

S2 Food Poverty Network- Newsletter No 4, November 2023



Welcome to the fourth newsletter. I write updates every couple of months following our Trustee's/ Manager's meeting.

I begin by repeating a plea made in each newsletter:-

If you are a standing order donor, please send me your contact email address. Please also indicate whether you would like a personal invitation to see Food Bank at work. My email address is: jtrhull@outlook.com

This plea has already solicited supportive, interesting replies. Several long-standing donors have taken up my invitation to visit Food Bank and see it in operation. I now send a personal e-copy of this Newsletter to 12 donors who have got in contact.

The Trustees/Managers met in mid-November. Here is a summary of the discussions at our last meeting.

1. Reviewing numbers and reasons for referral

At each bi-monthly meeting we compare data with the previous year. Our unit of measurement is "people fed". That is the number of individuals, or family members, who received provision for a week. So far, in 2023, we have fed 3,320 more people than in the first 10 months of 2022.

	Foodbank	Community Shop	Total Fed
2023	4407	3739	8146
2022	3023	1803	4826

We also review our data on **the reasons for clients being referred to us**. For 2023 these show 284 referrals are related to debt, 141 because people are short of money, 21 because they are unemployed, 19 because of benefit delays and 11 because they are homeless. We noted that there is an increasing impact of illness: 189 reported a mental health issue and 149 a physical illness.

2. Monitoring our attempts to address causes of food poverty.

In my last Newsletter I reported on two new strategies (debt advice, and the appointment of a Benefit Worker) and the review of one established practice (winter fuel top-ups).

Debt Advice: Debt is the single biggest reason for referral to Food Bank. We now have 6 trained volunteer debt mentors. We have appointed someone who will input all the relevant data collected by the debt mentors onto the Community Money Advice (CMA) web-based data system. We then receive advice from CMA about the next steps about how to help clients.

Benefit Worker: So far he has helped 21 clients. He has secured Housing Support Fund grants, offered support to 9 clients in pursuit of disputed Personal Independence Payments, helped with one Disability Living Allowance case and applied for one home improvement grant

Winter Fuel top-ups: These resumed in November. We have helped 34 households at a cost of £1,700.

3. Information about the new Community Shop

We are delighted by the success of the Shop. We are impressed by the work of our shop volunteers and our newly appointed shop manager. Clients are, we feel, very happy with our new systems.

Clients pay £2.50 per week and receive food valued in the region of £45, depending on family profile.

4. Getting ready for Christmas

We always try to ensure that our clients' families, despite the challenges they face, are able to enjoy Christmas. As in previous years, we plan to give families the constituents of a Christmas dinner plus presents for younger children. Already we have 40 turkeys donated by Fareshare and 40 Christmas dinners donated by South Yorkshire Transport. We have requested suitable toys from the Radio Hallam charity.

5. Setting a budget for 2024

Our November meeting sets the budget for the coming Food Bank Financial Year which starts in January. Regular readers of these Newsletters will be aware: S2 Food Bank holds healthy reserves. We are well placed should another cost-of-living crisis hit the country. We had set a deficit budget for 2023 in light of three expected new expenditures: (a) equipping/opening the shop, (b) providing further fuel top-ups, (c) setting up the (CMA) debt advisory provisions, and providing benefits advice.

We did not fully spend the money put aside in the budget. There are two reasons for this. The principal reason is that we budgeted for major, almost full year, costs in setting up, and running, the new Shop. We hoped to open the shop early in 2023. In the event, we could not access the shop premises until April. Full service did not operate until August. A second reason, is that our ambition to extend help to other food charities working in, or near, S2 (such as Park Community Action and S12 Food Bank), is taking longer to realise.

We have again set a deficit budget for 2024. This allows for a full year's expenditure on the new Shop, maintenance of the emergency Food Bank provision (4-6 weeks), funding fuel top-ups, and setting money aside to fund projects with other providers.

The projects with other providers, will, initially, be time-limited but, we hope will lead to a fuller, appropriate, provision across S2 which we will fund. We are in active discussion with Park Community Action around the question of extending the "reach" from St Swithun's to the far end of S2. Similarly, we accept clients from one area of S12 for which we are the only easily accessible food bank. How can we better support and help them? Additionally, we are exploring links into the Darnall area.

JTRH, 23rd November 2023.