

Andover Food Bank



Providing food for local people in crisis

AFB – how it all began....

The idea of a food bank in Andover first came to Patrick Lavelle, a St John the Baptist parishioner, when he began to explore ways of making the Parish more involved in the local community. He was inspired to visit the Trussell Trust in Salisbury and find out more about the work being done there.

Armed with masses of advice and information Patrick got down to work setting up a similar scheme in Andover - supported at first by just a few keen volunteers. He called on the Parish for financial help and resources and simultaneously established links with 16 local aid agencies to distribute the Andover Food Bank vouchers with which food boxes could be claimed by those who needed them.

Finally, the AFB was launched in Easter 2006 with a very small quantity of food available for distribution in just a few food boxes. During the first 6 months progress was slow but Patrick remained optimistic and awareness of the AFB's work increased with the help of the aid agencies and food donors.

By the end of its first year the AFB had the support of several local schools and churches and an ever rising number of dedicated volunteers. Finances steadied and local supermarket collections became all important.



AFB – 2 years on....

As the AFB comes to the end of its second year in operation it has been able to reach out to people struggling for whatever reason in a greater variety of ways. Easter eggs are distributed to local children and a very successful appeal at Christmas enabled dozens of shoeboxes, jam packed with goodies to be sent out, not to far flung places, but to children on our doorstep.

Now the AFB also supplies "welcome packs" to those who have been rehoused but have no funds to furnish their new accommodation.

Patrick and all those who work with him are delighted at the success of the AFB. 11,000kg of food was distributed last year which represented a rise of 50% from the AFB's initial year. The AFB has proved itself everything that Patrick first wished it to be when he set out to help Andover open its arms to anyone who was in difficulty. It is truly a local charity - run for the community by its own members.



Statistics and information

Statistics

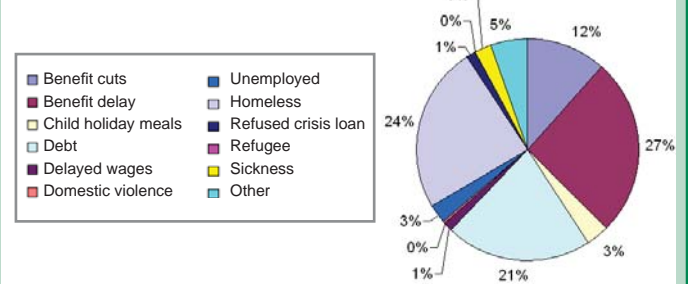
In 2007 the Andover Food Bank fed a total of 1205 people including 327 children. This was an increase of 105% on the same operating period in 2006.

This growth has continued into 2008 with figures for January and February significantly up on last year.

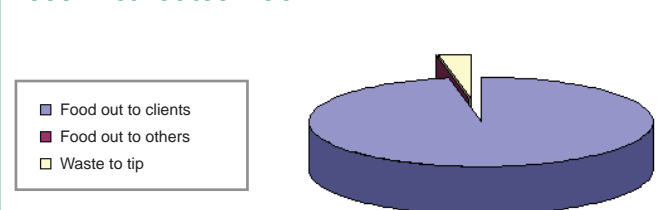
Referrals for food have come from all the agencies. In 2007 Andover Crisis and Support Centre gave 179 referrals, Sarum House 127 and The Bridge 95. The reasons for referrals are put into 12 crisis categories. In both 2006 and 2007 the main reason for requests was benefit delay. In 2007 this was 33% of our total referrals. Next in line was low income at 20%, homelessness 14% and debt 11%. The 2006 figures are illustrated in the diagram.

The upwards trend in demand is expected to continue. Worsening economic conditions and the higher profile of the AFB will contribute to this demand. Food donations need to increase to meet these requirements.

Crisis Category 2006 Andover



Food Distributed 2007



Poverty and Homelessness Event at The Bridge

On Friday 22 February The Bridge drop-in centre hosted an informal discussion on poverty and homelessness. Speakers provided statistics and definitions of poverty and homelessness, revealing that one in six people in semi rural districts such as Test Valley live on a low income and that there were a far higher percentage of pensioners (22%) in this area compared with urban areas on low incomes. There has been an increase of 80% in homelessness over the last 10 years (defined as households trapped in temporary accommodation) which has been shown to lead to poor child health and educational attainment.

The figures came alive as we heard real life stories from local agencies and one brave individual's own vivid account of his downward spiral into homelessness, unemployment and depression. The AFB described its work and the reasons for the increase in demand for food boxes.

A brainstorming session identified the following key issues: benefit delay and the inability to access benefits, need for better signposting between agencies, relationship breakdowns being a major cause of homelessness, the influence of lack of self esteem and lack of education, debt and poor money management skills, and the need for a drop-in day centre and night shelter facilities.

Sir George Young drew the discussion together and commented on the increase in repossessions, relationship breakdowns, alcoholism and addiction issues, immigration, and, system failures causing mistakes or delays in benefit payments. He also agreed that there should be better signposting between agencies. Sir George raised a number of questions such as how do we create not just more homes but the right type – balancing out the need for more housing against the aims of developers? How many empty houses or empty rooms could be re-let? How could landlords be persuaded to take in those on benefits? Could “empty nest” couples be paid to give a homeless young person a roof and support?

The issues raised will be sent to the Housing Minister and to a national forum on Poverty and Homelessness. In the meantime those present were keen to consider what could be done in Andover now.



Company News

Colleagues get together to support Andover Food Bank

Eleven members of staff at BP Rolls in the Portway West Estate Andover have been loyal supporters of the Andover Food Bank since its start. Georgina Hargreaves revealed that when she first read about the AFB the idea of a local charity instantly appealed to her and colleagues at work. The work mates have since worked hard on regularly supplying the AFB with foodstuffs and Christmas boxes. As Georgina says "We have all been in a position at some times in our lives when we needed help either as food or moral support."

The Christmas boxes put together by the group for local Andover children were beautifully wrapped and prepared with great care. Inside, Georgina reports, were a variety of little presents such as crayons, magic tricks, scarves, woolly hats, chocolate and even whoopee cushions!



The colleagues enjoy getting together in the run up before Christmas and discussing what is going into the boxes. "It can be quite emotional," says Georgina, "As we realise how much we are giving our own families but that there are local children receiving much less."

Everyone has found that supporting the AFB has brought them together as they work in different departments in the company and may not see each other day to day.



Georgina sums it up:

"We like to know someone, somewhere is getting the help they need".

How you can support the Andover Food Bank

The Andover Food Bank needs food, volunteers to pack and distribute boxes, administrative support and cash to fund basic running costs. We welcome support from:

Group Donors

Groups of people at work like the team described above or those who meet for social activities and can organise collections of food or money or can offer their combined support. Recent Group Donors have ranged from the 2nd Andover Beavers to the staff and members at Curves

Individual Donors

Any member of the general public who can provide food, time or money

Corporate Donors

Can help in a wide variety of ways, for example, by giving sponsorship or seconding staff. Among our corporate donors are Petty Wood & Co Ltd, Corporate Freight Logistics and HSA.

Agency Update

How I was helped..

This letter was received in February from a local young man.

Dear Patrick and everyone else who helps with the food parcels -
"I was homeless for 5 months and living in my car. Just before Christmas 2007 I was given a flat by Testway housing. When I got the keys I had no money, no job and only a few bags of clothes. I arrived at the flat to find to my amazement that there were two lovely food parcels that were left for me. They were packed full of goodies. I was very touched by this gesture and would like to express my deepest thanks to you all. You have made me a very happy person."

The Andover Crisis & Support Centre

The Andover Crisis and Support Centre ("ACSC") is one of the agencies supplied with food boxes by the Andover Food Bank. Located in the town centre, ACSC not only provides emergency accommodation for women and children, the majority of whom are fleeing domestic violence, but it also acts as a drop-in centre, and provides counselling and a telephone help line.

ACSC has 19 bedrooms and 4 kitchens, but food is not generally provided for the residents. ACSC does not receive any funding for food. Although it did have a small stock of food before the AFB was set up, which it was able to give out in emergency situations, donations were sporadic and the stock would often run out. Food boxes from the AFB, which contain enough to feed an individual or a family for 3 days, can provide an important stop gap while residents are sorting themselves out.

Working with the Andover Food Bank

Elaine Oates, senior project worker at the ACSC, says that since the advent of the Andover Food Bank the ACSC has not only been able to give food boxes to its own residents but it has also been able to help other local people in crisis. Non residents helped with food boxes range from homeless people with alcohol addictions to families who, through sudden illness, find themselves out of work and in financial difficulties struggling to feed themselves.

In the two years since the AFB was set up, ACSC has supplied nearly three hundred food boxes feeding over 430 people in crisis. As Elaine confirms this simply would not have been possible without the AFB.

Dates for your diary

Saturday 5th April – food collection at Sainsbury's

Monday 28th April to Sunday 10th May – display at Andover Library

Saturday 21st June – food collection at Sainsbury's

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