



## **Demand throughout 2024 remained high and yet, despite the squeeze felt by so many, you enabled us to meet local need ....**

The support we have received has been outstanding from schools, **local churches, community groups, local businesses, individual donors and fundraisers**. We depend on those who donate through the **supermarket collecting points** and those who **drop donations** in to us.

We appreciate the **donations of plastic bags** used for our deliveries and the **regular financial donations** that mean we can buy items missing from our shelves at times. We depend on our **referral agencies** to understand what professional support is being provided and how our support might help. The collaboration with our website creator, local media and so many more ensure we can continue to support those in need in our community.

We must record our grateful thanks to the **Methodist Church** who host us and provide a base that keeps us in the heart of the town centre. Our staff, volunteers and trustee team all pull together and their time, talents and enthusiastic dedication have kept the Food Bank evolving to meet local need. In an ideal world we wouldn't be needed and we campaign with IFAN to that end. Until then, **thank you** to the **local community support that keeps us going** and we really, truly, appreciate it, as do our clients.

## **We supplied 1438 food parcels in 2024, with 35% going to single people and over 40% to families**

In January **Jim Tatchell** was appointed as our **new Chair of Trustees**. He has been our Treasurer for the last six years and is very much a part of the local community. He is a local businessman, Vice-President of the Stort Valley Rotary Club and co-founder of the charity Helping Herts. He said, "I look forward to carrying on the amazing work put in place by previous Chairs of Trustees, Bill Macdonald and Mione Goldspink, as we aim to reach even more deeply into our community to help even more people in need - I have a really hard act to follow."



Despite our area being relatively affluent compared to other parts of the UK, there are still people in need. Many fall on hard times unexpectedly and our aim is to provide a vital safety net for those in crisis. He added "the Food Bank in Bishop's Stortford is constantly evolving our offer to help address some of the root causes of the challenges that many people face." He wants the team at the Food Bank to continue working ever more closely with Citizens Advice East Herts, Clarion Housing and other partner agencies. He and his fellow Trustees believe this should bring real progress being made for clients facing complex situations.

## A word from our Manager—Helen



My first full year as Manager flew by quickly as we had a busy 12 months with 1591 referrals (food and fuel) feeding 3166 people in our local community.

As always, we could not run our Food Bank without our amazing volunteers who give their valuable time and commitment throughout the year. We really do appreciate this and wish to say a massive thank you, we really couldn't operate without you.



Throughout 2024, we had many Food Bank initiatives to help raise awareness of the support we offer and the donations we need to provide. Thankfully our local community continued to step up magnificently to support us, including schools, churches, businesses, groups and individuals. The Christmas period was very busy. Our Reverse Advent Calendar on social media was a great success and credit and thanks are due to our Assistant Manager, Pippa, for her hard work on this campaign.



Our joint project with East Herts Citizens Advice has continued to support the Food Bank clients. Find out more in the next article.

We have also linked up with Clarion Housing who do a Tuesday drop in at The Methodist Church once a month to offer support for their residents.

Our plan is to expand our working relationships with other agencies in the area, in order to help support our clients to get the appropriate help and advice they need.

We were very pleased to welcome our local MP Josh Dean to the Food Bank in December, to discuss our work in the community and his intention to raise the issue of Job Centres collaborating more effectively with Food Banks to help those in need.



Josh Dean on his visit to Bishop's Stortford Food Bank

## Working together to provide support beyond food



As you will have seen from our newsletters, the need for support with food has grown at an alarming rate in recent years. We have been increasingly aware that for some clients we are not just dealing with the need for food in an emergency, but with a chronic situation where households struggle to afford the essentials over the long term. Food Banks by themselves are not a long-term solution, but we feel strongly that, where we can, we need to play our part in enabling and empowering clients to address any wider or longer-term issues they may face.

Citizen's Advice East Herts have been vital to our work for many years. They are our largest referrer and many of our clients benefit from their support, expertise and advice across a wide range of issues. Over the last 15 months we have built on this relationship by working together to provide an Adviser based in the Food Bank for one day a week, providing face to face and telephone appointments to Food Bank clients.

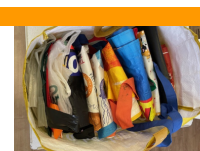
The Adviser directly supports clients with a range of issues, including benefit entitlements and applications, debt, budgeting and how to access other services. They can also refer clients to other Citizen's Advice specialists and support them to receive the advice they need.



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The aim is to provide supportive, expert and easily accessible advice, that is delivered in line with our ethos of care, compassion and community. From August the project has been fully funded by grants from the Hertfordshire Community Foundation and Community Alliance Broxbourne and East Herts. We are very grateful to them and to Citizen's Advice East Herts, Helen, Pippa, and our fantastic Adviser Alison (and Tracy before her) for making this project possible.

We always **need large, strong plastic shopping bags** if you have any spare!



## Bill Macdonald on what's changed at BSFB in the last 5 years

After five years as chair of Bishop's Stortford Food Bank I decided in January to retire, although I will be continuing as a Trustee. As you'll have seen, Jim Tatchell has kindly taken up the challenge of leading the Food Bank through the next stage of our development – which I am sure he will do brilliantly.



I wanted to take this opportunity to thank my wonderful fellow Trustees, our incredible managers and our amazing volunteers (and of course the wider community of schools, churches, businesses, donor organisations and individuals that support us) for all that we have collectively achieved during that period, and the many ways we have been able to make a real difference to people in food poverty.

In a busy world, we often don't make the time to reflect on our achievements, so I thought it would be good to list some of the many things we have done since 2019. We have (in no particular order):



- coped with the quadrupling of demand in our area
- introduced a driver delivery system to take food to people's homes
- improved our 'offer' to clients, to include a supermarket voucher
- helped clients in fuel poverty by putting money onto their gas and electricity pre-payment meters
- refurbished and reorganised the Food Bank room and our office
- refined our voucher processes to be less reliant on paper, and focussed agencies to consider the wider needs of our clients
- reached out to stakeholders (e.g. by hosting events at the Food Bank) and networked with other agencies
- increased our public profile through social media (our web site and Facebook page), print media (Bishop's Stortford Independent) and our Carnival involvement and Jackson Square presence
- provided an adviser for our clients one day a week through our groundbreaking relationship with East Herts Citizens Advice (and worked with Clarion Housing to facilitate help on social housing issues)
- worked with primary and secondary schools in the town to help inspire the next generation
- become more professional in our financial and governance arrangements



Some of these changes were driven by events beyond our control such as COVID and the flood we experienced while others were forced upon us by the need to cope with the massively increased demand for food, but most were the result of conscious decisions of Trustees, managers or at the suggestion of volunteers. Quite a list!



Finally, I wanted to share a couple of stories which I feel in their way sum up who we are and why we do what we do.

The first demonstrates the trust that we have built up in the community and the generosity people are capable of towards strangers: Halfway through Christmas packing day this year a couple of us needed to go to B&M to buy large quantities of gravy, custard and other essentials for Christmas. As we approached the check out with an enormous pile of items, someone in the queue asked us what the occasion was. 'Food Bank' I said with a smile (wondering how the queue would react to being held up in this way), when the person in front of us turned round, saw the size of our trolley and then quietly asked if he could pay for the whole lot. Wow!

The second story really encapsulates to me the impact we have on those in very difficult circumstances: We were closing up at the end of the day when the phone rang. A health visitor was seriously concerned about a family with young children who had nothing to eat. The volunteers happily went back into the Food Bank room and within a few minutes had assembled several large bags of food, extras and some toys we have just received. We had no drivers available so I took the bags to the client – on a new housing estate I wasn't familiar with. I don't think I have seen someone's mood change as quickly as when the mother and children saw the bags being given to them. The client explained that she was completely broke and had been in a desperate situation – and before I could stop her, she hugged me, crying tears of relief! I've got to admit, I may have shed a quiet tear myself on the drive home.



## Every little helps...

Bishop's Stortford Food Bank's bi-annual food collection at Tesco's, Bishops Park took place at the end of November.



These collection days are invaluable and our partnership with Tesco is one of our biggest sources of donated food. The annual festive food collection allowed us to prepare for the increased need that winter brings, and the inevitable demand in the run up to Christmas.



The community responded with generosity to our appeal and it was heartwarming that so many shoppers donated food items with such kindness.

## Fun while funds raised!

We are grateful to all the organisations, groups and individuals who have held fundraising events in aid of the Food Bank in the last year. Many of the Trustees joined the fun at the Beer Shop in late November when it held a quiz night. Our team



joined the singing once again on the **Eve of Christmas Eve**. A great crowd gathered in Castle Park as the spirit of Christmas was in the air. An amazing £1000+ was raised. All these events raise

much needed funds that help us keep our store cupboard shelves stocked and stacked with items needed by our clients.



### Information Afternoon for our Referral Agencies – Monday 24<sup>th</sup> March

### Come along between 1.30pm and 3.30pm

Learn about important changes to our referral process, have a look at our premises (34B South Street, Bishop's Stortford—side entrance, to the right of the Methodist Church), and meet some of the team. We would also like to talk to you about how we can further develop the partnerships that we have already established.

You'll have a chance to ask us questions over a cup of tea and a slice of cake so do come along and join us.

RSVP by Monday 10<sup>th</sup> March - Please contact Helen, our [Manager](#), at [helen.kenny@bishopsstortfordfoodbank.com](mailto:helen.kenny@bishopsstortfordfoodbank.com) to book your place (maximum 2 persons per agency)



Our well established Reverse Advent Calendar campaign got underway as usual at the start of November and each day had its own reveal on Facebook. The Advent Calendar list was shared throughout November on social media to spread the word and initially reached a staggering 4.3k people!

Some people brought their donations along to the Food Bank on Saturday, 30th November while many firms, schools and individuals brought them along during opening hours.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to one of our most valuable collections of the year.



**Please do remind ANYONE in need that we're here to help!**

## Drivers needed

Many of our parcels are delivered and so we are keen to increase the driver pool and spread the load wider. If you can lift bags and boxes, would you **consider being a driver for us?** It's rewarding and, once trained, you sign up for slots that suit you via our rota app ThreeRings. You'll get to know your neighbourhood a little better and help others. Get in touch if interested.

### The items we need most ...

Toilet rolls

UHT milk

Tinned meat & fish

Long life fruit juice

Tinned fruit & vegetables

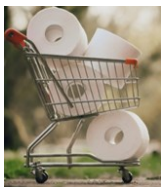
Crisps & chocolate

Biscuits

Tea / Coffee

Toiletries (shampoo, shower gel, toothpaste,  
deodorant, sanitary products)

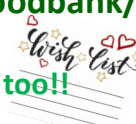
Nappies (size 5/6/7), baby wipes



If you want to know more or want to support us  
but don't you know what to give ... check out

[www.bishopsstortfordfoodbank.com](http://www.bishopsstortfordfoodbank.com)  
<https://en-gb.facebook.com/bsfoodbank/>

You'll find our Amazon Wish List there too!!



## GET HELP

If you are struggling to buy food, there are a few different ways you can get a referral to the Bishop's Stortford Food Bank



Contact **East Herts Citizen's Advice** on **01920 459944**. Leave a message and someone will get in touch with you to discuss your situation and refer you to the Food Bank if you need food.

Working with another agency or service? We work with lots of local services. Have a chat with the service you are working with for a referral to us.

Give us a call and we can discuss with you what we can do to help.  
Call us on 07432 785976

Give Help Get Help  
[bishopsstortfordfoodbank.com](http://bishopsstortfordfoodbank.com)

## 'Looking ahead to Lent donations'

If you're thinking of giving up chocolate or crisps (or something else) for Lent perhaps you might consider giving it to us—we'll find someone in need who will appreciate your kindness. We'd happily accept the monetary value as a donation instead! Every year we are really grateful for the support of our local churches, businesses and primary/secondary schools for their generous donations during Lent. The shelves at the storehouse in Matching Tye are emptier following a really busy Christmas period. If you would like to arrange a Lent collection please contact Jane Towns, our Schools and Community Trustee via email [community@bishopsstortfordfoodbank.com](mailto:community@bishopsstortfordfoodbank.com).

Trustees are also available to give talks in the community/assemblies.



If your organisation would be interested in learning more about making referrals please email Helen Kenny, our Manager, at [Helen.Kenny@bishopsstortfordfoodbank.com](mailto:Helen.Kenny@bishopsstortfordfoodbank.com)

If you know of anyone struggling with food or fuel poverty, please don't let them face crisis alone. Get them to talk to one of the agencies who refer to the Food Bank or contact Citizens Advice.

Working in partnership with



and gratefully supported by



Bishop's Stortford Food Bank, The Methodist Church, 34b South Street, Bishop's Stortford, CM23 3AZ

Charity Number: 1154800