

Why do our neighbours need Community Food Support?

There are no two stories the same. For some, there are crisis moments that can be resolved in time, for others issues are ongoing with no easy route out.



Adur & Worthing
FOOD PARTNERSHIP

I am a single parent with two children. I work part-time but my ex-partner doesn't contribute financially, so money is tight. During lockdown the situation got worse and I often skipped meals to make sure my kids could eat. Using the foodbank helped, especially as they were able to deliver.

"When we were with the food bank we did have a lady that used to call us every couple of weeks just to see whether we needed anything, ...which was really helpful actually and she was really lovely"

The flexibility of the approach from the food bank meant that Audrey and her children's needs were met during her time of crisis. Audrey has now moved, and no longer requires community food support.



Francis' partner became very unwell during pandemic and can currently only move around in a wheelchair. Francis also hasn't been able to work much, as most of her work was cancelled; unfortunately, she wasn't allowed to be furloughed. The family have two children, and the stress of the situation has meant Francis is suffering with anxiety and depression, she has been advised by GP to go for counselling.

"It has helped us so much knowing that once a week there is going to be some food coming. [...] you're doing an absolutely wonderful job and I don't know where I would have been the past year without you"

The fact that food is being delivered helps Francis to feel less embarrassed in front of neighbours and saves her from the stress of queuing. Francis doesn't want to be living in this situation.

Carly, who was a working professional, moved down to the coast. Just a couple of months later she was diagnosed with cancer. Carly needed money and decided to put her previous home on the market to sell, the people who were renting quickly moved out. Carly had to cover the mortgage, and was unable to sell quickly. When the flat was finally sold, Carly was left with a lot of debt.

The doctor put Carly on anti-depressants to ease the worry and get some sleep. Carly often relied on friends to cook her food, but being vegetarian she wasn't always getting the balanced diet she needed to recover.

The local council and a vegan community food group have been supporting Carly.
"there's a lady looking after me, and I have a long list that I have to do, because she's trying very hard to get money for me. Because of the nature of my depression, I find it very, I can't cope with it, so I don't bother, and she's really trying hard"

It would be beneficial for support-workers to have more time to spend with Carly, to support with filling in forms and making phone calls to help access available support.



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Issues with social security are one of the key reasons our neighbours need to rely on food support. The people below shared their experiences in 2021, before the cost of living crisis.

During the COVID lockdown, Carol's husband was diagnosed with terminal cancer and, after a short time, he sadly passed away. Carol's husband took care of the financial support for the 3 children, 2 of whom have special needs.

"My husband did everything for me. ... he gave me the money for the shopping [...] and suddenly he was dying and I didn't even know how to do an email."

All the money and financial support had been in her husband's name; because of this, Carol was asked to repay £1,600 of support, and the support payments ceased. Carol and her children were without money for 8 weeks.

Citizens Advice have been supporting Carol with a tribunal to try and access money for the children, while a Community Food group continue to support Carol and her family.

"I don't know what people would do if they didn't have a food bank and it would be horrendous if the support ever stopped."



bereavement and social security system

Emily has physical disabilities and is on Disability Living Allowance. She worked all her life but recently lost her job. During the pandemic her children and their families moved back home, including a small baby; they could no longer afford to live on their own.

Emily has mortgage free house which is big enough to house the family, but a small income means the family struggle to afford food and pay bills.

"I was feeling quite sick [with worry], you go and buy the shopping and there's five adults and a baby and it's gone in a couple of days, [...] they were getting their bit of Universal Credit but you know how expensive babies are"

When Emily lost her job, a person at the Job Centre recommended a local Community Food stall to top-up her shopping. When the extended family moved in, Emily started using a regular Community Food delivery to help ensure everyone had enough to eat.



social security and low income

Claire was previously employed in a managerial role, but lost her job after a personal trauma, which resulted in her being diagnosed with PTSD. Claire was so low that she attempted suicide and ended up as an in-patient in the local mental health facility. Now on Universal Credit, ends don't meet and there is often not enough money to feed herself.

"If I had food and money and electric, it would help me concentrate on my mental health and start looking at ways, at pathways, to fixing it "

Claire's mental health, alongside experiencing food insecurity and the additional trauma that comes with that, means it isn't as straightforward for Claire as just requiring food.

"You know, it's all sorts of things, and one thing leads to another and then you just, it's a cycle of worrying. It's a cycle of constant stress."

Additional support, including getting on the right benefits and mental health support being more readily available could have helped Claire to tackle some of the other stressors.



mental health and social security

Thankyou to those who have shared their stories in order to help others by raising awareness of these issues. All names have been changed to protect people's privacy.

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The themes of low wages, insecure contracts and low paid, inflexible working arrangements are common. However, no two situations are exactly the same. Higher wages, better social-security, secure contracts and one-to-one person centred support is needed to ensure our neighbours have enough to eat.

Nathan is on a zero-hour contract, and his hours each week vary. During the pandemic, Nathan's hours were reduced, because he was unable to visit some households to carry out his work. After approaching the Job Centre, Nathan received a £600 loan to help cover rent and £70 toward other bills. The zero hour contract often causes Nathan financial uncertainty which causes worry.

"I went to the office this morning, had a word with the manager again, I said, "can't you put me on a contract?" They said, "no, Head Office won't let us do it because of your health condition. Because they're frightened that you'd be having loads of days off sick and we'd still have to pay you."



zero hour contracts



I am a single parent, and used to support Community Food organisations through my job. We moved areas to improve the situation for my family, this used up most of our savings and it's been difficult for me to get a new job, I didn't expect this.

'The food support has obviously freed up some finances [...] especially on toiletries and her Tampax [...] things for school, without having to worry about things, you know, her things'

Chris has been able to claim Universal Credit with the help of a local support worker. Without this help he wouldn't have known where to turn. At the moment, Chris is applying for cleaning jobs, he knows the pay means he won't be much better off financially but he would rather be working.

suitable work for single parents



John moved back to England with his family a few years ago, initially he claimed Universal Credit until he was able to get a full-time job. However, the full-time work wasn't enough to cover the rent, bills, food and other essentials for his family.

"So we stopped claiming and we were absolutely skint, you know, because just, the wage was crap and the rent's expensive here".

John didn't realise he was still entitled to Universal Credit until a local councillor mentioned that he could still claim while he was working. Universal credit is now paying a contribution toward the family income, however, despite budgeting, John and his family continue to rely on community food provision to meet all of their food needs.

"It's [the food support] that peace of mind really, it's just like, wow, you know, we don't have to panic".

low wages

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