

## What an Amazing Community Response

Thank you to each and every one who has given and supported the work of the foodbank this year. You are amazing!

We just haven't got the space to list everyone here – but if it was you, then we really can't thank you enough. Your generosity has meant we continue to bring some respite to struggling families, by providing food parcels, helping those in fuel poverty, and helping people move forward from their current state of crisis.

In March of this year, two of our volunteers stood in the foodbank warehouse watching aghast at food going out of the door much faster than ever before as demand soared due to the onset of the pandemic. It seemed at first that the foodbank would not be able to meet demand from those in need. But an amazing community response rapidly kicked-in, and so many of you who could, gave something extra to our work.



Although 2020 has been a really difficult year for so many, it is also very encouraging to see how communities have responded – stepping up to support those who are in need of help, offering to shop for neighbours, calling in for a chat, and being the first point of contact for every day needs for many. Our on-line doors have never been 'open' so much as they have been this year with amazing donations of money, food and where possible, time.

We do however miss the chats we previously had with clients – “what brings you to foodbank?”, “are you getting enough help?” – are questions that take time to answer, and we do look forward to a time when we can have more face-to-face time with our clients again.

Thank you all for your kind, generous support and donations – we literally could not do this without you!

## Rural Development Manager

In September, Ely Foodbank appointed Brenda Francis to the new role of Rural Development Manager. The role involves piloting and developing new distribution models to address client needs in rural locations, offering “floating” signposting support to clients, and managing Soham Distribution.

We asked Bren for a few words on what's been happening. Bren says, “It has been a busy time to say the least! Engagement with the local community, directing clients, engaging with support agencies, and organising the relocation of Soham Distribution are all starting to bear fruit.

“I have been able to set up pilot models in both Burwell and Sutton, so that food is available to those who need it. I am working alongside clients to help them move forward, and with amazing support from the Methodist Church, where we have moved to, we have managed to relocate Soham Distribution – our 5<sup>th</sup> move in 7 years!”

## Citizens Advice Partnership

From our earliest days, Ely Foodbank has signposted to a range of agencies where clients can seek the additional help they need to move forward from their current circumstances, and we continue to look for new ways to extend this aspect of our work.

We are delighted therefore to update you that our new partnership with Citizens Advice launched in September, offering detailed advice from trained personnel for our clients, to help them address underlying challenges they may be facing.

We have launched (due to covid restrictions) with an initial telephone support service, provided by Sarah and Katie who have joined CA on a job share basis as

dedicated advice workers for foodbank clients. Having a direct call from an advice worker with key knowledge (for example in the area of Universal Credit applications) has been a real advantage.

This partnership has been in formation for a while. We first explored the idea with Citizens Advice Rural Cambridgeshire, and asked how it might be possible to 'embed' an advisor into our sessions. We partnered with Godmanchester, St. Neots and Ramsey Foodbanks to make a full time post between us, and were successful in receiving a grant of £ 60, 000 generously provided by ASDA in partnership with the Trussell Trust, for a two year period.

Since launch, over 55 referrals from Ely Foodbank have been made – along with other referrals by the other foodbanks in the joint scheme. For some clients this referral has proved just what they needed to take new steps and become self-supporting once again.

### Move to e-vouchers

During these tricky times, we have accelerated the roll out of an electronic method of issuing vouchers. We now encourage our agencies to access an area of our Data System to issue e-vouchers. These are quickly replacing the original red vouchers which could easily get lost and most importantly were not a fool-proof method of tracking voucher usage. Issuing e-vouchers has helped enormously, as agencies need only to have a telephone conversation with a client, issue a voucher and text the number to their phones. If you are a referring agency who hasn't signed up to e-vouchers, then please do get in touch as we would love to bring you on board.

### Reflection on this Year

*'But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.'*

The above statement was made by a great king and recorded in the Bible. The king was bowled over by a surge of generosity, seeing how the people collectively gave willingly. At Ely Foodbank we also have been

absolutely bowled over by not just a surge in giving, but literally wave after wave of generous donations in the form of money, food items, and also both toiletries and cleaning products.

From an all-time low in late March, we have seen our warehouse stores fill right up and maintain high levels of stock across virtually all items. This has continued even though typical harvest collections through schools and churches etc have by and large not been possible this year. Many members of the public and organisations have been very creative in finding ways to continue giving, for which we are incredibly grateful.

One of the principles on which we operate as Ely Foodbank is that we hold a basic trust that there will always be enough for the needs that present themselves. The king quoted above held this principle as well – recognising that whatever we have comes from the open giving hands of God in the first place. This spiritual principle has been proven in Ely Foodbank over and over, and especially so over these difficult months of pandemic. What we are able to give is from the incredible generosity of our supporters. For us this is a God-thing!

### Gift Aid it!

We are so grateful for the many cheques posted to us over the past 6 months. Did you know that if you pay UK income tax we could claim an extra 25% on your gift – including cheques already sent to us and paid in? Simply get in touch and ask for a Gift Aid form (or download one from our website) and send it in, and we will do the rest!

