

## **S2 Food Poverty Network- Newsletter No 5, January 2024**



Welcome to the fifth newsletter. I make updates every couple of months following our Trustees'/ Managers' meeting.

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

If you are a standing order donor, please send your contact email address to me. Please also indicate whether you would like a personal invitation to see Food Bank at work. My email address is: [jtrhull@outlook.com](mailto: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 some 25 donors who have made contact.

The Trustees/Managers met in mid-January. I'd like to update you on discussions in our 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. This January we could look back over the whole of 2023. **We fed 3000 more people in 2023 than 2022.**

Across 2023 we received 563 referrals of which 330 were self-referred. We looked at their reasons for food poverty. Of these 893, 315 faced debts, 161 were short of money for other reasons, and 367 had mental or physical health problems.

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

We reviewed our two recently developed strategies (debt advice; the appointment of a Benefit Worker) and our established practice of winter fuel top-ups.

- a. **Debt Advice:** We now have 6 trained debt mentors and a part-time clerical support who uploads client's information onto the Community Money Advice's (CMA) Hub system. Debt advisors at CMA then use their expertise to suggest appropriate action. Currently 47 cases are active.

- b. Benefit Worker:** To date he has pursued the cases of 38 clients. He is looking into their eligibility for Discretionary Housing Payments, Personal Independence Payments, Disability Living Allowance, and Housing Support Fund. So far, in four months' activity, he has secured an additional £7,626 in benefits and allowances.
- c. Winter Fuel top-ups:** In the November, first round of top-ups, we distributed £1,700 in £50 top-ups to 34 households. In our second (November-December) round we gave £100 to the households. There will be a third round in late January.

### **3. Community Shop update**

We continue to feel proud of the way the Shop is working. 54 people are now registered as weekly clients. The premises now have three specific phone lines installed to help debt workers, benefits handling and shop business. The offices are well equipped.

Currently clients pay £2.50 per week and receive food valued in the region of £45, depending on family profile. We agreed to increase this to £4.00 but with a more generous provision of food.

### **4. Christmas 2023**

We provided 75 Christmas family dinner parcels. The contents of these parcels were determined by family size/composition and by choices of meats, vegetables, puddings etc.

We provided presents (up to 8 per family) for 75 children. Volunteers from several local businesses and our associated charities helped with wrapping presents. When our usual Father Christmas fell ill, Whirlow Hall Farm put us in touch with an excellent substitute!

### **5. Finances in 2024**

Our financial position is very stable. We hold adequate reserves. We have therefore set a deficit budget for 2024.

The sufficiency of our reserves means that we can confidently and securely **continue to** (a) fund Food Bank and Food Shop for the year, (b) maintain and increase fuel top-up provision, (c) fund the CMA debt advisory work, and the benefits advisory role, and (d) fund the paid part-time coordinating roles.

Beyond these continued approaches, we agreed that we are in position to explore **two other initiatives** which are likely to incur costs. (a) We will look at increasing the value of Food Bank and Shop provisions/parcels. (b) We will

seek better to publicize our work to potential referring agencies (Schools and G.P. surgeries and individuals).

We shall **continue to explore means of working with other local partners to meet need and expand impact**. In our January meeting, we more clearly defined our offer to potential partners. We can offer access, via the Sheffield Food Banks' Network, to more economic bulk-purchasing of food supplies. More importantly, we think the Community Shop model might, with our help and provided the existing charity has suitable premises, be, with our support, replicated on smaller scales elsewhere.

We are exploring these possibilities with Park Community Association, St. Mary's Church, Hope Church in Woodhouse, the S12 Pantry. We have also identified one part of Sheffield (Tinsley) which lacks sufficient Food Bank provision. We are enquiring about potential Tinsley opportunities.

JTRH, 18<sup>th</sup> January 2024