



Still meeting needs

REFERRALS for Salvation Army food banks across the territory have doubled in just weeks, as people lose jobs and vulnerable individuals and families struggle to feed themselves amid the worsening coronavirus outbreak.

Preston food bank recently provided more than 80 food parcel referrals for those in need in the community – a rise of 40 on the previous week.

‘People are stretched due to changes in their daily and working life,’ says corps officer Captain Debbie Eaton. ‘As the pandemic continues, we are seeing a lot more need for our food bank, and for some people it is a truly terrifying position that they may not have found themselves in before.’

While the number of clients initially increased at Edinburgh Gorgie food bank, Community Programme Co-ordinator Elizabeth Young says the recent dip in numbers may be due to the council’s introduction of the Scottish

Welfare Fund Crisis Grant. It gives money to those who may be struggling and does not need to be paid back. Those eligible would be able to buy things as they need to rather than depend on the food bank.

Even before the coronavirus pandemic, demand for emergency food packages was on the rise. With the number of people in need expected to increase, staff at New Addington have become strict on how supplies are distributed.

‘Until now we have been able to be generous in our giving, but we need to preserve our resources for what is still to come,’ says New Addington Community Services Co-ordinator Lesley Holland. ‘We anticipate that over the coming weeks and months, demand will increase and so we are now being very strict about what goes in each bag.’

With some supermarkets finding it hard to restock goods and needing to restrict shoppers, it has also become

important for food banks to be cautious so that the service is not abused.

‘Now is the time people need our help more than ever but as supermarket shelves are running extremely low, we need to ensure that the food bank is used for genuine financial hardship and not as a stopgap until the shops replenish shelves,’ says Captain Debbie.

Despite the unfolding pandemic, people are continuing to make donations. Several schools had a big collection before they closed and donated items to New Addington. Edinburgh Gorgie has received plenty of donations from individuals and corporations and, as a Trussell Trust food bank, they are able to seek support if they are running low on items. Preston also has food bank donation stations in nearby branches of Sainsbury’s and Morrisons.

Whether it’s someone making a donation, someone in need of help or someone volunteering, the Army’s main priority is ensuring that everyone who



New Addington donation point

In December 2019 *Salvationist* featured the work of three food banks. Shanelle Manderson finds out how they are coping with the coronavirus outbreak



Preston food bank



comes into contact with a food bank is safe. As the government-issued guidelines and measures were put in place to slow down the spread of coronavirus infection, food banks have been challenged to find new ways of operating to continue supporting those in need.

Clients at Edinburgh Gorgie would usually have come into the café for a chat and enjoyed tea and biscuits while someone looked at their referral and packed their food. 'Now it's very much get your food and go,' says Elizabeth.

Clients come into the inner door of the hall next to the corps one at a time. A table marks out where they need to stand while someone processes any paperwork two metres away and provides them with a parcel. To adhere to social distancing as much as possible, people have been instructed to bring any donations to the back of the hall rather than the front where service users queue.

At New Addington, staff are no longer letting clients into the building.

'We take a client's food voucher at the door, they wait outside and we give them pre-packed food parcels. They can ask for a few toiletries in addition and nappies or wipes if necessary,' says Lesley. 'We can no longer offer a conversation and additional help with their situation.'

'It's not who we are but, unfortunately, we have to do this at the moment. We do still have a chat on the doorstep but at a distance.'

A strict cleaning schedule at the start and end of each session has also been implemented.

At Preston, referrals are being processed through a reception window at the front of the corps and community centre. Access is granted via an intercom and automatic door system, so there is no social contact, and food parcels are packed securely in a sanitised kitchen and left in the

foyer for collection. Donations are received in the same way and stocked on a turnaround basis with new items going at the back of the shelf to reduce contamination.

Many older volunteers at New Addington are self-isolating and have temporarily stepped down as a precaution. Others continue to offer their free time, however, and are operating sensibly, keeping two metres apart. Extended family units are staffing the food bank in the evenings so that it can stay open for deliveries, with one family on shift where possible. This also reduces the risk of contamination across different households.

Volunteer numbers at Edinburgh Gorgie remain high.

'Many corps members have become involved with the service, which is amazing,' says Elizabeth. 'Hopefully we will be able to continue seeing as many people as possible.'