

Happy Easter! As the Coronavirus pandemic has hit, the work of the Foodbank has continued, despite very many changes and adaptations. In this issue of the newsletter, we give you an insight into all that has been happening from the start of the crisis up to Easter Sunday.

### **Adapting our operation**

With adaptations, all six of our distribution centres (Chatteris, Cottenham, Ely, Haddenham, March, Soham) are still operating at their normal times. This has only been possible due to the incredible support of our staff, volunteers and the general public, for which we are very thankful and grateful.

Our centres are running in a revised 'streamlined' mode. We have two standard sizes of parcels, and these are handed to one client at a time, to ensure that we observe social distancing best practise. Clients are also respecting safe distances when queuing and receiving their food. The Countess Free Church hall in Ely is now operating as a packing zone to make up the parcels during the crisis as part of our streamlined operations (as seen in the pictures).



Many partner agencies are still operating – though most now only by telephone support. Agencies are still able to issue vouchers and the details are being sent to us electronically so that clients can still come to our distribution sessions and receive their food parcels.

In some cases we are delivering a food parcel on behalf of clients – thanks to our willing and dedicated volunteers. We are not always able to fulfil all delivery requests, but we try our best and prioritise for those most in need.

### **Food stocks – somehow, always enough**

Although a bumpy ride, by God's grace there has always somehow been enough food for new parcels for our clients. Members of the public are still donating food – we are really very grateful!

A few weeks back we did see the warehouse stocks so depleted that we couldn't see how we could last another week. Just at the time the public were finding it difficult to donate because of the situation with panic buying at the supermarkets, we also encountered a huge surge in demand at all of our Centres. The panic buying in the wider community did subside and the food supply gradually caught up. In one session alone we handled 38 vouchers and gave out 700 Kg of food. Demand on the Foodbank, although still high has now stabilized. To quantify this, we had stock in of 6644 kg and stock out of 6462 kg in March. In just two weeks we fed approximately 500 people, compared to 300 people in the same period a year ago.

### **Financial donations – incredibly blessed!**

In this crisis, the general public, and a number of local charities, have stepped up their response by providing additional financial giving to the Foodbank. Since the crisis started, over £ 9, 500 has been donated online, with additional donations by cheque. Local charities have made grants totalling over £ 7,000, and we have also seen a rise in regular monthly donations, as people recognise that we are here for the 'long haul' to help others in crisis. These additional funds have enabled us to buy stock to replenish critical items – ensuring each parcel has the essentials for clients in crisis need.

### **With all our thanks**

As the crisis first started to unfold, the number of phone enquiries increased very quickly. Thankfully we

are blessed with incredibly efficient support by **PA Answer** who took 200 calls on our behalf within just 3 weeks. This was an amazing effort, especially as they were re-configuring their own business operations to respond to the crisis at the same time.

**Glovers Van Hire** extended our van hire so that we can use the van on any day that we need it for 'as long as it takes' to get through this. This is very generous, especially as they have faced the same problems as many other local businesses. One day the van suffered a tyre blowout, but Glovers got us straight back on the road so that our movements of stock could continue.



**Fencab taxi drivers** have undertaken parcel deliveries on our behalf only claiming enough to cover mileage.

When **Starbucks** closed their store, they donated 80 litres of fresh in-date milk, which we included in food parcels distributed that week.

Recognising our shortages of stock, **Morrison, Tesco** and **Waitrose** have enabled us to arrange bulk-buy of critical items. They have also supported these purchases financially.

Thank you to **FACT Community Transport** for helping us move people and food around the area.

Thanks to **Fenland Mobile Libraries** who have a squad of volunteers with spare capacity who are helping our team at Chatteris meet out of hours demand.

## Community and volunteering

Through this crisis the community has come together in amazing ways to support each other and to support charities like ourselves.

We recognise many of our regular volunteers have had to self-isolate or stop volunteering for health reasons. We are so grateful for their regular contributions, and wish them well as they stay safe through this period. We look forward to welcoming them back in happier times.

Many new people have offered to volunteer with us. Sadly we have not been able to accommodate many of them – this is because we have kept the number of people in our sessions to a minimum, and have streamlined the operations for safety reasons. We are grateful of the offers though.

Many have asked us if we can help their elderly or health-vulnerable relative or friend with food deliveries. In instances where the recipient has money to pay for the food we have suggested they use the various local support offers (eg street community help schemes that have wonderfully sprung up), so that we can concentrate on individuals or families whose financial situation leaves them in a crisis. We recognise that it has been a tough time across the board, and are glad that the community as a whole has responded in so many ways.

