

Chair's Report 2020 Morecambe Bay Foodbank

Introduction

When I wrote the Chair's Report before our last AGM in February 2020 I wondered to myself whether or not I would be able to write this year to say that Foodbank use had decreased in our area. Little did we all know that the Pandemic was barrelling towards us and would upend our lives in ways previously unimagined.

From the moment Covid-19 took hold, staff and volunteers have had to adapt incredibly quickly to try and continue to provide emergency food to people who need it quickly, efficiently and most importantly, safely. We had to close down our face to face operation at the West End Community Centre because we could not socially distance in that space and it wasn't safe for volunteers, staff or clients. We then had a dilemma on our hands about how to reach and help people who we knew were going to be in need of food.

In the third week of March we had an initial discussion with staff at Lancaster City Council who recognised that access to food might become difficult for some residents as the first lockdown arrived. Their foresight and willingness to work with us and let us lead the emergency food operation was amazing and our partnership grew from a sunny afternoon outside Salt Ayre Leisure Centre with blank bits of paper, to a fully fledged delivery operation that has to date delivered over 37,000 emergency five day food supplies to people in our district.

The Council gave the Foodbank access to staff, vans, buildings and funded boxes and fresh food purchasing. Without this support the Foodbank could not have kept people fed during the Pandemic and we are extremely grateful to the staff, councillors and cabinet members at Lancaster City Council for their willingness to work in partnership with us. Particular thanks go to Mark Davies and Suzanne Lodge at the Council who were so keen for us to develop a good working relationship, and to Rachel Williams for allowing us to take over her Sports Centre for so long with such grace and fortitude, to Simon, Tom and Terry for subsequently lending us The Platform Building in Morecambe with such generosity to operate from in the second half of the year. To all those staff - lifeguards, training instructors, events managers, receptionists and others among the Council Staff who found themselves packing boxes rather than doing their day jobs - thank you! Their willingness to get stuck in was so much appreciated as demand escalated.

Special thanks must also go to Lancaster Area Search and Rescue (LASAR) who provided route mapping software and helped us to get our heads around delivery routes and how to schedule everything. A website was built at record speed and at cost by Hotfoot Design to allow agencies to refer clients via a website rather than the usual red vouchers, and thanks also go to them for their willingness to work all day and night to get it in place so fast.

Our logistics manager David Smith was like a quiet magician in the centre of all this activity. His ability to calmly direct huge quantities of goods, people, vehicles and donations never ceases to amaze me, especially as he does it with such grace and good humour! Thank you David.

As always, Citizens Advice have been on hand to provide thousands of foodbank referrals and along with the City Council, schools and our other partner agencies have taken many thousands of calls from clients needing help. We hope to work in close partnership with agencies, other charities and statutory organisations into the future and are so glad of the opportunity to work together across the district to serve clients.

Volunteers

Our volunteers are of course crucial to what we do. For some of them, it was heartbreaking to have to shield during the pandemic as they were so used to being on the front lines, helping clients and distributing food. We appreciate and miss all our volunteers who have not been able to participate over the past year and we look forward to welcoming them heartily when we are back to 'normal' again. As Annette always says, this is a Foodbank family and it has been hard not to see each other, to drink a brew together and have a chat with each other and with clients as we work.

We also experienced a devastating loss in 2020 when volunteer Richard Rolfe passed away suddenly in the summer. Richard was a dedicated, loyal, funny, kind and incredibly hard working member of the volunteer team who had been involved with the foodbank almost from the beginning. Our sincerest condolences go to his wife Gail and daughters Jess and Beth, all of whom work so hard for our Foodbank. We will miss Richard and we all remember him with much warmth and gratitude.

Despite these strange times we have continued to welcome new volunteers to the foodbank and new staff too, including two 'Foodbus' staff, Lacey and James, who have been working on our pilot project, and our new finance manager Tarnia who joined us recently. Welcome to new staff and to new volunteers! We are so grateful for all your work and help. Our volunteers continue to be our lifeblood and they work incredibly hard, delivering thousands and thousands of food parcels and you may have seen our vans whizzing about the district taking emergency food to those who need it. Volunteers have been very flexible about changing the way that they work and accommodating the restrictions that come with Covid-19 so thank you for everything you've done to make it straightforward and possible. Thanks go to Dan Clarkson, our statistics volunteer who compiles all our numbers into beautiful reports that really help to inform our strategy, and to Colin Midwinter who has taken over social media this year and is doing a fabulous job.

As ever, our volunteer manager Briony Scott has been on hand to help and support volunteers whether they were with us or at home. Thank you Briony for ensuring that everyone has been welcomed, kept safe, kept included and kept sane.

Donations

As always, the good people of this district have never let us down - and although there were moments when we worried about having enough food, the donations that we have received have been frankly breathtaking. The villages in the Lune Valley deserve a special mention as they got together to do huge food drives that kept us in key foodstuffs over the year, but donations flooded in from all over the place and all throughout the year culminating in a huge surge over Christmas so that we could try to give as many families a Christmas food parcel as possible. Financial donations have also increased a lot over this year and we are so grateful for every penny given to us by generous donors. These funds help us to pay our staff, fund our vehicles, computer equipment, insurance, administration and in the future, a new building for the Foodbank to operate from.

Staff

As we limped over the finish line of 2020 at the end of December, I wanted to give our staff a medal! (and a hug). They have worked so, so hard this year, some despite their own health challenges, and have remained professional, calm, warm, generous and welcoming despite trying to

maintain social distancing, pack what felt like millions of boxes, get vans on the road, deal with moving the foodbank twice and cope with huge amounts of donations and interest in our work, plus getting used to working in partnership with Council staff.

I do not underestimate how hard the year has been and how hard it continues to be to do this job and I salute each and every staff member on our amazing team for all their work. As ever, our manager Annette stands at the centre of our operation, and despite having just had surgery at the start of 2020 ensured that the whole operation worked, that the Council understood what we were trying to do, that all staff knew what they were doing and miraculously, that we managed to feed people when they needed it most. Thank you Annette for your incredibly hard work and leadership of our organisation.

Numbers fed

In 2020 we delivered 38,196 five day food supplies. That breaks down to 25,768 adults and 12,428 children. These are enormous numbers and represent an increase of 368% on 2019. Obviously the numbers represent extraordinary times and part of this was that some people couldn't access food at the start of the pandemic despite being able to afford it. However this was a small proportion of the overall need and we have discovered as the year has progressed that much of this increase has come because we are delivering to people's houses, so they can access emergency food in a way that they could not do so previously. This has implications for how we plan our service in the future and the design of our service will be a key strategic aim for trustees 2021 as we recover and plan how we will help people over the coming months and years.

A new home?

The council have generously housed us since March 2020 but this was never a permanent arrangement and a new home has been sought for some time by trustees. In 2021 we hope to move to new premises to start the next step on our journey which will be to continue to help people as we all recover from this devastating pandemic. We don't know what demand is going to be like but we suspect it will be high, and we are prepared to meet whatever is thrown at us. That's because we have an amazing team of staff, trustees and volunteers and we are all committed to ensuring that no one goes hungry in our community. Coupled with our foodbank we also hope to house our Uniform Project at a new building which this year gave out free uniform to over 200 families who needed it. A particular thank you goes to Briony Scott, our volunteer co-ordinator who organised much of the distribution of uniform in August when demand was very high.

Trustees

Trustees also deserve a special thank you this year as they have been trying to guide our organisation through the storm and there have been many difficult decisions to take along the way. They are all volunteers and my particular thanks goes to them for their wisdom, time, kindness and generosity in helping us tread the right path as we move forward into 2021.

Particular thanks go to John Entwistle, our treasurer who has done so much to keep our finances in check since he started in his role in 2016. We now have a finance manager, Tarnia, in place who, with her trusty calculator and spreadsheets, can take some of the day to day work off John and we hope that he can enjoy a bit more leisure time as a result! We welcomed 4 new trustees to our board in 2020 - Mark Wight, Rev Ian Dewar, Paddy Hunt and Dusty Thomas who have joined us, and we very sadly said goodbye to the wonderful Jean O Neill and Trudy Wilkinson, who left us to

spend more time with grandson and family respectively. Thank you to both of them for everything they did to support the foodbank.

Clients

We know that this year we have served many, many people who may never have imagined that they would need to use a foodbank. We don't for a moment underestimate how hard it can be to pick up the phone and ask for help. We are so glad that people have done so and we will, along with the Trussell Trust, continue to advocate for the people who need to use our service, and campaign to tell the government that policies must change to make sure everyone can afford the basics.

It remains for me to thank all our supporters, cheerleaders, donors, partners and anyone who has provided help to people in need during an unprecedented year. We don't know what the next few years will hold but we have learned, and shown, that we work best and serve our community best when we work together.

Joanna Young
Chair of Trustees
10th February 2021