700068

**Text:** 07958000719

**Email:** [getintouch@westnorthumberlandfoodbank.org.uk](mailto:getintouch@westnorthumberlandfoodbank.org.uk)

Registered charity number: 1158289

*We never take public generosity for granted and manage our finances carefully, this report cost just 51p to produce.*

Report Designed by **Matt Hamer**