



The Methodist Church, 34b South St. Bishops Stortford.Herts.CM23 3AZ.

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## **BISHOPS STORTFORD FOOD BANK – UPDATE FOR CTBS – NOVEMBER 2024**

The last year has again been very busy at the Food Bank, with demand continuing to remain high. Over the past year, we received over 1,500 referrals and fed the equivalent of 3,465 people (some of these are repeat referrals so we actually fed around 1,100 individual people). We were also able to provide top ups to the pre-payment meters of 185 people.

We are only able to meet that high level of demand thanks to the amazing and generous support we receive from our community. For example, during Harvest a total of thirteen different primary schools, as well as many churches, collected food items for us.

As well as having to cope with increased demand this year we are again planning to give out nearly two hundred bags of 'Christmas Cheer', distributed by agencies, such as the Salvation Army, to families in need on our behalf. So, all the donations we receive are really important to us as we gear up to meet the needs of the busy winter period.

People are again enthusiastically taking part in our 'Reverse Advent Calendar' initiative where the food item to be collected is revealed on Facebook each day! We are also quietly confident that our three day event at Tesco at the end of November will bring in lots of badly needed food items.

It is incredible that we have always been able to give food to everyone referred to us, and we thank every single person that pops an item into the donation box when doing their shopping at the supermarket. Please keep the food items coming – it's really appreciated and much needed!

As many people realise, financial giving is also vital for us to continue in our work. As well as paying the salaries of our staff and meeting transport and storage costs, financial donations enable us to buy food items not donated. They also fund supermarket vouchers, allowing those in hardship to choose some items for themselves – something we think is very important and only possible through the generous support we receive. In some cases we have also been able to help people struggling with the costs of gas and electricity by putting money onto their prepayment meters.

The generosity of people in donating money to us has been truly breathtaking. It could be a gift from a Church congregation, the proceeds of a sponsored swim, a donation from a local business or an envelope of cash brought into our office. People continue to give by direct debit, JustGiving and one month money just arrived anonymously into our bank account!



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We are, of course, hugely grateful for all this support, without which we could not continue to meet local need.

For some time we have been concerned that simply giving food is not enough, that more needed to be done to help people deal with the issues that have contributed to their food poverty in the first place. For that reason, we have been happy to enter into a partnership with East Herts Citizens Advice to provide an Adviser at the Food Bank for our clients. Part funded by Hertfordshire Community Foundation, the adviser is at the Food Bank every Thursday to offer free, confidential, face to face and telephone advice on many issues such as debt, benefits, housing and more to help move people on from their difficult situations.

Partnerships like this can really make a difference for people in difficult circumstances and so, on the same note, we have recently begun to work with Clarion Housing to set up a monthly pop up advice hub for housing issues. We are also keen to tap into the massive expertise available within our local business community, and are always grateful for any offer of help on things like training provision.

I am immensely proud of our staff and volunteers who remain upbeat and enthusiastic but also hugely grateful for the love and practical support we receive from our community that we can then pass on to those in need. I am sure we all hope to reach a point when Foodbanks are no longer needed in our rich country but until then we are most grateful for your prayers and the financial support that we depend on to meet local need.

On a personal note, after five years as Food Bank Chairman, I will be retiring in the New Year. I would like to thank Churches Together for their constant support and good wishes for which I and everyone at the Food Bank have been very grateful. Such support has helped us to overcome many of the difficulties and challenges that we faced, and reminds us that we do all this to share God's love with all we meet.

Many, many thanks.

Bill Macdonald, Chairman