

Chair's Report - Morecambe Bay Foodbank 2019

Introduction

When our charity was formed the trustees agreed that our initial strategic aim was to close our Foodbank because we didn't believe that anyone should need to use one.

We still believe that no one should have to use a Foodbank but the reality is that in 2019 we have seen the numbers of people using our services increase for the seventh year in a row. Looking at our data, we know that although numbers are now levelling off from the previous steep rises in 2016 and 17 (when Universal Credit was rolled out in our area), they remain stubbornly high.

At our last trustees' Away Day we agreed that 'closure' is a waste of a strategic aim. We have too much to do, and we acknowledge that we are likely to be here for at least the next five years. This is unwelcome, but realistic.

As such, we have spent 2019 consolidating our operations and trying to ensure that we are sustainable, well-structured, well-run and have enough money to work with to run the Foodbank and plan additional projects that will be aimed on preventing its use in the first place. This relies on successful partnership working with other organisations who we are extremely grateful for.

Foodbank numbers

At the heart of our operation is our Foodbank which in 2019 saw a relatively small increase in usage (compared with other years) of 16.1%.

From 1st January - 31st December 2019 we gave out 8,152 emergency three day food parcels with 3,357 of these going to children.

The numbers of people seeking our help continues to rise, and despite national campaigning from The Trussell Trust (who use our data, along with other Foodbanks across the country), the five week wait for Universal Credit and the benefits cap remain in place. The principal reason in 2019 why people come to see us is, again, "Low Income" which it was last year too - showing that for many, there is simply not enough money for those on the lowest incomes to afford the basics.

Like all Trussell Trust Foodbanks, we allow users to come to us up to three times in any given 'crisis' period (usually six months) unless there are exceptional circumstances. This is because we are an emergency service, and also because we don't want to create dependence on the Foodbank. Our statistics show that the average user comes to us 2.2 times, with 57% of users coming to us only once. A small number of clients come more than three times, by prior agreement in exceptional circumstances.

Campaigning

Along with the Trussell Trust nationally we called on politicians and policy makers last year from all sides to listen to what these numbers are saying, and to act accordingly, but there is no change in policy yet. We will keep campaigning and keep sharing our statistics and the stories of those who rely on us both locally and nationally.

Last Spring we were glad to welcome Heidi Allen MP and Frank Field MP to Morecambe to see our Foodbank and to speak to us and a number of other colleagues working in the charity and third sector to tell them about the experiences of our clients, and the experiences that we ourselves were having in trying to serve these needs. This visit was highlighted in the national press and on Channel 4 News, and our manager Annette was on BBC Breakfast nationally, talking about Holiday Hunger. Although it can feel uncomfortable for us to put our heads above the parapet, this public campaigning forms part of our work and we hope that by raising awareness about what our clients go through, we can encourage both giving, and the policy change that will reduce our numbers.

Food Donations

In 2019 we received just over sixty tonnes of food which was donated by the general public, and twenty four tonnes from our partners who give us fresh food (Bookers, Morrisons, Speights and Greggs, to whom we are incredibly grateful). This total of eighty four tonnes represents an average donation of seven tonnes per month. We are giving out as much as we are taking in, so the demand is there and the public have been hugely generous in helping us to meet the need.

Huge thanks go to every single person who thinks of us when they are shopping and drops a tin or a packet into our donation bins - every tin really does help, and we know, from the reaction of our clients when we give out food, how sincerely it is appreciated. Thanks also go to those supermarkets and their staff who host our donation bins, namely Sainsbury's, Asda and Tesco locally.

Referral Agencies

We have over 130 different professional referral agents 'on the ground' who give out vouchers for our clients to bring to the Foodbank. Without their help, we couldn't operate and particular thanks goes to Citizen's Advice (CAB) in both Morecambe and Lancaster, who give out over 75% of our vouchers.

CAB's volunteers and staff are unceasingly generous in helping our clients to get the vouchers that they need, but more importantly in offering them further help to signpost them to other services so that they don't need to come back to us. We hope to work in partnership with Helen

Greatorex and her team at CAB on further projects in the coming years to help clients whenever we can.

Volunteers

Our volunteer team has increased again in 2019 and is now up to eighty people who regularly help us in myriad ways with the Foodbank operation. In 2019 we calculated that if we were paying a national living wage to each and every volunteer for their average of five hours a week, it would have cost us over £170,000 to operate the Foodbank, based on an estimate of 20,800 volunteer hours donated in a year. (NB this is simply the wages, not employer costs!).

From driving a van, to making the tea, from listening to clients to designing posters and from data entry to stacking and shifting tonnes and tonnes of food, we have an extraordinary team who pulls together, works incredibly hard and serves our community with grace and love. To all our volunteers, thank you. The work that you put in, and the kindness that you show to our clients is remarkable.

The Uniform Project

The Uniform Project having been started in 2018, formally opened in July 2019 in a unit next to the Arndale Centre in Morecambe which has been kindly donated to us for free to use by the company that operates The Arndale - Riverside.

The Uniform Project offers free uniform to anyone who needs it, which has been donated by countless generous families across the Bay.

Since we opened in July, 285 families have been given (on average 5 items) of free school uniform. This is important for children, who should be able to start school looking smart and ready to learn, but it also means that families who might previously have had to choose between food and uniform are kept away from using the Foodbank as a result. Many thanks to all our Uniform Project volunteers who have worked so hard to get this project started and for their ongoing efforts, and to Standfast & Barracks and Johnson's Cleaners for their support with this work.

Funding

Our financial year runs from 1st September - 31st August and we are very pleased to report that our fundraising efforts have more than doubled our income over the past year. Whether donations are large or small, regular or one-off, we are so grateful to everyone who thinks of us.

In 2019 we have also been fortunate to receive ongoing grant support from The Walney Foundation, The Westminster Foundation, Lancaster City Council and The Trussell Trust. The

Lancaster District Chamber of Commerce named us their charity of the year for which we are very grateful.

Financial donations have come to us from all sorts of places, including churches, schools, scout groups, hospitals, small and large companies, football teams, groups of friends, families and individuals. Thank you to all of them!

In July singer-songwriter Frank Turner came back to Lancaster for the second time to perform a benefit show for us at Lancaster Town Hall (and he also officially opened our Uniform Project with help from the deputy mayor and pupils from Morecambe Bay School). Frank's gig raised over £14,000 for the Foodbank. Thanks to him and all those who bought a ticket for the show.

Sincere thanks also go to all those wonderful people who have run, walked, eaten cake, stopped eating cake, bought raffle tickets, danced, sung, cycled or done anything else in aid of the Foodbank, and their sponsors! These donations make a huge difference to us and we are very grateful for each and every one. You can read our financial statements alongside this document.

Staff

Last year we were delighted to receive a generous grant from The Walney Foundation which allowed us to employ our manager Annette, four days each week. Now thanks to a further grant from The Trussell Trust we have also employed two further staff.

It has been obvious for a while that the scale of our operation was getting too large for one person to manage on their own, so we created two new roles within the Foodbank to offer support and assistance to Annette.

Further to a competitive application and interview process the Trustees and I were delighted to appoint Briony Scott as Volunteer Coordinator and David Smith as Operations Coordinator. Both of them began their roles in December and it has been fantastic to see how they have dived straight in and have made a real difference almost immediately. They carry out their roles with professionalism, practicality, warmth and humour and we are very glad to welcome them to the team.

Annette's leadership of the Foodbank drives us all along and her continued hard work and vision for our charity is appreciated by Trustees, volunteers and supporters alike. Thank you, Annette for everything that you do to make the Foodbank what it is, it has been another lightening-quick year!

Trustees

As ever, our trustees continue to work hard to steer the strategic direction of the Foodbank through uncertain times. We don't know what challenges changes in social policy may bring in the coming months and years but I am very grateful for the wisdom and thoughtfulness of all our trustees who help look at the big picture around us, and how we might respond. So, to Helen, John, Roger, Jean and Trudi, thank you for another year of your contribution in guiding our charity.

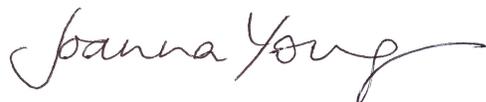
2020 & Beyond

Prevention is part of our focus on trying to reduce Foodbank use in the first place. Further projects will be starting in 2020 to focus on preventative work, partnership working with other charities and agencies, signposting and generally reducing the use of the Foodbank where we can, by helping individuals and families before they get to the point of needing to use it.

We have grant funding to start our pilot project - Foodbus, and we will be working with the NHS over the coming months to develop this idea, which will involve us delivering food to people who can't physically get to the Foodbank, and working with other charities to make sure that they have the help that they need so that they don't need to come to us at all.

Of course, we don't believe that anyone in our community should go hungry. While this situation still persists we will continue to do our work both to meet the demand and to campaign, along with The Trussell Trust nationally, until no-one needs to use a Foodbank.

For now, the work goes on.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanna Young". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Joanna Young
Chair of Trustees
February 12th 2020