

EPPING FOREST FOODBANK



ANNUAL REPORT
2023/2024

An Epping Forest where no one needs to go hungry



24 Oakwood Hill Industrial Estate
Loughton,
Essex
IG10 3NY

eppingforest.foodbank.org.uk
Phone: 0300 102 9808

info@eppingforest.foodbank.org.uk
Epping Forest Foodbank

[@eppingforestfb](https://www.instagram.com/eppingforestfb)
[@EppingForestFB](https://www.facebook.com/EppingForestFB)

FROM THE DIRECTOR



2023/2024 has been Epping Forest Foodbank's twelfth year operating as a foodbank and fifth year as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. It has also been a year of great change at the Foodbank and the opening up of additional services.

We have worked closely with partner organisations to bring in additional support from experts stationed at our Hubs including Mental Health, Energy advice and Benefits assistance. Most importantly we have worked with VAEF to have a fully trained benefits advisor present in all our hubs, providing a vital service to people who are struggling to get their entitlement in the often Byzantine systems.

This year saw us move to a new warehouse with increased storage capacity and office space. It was a tremendous effort to get everything moved across, and a huge thanks to all those who lent a hand. If this wasn't enough, we also moved one of our hubs from St John's on the Broadway to Trinity Church, Mannock Drive. We established a new hub in Waltham Abbey on Thursday afternoons at the Hazelwood Children's centre, which is our first centre in Waltham Abbey and our first afternoon session.

We wish to thank all these churches for this tremendous support without which we wouldn't be able to complete our vital work.

We have a great team of committed volunteers and much support from the local community and Trussell Trust. We have needed everyone pulling together to deal with the significant rise in usage our foodbank has seen. This year has been our busiest ever, every single month was a record breaker! I am incredibly proud of the work done by the volunteers across the Foodbank to make sure we always had enough supplies to meet the needs of everyone who came to us.

We supported more households in crisis than ever before, increased our number of volunteers, increased our staff hours, distributed more donated food, and saved more surplus food from landfill than in any previous year.

Our track record and experience has equipped us for the impact that redundancies, business closures, sickness, short hours and the cost of living crisis have presented to our community. As well as our emergency food provision, we have utilised the Frontline system to make referrals onwards to further support organisations, giving our clients the best possible chance of not needing our services in the future.

Sadly, as the impact of the cost of living crisis continues to grow, so does demand for our services. But at Epping Forest Foodbank we are ready to meet whatever the future throws at us with the same compassion and commitment to our community as we have always had.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Forman'.

JACOB FORMAN

Director

VOLUNTEERS

Epping Forest Foodbank is a volunteer-powered organisation. Now numbering over one hundred and fifty volunteers. Our volunteers come from a diverse range of backgrounds, religious beliefs, employment experience and ages.

There are numerous roles and responsibilities that keep an operation like this running smoothly, including warehouse, governance, collection and delivery drivers, office and admin, social media, training, communications, centre volunteers, health and safety, liaison with donors, referral agents, premises, recruitment, accounts, research and keeping records of local services. We are fortunate and grateful to have a committed, enthusiastic, dedicated group who work as a team to provide the best service we can to the people we serve and support.

We have worked creatively to support people remotely, to signpost and understand what to include in their food parcels.

"Volunteering at the Foodbank is always a pleasure, a great team approach whilst helping to deliver an essential front line community service. My only real frustration is the nagging question why in 2023 is a food bank still essential within our Epping Forest community."

"It was the worst and best of times. We have never worked harder to meet the needs of families since that first lockdown – all our amazing volunteers pulled together to get those food parcels packed and delivered in difficult times. But we also have such fond memories of those times of beautiful weather and operating in the lovely environs of St. Marys. It has been a non-stop year for our operations – receiving record levels of donations, shifting to online referrals, moving to a new warehouse and opening the new venue at Debden Broadway. It's been a blast!"

I really enjoy volunteering for Epping Forest Foodbank, carrying out admin tasks and once or twice a month helping to give out food parcels on Saturday mornings at St John's on Debden Broadway. The best bits? Helping in a practical way to get food to people who need it; working alongside such a great team; feeling I can still be useful after retirement.



PARTNER AGENCIES

We have over 80 partner referral agencies that support people during a time of crisis who can make a referral for a food parcel. These front line professionals have knowledge of a person's circumstances to understand and support them with more than just food during a crisis.

We have built this range of referral agencies to enable all who need help in a difficult time to access help and for that help to be more than just food. We are proud of the deep knowledge we have built up about local support and services to signpost the individuals and referral agencies to tackle issues like benefit claims, debt, housing issues, visa issues and domestic abuse.

During 2023 our referral agencies all made use of the Trussell Trust's E-referral system. This has helped us give remote access to the foodbank service while many of these staff work from home.

We have built stronger communication with our referral agencies. Where one might touch the tip of an iceberg of issues going on for an individual or family, it plays a part in linking them up with holistic support. We are proud of the positive impact this support is having on people in our community and that these professionals rate highly our professional, helpful, kind, collaborative and efficient approach.

In addition to referrals into the Foodbank, we have made frequent referrals out to other agencies whenever possible, we did this by utilising the council run Frontline online tool, a tool to easily share details between agencies. Through our specially trained signposting volunteers, the people using our services have been able to: collect hundreds of pounds in Energy top ups, access women's refuges in Harlow, gain temporary employment through job agencies, book appointments with audiologists, access specialist budgeting courses with CMA, access Men's social groups, claim a Blue badge for free parking and much, much more.

VAEF PARTNERSHIP

This year we began working even more closely together with long time partner Volunteer Action Epping Forest. Using our Data Collection System (DCS) we identified many of our clients were having an issue with the benefits system, being underpaid, wrongly turned down or simply unaware of their entitlements.

Having identified this issue we worked closely with The Trussell Trust Financial Inclusion team and VAEF to bring in an Benefits Guidance Officer, Rosie Coffey.

Rosie is present at all of our foodbank hubs and is there to provide impartial and confidential advice and assistance to local foodbank service users.

This collaboration aims to empower individuals by providing guidance on accessing entitled benefits and equipping them with the knowledge to navigate complex systems independently.

By pooling resources and expertise, the partnership maximizes its impact, reaching a broader segment of the community. Beyond immediate assistance, the initiative aims to foster long-term resilience and self-sufficiency which will reduce the need for repeat visits to the Foodbank.

It is still early into the project, but in the first 3 months alone Rosie assisted 76 clients and managed to recover £83,000 worth of financial assistance.



TELLING OUR STORY

Users of Epping Forest Foodbank

A case study: 'Lucy's' story

By JACOB FORMAN
Epping Forest Foodbank

LUCY (not her real name) and her three-year-old daughter came to the foodbank about twice a month. Homelessness and abuse led her here.

Although she has good academic qualifications, Lucy's former husband would not allow her to work so she has no funds of her own.

Since November, when they had to flee her husband's physical abuse, mother and daughter have had four moves into temporary accommodation.

When Lucy tells her story she is on top of all the dates, as she explains, each move for her and her daughter takes place in a rush, as notice periods expire and some rentals require a deposit.

By now they have a few clothes and no spare money. Other belongings have to be left behind each time they move.

Lucy's relationship with her husband was marked by controlling behaviour and uncertain-



Epping Forest Foodbank supports a wide range of the community

and she's not entitled to housing benefit and now she has received a large bill for arrears of council tax. The letters from the council tell her the debt is urgent but she has no money to pay it.

Lucy is losing sleep thinking about it. She would like to appeal but had no idea how to go about it.

Epping Forest Foodbank has helped her with food, toiletries and practical advice.

It's clear that Lucy has had to swallow her pride, but she is so grateful for the help and reassured by knowing she can come by any time she needs to.

It helps so much with the cost of things for at least three to five days. Her daughter loves cereal and always gets enough from the foodbank.

At Epping Forest Foodbank, we are seeing more and more people come through our doors.

■ If you need assistance, call Help Through Hardship on 0808 208 2138.

■ If you would like to help with our work through donating time, money or food items, visit our website: eppingforest.foodbank.org.uk

This year also saw us embark on a new storytelling project alongside the Epping Forest Guardian.

We interviewed real people who had attended the foodbank and asked them what had brought them to us, what they hoped for the future and what extra help they needed. We then published anonymised stories in the local newspaper, the Epping Forest Guardian. The readership approaches ten thousand people and really helped to get our message across.

This project was a part of our work to destigmatize the use of Foodbanks, as well as humanise those that need our support. To often we have seen disinformation and myths about the nature of Food Insecurity, especially in regions such as ours that are traditionally thought of as affluent.

Overall we interviewed 15 clients, and the feedback was excellent, both from the public and the interviewees themselves. The interviewees shared that the act of storytelling itself was a cathartic experience and reassured them that there was someone to listen to their life stories and be interested in it. It was a sobering reminder that alongside the immediate struggle of a lack of food, being in need can be a truly lonely experience. Luckily, there are people here to help, and as a foodbank we will also be here to support and signpost on. Our director was even asked to discuss these stories on Sky News Live.

As well as this, you may have seen us appear on BBC One's Stacey's Crafty Christmas. Filming actually took place in October and it was wonderful to see us featured so prominently on a flagship show

Feeding family on the breadline

'Emma' can't afford shoes for her children

By Jacob Forman
Epping Forest Foodbank

EMMA only goes to the foodbank when she's desperate, but when she does it's a massive help.

She says: "Definitely there have been times when I haven't been able to get through without it. Recently she has had big problems affording the gas and electricity."

When she gets her benefits she puts money onto the gas and electric meter but this year it has been more than double what it used to be.

She says: "It's literally impossible."

There have been times when she couldn't top up the gas even though she has children. Now she has an extra direct debit coming from her bank account to clear the debt on the energy bills.

Sometimes she forgets about that and thinks there is more in the account than there is. Emma has found herself in the shops with no money in her account.

There's always something new to pay for; food has gone up a lot as well and with a family to feed that's



After paying heating bills, Emma had no money for food

another stress. Universal Credit is simply not enough to cover anything extra that may crop up.

School uniforms are yet another bill, especially shoes.

Emma can get inexpensive shoes for her children but they break quickly. On the other hand a pair of shoes from Clark's can be £80 but

lost a year.

This is a choice Emma would love to make, but just cannot afford to buy the long-lasting pair!

She is left dreading her children coming home from school and telling her that they have broken a shoe or ripped their shirts because she doesn't know how she'll replace them.

She has asked her children not to play football at break times for fear of the damage it may cause to their uniforms.

She has been through different referral agencies to try and get help with energy and school uniforms but often ends up on the phone for hours and getting nowhere.

As winter is approaching, she is desperate to save up something for Christmas presents, but doesn't now how this will be possible.

At Epping Forest Foodbank, we are seeing more and more people like Emma come through our doors.

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EMERGENCY SUPP

Our emergency supplies can come in several forms;

- A food parcel of at least three days of nutritionally balanced food collected from a distribution centre in exchange for a voucher or code
- A food parcel delivered to a doorstep from a voucher or code issued by a referral agent
- Where we have supplies of fresh food from supermarket surplus and donations from catering establishments this is in addition to the food parcel
- An emergency foodbox.

We have many of these boxes stationed in Children's Centres/medical practices/community groups, churches and schools. These on-site boxes contain a small family equivalent food parcel.

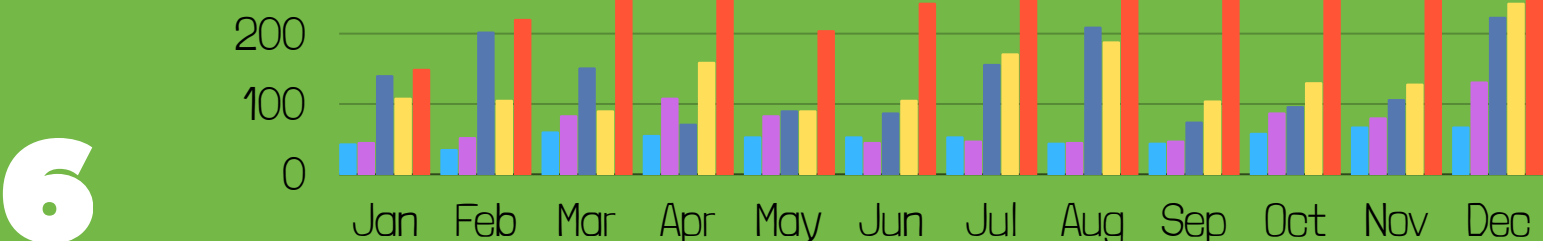
Figure 1.

Below is the percentage of households that reported each of the issues that drove them to the Foodbank

- **16% had a change in work status including; change of work hours, loss of work, delay in wages**
- **16% had issues with the benefits system including; delay in payment, benefit sanctions, awaiting first payments**
- **10% could not afford food due to paying off debts (priority and non priority)**
- **61% were struggling due to the rising cost of essentials including fuel and food**
- **20% had a change of personal circumstances including; Insecurely housed, No access to financial support due to immigration status, Loss of support from friends or family, Change in relationship status, Domestic abuse, Change in dependents**
- **11% were impacted by health, including mental and physical wellbeing and Long and Short term issues.**

FIGURE 2.

Total people fed from food parcels issued by Epping Forest Foodbank by month in 2021 and 2022



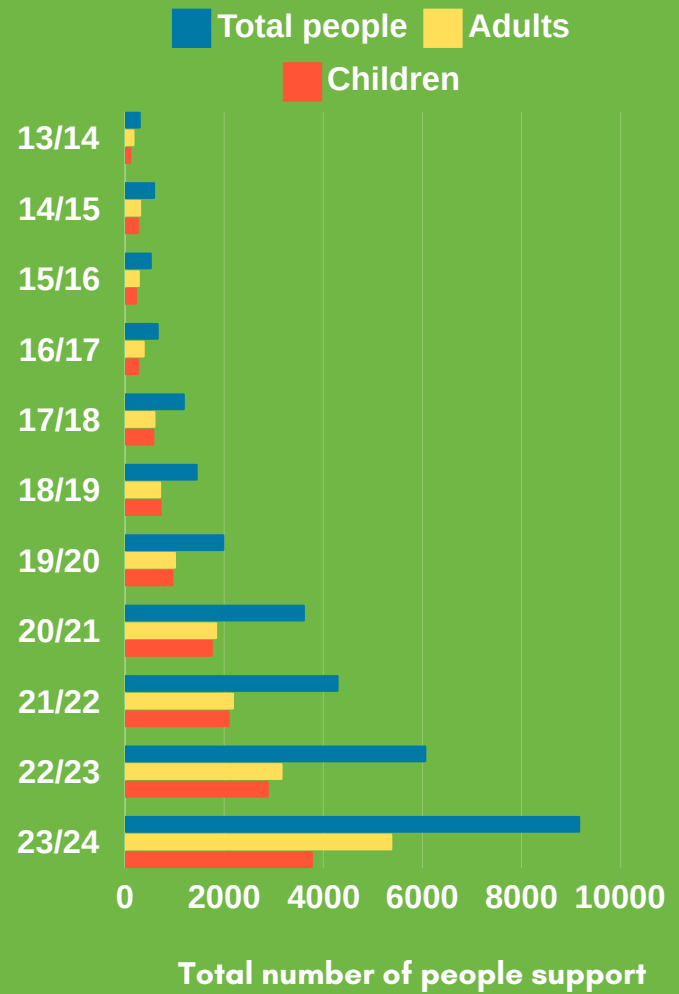
LIES DISTRIBUTED

We are grateful to the venues that host our foodbank sessions. We work collaboratively with them to make them safe enough for our volunteers and people using the Foodbank at this challenging time. Particular thanks to St Mary's Church, Loughton who have allowed us extended use for packing and dispatching, Trinity Church, Loughton for the centrally located space in Debden on a Saturday, Hazelwood Children's centre in Waltham Abbey on Thursdays and Epping Forest District Council for allowing us space in the Hub on Tuesday mornings.

Our centres remained open all year round, only closing for Bank holidays. It was really rewarding to serve people face-to-face while maintaining our delivery service supporting people across the Epping Forest District.

FIGURE 3.

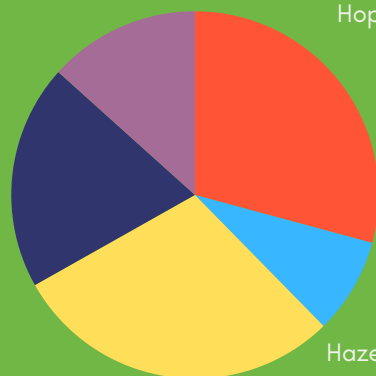
Total people supported by Epping Forest Foodbank from 2013 - 2022



Community Hub, Epping Civic Offices
1206

Hope Centre
2640

Debden hubs (St Johns + Trinity)
1792



Hazelwood Children's Centre,
763

Oakwood Hill - Warehouse
2638

FIGURE 4.

Breakdown of how many individuals were supported by each of our distribution centres

DONATIONS RECEIVED

There have been widely reported increases in the cost of food and other essential items as part of the cost of living crisis, this has resulted in a dip in the amount of food donated in the local supermarkets and other donation venues.

We have still had a massive 30.47tonnes of stock donated. We take our responsibility and stewardship of these donations very seriously. We sort and organise all donations so as much as possible is used in food parcels before its use-by date. We are always grateful when people check use-by dates carefully and save us the job of disposing of food we cannot use.

We did give out 58.6tonnes of food meaning there was a substantial shortfall. This was made up through purchases from wholesalers and the cost was covered by our fundraising efforts.

This has been a pattern we have seen across the Trussel Trust network of more food going out than ever before and less food being donated. We continue our pledge that every person suffering from food insecurity in Epping Forest will have access to a three day food parcel and will do whatever it takes to fulfil this pledge. If you can, please do give generously in either food or financial support.

Thank you to Waitrose Buckhurst Hill, especially Maxine, their community champion who is a loyal foodbank supporter; Tesco in Epping and Aldi in Debden for hosting our donation points. Phil the Trolley at St Mary's Church deserves an honourable mention. Volunteers are at the warehouse every Wednesday and Friday morning to accept donations and then sort, order and organise efficiently and effectively. All food is then ordered by date order ensuring that no food goes to waste by being out of date.

FUNDRAISING

People's generosity during a challenging year has been humbling and very affirming. Individuals, churches, community groups, companies, local councillors and school PTAs have given very generously and spoken loudly and clearly of the value and trust that we have in the community to meet the needs of people who find they are having a difficult time.

Through regular giving via our Fellowship 200 scheme, grants, donations through our website, cash in envelopes and cheques, we are in the fortunate position of covering our costs and have money to invest in strengthening and

and growing our service to support more people and work strategically to reduce the need for emergency food, hunger and food poverty.

We raised money to provide resources to help our community empathise with what it is like to be using the services of the foodbank. We know it isn't easy to reach out for help and treat all people who use the foodbank with kindness, respect and dignity.



Photos highlights

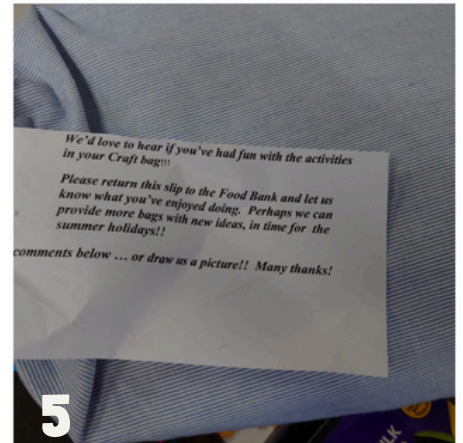


Photo key:

Picture 1, Christmas FISH packing at our new warehouse, with members of staff Raytheon and CLC, **Picture 2**, Jacob taking part in the Stay Safe and Well event, **Picture 3**, DA FISH delivery **Picture 4**, Sarah and Dani collecting donations at Waitrose, Buckhurst Hill **Picture 5**, A note from the Arts Society of West Essex that was put into each FISH delivery **Picture 6**, Staff from Kier who spent the day volunteering helping us move to our new warehouse, **Picture 7**, Volunteers from Higgins in front of the shelving unit they put together for us.

from 2023/24



Picture 8, Our new full time operations manager, Bob Glasgow **Picture 9**, A flyer for our new online shop **Picture 10**, Stacey Solomon and members of the team during filming at our warehouse **Picture 11**, Foodbank fairies hand made by a parishioner of Loughton Methodist Church to raise money for the Foodbank **Picture 12**, Top Golf Staff helping to sort deliveries on a corporate volunteering day

CASE STUDIES



Below are two case studies originally printed in the Epping Forest Guardian, further case studies can be found in the Newspaper archives and our website

I'm keen to share my story if I feel up to it. I used to work as a retail manager in both the UK and North America until I fell seriously ill. Even after reaching out to my MP about my issues, it's been a constant uphill battle.

I was born in the UK but spent some time living abroad with my wife. When we returned, we had to use all our savings to pay rent upfront for a year because we had no credit rating in the UK. This left us with nothing when I became too ill to work. My doctors have signed me off, and I now have little energy. I rely on Universal Credit and Employment and Support Allowance (E&SA), but the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) only pays me the single person's allowance because my wife is not a UK citizen; her salary counts against my Universal Credit. Despite my doctors recommending it, I was declined Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

Since I can no longer work, bills have become a major issue. Universal Credit doesn't cover our rent, so everything else comes from my E&SA. The DWP's inaccurate meter readings and estimates led to us being billed a staggering £2100 quarterly for electricity in our flat. The energy company wouldn't accept that a couple in a flat during the summer wouldn't use that much energy. A new energy company installed a smart meter and immediately recognized that we were only using about £30 per week, but the debt still looms large. Situations like this weigh heavily on my mind.

My wife and I are constantly crunching numbers and looking at our finances. At the end of each month, we have very little left.

We couldn't feed ourselves without the foodbank. The people there never make you feel bad about yourself.



I come to the foodbank about twice a month with my three-year-old daughter. Homelessness and abuse are what led me here. Despite having good academic qualifications, my former husband wouldn't allow me to work, leaving me with no funds of my own.

Since November, when we had to flee my husband's physical abuse, my daughter and I have moved into temporary accommodation four times. I keep track of all the dates because each move happens quickly as notice periods expire and some rentals require a deposit. We only have some clothes left; we leave behind most of our belongings each time we move.

My relationship with my husband was marked by controlling behavior and uncertainty. Sometimes he sends unpredictable amounts of money, switching between promising to find housing for us and insisting I find it myself. In December, I started receiving Universal Credit, but it's not enough, and I don't qualify for housing benefit. Now, I've received a large bill for arrears of Council Tax. The council's letters say the debt is urgent, but I have no money to pay it. I lose sleep worrying about it and would like to appeal, but I don't know how to start.

The foodbank has been a lifesaver, providing us with food, toiletries, and advice. It's been hard to swallow my pride, but I'm so grateful for the help and reassured knowing I can come anytime we need to. It eases the burden of basic expenses for us, at least temporarily.



