



YEAR 10 | OCT 22 | SEPT 23

West Northumberland

# FOOD BANK

PROJECT REPORT

# 20 23

A DECADE OF IMPACT

# A Year Like No Other

We started the year knowing we were dealing with unprecedented levels of demand and joined thousands of food banks around the UK calling on the government to take urgent action to end the need for charitable food aid by ensuring everyone has enough income, from work and social security, to buy the essentials.

**Year 10 ended up being our busiest year ever: we supported almost 1,000 adults and over 580 children in 720 homes, which is more than we have ever had to help.**

As winter approached, we readied ourselves for the expected spike in demand by recruiting new staff and extra volunteers, building our team to a small army of over 70 volunteers. We set up additional cost of living awards, increased the value of our Hardship Grants and started a new Shopping Voucher Scheme for our most vulnerable residents; knowing that people often leave it until they have nothing left before calling to ask for help, we also increased the value of the shopping voucher we offer to every new caller to supplement their first food parcel.



**269%**

INCREASE IN HOUSEHOLDS REACHING OUT FOR SUPPORT IN YEAR 10 IN COMPARISON TO YEAR 1



We were concerned to see a rise in people in employment asking us for help, so we carried out a Low Pay Survey. This gave us an informative snapshot of callers to our helpline over a couple of weeks and we found that just one person received the Real Living Wage, the only UK wage rate based on actual living costs.

## Our busiest year to date

We ran two Cost of Living Schemes last year. The Energy Voucher Scheme helped 110 families by providing them with £100 to heat their homes, cook and have hot water. The Back-to-School Award provided 90 single-parent families, with 180 school age children, up to £200 in shopping vouchers to help with the costs of uniform, school shoes and PE kits. We also made 15 Hardship Awards to help families experiencing furniture poverty and households using solid fuel.

We ended the year knowing we had done everything we could to help local people through the cost of living crisis, but fully aware that things are getting worse for people. It would be impossible to help so many people without grant giving organisations and the vital support and donations we receive from hundreds of kind and generous local people across our communities. We appreciate every single one of them.

 **47%**

OF THE PEOPLE WHO CALLED US HAVEN'T HAD TO TURN TO A FOOD BANK BEFORE

 **338**

NEW HOUSEHOLDS INCLUDING:

 **458**  
ADULTS

 **270**  
CHILDREN

NEEDED TO USE OUR SERVICES

# HELPLINE REPORT

This was the year that the helpline went fully digital, so all the information we collect on calls is now entered directly into a computerised form, rather than being written by hand. Not only does that save on thousands of sheets of paper, but it also streamlines the processes between phone call and delivery.

We took 6,015 calls and made 5,495 deliveries in Project Year 10. We also issued over 884 supermarket vouchers. This is an achievement in itself, but it's important to bear in mind that every one of those contacts is the result of a phone call with one of our helpline volunteers.



Our helpline team did an incredible job providing much-needed information to help people through these very difficult times. Each phone call averaged around seven minutes in length, which means our helpline team have spent about 42,500 minutes on the phone in Project Year 10. That means if one person took all those calls back-to-back, it would take nearly a whole month!

## Stats on our callers



of our signposting is to organisations offering energy and debt advice



of people using the food bank are in employment but struggling to afford the basics



increase in calls from pensioners calling for support

## Nick's Story



We made 15 Hardship Awards to help people like Nick who are using solid fuel and weren't eligible for the government's Energy Bills Support Scheme. Nick is a single parent living in a rented house off the gas network. He works 15 hours a week in healthcare and receives Universal Credit. Until the sudden increase in oil prices at the time, he could budget for around £300 every 8 weeks for 500 litres of heating oil. When Nick contacted the food bank on a very cold morning in March, the oil tank was empty and the price had shot up more than 50% to £700.

## A new approach

Last year we wanted try a new approach to supporting regular callers who had been using our services for up to 3 years. These callers are often older adults who are unemployed, living alone, and in chronic poverty. Trying to survive on only £334 Universal Credit each month, they were struggling to pay bills and cover the cost of items to take care of their basic needs. We found most people in this group had long-term mental health conditions and poor physical health that was impeding their quality of life.

To see if we could help improve well-being and combat social isolation, we moved 20 households off food parcels and onto shopping vouchers, with targeted support from our helpline team to help them overcome barriers to accessing services and to connect them with community-based projects in their neighbourhood. This approach has been very helpful; most people stocked up the freezer and enjoyed having fresh food including meat, fish, fruit and vegetables, and felt healthier.



**Jeff told us the vouchers helped him get out and about more 'to break the day up a bit'. He started going to some local places to meet up and chat with others, like his local warm hub.**

\*Names and details in our case studies have been changed to protect the anonymity of our callers.

# A LIFELINE OF SUPPORT



## Vital signposting

Our helpline team has been instrumental in connecting individuals with the help they need, signposting to organisations offering energy and debt advice; we also helped more people access mental health services and local community-based projects.

21-22 vs 22-23

**570** vs **720**  
HOUSEHOLDS vs HOUSEHOLDS

**795** vs **1,000**  
ADULTS vs ADULTS

**446** vs **580**  
CHILDREN vs CHILDREN

28 VOLUNTEERS

## Recruitment & Training

With demand and pressure on the team increasing, we recruited Antonia in November 2022 to join Owain as a job share in the Helpline Team Leader role. That doubled our ability to deal with identifying the needs of our helpline team and guiding their development so they could better offer support and information to our callers. After training sessions on active listening, welfare benefits and proactive signposting, the helpline team was well equipped to listen compassionately and point callers towards further sources of support.

Of course, some of those 6,015 calls can be very emotional experiences for those on both ends of the phone line. To help better support our team, Antonia, Owain and Sam all took part in Mental Health First Aid training, and the food bank as a whole joined an Employee Assistance Programme offering 24-hour confidential support for any staff or volunteers experiencing emotional distress.

 **708**  
HOURS OF SUPPORT



## Sophie's story

Sophie and her husband were both working until Sophie was forced to temporarily stop work due to physical health conditions. Her husband continued to work full-time and was trying to do extra hours to compensate for his partner's lost hours. Sophie had applied for benefits, but the shortfall in income while they waited for this support left them unable to manage general living costs. With rising debt on their prepayment meter, they were unable to heat or cook any food for their family.

On the day she called us, Sophie was very distressed; she was in tears as she asked for help. How could they feed their child after school, with only a tin of vegetables left in the cupboard? They were ashamed to ask their parents for help again. They were going without so they could feed their child, and due to Sophie's physical health condition, she was feeling very guilty about creating this situation for them all.

With debt rising on the pre-payment meter and her energy provider taking the first 30p of every £1 going on to the meter, how could they hope to get out of the downward spiral?

We gave immediate support with a food parcel and discretionary shopping voucher, and used our Hardship Fund to provide an energy voucher. This enabled the family to get the air fryer back up and running and provide some much-needed relief for a few weeks until the entitled financial support for medical conditions could be in place.

— “ —  
**I don't know what we would've done without you. My child can have a hot meal tonight. Thank you from the bottom of our hearts.**  
— ” —



of our callers are in treatment for their physical health

## £53,000

OF HARDSHIP FUNDS DISTRIBUTED

In addition to the 11,600 food parcels we delivered, we were also able to provide additional support via our Hardship Fund. Thanks to support from donors, we were able to supply £53,000 of support to local people in need.

# CHANGES TO DELIVERIES



On the 1st of October 2022, we changed from set area delivery days to a new 'day 1 for day 3' delivery system. This was in response to sustained delivery volumes and allowed us to better spread deliveries through the week. Anyone ringing on a Monday would now be delivered on a Wednesday, Tuesday a Thursday, Wednesday a Friday, etc., regardless of where the recipient lived. The changes saw our vans being used 5 days per week for deliveries.



The logistics volunteer team at the end of September 2023 comprised 45 people. Additional volunteer drivers have been welcomed onto the team, allowing us to run all 3 vans 5 days per week.



## INCREASE IN WEEKLY DELIVERIES

Delivery volumes were consistently up on the previous project year, with around 25 to 30 extra deliveries completed per week. Over 1,000 deliveries were made to households outside of the three main towns of Hexham, Haltwhistle and Prudhoe.

— “ —  
**Volunteering at the food bank has given me an opportunity to give something back to the local community: the simple act of giving a few hours of my time each week, being part of something worthwhile.**

— ” —  
ROY - VOLUNTEER DRIVER



**3 VANS**  
5 DAYS A WEEK



**50 TOWNS & VILLAGES**  
PROVIDED WITH FOOD PARCELS





**£124,000**

OF TINNED / DRIED FOOD DELIVERED

**£13,000**

OF FRESH FOOD DELIVERED



**20 COLLECTIONS**

A WEEK FROM DONATION POINTS

A significant part of the food bank logistics operation is the collection of food from our donation points. Every week we undertake at least 20 collections in addition to the deliveries that we carry out. All our collection points must be visited, food collected and then returned to our Hexham depot to be date-checked and sorted. Larger collection points such as Tesco and Waitrose need to be emptied three times per week.

We also receive donations brought to us directly by local churches, shops and other organisations. Although sometimes small, these donations are vital in keeping the food bank going and providing a physical link with the wider community that we support.

**5,495**  
DELIVERIES  
MADE

**11,600**  
FOOD  
PARCELS

**20,000**  
MILES  
COVERED

Reviewing the new delivery system at the end of 2022 it was identified that whilst the system was working well several issues were becoming apparent.

- ▶ We were struggling to maintain a regular food collection timetable from our drop-off points.
- ▶ We had no redundancy in the fleet. When a vehicle needed servicing or repair there was no back up capacity.
- ▶ We were struggling to reach our growing rural user base outside of the A69 corridor due to the delivery focus being on the main towns.

Following a proposal to the Board a third van was purchased in February 2023. This meant we could operate five days a week.

# ROAD TO RECOVERY

## “ John’s Story

My name is John, I'm 50 years old, and I've been using the food bank since 2017. Until the start of this year, I had no contact with my family, and living here, I often felt like I didn't have a support network. The food bank has been a lifeline for me, providing practical and emotional support.

I remember when I first came into contact with the food bank in 2017 when I was homeless. It was just a warehouse with few staff, and it's incredible to see how it has grown since then.

Over the last two years, I've been working on my substance abuse issues and have been clean from pills I'd used for over 25 years. The team at the food bank has been instrumental in turning my life around. I honestly can't imagine where I would've been without their assistance over the years. When I moved into my flat, it was unfurnished, and I left it that way for three-and-a-half years until, with their help, we got carpets fitted and curtains sourced. They really helped turn things around.



The monthly voucher scheme has also been a great incentive for me; it's helped me to budget better and think about food waste. I think it's sad that a town like Hexham needs a food bank as badly as it does, but I'm grateful for the incredible support provided by the food bank and its staff. They've made a massive difference in my life.

”



of our callers are in treatment for their mental health

— “ —  
**I can't imagine where I would've been without your assistance over the years. You have kept me going. I wouldn't be OK without you.**

— ” —

**15** **HARDSHIP AWARDS**  
to help families experiencing furniture poverty and households using solid fuel

**130** **ENERGY AWARDS**  
of £100 to help vulnerable households to heat their home, cook and have hot water

**90** **BACK-TO-SCHOOL AWARDS**  
supporting 90 single-parent families with the costs of uniform, school shoes and PE kits



**Cathy told us the vouchers helped free up money towards hospital transport costs, which is a big help as she has a lot more hospital appointments coming up and is now having to go to North Tyneside, where she has never been before.**

In response to the ongoing cost of living crisis, we've expanded our services beyond the provision of food parcels. Thanks to the support of our community and funding from Northumberland County Council, we've been able to offer additional assistance to vulnerable residents for essential living expenses, such as energy support vouchers, shopping vouchers, as well as toiletries and household essentials.

— “ —

**I am so grateful for all the help you provide for me and my family. I wouldn't be able to pay off my debt or my rent arrears if you didn't help us, and I just wanted to say thank you!**

” —



**185**

**FAMILIES\* PROVIDED WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT THROUGH OUR HARDSHIP FUND**

\* This included 223 adults and 191 children



**£30,000**

**FUNDING FROM NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

This was made available by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) as part of the Household Support Fund, which has been used to support vulnerable residents who are struggling with the ongoing cost of living crisis.



## COMMUNITY SUPPORT

We are so grateful for the outpouring of support from our community. Thanks to generous donations from 450 local individuals, we have been able to continue our important work. With an average donation through our website of around £65, every contribution has made a big impact, providing a lifeline to local people in hardship.



### Supermarket donations

Thanks to the support of our supermarkets:

**TESCO, WAITROSE, SAINSBURY'S, LIDL & CO-OP**

We have 10 donation points across Hexham, Corbridge, Haydon Bridge, Allendale, Prudhoe, Bellingham, Saley, Haltwhistle, and Bardon Mill.

— “ —

**You have helped me in the past. So I'm just giving a little back.**

— ” —

**£221,000**  
IN CASH DONATIONS



**1,133**  
WEBSITE DONATIONS



**32**  
LOCAL ORGANISATIONS PROVIDING FINANCIAL SUPPORT



**450**  
LOCAL PEOPLE MAKING FINANCIAL DONATIONS



**12**  
GRANT GIVING TRUSTS

## A word of thanks

Financial support from grant givers, local businesses and community groups has been incredible. Here are a few who have helped support our work.

[ACM Holdings](#)

[Allendale Methodist Church](#)

[Arnold Clark](#)

[Broadwood Hall Studios](#)

[Catton Village Hall](#)

[De Vitre Fund](#)

[The Drapers Charitable Fund](#)

[EG Foundation](#)

[Egger](#)

[Footprint Public Relations Ltd](#)

[Haydon Bridge Churches](#)

[Henry Bell Trust](#)

[Hexham Abbey PCC](#)

[Hexham Trinity Church](#)

[Hexhamshire WI](#)

[Inspira NCS Fund](#)

[Jim Paul Associates](#)

[Karbon Homes](#)

[L Manning Foundation](#)

[Lloyds Bank Foundation](#)

[The Masonic Charitable Fund](#)

[Newbrough WI](#)

[Newcastle Building Society](#)

[Norah Phipps Iyengar Yoga](#)

[Northumberland Mark Benevolent Fund](#)

[Northumbria Healthcare](#)

[Ponteland Inner Wheel](#)

[Riding Mill Art Club](#)

[Rotary Club of Tynedale](#)

[St Aidan's Church](#)

[St Cuthbert's Church](#)

[St Mary's PCC](#)

[St Mary's Choir](#)

[St Mary's Guild](#)

[Stocksfield Baptist Church](#)

[Stocksfield Methodist Church](#)

[SVP St Mary's](#)

[TerraCycle UK Ltd](#)

[The Smith Charitable Trust](#)

[Vercelli Restaurant Hexham](#)

[Wall WI](#)

[Whitley Chapel PCC](#)

[Wylam St Oswin's Church](#)



# £85,645

WORTH OF FOOD DONATED BY LOCAL PEOPLE, BUSINESSES AND GROUPS

We'd like to say thank you to every one of them - here are just a few:

[Acomb Methodist Church](#)

[Allendale Co-op](#)

[Bardon Mill Village Store](#)

[Bywell St Peter](#)

[Corbridge Middle School](#)

[Glasstap Ltd](#)

[Hexham Abbey](#)

[Hexham BP Euro Garages](#)

[Hexham Middle School](#)

[PCCA – Prudhoe](#)

[Slaley Community Shop](#)

[St Mary's Catholic Church Hexham](#)

[The Barrasford Village Shop](#)

[Tyne Valley Ices](#)

[Wark Post Office](#)

[West End Methodist Church Hexham](#)

[Wylam Food Bank Info](#)

[Wylam Pharmacy](#)

[Wylam Spar](#)

— “ —

**It is so rewarding knowing that the donations made by the local community have gone to a home that really needs them.**

— ” —

Thanks also go to our team of volunteers and trustees, as well as photographers Joanne McNeil, Rob Halliburton and Claire Foster, for volunteering their time and skill capturing images of our work.

\* To protect the anonymity of our callers some images are stock photography from Istock and Getty

# A REFLECTION ON THE LAST 10 YEARS



Looking back over the past decade, it's clear that the journey of West Northumberland Food Bank has been both humbling and transformative.

The call for a local food bank in Autumn 2012 emerged from a coalition of community organisations, united by a shared concern for the growing number of individuals and families struggling to put food on their tables. Sure Start Children's Centres, Hexham Youth Initiative, No.28 Community House in Hexham East, and various churches in the area all observed first-hand the reality of food poverty exacerbated by economic downturns and welfare reforms.

In the face of these challenges, West Northumberland Food Bank launched in 2013 under the stewardship of Hexham Community Partnership, and later became a charity in its own right, with local people as the founding trustees.

Since the charity started



**31,348**

REQUESTS FOR SUPPORT



**70,000**

FOOD PARCELS DELIVERED

— “ —

**I volunteer because I want to give something back to my community. Also, I have been lucky in later life, but my childhood was set in poverty, so I especially want to help people that have the same problems now that my mother faced in the 70s. Food banks didn't exist then - I wish they had.**

— ” —

CAROLE - HELPLINE VOLUNTEER



Over the past decade, we've witnessed the profound impact of our work on the lives of countless individuals and families. From humble beginnings, we've grown into a pillar of support for our community, offering not just food assistance, but also hope and dignity to those in need.

— “  
**I work on the telephone helpline, so I hear firsthand about the desperate situations people from all walks of life find themselves in. It can be very sad and challenging at times, but very worthwhile. I know I'm playing a small part in improving lives by ensuring they receive their food delivery.**  
 ” —

VAL - HELPLINE VOLUNTEER

As we look back on the last ten years, something that has been apparent since day one is the strong sense of community solidarity, and how this has inspired collective action. We are truly grateful to the hundreds of local people who, over the years, have given their time, skills, food and money to support those in our community who are struggling.



INCREASE IN FOOD PARCELS DELIVERED  
 IN YEAR 10 IN COMPARISON TO YEAR 1

— “  
**You think it can't happen to me but, more than we'd like to admit, we may only be one misfortune away from it. The most important message we can give is that somebody cares.**  
 ” —

ROY DALLISON - FOUNDING CHAIRMAN

## 2013 vs 2023

Amidst the strides we've made, the challenges persist. Economic uncertainties, welfare reforms, and other systemic challenges continue to threaten the well-being of vulnerable individuals and families.

**2013**

**195**  
 HOUSEHOLDS

**222**  
 ADULTS

**168**  
 CHILDREN

**2023**

**720**  
 HOUSEHOLDS

**1,000**  
 ADULTS

**580**  
 CHILDREN



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West Northumberland

# FOOD BANK



[www.westnorthumberlandfoodbank.org.uk](http://www.westnorthumberlandfoodbank.org.uk)



TO SUPPORT OUR WORK