



West Northumberland

FOOD BANK

Project Report Year 9

October 2021 to September 2022

Project Manager's report

– Sam Gilchrist

We started the year fully expecting a significant spike in calls to our helpline as people were plunged into hardship during the 'perfect storm' of rising costs and falling incomes. All the major energy suppliers confirmed massive price hikes at the same time as the furlough scheme was ending and the £20 a week cut from Universal Credit was about to come into force in October 2021. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation* estimated that 27% of families with children in the Hexham constituency would be impacted by the planned cut to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit and callers to our helpline were very worried about the sudden drastic drop in income.

"I had £60 a month left after my bills were paid, and now I've lost £86 UC a month! I don't know how I'm going cope this winter"

Steve is in his 60s; he is unemployed and has a heart condition.

On top of this we were facing potential declining stock levels caused by the HGV crisis and supermarket supply shortages that were affecting food banks across the UK, but yet again our communities stepped in to help. With many swapping their usual food donation for a cash donation, we have been very fortunate that donation levels have remained strong during last year, enabling us to help 570 households with 1241 adults and children, which is far more people than ever before. 313 households came forward to ask for our help for the first time

This support from our communities helped us provide new and expanded support for households throughout West Northumberland including doorstep deliveries of fresh food and supermarket vouchers to all new callers to stock up on essential supplies, as many told us they had nothing left before they finally plucked up the courage to call us for some support.



"I'm spending a fortune on the meter just paying back debt and emergency credit. I never have more than £3 on it. I stay in bed to keep warm"

Some local people donated their Winter Fuel Allowance, wishing it to go to help others heat their homes. This helped us to make Hardship Awards for solid fuel and heating oil and to launch our first 'Energy Voucher' scheme in February 2022, making life a little easier for 100 local households who live with the constant worry of the prepayment meters running out of credit and turning off vital gas and electricity supplies to the home.

"Universal Credit comes in one hand and goes straight on bills. I've got my wage coming in but more than half of it goes on my rent. I've got a hundred and odd quid to last me four weeks"

Very often people who turn to us for help are overwhelmed with the generosity of local people who donate food, money and their time to help their neighbours. We are incredibly grateful and proud of the support we receive from kind and thoughtful locals.

On top of support from our communities, grant-giving organisations helped us create two part-time jobs, building our staff team to help us cope with the unprecedented demand. In April, Northumberland County Council awarded us £20,000 in funds, made available by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) as part of the Household Support Fund to support vulnerable residents. This helped us to buy in additional vital food supplies and increase our Hardship Funds to support the ever-growing number of local households who are struggling to stay afloat with the soaring cost of living, energy price hikes, low wages and insufficient benefits.

We ended the year ready to face yet another spike in demand with the October 2022 energy price hikes and the costs of a food shop spiralling, in a strong position to make sure households across West Northumberland are not left behind and going without.

2020-21 vs 2021-22
Households

386 vs **570**

Adults

509 vs **795**

Children

256 vs **446**

 local people make regular cash donations

 local people volunteer with us

 local businesses and organisations provide regular support

* – Universal credit cut - impact by constituency | JRF

Helpline report

Our helpline took **calls from around 100 households every week** who were struggling to stay afloat as costs soared against low wages and benefits – the standard allowance of Universal Credit is just £334.91 per month for a single adult. **55% of callers to our helpline had never used a food bank before**, or not for a very long time. The team help callers access other services – particularly benefits, debt and energy advice – ensuring callers were receiving the Government Cost of Living Support payments and helping callers access mental health services and local community-based projects.

“I am so grateful for all the help you provide for me and my family. I wouldn’t be able to pay off my debt or my rent arrears if you didn’t help us and I just wanted to say thank you!”

Stats on our callers

20% were in low-paid employment

10% are pensioners

26% are in treatment for their mental and/or physical health



Along with taking orders for food parcels, **the helpline team distributed £15,660 of Hardship Funds to provide shopping vouchers and energy vouchers for prepayment meters**. It’s really important that people experiencing poverty know where to go for advice on household fuel costs. This scheme means we can step in with a quick cash solution, like the fuel voucher we gave to a gentleman in his 70s who only puts on his heating for a couple of hours a day. Our helpline team make sure people can access other services, such as their energy suppliers’ support schemes and the Citizens Advice Northumberland Energy Project to avoid their prepayment meter disconnecting.

From May, our helpline started to take calls from some of the Ukrainians fleeing the conflict at home and finding refuge with local hosts in their own homes or self-contained accommodation, struggling to pay for food and essentials.



Case study

Dave* works 20 hours a week; he can’t work any more hours due to health problems. He receives Universal Credit (UC) monthly. Occasionally his payday from work falls on a weekend or a bank holiday, so he gets paid early. That means he gets paid twice in one UC monthly assessment period, so he doesn’t get any UC for the following month.

Dave has shared custody of his children. He has a two-bedroom property but doesn’t get any UC housing element for the second bedroom. After paying his rent and bills, he’s left with just over £20 per week to live on.

When Dave contacted us for help, his cooker had broken beyond repair and he had very little credit left on the gas and electric prepayment meters. We used some of our Hardship Funds to buy Dave a new cooker and get it safely installed. We also provided him with energy vouchers to top up both meters and supermarket vouchers to stock up on some fresh food.

“They’re a godsend – in more ways than just supplying food.

I wouldn’t have had heating or hot water. We’re having to prioritise which is more important: food, or electric and gas”

* Name has been changed



Helpline data

Every delivery we make is the result of a phone call that lasts on average around seven minutes, including the completion of paperwork. Having made **5,075 deliveries** over the course of Project Year 9, that amounts to about **35,500 minutes on phone calls**, up from 26,000 minutes in Year 8.

35,500
minutes =

592 hours, or
3.5 weeks



Helpline recruitment

36%
increase in
requests for
support



Since we started operating a helpline and delivery system in 2020, we had kept the same sort of rota patterns on the phone helpline – either one or two volunteers each morning and one in the afternoon. **As we saw a 36% increase in requests for support** from project year 8 to year 9, our helpline team simply didn't have the time to support everyone effectively. To that end, we opened up ten new volunteering shifts on the helpline in order to meet the number of phone calls. Naturally, the phones won't answer themselves, so we also had to recruit extra helpline volunteers to fill those shifts!

23

volunteers on
the helpline by
the end of the
project year



A cohort of five new helpline volunteers came on board in December 2021 to fill the most urgent Monday and Tuesday rota slots, followed by a further five volunteers over the summer of 2022. Our new recruits came from a wide range of backgrounds – including pharmacy, social work, IT and teaching – which meant that everyone brought something unique to the role. For some, it felt very familiar from previous experience, while others weren't used to offering support over the phone. Everyone rose to the challenge via our induction and training programme, and we finished the project year with 23 volunteers on the helpline.

“It's an invaluable service. There would be so many people who would collapse without the food bank”

Case studies

Stephanie* lives in a rented house which is heated through oil. She works 15 hours a week and receives Universal Credit. Until the sudden increase in oil prices, she could budget for around £300 every 8 weeks for 500 litres of heating oil. When Stephanie contacted us on a very cold morning in March, the oil tank was empty and the price was now £716 for 500 litres. Using our Hardship Funds, we made an award so she could order some heating oil. We also issued some shopping vouchers so she would have a little spare cash to help with her travel to work.

Vicky* is a single parent of three children, but her youngest was born just after the Two Child Limit came into force in April 2017. This means she gets no extra UC for her youngest, which would have been worth £244.58 a month.

When she contacted us in January, she'd had a very difficult winter. After the Universal Credit uplift of £20 per week ended in October and the energy price hikes came into effect, Vicky was finding it increasingly difficult to afford to keep the prepayment meter topped up and her home warm. She told us that she tries to batch cook for the week ahead and get all the laundry done on Sunday, as her energy supplier can't turn off the prepayment meter at the weekend. We used our Hardship Funds to provide an energy voucher so she could top up the meter.

* Names has been changed

Changes to deliveries

In October 2021, a busy delivery week was 85 deliveries. We had a pool of 18 volunteers (6 drivers and 12 bag packers) who delivered two days a week and did supermarket collections on the other three days. Deliveries were on Tuesdays to Haltwhistle and the West, and on Thursday to Prudhoe and the East.

The bag packing team was concentrated mainly toward the first half of the week.

After a bruising December where in a peak week 176 deliveries went out, it was clear that change was needed. In January 2022, we introduced a second Prudhoe delivery day (Monday), a second Haltwhistle day (Wednesday) and moved the Hexham element of Thursday deliveries to Friday. After a summer holiday lull, September 2022 hit us hard with over 110 deliveries every week.

13,500 miles covered between two vans



£35,200 spent buying in food supplies

77% of households received less than one delivery per month on average

8,500 bags of food worth £105,000 given away

18 volunteers in our team at this stage



Changes to Unit 2

By spring 2022, we were really starting to struggle for space in Unit 2. Bags going out were tripping over donations coming in and volunteers were literally dancing around one another. After a fruitless search for suitable alternative premises, a plan was hatched to demolish the toilet and kitchen area of the unit and then form a doorway through into Unit 1, so we could access the facilities in there. The doorway was installed in May and the kitchen/toilet was down by the end of July. The additional space we created has been critical to allowing us to grow with the volume increases we have seen.

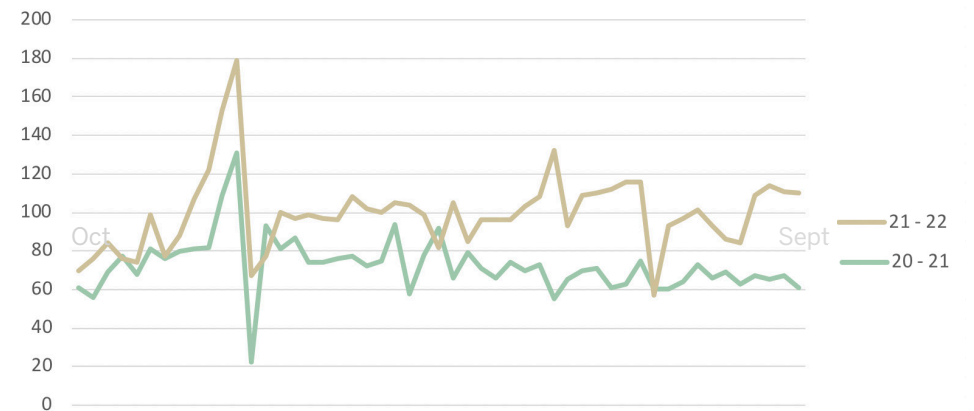


Fresh food bags

One clear need identified from the user survey of summer 2021 was people's desire for more fresh food. It was agreed by the board of trustees that we could have a budget of £8,500 to spend on fruit and vegetable bags based on a proposal to provide 50 per week.

1420 Fresh food bags provided, costing over £5,500

Illustration showing the weekly delivery volumes year on year



5,075 deliveries to 570 households



44 towns and villages provided with food parcels



Public support

1000 collections a year

20+ donation points

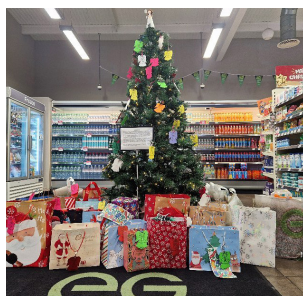
30+ local businesses and organisations providing regular support

£83,063 worth of stock donated

In May, local artist John Fowler and the Allendale Forge Studios worked together to raise money for our work. 30% of John's proceeds from the exhibition as well as 100% of the raffle ticket sales proceeds were used to buy vital supplies from Allendale Co-op!



To celebrate 100 years of Soroptimist International, our local group Soroptimist International Tynedale donated 100 items.



None of our work would be possible without donations from grant givers and from very thoughtful and generous local people, businesses and community organisations.

We sincerely appreciate everyone's support. We are incredibly grateful and proud of the support we receive from local people.

200 people bought Christmas Angels for local children

170+ people donated cash through our website, giving us the flexibility to support people effectively

£126,944 in cash donations + £17,901 in Gift Aid was donated by almost 500 people



Financial support from grant givers, local businesses and community organisations has been amazing - here are just a few!

- Allendale Lions
- Carol Nunan Arts
- County Durham Community Foundation Sherburn House
- De Vitre Fund
- Fire and Dough
- Greenhead Hotel
- Henry Bell Trust
- Hexham Abbey
- Hexham Rotary Club
- Hexham Trinity Methodist Church
- Humshaugh Village Hall
- Leslie and Lilian Manning Trust
- Masonic Charitable Trust
- Neighbourly Foundation
- Northumberland Communities Together Household Support Fund
- Northumberland Freemasons
- Northumbria Health Care Trust
- Places for People
- Skipton Building Society
- Smith Charitable trust
- Squires Foundation
- Society of St Vincent de Paul
- Tyne and Wear Community Foundation
- Tynedale Beer Festival
- Whitfield clay pigeon shoot

And a huge thank you to these local organisations:

- Waitrose Hexham
- Tesco Hexham
- The Co-op group - Haltwhistle
- Haydon Bridge
- Hexham
- Prudhoe
- Bellingham
- Corbridge
- Allendale Co-op
- Wylam Foodbank Info
- Barrasford village shop
- Bardon Mill village store
- Slaley Community Shop
- Corbridge Middle School
- Hexham Middle School
- Prudhoe High School
- Haydon Bridge High School
- The Hygiene Bank
- Wark Post office
- Wylam Pharmacy
- Wylam Spar
- BP Garage Hexham
- Glasstap Alston
- PCCA – Prudhoe
- Tyne Valley Ices
- Essity

A special thanks to Newcastle Dog and Cat shelter and just about every Church in West Northumberland!

Thank you to news and documentary photographer Mary Turner for her time and skill capturing images of our work.



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

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Email: getintouch@westnorthumberlandfoodbank.org.uk

Registered charity number: 1158289

Report Designed by **Matt Hamer**