



West Northumberland

FOOD BANK

Project Report Year 7

Project Manager's Report

– Sam Gilchrist

We started the year recruiting 20 new Volunteer Targeted Support Workers to join our team. After training they worked one to one helping people access services, get support with debt and benefits and of course making sure people had enough food and other household essentials from our mini markets at the Spetchells Centre Prudhoe, Haltwhistle Library and from our Food Bank in Hexham.

And then Covid-19 hit and we had to radically and very quickly change our entire way of working. To keep people safe we closed our Food Bank drop-in sessions and opened a daily helpline and delivery service on March 17th.

Since then a quarter of the people contacting our Helpline during the Pandemic were coming to us for the first time as they have been directly affected by Covid-19. Some have lost their jobs; some are on furlough and struggling to make ends meet and some are self employed people who are unable to carry on their business in lockdown. Many people who call us live alone and feel very isolated, a five minute chat with our helpline volunteers can help make people feel reassured that help is there and people do care.

60000

Food parcels provided with your donations

150

Food parcels made up per week

20

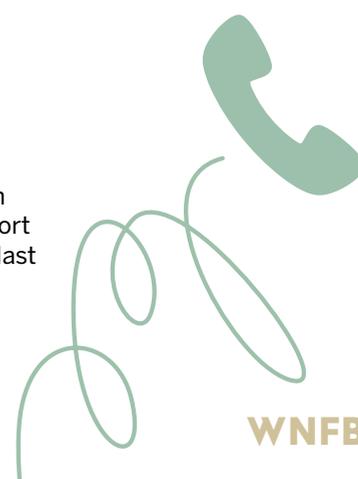
New volunteer Targeted support workers



By July we realised that the safest and most efficient option was to expand our Helpline and Delivery service until this public health crisis is well and truly over. We recruited extra volunteers to our Logistics Team to collect, sort and pack donations into around 150 food parcels a week ready to deliver. Many people we deliver to live alone and feel very isolated and really appreciate seeing our friendly drivers and having a socially distanced chat.

None of this would have been possible without donations from local people who have been extremely generous. They have helped us purchase extra supplies to provide 6,000 food parcels as well as providing supermarket vouchers and frozen food to families in place of Free School Meals during lockdown or when children are sent home from school to isolate under Covid-19 restrictions.

We've been amazed by the generosity of the local community during the pandemic. We ended the year extremely well funded with no need to appeal for cash donations, and fully committed to continuing to support people experiencing poverty as we have done for the last 7 years for as long as we are needed .





User Feedback

We are so grateful for our entire team of volunteers, staff and visitors who all help the charity be so successful. Here are few bits of feedback we have received this year which really show how well we have adapted to an unusual year.

“I always feel cared for and the people on the phone always listen without judging me”

Visitor Experience

Alice* hasn't worked for several years due to physical and mental health problems. Her two adult children also struggle with severe anxiety, which means their attempts to live independently can be short-lived and erratic before they come back to live with Alice. The regular changes in occupancy mean that Alice's benefit income can vary quite a lot, making it difficult to plan and budget.

* Name has been changed

“I don't know what I'd do without West Northumberland Food Bank. It's not just the food – don't get me wrong, the food's amazing! – but just knowing that there's someone there to listen and help out makes me feel like I don't need to worry all the time. I always feel cared for and the people on the phone always listen without judging me.

“I didn't know what to do when the washing machine blew up, but when I mentioned it on the phone to the food bank, they suggested straight away that they could put in a grant application. It was such a load off my mind when I had a new machine within a couple of weeks. I had no idea there was such support available, so I'm really grateful for the knowledge of the food bank volunteers and staff.”

“We feel quite overwhelmed by such kind generosity, so much more than we could have hoped for. I never knew that the kindness and help was actually out there, and believe me, it makes me feel so much less alone with fears and worries. Even if, hopefully, we only need help for just a very short while, it has opened my eyes and gives a feeling of a safety net, available if needed.”

“I just wanted to say thank you sooo much for my bags on Tuesday. You guys are absolutely brilliant. No one's mentioned food bank workers who've been working 5-7 days a week – no one's mentioned them at all. I guess if they do it'll highlight poverty in this country which would ruffle feathers, without doubt. I think that you guys most definitely deserve national recognition. Thank you again.”

“Today a lovely couple arrived to deliver some wonderful supplies to us, so generously giving their time and transport to help. The lady was so kind and nice, and spent several minutes talking to me when I know how busy they must have been. Those few words meant a lot as currently I don't get a chance to speak to anyone for days, even weeks at a time - so, much appreciated - even if it is mainly talking about 'problems', it's still good just to speak the words to another human!”

How our way of working has changed

We had to change up our whole way of working due to the pandemic. Before the pandemic set in we were delivering **36 public support sessions each month in 3 locations** – Hexham, Haltwhistle, and Prudhoe. We were also averaging around **550 visits per month from between 200 and 250 households per month** whilst making **less than 30 household deliveries in and around our area.**

As you can imagine everything changed when we had to move over to household deliveries only, taking all our usual face to face requests over the phone.

During Covid (March to September):



Pre Covid:



Once Covid hit:

We were able to transform our way of working in order to fulfil all our usual services and more.

Between March and September of 2020 we were able to support a total of **291 households**, and out of those households **24% of visitors were new to our service**, which in turn shows us how difficult the pandemic has hit families in our area.

Owain, our targeted support worker team leader, did an incredible job of training our volunteers to continue their work over the phone.

Deliveries

John and our amazing logistics and delivery team have been hard at work each week, making an average of **250 monthly household deliveries** across our area, which reaches as far out as Kielder, a 78 mile round trip from our Hexham hub.

We have made a **total of 1516 deliveries** and **covered a whopping 6000 miles** between March and September 2020.



6000
delivery miles done since moving over to our delivery only service

The communities where we have supported people:

- Kielder
- West Mickley
- Prudhoe
- Hexham
- Haltwhistle
- Allendale
- Newbrough
- Acomb
- Haydon Bridge
- Fourstones
- Corbridge
- Wark
- Greenhead
- Wylam
- Barrasford Park
- Ponteland
- Greenside
- Stamfordham
- Humshaugh
- Stocksfield
- Healey
- Slaley
- Halton Lea Gate
- Ovingham
- Matfen
- Gilsland
- West Woodburn
- Bellingham
- Row Foot
- Bardon Mill
- Whitfield
- Simonburn

A Year in the Life 2019/20

October

Volunteer Recruitment, 20 new recruits joined our existing team of 20 volunteer Targeted Support Workers and embarked on a training programme to help combat poverty.

November

Our busiest month on record, up to 120 households a week visiting free mini markets at Prudhoe Spetchells Centre, Hexham Enterprise Hub and Haltwhistle Library.

December



The staff and customers at Hexham BP garage donated some wonderful toys and gifts through your Christmas Angels that went to 70 local children, which made a huge difference to the families we support at the Food Bank

“Thank you from the bottom of my heart to whoever dropped off the gifts for my children. You have saved Christmas. I am so overwhelmed and crying happy tears! I could not begin to describe how much this means to me”

January

To meet the ever growing demand on our free mini markets, offering a range of tinned dried and ambient food as well as toiletries and other household essentials, we took on an additional storage unit and started to offer fresh and frozen food.

February



We were thrilled when artist Matthew Thompson contacted us offering to donate 20% of his Tyne Travels Exhibition art sales to the Food Bank. It was particularly helpful right then as we had been working hard to meet around 500 requests for help a month so far that winter.

March

Ahead of the national lockdown to protect our visitors and volunteers from Covid-19 we closed our drop in sessions and opened helpline and delivery service. With just 8 Volunteer Support Workers and a reduced staff team we took 92 calls in the first few days from people experiencing poverty and from people shielding and unsure where to turn to for help with food and other essential supplies.

April



During our first month running a Helpline and Delivery service in the pandemic we made 309 door step deliveries to 169 households in lock down. We recruited extra drivers to help deliver essential supplies to people often living alone and feel very isolated who really appreciate seeing our friendly drivers and having a socially distanced chat. “ Means so much to me at these sad dark times”

May

As lockdown continued some of our TSWs returned to work on the helpline. People were becoming increasingly worried and need to spend longer talking to us. The helpline team make sure callers are listened to, treat with kindness and provided with essential supplies as well as given help to access other support.

June

3 months into the pandemic we had made 829 deliveries to 238 households across 14 towns and villages, thankfully donations continue to roll in from the public helping us purchase additional supplies. New Volunteers joined our Logistics Team working Monday to Friday to collect, sort and pack donations into around 150 food parcels a week.

July

The TSW helpline team took part in the Covid Cash Course from the Just Finance Foundation, our first experience of online training!

August



Hexham Fresh Food project, a network of 200 home growers, start donating their surplus homegrown organic crops to us.

September



Local people helped with funds to refurbish a store room to expand our daily helpline office staffed by TSWs who have taken around 3000 calls during the pandemic.



A Volunteer's View

In the months before the Covid pandemic, when we were open to the public, we seemed to be getting busier and busier. With queues outside the door before we opened and dozens of people to see in each session, I hope that people felt we were still able to give them as much time and attention as they needed. I really felt for those who found the busy morning sessions too overwhelming; thankfully, opening up our Hexham branch in the afternoons gave those people a quieter, calmer option. It felt like we were becoming a real community hub.

After the world changed in March and we closed our doors to visitors, the transformation in our operations has been incredible. John and the logistics volunteers did an amazing job switching to a packing and delivery system virtually overnight, which has evolved – along with the phone helpline – to meet the demand across the West Northumberland area.

It's obviously a lot quieter and calmer now in our units on Burn Lane, even if the phones sometimes don't stop ringing. But people still need our help and now my worry has shifted to those who saw the food bank as a safe place to come and talk to someone who would listen with a compassionate ear. My concern is that those people are now in even deeper social isolation than they might have been before the lockdowns began, so I always try to offer a social chat when we're not too busy.

On a personal level, while it can obviously be difficult and draining to hear so many people's experiences of poverty every week, I've really valued having my role at the food bank as a solid and dependable routine. It's helped keep me steady through such a tumultuous year.

Public Generosity

We have been amazed by the generosity and compassion of people throughout our communities who share our values of caring about each other and looking after each other.

We wouldn't be able to operate without you, and therefore a HUGE thank you goes out to every single person who has shown us kindness this year.

At least £90,000 worth of food and other essentials and over £143,000 in cash and Gift Aid has been donated through the year from local people, community groups, charitable trusts and businesses.

£143,000

in cash
donated in
the year

£90,000

worth of food and
essentials donated

- Allendale Lions
- Allendale Primary
- Allendale Village Hall
- Apple Press
- Bardon Mill Village Store
- Beltingham with Henshaw Parochial Church Council
- Carol Nunan Art Sale
- Catton WI
- Comm Foundation
- Community Foundation
- CSL Rough Platform Charity
- D Kilgallon - Gallery
- Eco Fair
- Footprint PR
- Hackwell
- Haltwhistle Sainsburys
- Halwhistle Walking Group
- Henry Bell Trust
- Hexham Comm Church
- Hexham Labour Party
- Hexham Rotary
- Hexham Town Council
- Hexham Trinity Methodist Church
- Humsaugh Village Shop
- Independent Food Aid Network
- Karbon Homes Limit
- Leslie and Lilian Manning Trust
- Masonic Charitable
- Merope Pease Facemask Love To Hold

- Methodists Corbridge
- Methodists Prudhoe
- MK Benevolent Charity
- Mrs F D Reed
- National Citizen Service
- NHS Trust
- Northumberland Cricket Club
- Rotary Club of Tynedale
- Sign and Design
- Slaley Village Shop
- Solarsigns
- Squires Foundation
- St Marys Guild
- St Oswins
- Terracycle
- Tesco
- The Baboons
- The Barber Bus.
- The Cooperative Group
- The Lions Club of Tynedale
- The Smith Charitable Trust
- The Talisman Trust
- Tom Doody Ltd
- Two Plus Two Commercial
- Tynedale Lions
- Tynedale Rotary Club
- Waitrose
- West End Methodist Church
- Wylam Pharmacy
- Wylam Spa



You can get in touch with West Northumberland Food Bank on:

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Email: getintouch@westnorthumberlandfoodbank.org.uk

You can also keep up to date with what we are doing by following our social media sites, links below:

FACEBOOK

TWITTER

INSTAGRAM

Registered charity number: 1158289

Report Designed by **Matt Hamer**