

# **S2 Food Poverty Network- Newsletter No 3, September 2023**



Welcome to the third newsletter providing you with updates. I make updates every couple of months following our Trustees'/ Managers' meeting.

I begin by repeating a plea made in the first 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 resulted in supportive, interesting, replies.

The Trustees/Managers met in mid-September. I'd like to update you on three particular agenda items:-

## **1. The success of the new Community Shop**

Our new Community Shop is across the road from our Food Bank base at St. Swithun's. It offers sustained support as follow-on, in appropriate cases, to Food Bank's 6-week provision. The Shop is now open on three days in the week and has capacity to help 24 clients per day. Clients pay £2.50 per weekly visit and receive food worth typically £32, or more for a family.

We are already delighted by the impact of this initiative. In our meeting we compared data on the numbers of clients (January to August) helped in 2022 (when provision was Food Bank and Food Club) and so far in 2023. In 2022 across the eight months we gave 3575 weekly food provisions. In 2023 we gave 6657.

Our clients appreciate the quality of food (which includes both fresh and tinned), the ability to choose, and the supportive approach of our fine volunteers.

## **2. Expanding our reach and impact**

We have sound financial reserves and so want to expand our impact. Financial donations, via standing orders and several recent one-off donations, continue to be remarkable. In our meetings, we often speak of these donors with deep gratitude.

We worry a little that food donations in the first eight months of the year are 4582 tonnes less than 2022. In response to this fall, we are spending more on provisions from Fareshare and other suppliers.

The Shop is already extending our impact. There are, however, new costs in terms of insurance, upkeep and repair. We have the financial reserves to meet these costs.

We have committed to a number of initiatives to expand impact:-

- i. We are working with Manor and Castle Development Trust (MCDT) to identify other food-related charities in S2 to which we can offer both financial help and strategic support to help impact and expansion.
- ii. We have made a number of appointments to support our shop administration, debt advisory work and secure clients' full and correct benefit entitlements.
- iii. We are reviewing, with a view to increasing, the range and amount of food/supplies in our standard Food Bank parcels.
- iv. We also expect to increase the value of goods available in the Shop.
- v. We are starting to plan and budget for our Christmas provisions. This year we have many more eligible clients. We want, as usual, to ensure that all receive ingredients for a nourishing Christmas meal and that all our children receive a suitable present.
- vi. We are looking at the timing and generosity of our winter gas/electric grants to clients.

### **3. Work on debt, and benefit, issues**

Unmanageable debt is, currently and by far, the main driver of the food poverty which we encounter. That is why we have joined the Community Money Advice (CMA) charity. CMA is training our volunteer debt mentors.

A condition of access to the Food Shop, in cases where debt is involved, is willingness to share case information with our debt mentors and to agree a plan to manage, and reduce, the debt in reasonable time.

The process, with CMA, is that, first our mentor builds a detailed case study. Second, this is input to CMA's interactive hub. Usually, the reviewing CMA expert will require a few more details. Then the expert will recommend a way forward to help with the debt.

Early data show that our approach is working. We have convened 109 debt counselling meetings. 41 sets of information now await input to the CMA hub. 68 cases have been closed or the clients are being monitored and supported according to CMA's advice.

These deep discussions have given us important insights. We now know that a significant number of clients are not receiving their correct, and full, benefit entitlement. We have, helped by MCDT, secured the input of a skilled benefits adviser. He is now working with identified clients.

I conclude with sincere thanks to our volunteers, donors and supporters.

JTRH, 20<sup>th</sup> September 2023.