

## West Northumberland Food Bank, year 4 project report October 2016 to September 2017

In our fourth year of operation we expected a 75% increase in requests for help from people experiencing poverty throughout West Northumberland. Also as two out of three requests for help in year 3 were from people in treatment for Mental and Physical Health problems, we knew we had to develop and expand our services to support more people in financial hardship especially people in poor health.

We set out to meet this increased need by recruiting and training additional Volunteer Welfare Rights Advocates, offering more sessions from our centres in Prudhoe and Haltwhistle and doubling our efforts to bring in extra donations of food and household essentials to our base in Hexham. We expected to help an additional 24 households in year 4; we actually helped 148 more than the year before and met 2194 requests for help an overall increase in demand of 111% (spiking at 133% some months).

Although we have at times felt shocked at the mounting inequality we witness, saddened by some of the terrible hardship we try to help with and frustrated with growing gaps in the state safety net, we also feel so privileged to be able to provide much needed support to so many people.

Last year we achieved everything we set out to do and more, we could not have done this without great **Public Support, Volunteers and Partnerships**, and together we really have made a great deal of difference.



**"What would we do without the Lions?!"**

**Our great friends Tynedale Lions took us shopping when the Food Bank shelves were looking a bit empty**

Local people have also donated an amazing £18,740 including Gift Aid at fundraising events such as the 'I, Daniel Blake' screenings at the Hexham Forum Cinema and Bardon Mill Village Hall. Across West Northumberland local groups have raised funds like Riding Mill Parish Hall fete, Haltwhistle Coffee Morning and the 'No Place Like Home' event.

We also received an unprecedented amount of donations from local individuals including regular standing orders and people donating their Winter Fuel allowance to others in greater need. This level of support is a big public statement proving just how much people care about each other in the communities of West Northumberland, and that **Together We Do Make a Difference!**

**Public Support** Last year we received more public support than ever before. Local people donated well over £32,000 worth of food and household essentials. Through Churches, Schools, Scouts/Guides Groups, Workplaces, Sports Clubs and Community Groups, local people have rallied together to collect much needed donations. On top of our annual Holiday Hunger and Christmas Appeals, and the big collection at Tesco, Harvest Festivals, the Tynedale Lions and the local Labour Party taking us shopping, individuals have continued to donate regularly at our collection points at the Coops, Beales, Waitrose, Sainsbury, and Tesco. Combined with surplus produce donated by Caterers Independent Retailers and Marks and Spencer we received enough to fill and distribute 3645 bags of food and other essential supplies and 181 Christmas Hampers.



**The I, Daniel Blake effect**  
We've seen a marked increase in donations since this film's release that started straight after a special screening at the Forum Cinema Hexham to a full house. Actor Dave Johns, who plays the title role, came along to discuss the film and the issues that it raises hosted by Richard Moss from BBC North East & Cumbria.

**Volunteers.** Volunteering is vital to the success of the Food Bank. We have a core team of 8 volunteers at our base in Hexham who organise collections, storage and distribution of food and household essentials, they also keep the Food Bank clean and organised as well providing admin and data management support. That team are supported 3 mornings a week by a rota of 7 local organisations Tynedale Lions, St Marys Church, Trinity Church, Hexham Abbey, Hexham Community Church, Hexham Quakers and West End Methodists. On top of this we have another team from Prudhoe Churches Together organising collections and distribution in Prudhoe, and many more casual volunteers available for events and cover. In total 83 volunteers have given over 1,400 hours of their time last year working together to help people in hardship.



**Volunteer Welfare Rights Advocates** Last year we recruited 19 new volunteers to help meet the huge increase in demand from people who come to us feeling alone with the problems they are facing and embarrassed to ask for help. Here are some of our new recruits at the start of their training programme. Once on placement at our 3 centres they distributed food and provided vital support by offering people a caring friendly person to listen, have a cup of tea with, help make difficult phone calls, fill out forms and write letters (see P4)

**Why do people come to the Food Bank? The issues underlying poverty in West Northumberland last year**

1. **EMPLOYMENT 18%** of requests are from people in low paid employment. Some have very little job security with hours cut or they're on a zero hours contract and have little or no work some weeks. Sadly just 5% have enough work hours to be eligible for the 'in work benefit' Tax Credits that should help to make ends meet.
2. **JOB LOSS 4%** of requests are from people who have recently lost their job.
3. **IN RECEIPT OF BENEFIT 89%** are from people in receipt of benefits including pension credits and "in work" benefits. Most benefits have been frozen since 2015 but the cost of living just keeps rising leaving many in financial hardship
4. **BENEFIT DELAY 22%** of requests are due to DWP and HMRC benefit processing which can be lengthy and complicated to sort out. This can happen following a change of circumstance or starting a new claim for instance we've seen people wait over 12 weeks for Universal Credit.
5. **BENEFIT SANCTION 11%** are due to a UC, JSA and ESA sanctions where payment can be suspended for up to 3 years for alleged missed appointments or being judged not trying hard enough to find work.
6. **DEBT 42%** of requests are due to debt, this includes personal debt like credit loans as well as rent arrears, council tax arrears, utilities arrears, benefit loan deductions, bank charges and owing money to family or friends.
7. **MENTAL HEALTH 30%** and 8. **PHYSICAL HEALTH 32%** The majority of requests for help have been from people receiving treatment for health problems who are having difficulties claiming benefit entitlements. Also many face additional costs linked to illness such as travel costs for hospital appointments which can cause even greater financial hardship
9. **OTHER 19%** are due to other reasons such as School Holiday Hunger, school uniforms, fuel poverty, moving costs, homelessness, vets bills, ex partners not paying child maintenance, travel costs, escaping Domestic Abuse, appliance breakdowns, paying for funerals and even buying work boots can leave people in hardship

We had **2194** requests for help

From **842** people in **393** households  
 88 Prudhoe, 88 Haltwhistle  
 217 Hexham

**1088** from single people

**441** from Prudhoe

**781** from families

**663** from Haltwhistle

**325** from adult families

**1090** from Hexham

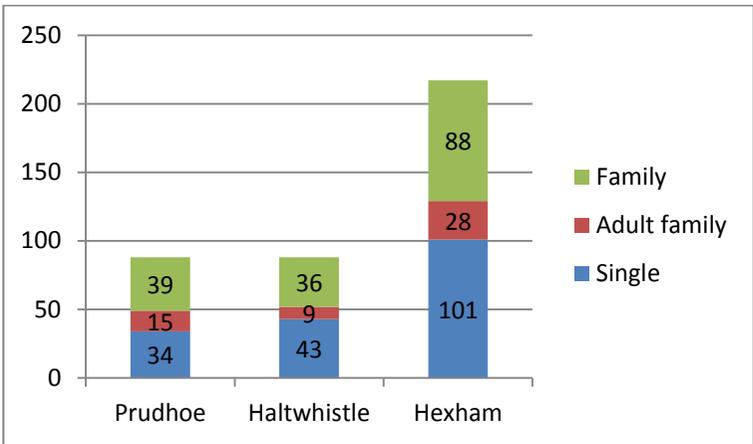
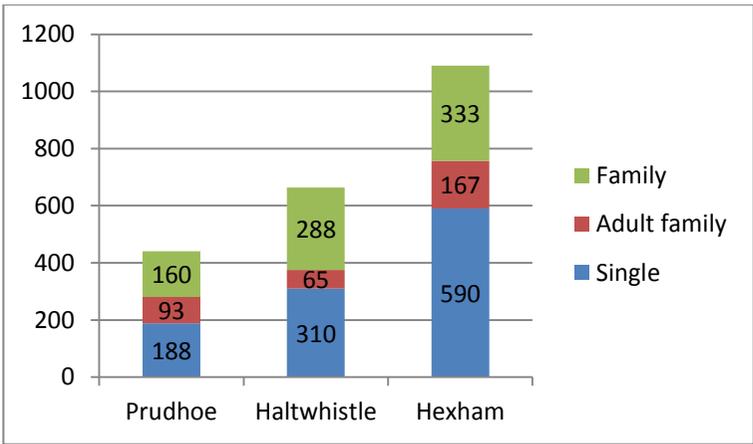
**526** Adults

115 adults and 87 children in Prudhoe

**316** Children  
 70% under 11

123 adults and 68 children in Haltwhistle

288 adults and 161 children in Hexham



Reason	Why people come to the foodbank								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Prudhoe	12%	5%	79%	29%	18%	35%	29%	26%	17%
H'whistle	16%	5%	94%	15%	9%	56%	28%	22%	10%
Hexham	21%	3%	89%	23%	8%	36%	36%	37%	26%
Total	18%	4%	89%	22%	11%	42%	32%	30%	19%

1. Employed
  2. Job Loss
  3. In receipt of benefit
  4. Benefit delay
  5. Benefit sanction
  6. Debt
  7. Mental health
  8. Physical health
  9. Other
- See page 2 for details

**Welfare Rights Advocacy Service.** We know through the 2014 Northumberland Advice Network mapping exercise that Advice Agencies are being cut. Since then our Welfare Rights Advocacy service has helped fill that gap in provision and last year our team of Volunteer Welfare Rights Advocates supported 88 households (109 adults and 50 children) across West Northumberland, including 8 lengthy benefit cases for people with disability and/or mental health grounds to claim £88,843 of benefit award that they were finding incredibly difficult to do on their own. Here's what just 4 of the people we have helped say;

*Me and my children had to go into homeless accommodation in Hexham. I went to the food bank and talked to a worker there about my situation as my child benefit had stopped. She was very patient and helped me phone the child benefit agency and write to them appealing the decision and explaining our situation. I was very stressed and anxious at the time and not thinking very straight. The food bank worker helped me take control of things that I was struggling to do and I couldn't have done it without her help.*

*I'm on Universal Credit and about to start a new job. I came to the food bank and when I told the woman there that I had only a few pounds on my gas and electric she explained that energy suppliers can provide emergency credit which I didn't know. We phoned up and got it sorted. I was saying to my daughter that I've never been as low as this in my life. The people at the food bank have really restored my faith in humanity and I'm so thankful.*

*I was put onto Universal Credit when I lost my job. I managed for four weeks without any money but was very stressed all the time and I ran out of food. Someone told me about the food bank and it took a lot of courage to go. When I walked in I burst into tears and could hardly speak I was so upset and ashamed. A lady took me to one side, made me a cup of tea and listened when I was feeling calmer. She was lovely and told me that I could apply for an advance payment which I didn't know about and she helped me phone the jobcentre to apply for one. I don't know what I would have done if it wasn't for the food bank and their kindness.*

*I'm a 54 year old woman and have always had a job since I left school. I've had a lower back problem which has got worse over the last year and I'm getting treatment from a consultant. I take prescribed painkillers including liquid morphine every day. I'm in constant pain and cannot get comfortable sitting or standing. I applied for ESA, went for my assessment and was declared fit for work as they said I could use a wheelchair. Many times I have broken down and cried when I have had to use the food bank. They helped me with the mandatory reconsideration, which was turned down, then we went to an appeal tribunal and won. The tribunal was very stressful, there was a DWP man there and I felt like a criminal. Without the support from the woman at the food bank who helped fill forms in and came to the appeal I would not have had the confidence to go through with it*

**Partnerships** 20% of our distribution in Year 4 was through partners including Stop Gap, No28 and Hexham Youth Initiative. In particular 9% of our distribution was through the Sure Start Children's Centres who led the call for a local Food Bank in 2012 and have remained close partners since, working together to ensure families with young children across West Northumberland do not go hungry.

Just some of our other partners who helped us to achieve so much in Year 4 include Prudhoe Community Partnership who helped us to improve and expand our work in Prudhoe at the Spetchells Centre. Chris Metcalf for providing excellent Mental Health Awareness Training and Northumberland County Councils (NCC) welfare rights team who provide us with invaluable training, information and advice year on year.

Also the NCC Community Regeneration Team particularly Anne Lawson who facilitated a development day where we started to plan how we could continue to meet the ever increasing demand in the coming years. Recommendations from this day were to expand our Welfare Rights Advocacy service into a 'Targeted Support Service' offering more help to people in hardship, and we look forward to reporting on our progress with this next year.

Report by Sam Gilchrist Project Coordinator, Jo Walker Lead Targeted Support Worker, John Stoker Data Manager.