



Spring Newsletter 2026

Generous community support means we're still able to meet local need.

THANK YOU SO MUCH!

Yet again we have been overwhelmed by outstanding community support from **our local schools, churches, community groups, local businesses, individual donors and fundraisers**. We depend on those who donate through **supermarket collecting points** and those who **drop donations in** to us, as well as those who donate financially. The **regular financial donations** we receive enable us to **pay our overheads** and **buy core stock items missing from our shelves**. **THANK YOU!**

Our staff, volunteers and trustee team all share their time and talents as we aim to offer practical non-judgmental support to those who find themselves at our doors for whatever reason. We must record our grateful thanks to **Rev Gill Hulme** and the **Methodist Church** who host us and provide a base that keeps us in the heart of the town centre. In an ideal world we wouldn't be needed, and we campaign with the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) to that end, but until then we need and truly appreciate the **local community support that keeps us going**, as do our clients. **THANK YOU!**

Our volunteers are the back bone of the Food Bank, without them and their time, compassion and commitment it would simply not exist. **THANK YOU** Food Bank volunteers for everything you do and everyone you help!

Following recruitment of **new volunteers** last summer we undertook **training** for all our team in safeguarding, confidentiality, manual handling and safe working. We are **grateful to Community Alliance Broxbourne and East Herts** for the funding towards this initiative. **THANK YOU!**

Our recent funding application to the **Stansted Airport Community Fund** was successful and will enable us to improve our shelving, upgrade the workbench capacity in our Food Bank room and improve access. We are extremely grateful for the funding that will enable us to make these improvements. **THANK YOU!**

We supplied 1143 food parcels in 2025, with 40% of clients only requiring one food parcel.

DID YOU KNOW??

In order to remove barriers to support, no referral is required for a first visit to Bishop's Stortford Food Bank. Beyond that we depend on our referral agencies to clarify how our support can help supplement the professional support already being provided. We continue to increase the range and scope of agencies we work with as we seek to support those in need in our local community.

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 many agencies who refer to the Food Bank or contact Citizens Advice East Herts on 01992 449944.

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

A WORD FROM OUR MANAGER—HELEN



We greatly value our links with our growing number of **referral agencies** and will be holding a further gathering for them in mid-June to share thoughts on how we can collaborate more effectively. It follows a similar successful event, held last summer, which was valued by those attending. There will also be an opportunity to learn more from Maxine Bromyard of CAEH about the new Crisis and Resilience Fund being made available to local authorities in England to support low-income households who encounter a financial shock and to support activity that builds individual and community financial resilience.

VOLUNTEER NEWS.

We depend on our team of wonderful volunteers who pick, pack, stack and stock, date check and deliver parcels with a smile so it was a pleasure to gather over tea and cake to say thank you. Our afternoon at Home & Eat recently gave us the opportunity to talk about more than sell by dates and toilet rolls! Every volunteer brings their own individual skills and talents which ensures we have a diverse and professional team. Recently we've undertaken training in confidentiality, safeguarding and manual handling to ensure safe working. We're also grateful to the new recruits who have got stuck in and are now regularly joining shifts as part of our team.



One of our new volunteers, Phoebe, said 'It has been an awesome experience volunteering for the Food Bank, especially being there with Helen, Pippa and the many other volunteers I've had the pleasure of working with! It's amazing to see the compassion from those in the local community and I'm grateful to be part of it.'

Earlier this year with help from local councillor, Dave Willcocks and quizmaster Simon Reynolds we held an event to raise funds towards our ongoing project with CAEH. They fronted a highly successful and entertaining evening at Birchwood High School which raised just under £1,500 towards the costs. We are enormously grateful to Dave and Simon, to Birchwood for providing the venue and to all those who bought tickets and supported the raffle. These funds will ensure we can continue to collaborate with CAEH. Further details on the impact of this project are included on page 5.

Local supermarkets offer us the opportunity to raise our profile and we have taken part in storefront promotions in both Tesco Bishop's Park and Waitrose Bishop's Stortford in the last 6 months.

Every little helps...

The annual food collection at Tesco's, Bishops Park at the end of November enabled us to prepare for the increased need that winter brings, and the inevitable demand in the run up to Christmas. Tesco provide head office personell to support the collection and just over 400kg of items were received.

The generous donations, along with so many others, enabled our fabulous team of volunteers to prepare 200 bags of Christmas cheer for our clients and clients of local charities who had requested our help.

Waitrose host a regular donation bin for us but were also nominated as recipients of their green token scheme, Waitrose Community Matters. We were delighted to receive their largest award of £1,500 so many thanks to everyone who voted for us and dropped green tokens into 'our' bin.

Recently you might have spotted some of our trustees and volunteers in store when we were given the opportunity to raise awareness, share information and invite donations. We collected over 500kg of food and are extremely grateful to have benefited from both these initiatives.

Thank you Waitrose!



Trustee update

Our Trustee team has changed recently as we said goodbye to Louise Taub and Ian Williams. Louise has been involved for many years both in the Food Bank itself, in the office providing vital support to cover staff holidays or absence and in acting as Secretary to the Trustee Board for many years.

Louise and Ian have contributed in so many ways as the Trustee role in BSFB is more hands on than many might expect! We are extremely grateful for the time, talents and honest insights they have shared to keep us evolving. Thank you both.

Lucinda Boon, who has also volunteered in the Food Bank, joined the Trustee team last June while Keith Irvine, who has been involved as a driver for a several years, joined last September. Their career skills and expertise will prove valuable as we continue to review the way we work and support our clients, staff and volunteers as we continue to evolve.

We asked Keith for his first impressions and he responded “having volunteered as a Delivery Driver at the Bishops Stortford Food Bank for 4 years I was familiar with the idea of The Trustees: they were always enthusiastic people who popped up at random moments, doing random things, always with a smile. They seemed to know everyone and be able to do any job that came up: even the strange ones like being on their hands and knees sorting out the office safe! As time went on the full level of commitment of these people became more obvious. As a retired teacher there was an obvious difference from the ‘School Governors’ and these Trustees: they were obviously regularly working within the organisation, rather than looking in from afar. It was a refreshing change that indicated to me that this was an active group of people who really cared, and who would stretch themselves to ensure the success of the Food Bank.

It was, then, a bit of a shock to be approached to consider becoming a Trustee. I’d never seen myself in the same light as the above, let alone all the ‘extras’ that our Trustees do, and that are starting to be revealed to me: the fundraising and promotional speaking, the grant applications, the building repairs and refurb, the volunteer training, the links with so many organisations who refer to us, our professional staff employment and the recruitment of new Trustees (yes: it could be you!). The many professional and life skills of the group are so important to ensure the forward planning to support the clients of the Food Bank not to go hungry. I’m hoping that I’m living up to the ‘hands on’ reputation of the Trustees to ensure that all our decisions are grounded in the reality of the day-to-day struggles of our clients.

If you share our values and charitable objectives and would be interested to **learn more about being a Trustee** please do get in touch as we are keen to recruit those with **HR, premises and safeguarding** expertise to our team.



Currently we need:

- Toilet rolls
- Long life fruit juice
- UHT milk
- Tinned Soup
- Tinned fruit & vegetables
- Crisps & chocolate
- Laundry detergent
- Tinned meat & fish



INTERESTING FACT

The free BanktheFood app will tell you the top 5 items most needed at your local food bank! Once downloaded on your phone, you can check it on the go and donate when you can.
Simple ideas are always the best!

More than food ... collaboration with Citizens Advice East Herts

Citizen's Advice East Herts are our largest referrer and have been vital to our work for many years.



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Aware that Food Banks by themselves are not a long-term solution we started a collaborative project to provide an in-house adviser one day a week. Clients benefit from her expertise and support across a range of issues, including benefit entitlements and applications, debt, budgeting and how to access other services. Clients may also be referred to other CA specialists to ensure they receive the advice they need.

In order to understand its impact we asked our advisor Alison to outline how it benefits our clients in more detail.

My name is Alison Plaku and I have been working as a debt adviser with Citizens Advice East Herts since November 2020. I was inspired to help others after my own personal life experiences and spending 7 years working at Brent and Ealing Law Centres, who both offered advice and casework in Social Welfare Law.

In August 2024, I started to attend Bishop's Stortford Food Bank once a week as part of a funded project in partnership with Citizens Advice East Herts. In this time, I have advised and supported around 200 foodbank service users, many who are vulnerable due to age, disability or digital exclusion.

The Food Bank offers their service users the opportunity to have a face to face or telephone appointment with me to discuss any financial, benefit, housing or other issues that are causing them worry in their lives. My objective is to assess, advise, empower and support individuals with the aim of helping them to resolve the problems they present with.

By helping individuals to create budget plans, listing income, expenditure and debts (if relevant) and carrying out benefit calculations with them, I am able to advise on how they may be able to maximise their income, reduce expenditure and identify what suitable debt solutions are available to them.

I would encourage anyone on a low income to carry out or get help to carry out a benefit calculation. Many people do not realise that they have an entitlement to claim certain benefits. For instance, according to Money Week, almost a million eligible households are missing out on Pension Credit alone, with average losses estimated at around £4,300 a year.

At the start of my advice journey with Food Bank users, they are often stressed and worried about their financial situation and this has a detrimental effect on their mental health and physical wellbeing. Many often feel suicidal. During and after their advice journey the impact of my work is measured by the feedback received about how the help given has taken a weight off their shoulders and they feel more confident and able to move forward in their lives.

Due to the rise in the cost of living, many households currently have a deficit with their budget and struggle to make ends meet as their essential household expenditure is more than the income they receive. Without the charitable services provided by Citizens Advice East Herts and Bishop's Stortford Food Bank, the most vulnerable individuals would struggle to get much needed help and support at their time of crisis.

We are very grateful to Citizen's Advice East Herts, our fantastic Adviser Alison Plaku, Helen and Pippa for their involvement in the operational side of this project. The grants we received from Herts Community Foundation and Community Alliance Broxbourne and East Herts have been fundamental in sustaining this project and its value is obvious to all those involved. Thank you to all who have made this happen.

And Finally!.....Harlow Food Bank van spotted ...

Bishop's Stortford Food Bank was set up with support from Churches Together, along with the Stort Valley Rotary Club, in February 2013, for the prevention or relief of poverty and provides support to local residents in real economic need. Since then demand has grown and last year we dealt with 1143 referrals and fed 2433 people.

We are an independent food bank but work collaboratively with other local food banks/community pantries, including Harlow Food Bank which has supported and worked with us from our beginnings. They were seeded as a Trussell Trust food bank operating as part of the Michael Roberts Charitable Trust. Here in Bishop's Stortford Food Bank we are members of the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN) who, along with Trussell Trust, hold institutions and policymakers to account through joint initiatives using data to raise the challenges faced by those in need.

We wish to see a time when food banks are no longer needed but until then we continue to need the food so generously donated by our local community, either directly into our food bank or through the Trussell Trust **collecting bins at Tesco's and Waitrose and the collection points at both BS Sainsbury's stores**. You may have seen the Harlow Food Bank van which collects donations from stores and takes them to a storehouse in Matching Tye, where they are sorted, date checked and warehoused. As we need them, items are delivered back to our town centre base. This collaborative working means we have greater resilience and access to efficiencies of scale. It proved especially invaluable when demand for our help increased dramatically following the pandemic. Now things are more settled we are collecting directly from both Thorpe and Jackson Square Sainsbury's stores, but while we value enormously our town centre base here in BS, we do not have the capacity to run a full warehouse here at the Methodist Church.



We use a core list of food items to provide nutritionally balanced emergency food and it is these items you will see requested on our Facebook page and the Bank The Food app when stocks run low. **Long life milk, fruit juice and toilet rolls** are always needed along with **tinned meat, tinned tomatoes, crisps and chocolate** as well as **washing powder/liquid and bleach**. Each item donated enables us to offer some choice while maintaining the nutritional balance needed and we much appreciate your ongoing support, as do our clients!

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

GET HELP

If you or someone you know needs a food parcel, then please get support now.

We are open for collections Mon 10-1, Tues /Thurs 10-4
We can deliver Tues and Thurs pm
Don't leave it until you have nothing left!

We work with lots of local services and agencies. Have a chat with the service you are working with for a referral to us, check our website or give us a call to chat about what we can do to help.
Call us on 07432 785976

Give Help Get Help
www.bishopsstortfordfoodbank.com
bishopsstortfordfoodbank.com

BISHOP'S STORTFORD
Food Bank
Helping local people in need

Working in partnership with



and gratefully supported by



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Charity Number: 1154800