



Newsletter - May 2020

Like many organisations the past six weeks have been a whirlwind for all of us here at East Elmbridge Foodbank

We have continued...

to provide food to people in crisis including people experiencing issues with their benefits, people on low incomes and in debt in East Elmbridge. On top of our usual service to around 25 clients a week, we are now supplying emergency food to a growing number of people who are struggling financially due to the situation with Covid-19.

We have seen...

more than a four-fold increase in demand for our foodbank service as many have lost their source of income and are awaiting government support while others are waiting to receive vouchers from schools for lunches.

Before the crisis hit us, our stock levels were really high thanks to bumper Harvest Festival and Christmas donations. We thought our stocks would see us right through the summer and were even getting worried that we might not use all our 2021 dated tins before they went out of date! As the crisis unfolded, we reassessed our stock levels and reckoned that we probably had enough for no more than three to four weeks – a worrying scenario.

However, whilst everyone in those first two weeks of the crisis rushed to stock up on staples, we felt like Joseph's storehouse in the time of famine, as we were already sitting on large quantities of pasta, baked beans and toilet paper! We were also the grateful recipients of large quantities of stock from local catering businesses which were closing their doors and were able to include delicious cakes and cookies from Starbucks in our initial food parcels.

But, as supermarket shelves were stripped bare, it became clear that we would no longer be able to rely on food donations from the public and would need to look to other sources to purchase food, something totally alien to us which we had never before needed to do. We were fortunate to be offered the services of Dominic Raab's Parliamentary Assistant who researched all the available wholesalers on our behalf and gave us some useful leads. Dominic and Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council had visited us at our packing and distribution centre at Esher Green Baptist Church at the outset of the crisis and offered whatever help we needed.

The first two weeks of the crisis were a time of intense activity and frantic planning as we transformed our operating model from a twice weekly drop-in session into a full doorstep delivery service of pre-packed food boxes. If our phones weren't ringing, they were pinging with a stream of WhatsApp messages from the proliferation of new groups that we set up in order to communicate with each other. Our team of volunteers which had initially been halved in number (some being of a certain age) rapidly increased as we recruited and set up teams of packers, sorters and delivery drivers. We increased our Foodbank Co-ordinator's hours from 20 to 40 hours a week and appointed an operations manager, a stock manager and an administrator to deal with the rapidly increasing workload.

With such a great team of dedicated volunteers we were able to hit the ground running and had our new delivery service in place as lock down commenced. Boxes were ordered and filled, clipboards

loaded with instructions and delivery details, hand gel was applied and gloves and lanyards donned - our delivery team were ready to go! In our first week of operation we delivered food boxes to 63 clients – to nearly three times as many clients as normal. We are now in our fifth week and have just reached the 100 mark.

With food donations severely restricted we ordered our first delivery of wholesale food and launched a Crowdfunder campaign to raise money to purchase food instead. Our target was £5,000 which was reached in less than 24 Hours! Our new target of £10,000 has also just been reached which is fantastic. Only two years ago that was our total annual budget!

Now that the supermarket shelves are filling up again and long-life milk and loo paper are no longer much sought-after items, our stock levels have benefited hugely from over 50, and counting, local food collections organised at street level. Not only do these bring in much needed food, they have also served as a 'stockpiling amnesty' so we have ended up with all the long-life milk and baked beans that people bought in those first few anxious weeks. The collections are also keeping people connected with each other in their street and have given people a much-needed sense of purpose and of being able to do something positive to help.

We have also received large quantities of donated stock from Morrisons, Weybridge and from Tesco all organised by the Trussell Trust Head Office who have been amazing in their response to the crisis and in the support they have provided for all the foodbanks across the nation - including those who are not even part of the Trussell Trust network. As well as organising stock for us, the Trussell Trust have joined forces with British Gas and their engineers who have been delivering the Tesco stock – a fantastic example of corporate and voluntary sector collaboration.

And it's not only food donations that have been pouring in. We have received offers of help and other donations from so many people who just want to be a part of this amazing community effort. With social distancing, and the difficulty of managing large numbers of new volunteers at a time of rapid change, it has not been possible to mobilise all those who want to volunteer but we hope that there will be more opportunities for people to get involved as the situation eases. It bodes well for the future that at heart of this nation we are all there for each other and that community spirit is still very much alive.

So finally, like the Oscars, a long list of THANK YOU's

First and foremost to **Ryan and Val Ahern, Esher Green Baptist Church** – who have opened up their church to us and allowed us to take over the building to set up a packing and distribution centre and who, more importantly, are always on hand to support and encourage us when things get tough.

To all the local churches in East Elmbridge who have become local hubs for their communities and especially to **Alex Munro** and his team at **St Peter's West Molesey** and to **Andrew Cowie, St Nicholas, Thames Ditton** for all their support. Also to the **Church Revitalisation Trust** for their weekly donation of food supplies as part of their **#Love Your Neighbour** campaign

Elmbridge Borough Council – for making an immediate grant in the first few days of the crisis to support the foodbank service across the Borough.

Melanie Bussicott and Gail McKenzie, Community Support Services, Elmbridge Borough Council – for providing a fridge and freezer for us within hours of requesting it and for all their support in ensuring vulnerable people in Elmbridge receive the food they need.

Liz and Ellen, Elmbridge Community Transport for organising delivery of the fridge and freezer.

Cllr Tim Oliver, Leader of Surrey County Council – for securing additional premises for our bulk deliveries and for his ongoing support of our foodbank service.

Dominic Raab MP – for providing the services of his staff to help us in the early stages, for helping us deliver food boxes and for his ongoing support despite his other ministerial responsibilities at this time.

Emma Revie, CEO, Trussell Trust for her inspirational leadership and the way in which she and her team have provided so much support and help as we switched our complete operational model in a matter of days and especially **Christine Bamigbola and Phil Coyshe** our Area and Regional Managers who have made themselves available to deal with all our issues and queries as we step into unknown territory.

The Community Foundation for Surrey – for awarding us a grant from their Covid-19 Response Fund to cover our increased salary costs

Jackie Lodge and her team at Walton Charity – for ongoing operational and other support.

Mairi, Community Champion, Morrisons Weybridge for being the first of the supermarket chains to provide us with the share of a pallet of much needed stock and continuing to supply us on a regular basis.

Ian, Store Manager at Tesco Hurst Park and his staff for making sure we continue to receive items donated by shoppers in the store.

Kate Crossland and all the **partners at Waitrose in Esher** – for ensuring we receive the store donations and surplus bakery products including 144 packs of hot-cross buns!

Andrew Melia and all the **staff at the Claygate Co-op** for organising all their surplus stock for us to collect every day and for letting us borrow their crates!

Sue and the **staff at the Thames Ditton Co-op** who donated the entire contents of their chilled cabinet to us and the Council's Meals on Wheels service when their refrigeration unit stopped working due to a fire.

Mick and his team at Fruit World Claygate for donating crates of top quality fresh fruit and veg every week so we can not only give our clients fresh produce but preserve our stocks of tinned fruit and veg as well.

Elaine Bissell and her team at **Esher Citizens Advice** who are providing a fantastic telephone advice service to an ever-increasing number of people needing support from the foodbank and other services.

Grant Hutchinson, Kelly's Self Storage and **Big Yellow** – for donating boxes for our food deliveries

All the local businesses who donated their unused stock when they were forced to close down including – **Vikki Warden** and her team at **Starbucks, Jordan Addison – Café Giro, Esher, Pinewood Studios** and many others

ChelseaFC Foundation who provided a fleet of vans and footballing drivers to ferry food bags to our distribution centre at the beginning of the crisis.

Mandy Phillips for giving us her HP laser printer and her ex-colleagues at HP who helped her check it out to make sure it was working.

The Tech-Shed, Walton Station for coming to the rescue immediately when our laptop developed a fault and for giving us a replacement laptop and a spare keyboard to ensure we could carry on working.

Claygate Pharmacy for donating a large supply of hand sanitisers for our volunteers.

Cllr Trisha Bland and the **Boomerang Bag team** who have supplied us with hundreds of reusable Boomerang bags for our deliveries to single people – they are the perfect size and look great!

Cllr Tannia Shipley, Cllr Lesley Yauner, , Cllr Steve Bax and Cllr Charu Sood for their support with food box deliveries and donations.

Thames Ditton and Weston Green Residents' Association for their support.

Izzy Moffat for designing a series of inspirational cards with uplifting messages to be included in our weekly food boxes.

Helen Hawes, Old Cranleighans Hockey Club for organising a food collection and **JJ and Georgie, OC Club** for helping us transport it. Also to **Matt @Rhubarb_food** for donating boxes of top quality bananas and delicious muffins.

Mark Vernon and Kathryn Bartram at Reeds School for providing their van to help us transport donated food from Waitrose to our packing centre.

Phil Geraghty, Founder at Crowdfunder.co.uk for setting up our crowdfunding campaign for free and to everyone who has supported us financially either through the Crowdfunder website or by bank transfer, standing order or cheque payments.

All the **amazing residents of Claygate, Esher, Thames Ditton, Long Ditton, Hinchley Wood, and East & West Molesey** who have organised food collections in their streets which has brought in tonnes of food and other essential items so we have had enough food to fill 100 food boxes a week without the need to purchase any supplies.

For all the offers of help from people wanting to volunteer to help at the foodbank and for the offers of vans and other (sometimes quite random) things that people think we might need.

Our final thank you has to go to **Catherine Heavens, our Foodbank Co-ordinator** (who was originally employed to work 10 hours a week and who now has a full-time job with overtime!) and our amazing team of volunteers especially **El Lewis (Operations Manager), George Shand (Stock Manager), Vic Bernard (Admin support)** and all those too numerous to mention in our sorting, packing and delivery teams. And not forgetting our band of home-based volunteers who continue to support and encourage us – as her Majesty the Queen said “**we’ll meet again!**”

**Jenny French, Chair
East Elmbridge Foodbank
1 May 2020**