



Year 5 project report

Food bank use up 37% year on year

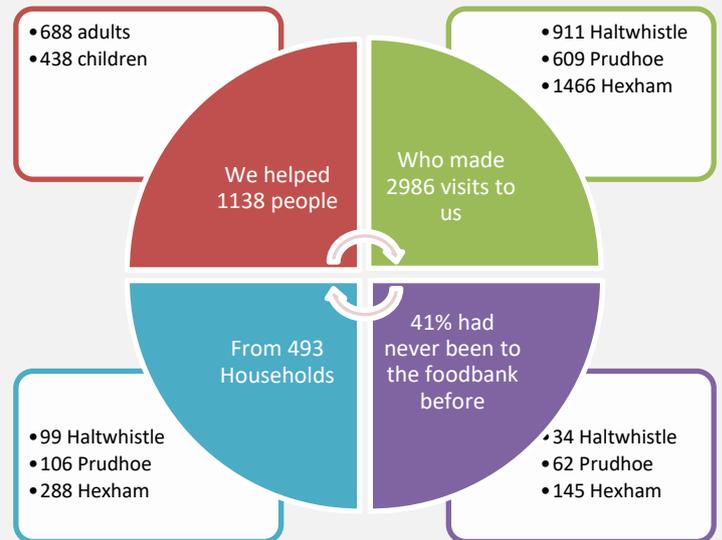
At West Northumberland Foodbank we handled a record 2,986 requests for help during our last project year.

Demand rose from 2,166 visits in 2016–17 to 2,986 visits in 2017–18, an increase of 37.86%.

A total of over 1,100 people from 493 households, including almost 450 children, were provided with food and support from our three foodbanks in Hexham, Haltwhistle and Prudhoe.

41% of people who used the food bank in the last project year had never been before.

From our three food banks we provided food and support to people throughout the district. People from over 38 towns and villages either attended or had food delivered to them. Our area stretches from the Cumbrian border in the West to Otterburn in the North and Ponteland in the East.



Public generosity continued support

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

In workplaces, sports clubs, community groups, churches and schools; through family and neighbourhood networks, people have rallied together for our annual Holiday Hunger, Christmas Appeals and Harvest Festivals to collect much-needed donations. Throughout the year, people donated regularly at our local collection points whilst shopping for their own homes, at church services or whilst dropping the kids off at school. People have given around £64,500 worth of food and household essentials, enough to fill and distribute 5,250 food parcels and Christmas hampers for local people in hardship. At a time of declining funding to charities from the Government, local people have come to the rescue and donated enough funds to help us support over 1,100 people last year.



Through regular standing orders, cash gifts or people donating their Winter Fuel Allowance, community fund raising events such as Park Runs, Cake Sales, Raffles, Quiz Nights and Sponsored Walks, people have given £32,289 to help their neighbours in times of need.

Friends of WNFB Kirk Barclay, Geoff Cant, Tony Hunter, Gavin Waugh, Keith Boylan and Kathy Keady, took up their walking boots and tackled the Pennine Journey from near Settle to Hexham, that's 115 miles over 5 consecutive days, raising £2,230 for our Holiday Hunger appeal.

A visitor's experience

"I was overwhelmed that someone had thought about us"

"I never thought that I would ever use a food bank, but I had separated from my long term partner and had no income except Child Tax Credits and Child Benefit.

I'd never claimed benefits before, but the staff explained the system to me so I could understand the benefits I was entitled to.

I have had a congenital physical disability since birth, so the support worker asked if I was in receipt of either DLA or PIP. I had never heard of either.

She helped me apply for PIP and when I went for my assessment, the assessor said that I should have been getting help all my life.

I was awarded higher rate on both daily living and mobility and this has changed our lives.

At Christmas, the food bank had wrapped some presents for my children and me. I was overwhelmed that someone had thought about us."

Achievements

Our objective is to prevent and relieve poverty in West Northumberland. Last year – to meet an ever growing demand for our help and make best use of our limited resources – we launched our 'Targeted Support Service' on 1st October 2017. This service broadened our existing Welfare Rights Advocacy work to target the causes of poverty such as debt, low pay, poor physical and mental health, as well as benefits problems. It provides visitors with much needed support through signposting and referral, but mainly through advocacy, working with and on behalf of people when contacting other agencies such as debt collectors and the DWP.

We recruited and trained 14 new Volunteers and opened 2 extra sessions per week in Prudhoe and Haltwhistle. Our team of Support Workers achieved so much last year, meeting around 75 requests for help every week, providing targeted support and, above all, kindness to people who are often feeling alone and overwhelmed with problems.



A family's story

"If it hadn't been for the food bank we wouldn't have been able to feed our children"

"My husband and I started a small business and, although it was going really well and we were working hard, the nature of the business meant it was going to take some time to get the cash flow balanced.

We have three small children and were getting Universal Credit, but in December our payment was reduced suddenly by £600.

We were told that, under UC as self-employed people, there is a minimum income floor which only lasts for one year. We weren't aware of this and therefore hadn't budgeted for it.

This unforeseen circumstance meant that we only had enough money to cover the rent and were running out of

bottled gas for heating and cooking.

If it hadn't been for the food bank, we wouldn't have been able to feed our children."

Organisations helping us out

Lots of organisations went the extra mile raising funds for the food bank last year. We don't have enough room to thank them all, so here are just a few. Our big collection at Tesco in December brought in 135 crates of donations and £1200! Tyne Valley chamber choir Antiphon put on a pre-Christmas evening concert of jollity and wassailing,



more than 200 guests making donations to WNFB and sampling complimentary pizza.

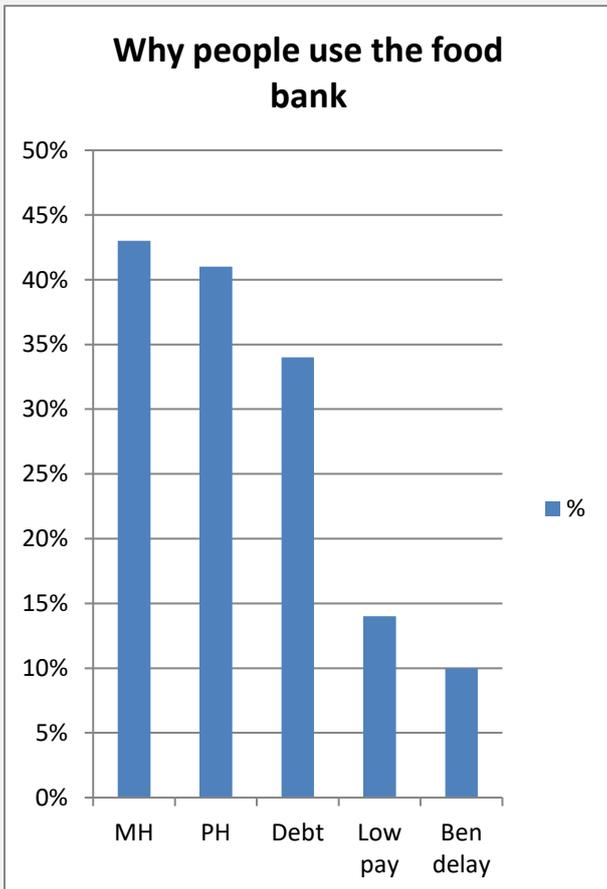
Hexham Town Mayor's Community Chest and the Screwfix foundation paid for a refurbishment of our unit in Hexham, with carpets, new heating and screened off confidential areas installed, offering our visitors a warmer and more welcoming experience.



The Fuse Cinema in Prudhoe did a special screening of *I, Daniel Blake*, The Forum Cinema in Hexham hosted a Summer Quiz in our benefit, the local National Citizenship Award Scheme organised a family fun day and the wood-fired pizza van Fire and Dough, set up by former QEHS students Ross Keady and John Nicholson, had a launch party with



Why people come to the Foodbank



Mental / physical health	Over 40% of those visiting the food bank suffer from either a physical or mental health issue. This can lead to issues claiming appropriate benefits as well as problems caused by additional costs related to hospital visits.
Debt / budgeting issues	Rent arrears, utility debts, budgeting loans, all can contribute to debt issues that prevent people affording food.
Receiving benefit	94% of visitors to the food bank claim benefits of some kind. Benefits payment levels have not risen significantly for a number of years.
Benefit delay	Over 10% of visitors attend due to hardship caused by delays processing benefit claims.
Homelessness	Almost 10% of visitors to the food bank are homeless.
Low pay	At least 14% of visitors are employed. Wages or hours are low or not guaranteed, leading to poverty and anxiety.

West Northumberland Foodbank

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Registered charity
number: 1158289

**FOOD
BANK**
— West Northumberland —

West Northumberland Foodbank is a charity based in Hexham, providing a safety net for people in hardship throughout the area. Through the collection and distribution of food donations and other household essentials alongside support with benefits and debt problems our aim is to help people get back on their feet.



A Volunteer's view

Giving support

"As part of the Targeted Support Team in the Hexham WNFB branch, I not only help our visitors with their immediate needs (supplying them with food, toiletries, etc.) but also try to make sure that they're accessing all the resources to which they're entitled.

That can range from pointing people towards benefits application

hotlines, through to making contact with organisations like DWP, utilities providers or debt collection agencies on their behalf, helping them fill in forms (both paper and, increasingly, online) that might not even be in their first language.

Volunteering at WNFB undoubtedly brings me into contact with people often at the most difficult

and desperate time of their lives, but the thing that keeps me coming back is seeing the resilience, determination and good humour that so many of our visitors display.

They won't be broken by a system that seems, time and time again, to be stacked against them. We see such a change in people from the time they arrive to the moment they go out of the door."

Rural issues

"Rural areas have particular problems of low wages, limited job opportunities and scarce, expensive public transport. We have sometimes

helped provide home deliveries or lifts for visits to job centres, welfare assessment appointments and health visits which would simply not have happened otherwise. This

can really make a difference to people's lives and help them stay in touch with basic support systems."

Goodbye to our Chair Rev. Neil Wilson who moved on to pastures new with wife Val our exceptional minute secretary, we will miss them both. Neil's warmth, good humour, leadership and his genuine compassion for others has helped us make an enormous difference to the lives of so many.