

How a Community Organisation Adapted During the COVID-19 Crisis

September 2020

By working with our colleagues in the Voluntary and Community sector, we have a series of reports on our website that capture the experiences and issues from the point of view of services and groups that support local people in the community.

This is an independent case study showing an example of one community organisation's story of adapting and what the future holds.

About the organisation



“The foodbank was there when we really needed it, it was an absolute lifeline.”

They do not think anyone in the community should have to face going hungry. That is why they provide three days' nutritionally balanced emergency food and support to local people who are referred to them in crisis.

This organisation is part of a nationwide network of foodbanks, supported by The Trussell Trust, working to combat poverty and hunger across the UK.



Our foodbank is a project founded by local churches and community groups, working together towards stopping hunger in our local area. There are Foodbanks in Selsey, Midhurst, Petworth and Chichester.

Joanne Kondabeka Chichester District Foodbank



What were the immediate challenges?

At the beginning the information from the Government was not clear especially, the messages around social distancing. As people could still visit the centre an appointment system was set up - *arrive, collect parcel, look at extra items boxes*. This worked well so long as people did not turn up before their allocated times, but people did turn up early, the queue went around the building, which caused social distancing issues. This system was only in place for one week and then the Government announced the Lockdown.

The Foodbank could not continue with the listening and signposting services. Selsey, Chichester, Midhurst and Petworth moved to a delivery only service.



The loss of the relationship side - listening and signposting - We did continue to signpost to national helplines as these are 24/7. We worked closely with CAB Chichester, Early Help, Richmond Fellowship and MIND West Sussex as they support by giving out the vouchers.

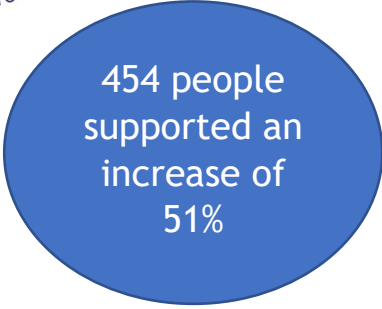


The Foodbank lost a lot of volunteers, as many are over 70 years and needed to *shield* or self-isolate themselves. But they did experience an increase in new volunteers, but with the new delivery system less volunteers were needed.

The Foodbank moved to a delivery service to better protect their team of volunteers, safeguarding and risk assessing. They decided that they needed two drivers from the same household to deliver to clients. Initially they were inundated with people wanting the volunteer but many were single and living on their own. In the end 12 teams were set up in Chichester - *with 2 members from the same household*. Deliveries were twice a day Monday to Friday. The same model was used in their other centres in Selsey, Midhurst and Petworth.

Another change was how the food parcels were packed. They moved from using plastic carrier bags to boxes. To better support the process generic boxes, single, couple and households with 5+ boxes were made up and stored in a local church hall - as they were closed. They also made up boxes for vegans, vegetarian, lactose intolerant, and kettle boxes - for those who can only make up foods using a kettle. This has worked really well.

Staff and a volunteer supports the administration and telephone calls to clients to schedule deliveries. Agencies contact the Foodbank with a voucher number for a client and their name and telephone number so that a delivery can be scheduled.




454 people supported an increase of 51%

There has been a 51% increase in numbers to over 454 people being supported since the Lockdown. This increase is partly due to loss of jobs, universal credit system - as people are still having to wait five weeks for funding and the benefit amount is very low. In fact the Social services, welfare state payments have not been increased since 2016.

Many of the people using the foodbank had been furloughed and are on 80% of their salary and many others are on low incomes. The Chichester Foodbank Centre has seen the highest increase and was already very busy. But all Foodbanks in the area have been very busy especially in the first few weeks of Lockdown.



There are very few people on low incomes who can cope on universal credit, due to their outgoings, in a district with a high cost of living.



837 children supported with packed lunches 52% increase

The Foodbank has also provided *Children's Lunch Packs* - a fortnightly food parcel for the Christmas, Easter and Summer school holidays. As the schools closed due to the lockdown the boxes were made up to cover 4 weeks.

There has been a 52% increase in demand and workload to make up these boxes. Many local schools who provide free school meals give out a voucher for a parcel. Normally the foodbank would have 540 children and parcels to make up, due to Covid-19 this increased to 837 and 1674 parcels.

How has Covid-19 affected their finances?

Chichester District Foodbank is well supported by the local community who have been generous in providing free food and money to buy items. Tesco have been fantastic in providing *free gifted foods*. Banquet provided a platform for supporters to donate money, which they then spent on food items that were needed by the foodbank.

The generous donations from the local community during the crisis means that the Foodbank has not had to spend time making grant applications.



It is important not to underestimate the benefit to people for the emotional support, in a safe environment, we are able to provide.



The foodbank has staff and volunteer capacity, and a very generous public, ensuring they have enough funding and can buy bulk to save on costs.

The local people have been very generous as they are receiving the same level of food and people are giving financially and donating food, which is incredible. People recognise that this is a time of *compassionate communities*, as people do need feeding.

How have they begun to Forward Plan?

The Foodbank may lose some of their volunteers as the furlough scheme changes and people return to work. The Foodbank are predicting an increase in people needing support as the predicted downturn and more people are out of work or living on universal credit.

It is their plan to continue with the delivery service as it is safer for volunteers and clients - *they drop the food box at the door of the household and do not have to engage with the client*. So are able to maintain social distancing.

One area the Foodbank is exploring is signposting through Zoom. During the crisis they have implemented a new telephone system so that staff and volunteers can work from home and the new delivery service and these are working well. They have introduced a new e-referral system, which means that voucher holders can contact directly and stops the paper voucher system. It is early days as they are still getting to grips with the new system.

What are the concerns for the future, post Covid?

The pandemic has highlighted the huge issues with universal credit - *that it does not work*. Also, it has exacerbated inequality and poverty. *we often say that people are just one wage packet, one salary away from the foodbank*. They have seen people for the first time access the Foodbank, who would never have dreamed they would ever need to.

Contact details

To get a referral to the services call **0344 771171** or **0300 330 0650**

To contact the service call 01243 773687

Email info@chichesterdistrict.foodbank.org.uk

Or visit their webpage <https://chichesterdistrict.foodbank.org.uk/>

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If you have questions about the content of this update, please either call 0300 012 0122 or email cheryl.berry@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk

