Annual report to the Trustees 2023

The organisation that I manage today is very different to the one I inherited, mostly because of the significant increase in need.

This year our Chair of Trustees, Paul Fletcher retired having seen us through the transition to the new management. We are very grateful for his work, and I personally valued his support. We have been very fortunate that Anthony Clements, who had only just become a trustee was willing to be our Chair pro tem, while we recruit a fresh team of trustees. He has done an exemplary job and I offer him my thanks for his guidance and commitment this year.

Liz Andrews has also retired from the trustees this year at the end of her term and has also taking the opportunity to step back from the deputy manager role. She has also been an enormous help to me and source of wise counsel. I am delighted that she continues to lead sessions for us.

Otherwise, the management team continues the same, with one or two extra session leaders to help cover the increased hours of operation. I am very appreciative of all that this team of people do. It is a cliché but worth repeating, I could not do all this without them. I offer them my thanks.

This year has seen further huge increases in demand. We decided to open on an extra day from May, so we now send out food on Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays. This has eased the pressure on Thursday, but it is still by far the busiest day of the week. We have continued to stay ahead of the curve, in that we have matched staffing to requests for food but as demand continues to grow, I am concerned for the future. I am keen that volunteers continue to enjoy their volunteering and have time to chat a little when they are on shift.

Last November we had 80 volunteers in the organisation, today we have 72 today. We have issued 1419 (21-22 1,238 ) vouchers over the year to 46 (40) organisations and I expect us to be over 4,500 (3,000) clients by the end of November, when the food bank year ends. This is an increase of 1500 people (50%) over last year. Last year saw an annual increase of 50% too. Of particular note is the huge increase in the number of children we are supporting, 84% up with a month to go.

We have continued to experience significant price inflation in our food shopping this year. It is a complex task identifying the best prices and seeking out stock as lines disappear from virtual shelves. Kate Hunt does this task diligently every week and she is very valuable in using our money wisely.

The impact of the war in Ukraine seems to have come to an end for Oxfordshire. We have one or two new families approaching us now – but most are now settled and if they do need help, we ask them to be referred like everyone else.

Over the year we have done the following administrative items

* Safeguarding: work has been done on our safeguarding policy and process. We have adopted our safeguarding policy as a group of trustees and most of our drivers will have attended training by the end of November. I am very grateful to Kate Hunt and Keith Tibbs for their time, expertise, and pragmatic approach to safeguarding in this organisation.
* We have introduced an electronic database for clients. This is the result of considerable work by Anya Ferguson. It is still settling in and adds to the session leaders’ work. However, it has many benefits and hopefully will gradually become easier.

During the last two months we have trialled offering supermarket vouchers. This has been positively received by virtually all those offered them. One refused as he struggles to get to shops due to his issues with mobility, another was nervous of the process, but eventually ‘gave it a go’ and was glad to repeat the exercise, the following week. One or two have been ill and preferred a delivery of food. From the point of view of the food bank it means we have to pack and deliver many fewer bags of food. On a recent Thursday we sent food to 15 households (25 adults and 15 children) and a further 13 supermarket vouchers were issued, (30 adults and 33 children). If we had had to deliver to all those families, we would have had a real problem. Interestingly that Thursday (the one immediately before half term) was also the busiest day outside December in 2022. I’ve made a note for next year!

We review this pilot at the February meeting.

As we look ahead, we must remember to be very grateful for the steady trickle of new, willing volunteers, the continuing financial support from so many, and the flow of food donations at a time when many food banks are desperate for any of these.

Alice Penney

November 2023