



LOCAL SOLUTIONS FOOD & ADVICE PROJECT REPORT

2022/23



THE YEAR IN REVIEW

We provided local and accessible solutions to existing and emerging problems faced by the food bank in Mexborough to help reduce dependency on food bank crisis support and improve access to advice and financial resilience of residents.

We offered our communities free, confidential, impartial, early intervention specialist advice and support on the all issues presented at food banks, Issues include benefit entitlement, sanction, budgeting and debt among other issues.

This advice was provided through a multi-channel approach clients could contact us via phone, email or face to face at offices and community locations across the borough, the Food aware team could make direct partner referrals to an adviser dedicated to this project.

An initial holistic assessment of the information, advice, and casework needs of the beneficiary in relation to tackling the issues that have led to their requirement for emergency food support

We have also learned from each other in regards to practice and process and we feel the partnership has positively impacted us operationally through shared ideas and expertise as well as the impact its had on the service users.



Advice and support was be providing the most accessible point of contact for the beneficiary with attendance by the generalist adviser, supported by a CA Doncaster volunteer, at each of Mexborough Food banks' weekly sessions to maximise face-to-face accessibility; We made the most of other modes of service provision and utilised these according to the preferences of the beneficiary and requirements of the case.

These include:

- Telephone support
- Email support
- Video support
- Home visits (only in exceptional circumstances to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, and with full risk assessment)

Full flexibility was ensured to maintain effective service provision through identified safe ways of working in line with pandemic working restrictions should they be in force (as agreed with Mexborough Food bank and fully risk assessed)

IMPROVED PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Systems and community partnerships set up as a result of this project have become embedded in our work. and we work much closer and have a seamless referral platform ,and an improved journey for this seeing help and support. Clients get access to the specialist support they require quicker and this has lead to reduced numbers of clients disengaging with our services, there as also bee a reduction in people needing to return for food bank support.

IMPROVED ACCESS TO ADVICE AND FOOD SUPPORT

This investment allows both organisations to add capacity to they teams, this is incredibly important at time when services are seeing the highest demand for services ever experienced. The project actively looked to support food bank users to resolve the issue which leads to food bank use.



Doncaster
Borough



ARE YOU USING THE FOOD BANK ?

DO YOU NEED FURTHER ADVICE AND SUPPORT?



We are looking to support people who are using food banks to resolve the problems which lead to them needing to use this service.

We are offering Free, Confidential & Impartial Advice & Support with

Benefits Advice & checks

Debt advice

Budgeting Advice

Energy advice

Income maximisation

Food parcels will be provided after we have advised you and helped you find a way forward.

For an appointment please contact the team on

01709 572402

or email: advice@citizensadvice-doncasterborough.org

OUR IMPACT



9

Referrals on average
per week



83

Clients advised and
supported via this
project



272

Separate issues dealt with
in 2022/23

REDUCED NEED LOCALLY CRISIS FOOD SUPPORT
LOCALLY IMPROVED ACCESS TO ADDITIONAL SUPPORT
LIKE FUEL VOUCHERS.

71%

of people who said they
weren't confident about
solving their problem before
they used this service

Over half of clients said we
helped to improve at least one
aspect of their lives

60%

of clients said it was easier to
get on with their day to day life
after coming to us for help.



THE WIDER IMPACT OF OUR ADVICE

We know giving people advice and helping solve their problems can impact their wider lives in positive ways and make them more resilient and prepared for similar problems in the future.

Both organisations have had a strong commitment to social policy research and campaigns throughout this project, this has allowed us to act as a catalyst for change in public policy and services, enabling local people to have a say about local issues and services which affect their lives, one such example was our campaign to local MP's to uprate benefits in line with inflation, CABD campaigned on this issues and the campaign was successful.

As a result of our campaigning uprating benefits by inflation is due to happen in April and is a vital first step in helping households weather this storm. Raising housing support in line with rents and additional government interventions will further close this gap.

"I was very worried before I spoke to Citizens Advice and was making myself ill with stress but after talking to them and receiving help I was much more relaxed."



CASE STUDY

Client is a single parent aged 33 with 3 children aged 13, 3 and 2. She lives in 3 bedroom council rented property, rent £360pm CT Band A. She works 16 hrs pw term time only and her income varies depending on the terms/holidays. Her highest income is £650pm but on other months she will get either £440 or nothing, so her UC amount varies accordingly.

She has a pre-payment meter for gas and electricity and her supplier for both is Utilita. She has been notified of the £400 Energy Bills Support Scheme and her pre-payment meter will be credited with £66 pm over the next 6 months or she will receive a voucher code. The client has no debts or arrears and no savings. Her eldest child is on free school meals. She is finding it hard to manage and had requested a food parcel.

She has had the first part of the cost of living payment and knows to expect the second part in November. She has accessed the Local Assistance Fund and received some white goods through this.

She also has £60-£70 deducted for an advance repayment. She borrowed the maximum amount and doesn't know when it will be repaid. Advised her to contact the DWP Debt Management Team on 0800 916 0647 and ask if she can repay a smaller amount as she is experiencing hardship. The benefit check showed no entitlement to CTR apart from the 25% single adult occupancy reduction which she is already getting.

Her employer, who came with her, said she was looking at spreading her wages over the full year and averaging it out so she would get the same amount each month, which would help with budgeting and her UC amount wouldn't fluctuate as much. Suggested she put a message on her UC journal to explain how her wages are paid and discuss the possibility of evening it out over the year.

As she is struggling with her energy bills, advised I could provide her with a Fuel Bank voucher for £30 to put on her gas or electricity meter or split it between the two. She chose to receive the voucher code in a text message which should arrive today and which she will redeem at Asda. Provided her with the accompanying leaflet and energy advice booklet.

As the client's annual water bill is approximately £660, she could be eligible for Yorkshire Water's Water Support Scheme which is a bill cap scheme for customers who have a low household income and their annual water bill is more than £350. Provided her with the relevant information and application form.

Advised that the Warm Home Discount Scheme will reopen again in November 2022. You could get £150 off your electricity bill for winter 2022 to 2023. The money is not paid to you - it's a one-off discount on your electricity bill, between October 2022 and March 2023. You may be able to get the discount on your gas bill instead if your supplier provides you with both gas and electricity and you're eligible. Contact your supplier to find out. Checked that her supplier is part of the scheme and advised her to keep checking the government website or to contact her supplier in November to check eligibility.

Advised that the new Household Support Fund should be in place during October, which is money provided by the government to councils for them to administer as they see fit. You could get help with energy bills, school meals if you qualify. Advised her to keep checking the Doncaster Council website page.

Client said she doesn't get any child maintenance as it's not worth asking as none of her children's fathers work and she would only get £7pw. Suggested they might be willing to pay for clothes or footwear or other expenses as they arise. She said she would consider asking.

Provided the client with a food parcel from our stores and emailed Food Aware to request delivery of a further parcel on Friday 21 October.

The client was upset so kept stopping as appropriate and told her I would ring in a couple of weeks to check how she was doing.

Rang client to check on progress and whether she needed another appointment at CA and further food parcels.

Her employer has increased her working hours and she now works Fridays. She has evened out her wages over 12 months so that they don't vary from month to month. Her next wages are due in December and so her UC payments from then will be more consistent so that she can budget properly. She had contacted UC about this but just been told they go on what has been paid.

The client has not yet contacted the debt management team but will now that her wages are being paid differently.

She has applied for the Household Support Fund but has not received a response yet.

She has contacted Yorkshire Water about their water support scheme.

She does not need another fuel voucher but will need further food parcels until her wages and UC payments settle down. FoodAware have confirmed they will continue to deliver up to and including 25 November.

"I didn't know what to do I was struggling to feed my family most weeks without Christine's help and advice my health would only have got worse"



CONCLUSION

Overall the project has been a resounding success on a number of levels operationally we have developed a closer working relationship as partners and would look to work together again on future projects.

The project highlights the impacts this project could have were it to be scaled up.

From a service user perspective the improved access to high quality welfare rights advice and support has allowed clients to receive benefits they would have otherwise not received. It has empowered clients financially and improved financial resilience, we have together improved the ability to make informed choices through the delivery of high quality advice and support.

The impact outcomes and the advice and support made significant in particular income gains for clients which will feed back into local communities.

This project evidences a real need locally and city wide for improved access to free, confidential advice and support in the area of crisis support especially during the cost of living crisis, significant work needs to be done to continue to reduce dependency on food bank usage.

This project highlights the demand there is for these services the importance of being able to make informed decisions but also the empowerment and resilience which can be developed through a well resourced and well designed partnership project.

Together we share a deep concern about the impacts of this project ending and will strive together to find a suitable funder to develop and expand what has been a responsive and impactful project.

Citizens Advice Doncaster Borough

Food Aware CIC



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We want to extend a thank you to Well Doncaster who funded and supported this project, from inception to delivery, this impact we have been able to make to clients' lives and communities across the city is down to the confidence and support you have shown in us.

Well Doncaster

A thick, horizontal green brushstroke that tapers at both ends, positioned below the text "Well Doncaster".