

Foodbank Update: The summer period has been a busy time for the Foodbank with continued need for our support; particularly from families with school age children. This year we trialled a Lunch Box Scheme.

School Summer Lunch Boxes: The Foodbank supports many families whose children receive free school meals who find the holiday periods difficult when these meals are not available. We have tried different methods of support in the past with varying degrees of success. This year we decided to trial a School Summer Lunch Box Scheme where the Foodbank produced "Lunch Boxes" or food parcels with enough food to provide a child with five lunches each week during the Summer holiday period. The "Lunch Boxes" were available for collection from a distribution centre. Gary, our intrepid warehouse manager together with his two advisors, developed the pick list for the "Lunch Boxes".

For our trial this year we chose Letchworth schools and the Letchworth Distribution Centre. Unfortunately, it is well beyond our ability to feed all the Letchworth school children receiving free school meals; volunteers contacted the schools; discussed the proposed scheme explaining we would like to help children who would really suffer during the holiday without help. Each school produced a list of children who needed help and their parents were able to call to the foodbank each week during the 6-week holiday period to collect their "Lunch Boxes". Some came every week, and some intermittently as their need required. In total we helped well over 60 children and distributed a total of 210 "Lunch Boxes".

We are now talking with the schools to see what lessons we can learn to apply next year. It would be good to consider how we can extend the scheme; and welcome contact from Hitchin and Baldock schools who think the scheme would help any of their children.

Harvest Collections: With the change of season to autumn, we have received an incredible number of donations from schools, churches & faith groups, and local business's through Harvest Celebrations. We are extremely grateful; as this has helped re stock the warehouse ready for the winter period.

Harvest collection at St. Pauls Walden JMI School, Whitwell.



Networking with other Foodbank:

Representatives of 5 foodbanks in Letchworth, Royston, Hatfield, Hertford and Broxbourne met with our new Trussell Trust area manager, Rebekah Hill, on 15th October. The aim of the meeting was to discuss the way we operate, identify problems and share solutions. Our summer lunchbox initiative for Letchworth children generated much interest.

Fuel poverty is a problem among all foodbanks, with people needing help with gas/electric payments. At our Foodbank we provide top-up payments. We have decided to limit these payments to 3 per household and are keeping a register of those who receive them. Our funds are limited, but we believe this is a fair way of helping our clients. If any of our readers feel able to support this initiative, you might wish to consider donating to the foodbank for our fuel fund.

Broxbourne foodbank has taken on a community hub which they are hoping to develop. This will support events such as a clothing event and a dementia sewing group. Hatfield foodbank are working with Tesco to provide clothing for a Romanian project run by a local church. All show the generosity of the public towards those in our society who are in need.

Universal Credit was discussed, and foodbanks are encouraged to put pressure on MPs to make changes. There is evidence that implementation of the roll-out has been delayed in some areas, but we anticipate that life may be made more difficult for some of our clients in the future.

Universal Credit: The reform of the Universal Credit (UC) benefits system is widely acknowledged to be in crisis. UC 'bundles' six individual benefits including Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), Housing Benefit, Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit into a single monthly payment. While the original aims of encouraging people to get back into work, to harmonise individual benefits and to save money remain valid, research studies clearly show in areas where the new system has been introduced it has often caused misery, client debt & homelessness.

Recent research revealed 2.8 million people are living in poverty in families where all adults are in full-time work indicating that low pay is a significant causal factor.

Government is aware of the shortcomings of UC. This is partly evidenced by the recent restoration of £1 billion to the benefits budget, previously cut by £3bn. The Trussell Trust, said that while measures announced in last month's budget were welcome, the only way to stop even more people being forced to food banks this winter will be to pause new claims to UC until increased funding is in place.

The rollout of UC has shown that in areas where applied the transition has produced much suffering, largely due to payment delays and benefit sanctions. In recognition of this, the payments system has been 'loosened' and the national rollout timetable adjusted. In N. Herts, UC was introduced for new applicants in October, existing claimants will not be moved onto UC until 2019.

All of this begs the question, we live in the 6th richest country in the world, so what else could we "food bankers" do. We will continue to lend a friendly listening ear to our clients and provide short-term emergency food parcels. We welcome your thoughts / views on this issue.

Facebook Update: We've been up and running for a while now and are grateful of the wonderful support we've received online. Do give us a like on Facebook and share our posts. If you are organising a food drive, cake sale, or any other kind of fundraising activity in support of the Foodbank, we can create an event on Facebook to share with others in our local community. This way, your event will get all the support it deserves! Please contact us on Facebook and leave the rest to us. If anyone needs information on referral agents or how to access the Foodbank all details can be found on our Facebook page. **To find us on Facebook, search @LetchworthFoodbank**

New Donation Point:



The Community Hub in Station Road, Letchworth is open for the collection of donated food for the Food bank. It is open from 10 am - 3.00pm Monday to Friday.

A word from our Chairman: The Foodbank Management Committee, wish to relay our great appreciation to our dedicated volunteers; to our supporters, Referral Agencies and all those who donate to the Foodbank.

A Big Thank you & Best Wishes for the Festive Season.

FOODBANK STATISTICS

Summary for April – September 2018

No. of referral vouchers fulfilled: 558

Number of People supported: Adults - 798 Children - 717

Reason for referral	%
Low Income	38
Benefit changes & delays	34
Debt & delayed wages	8
Sickness (affecting income)	2
Other e.g. homeless, domestic abuse	18

Distribution Centre	No. of Vouchers	No. of Clients
Letchworth (Howard Memorial Hall)	360	962
Hitchin (Scout Hut Our Lady Church)	165	464
Baldock (St. Mary's Hall)	9	25
Other	24	64
Total	558	1515

Newsletter Feedback

Please email Susan Kostrzewska, Foodbank Newsletter Editor. susan.kostrzewska@hotmail.co.uk

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