

Saltash Foodbank - Report to Annual Meeting with Parishioners of Saltash

The foodbank is pleased to be asked again to report to the Council's Annual Parishioners' Meeting. Saltash Foodbank is a Trussell Trust Foodbank and provides 3 days' worth of food for a balanced diet, to those that are experiencing a financial crisis, on receiving a referral from a Support Agency.

Since our Report last year and with the ongoing cost of living crisis, we have seen an increased demand for our services. We have over 55 volunteers, an increase on other years, due to an increase in the need for our services. We have no paid staff. Last year we supported 589 household referrals (548 in 2022), comprising 863 adults and 636 children, so a total of 1,499 individuals (1,408 in 2022) with at least 3 days of food.

Saltash Foodbank received the most referrals in 2023 from Plymouth Job Centres (84), Help Through Hardship (Citizens Advice / Trussell Trust Helpline - started during Covid19) (72) and Christians Against Poverty - CAP (45). The main reason given by many was Low Income, until 4th March 2023 from when we collected more detailed information from the referrers on our database. Currently, the 3 main reasons are 'Rising Cost of Essentials', people having 'Ongoing Impact of Physical and Mental Health Issues' and 'Priority Debt', such as Rent or Council Tax arrears.

Saltash Foodbank received over 39 tons (40.5 tons in 2022) of food last year from supermarket donation points, supermarket collections, community groups, churches and items such as bread, fruit and veg from supermarkets themselves just past their best-before date and items slightly damaged packaging. We distribute food parcels to people directly and if we have a surplus of certain items, we also support school breakfast and afterschool clubs, charities, other food organisations and local foodbanks, to prevent items on our shelves going out of date.

During December our Support Agencies and our volunteer drivers distributed to 138 households a Christmas Hamper with Christmassy food items and added surplus food items. This supported 202 adults and 205 children with an additional gift for each person. These families were offered a hamper via our many Referral Agencies. We had great community support last year when Saltash Rock Choir, Saltash Community Fire Station and Pentillie Castle did large collections for us, as did many other individuals, groups and businesses. We could not provide our Christmas Food Hampers without the support of our local Community. In addition to the Christmas Hampers in December, we also managed to provide regular food support to the clients referred to us. December is always a busy month for Foodbanks and we are blessed to have the use of our overflow store in the other Belle Vue Road car park, to allow us to distribute the hampers from there.

Further Support

Due to our small premises, we struggle to have confidential conversations with clients about their circumstances at Lower Ground Floor, 18 Belle Vue Road, so our growing team of Signposting Volunteers call those who have received a food parcel, to discuss their situation and signpost them to further support. Virtual Signposting allows us to speak to people over the phone at a less stressful time and see if they need further Signposting, especially to let them know about activities happening locally in Saltash. We are pleased to have organisations such as 'Saltash Community Fridge' and 'Warm Spaces' at Wesley Church that are helping many people access extra support. New last year, we can also refer people in crisis to Kremena, our Citizens Advice advisor who directly links with Saltash Foodbank on Fridays, to see priority clients, to help them to improve their financial situation. This is funded by a 'Financial Inclusion' grant from the Trussell Trust. This has been a great help to many people already, to help improve their situation.

This winter has been especially challenging, with clients facing increased costs with energy, food, rent and mortgages, leaving some with a negative budget, even after support from Citizens Advice and CAP (Christians Against Poverty).

Our Freephone number continues to be funded by grants from the Cornwall Community Foundation and is manned most days. This has been a great help to those struggling with their bills, asking for help. We can also help people with their phone data and calls due to free SIMs from network providers via the Good Things Foundation. We have also been able to use grant funding to purchase a few basic mobile phones to support those unable to contact, for example, their Support Agencies.

Our Concerns for The Future

We continue to worry how the cost-of-living crisis is affecting people's health - both physical and mental. There is an increase in dampness and mould in homes as people cannot afford to heat their homes properly. Then there is the housing crisis, with people sofa-surfing, often for many years, before they are provided with social housing, and people in temporary accommodation waiting for months to be homed. These are 'the hidden homeless'. We could see more of these as rents have increased recently and income has not kept up with the increase. We are also aware of people sleeping in cars, boats, and other unsuitable shelters in Saltash. Many of these are supported by us, Saltash Wesley Church, Saltash Baptist Church, Cornwall Council and St Petroc's.

We are still appealing for the creation of a 'social supermarket' or 'cooperative food hub' in Saltash as many people we see, wish to be independent and do not want to rely on charity for their food. We hope there will be a type of 'social supermarket' in Saltash, to allow those on a low-income to purchase food at low cost. This is especially needed if government support with energy is soon to be withdrawn - with people already struggling to afford the essentials. Ideally, benefits need to be increased to cover the rise in inflation, hence our support in the last year of the Trussell Trust and Sir Joseph Rountree Foundation 'Guarantee Our Essentials' campaign, which has recently been presented to No.10 Downing Street.

Thanks

I would like to express my sincere thanks to all the foodbank volunteers, old and new, who are making a huge difference to those we support. A BIG thank you to the community for continuing to support us. I would especially like to thank the Foodbank Trustees for their support and hard work to support those in need; especially Richard (Chair of Trustees), Jill (Treasurer and Trustee), Charles (Special Projects and Trustee), Corina (Secretary and Trustee), Ruth (Warehousing), Jackie (Signposting and Trustee), Sara (Agency and Trustee), Revd. Di (Churches Together and Trustee), Kathryn (Volunteering and Trustee) and Elizabeth (Trustee). I could not do this without you all.

Rika Chanter

Saltash Foodbank Manager (Volunteer) 23rd February 2024

Registered Charity Number 1157577

End of Report