

Feeding Derbyshire Food Bank User Feedback Survey

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Background: Context and Purpose of Survey

Feeding Derbyshire Food Bank Network has existed for over 20 years, established in 2014 as part of the original Feeding Derbyshire pilot supported by Feeding Britain (Feeding Britain, 2023). It has seen many challenges and developments, the most recent being the networks phenomenal response to the Covid-19 pandemic, which was echoed across the UK in from 2020 (Feeding Britain, 2020; Trussell Trust 2020).

In 2023, Rural Action Derbyshire was successfully commissioned to continue leading the Feeding Derbyshire programme, which includes a support and co-ordinating role for food banks across the County.

The Service Level Agreement requires regular monitoring and data capture for all community food projects, including the food banks; feedback from users is an important element of the monitoring and longer-term evaluation of the Feeding Derbyshire programme.

The Feeding Derbyshire Team have worked to incentivise the collection of accurate and reliable data from the food bank network, the User Feedback Survey is part of this approach. Information gathered from people using the food banks will be used to measure activity against outcomes, assess impact, and contribute to a comprehensive evidence-base, which will inform future service planning and delivery.

Context: Summary of information needed for the Service Level Agreement

- How are food banks helping people and what support do they provide?
- What benefits/impact do people identify?
- What is the user experience?
- How frequently do people use food banks?

Purpose: Aims of the User Feedback Survey

- Find out about the experience of people using community food projects, specifically, food banks in the Feeding Derbyshire network.
- Collect information from people using food banks which can be used to evaluate outcomes, impact, and effectiveness of the service/provision.
- Provide information to support the monitoring of the Feeding Derbyshire Service Level Agreement.

What We Did: User Survey Approach

The Food Bank Users Survey approach was designed to mirror, as far as possible, the Postcard Survey conducted with the Feeding Derbyshire Community Pantries. However, the questions were tailored to the Food Bank setting, which meant that both the fixed and free response sections were not an exact match with the Community Pantries postcards. Consequently, it was accepted from the outset that it would not be possible to combine or compare data collected, and that the analysis and reporting would need to be separate. However, it was anticipated that some of the feedback themes would share similarities which would be useful for reviewing both provisions in a wider and holistic context.

The Food Bank User postcard contained 8 Fixed Multi-response questions (Appendix 1) and a guided free response section:

- 'What could we do to improve your experience of food banks?'
- Comments

Five food banks were invited to participate in the User Feedback Survey. These were selected at random from across the Feeding Derbyshire network; The postcards were distributed to the five participating food banks for completion over a two-week period in February 2026.

84 postcards were returned; of these 49 were from a single food bank location, which represents 58% of the total responses. Four of the five selected sites collected and returned responses postcards to service users and the other one provided feedback in a narrative form (Appendix 2).

The postcards returned from the four locations were analysed but the narrative is not incorporated into the analysis; this ensures that the interpretation of data from the survey is consistent and preserves the integrity of data, as well as the research process and principles. However, the narrative (anonymised) is included in the appendices (Appendix 2) because it offers valuable insight into the wider food bank provision and the experience of services users.

What People Said: Survey Results - Fixed Responses

The following graphics present the results from the fixed response questions (Appendix 1).

Figure 1. Food Bank User Feedback: Frequency of Use.

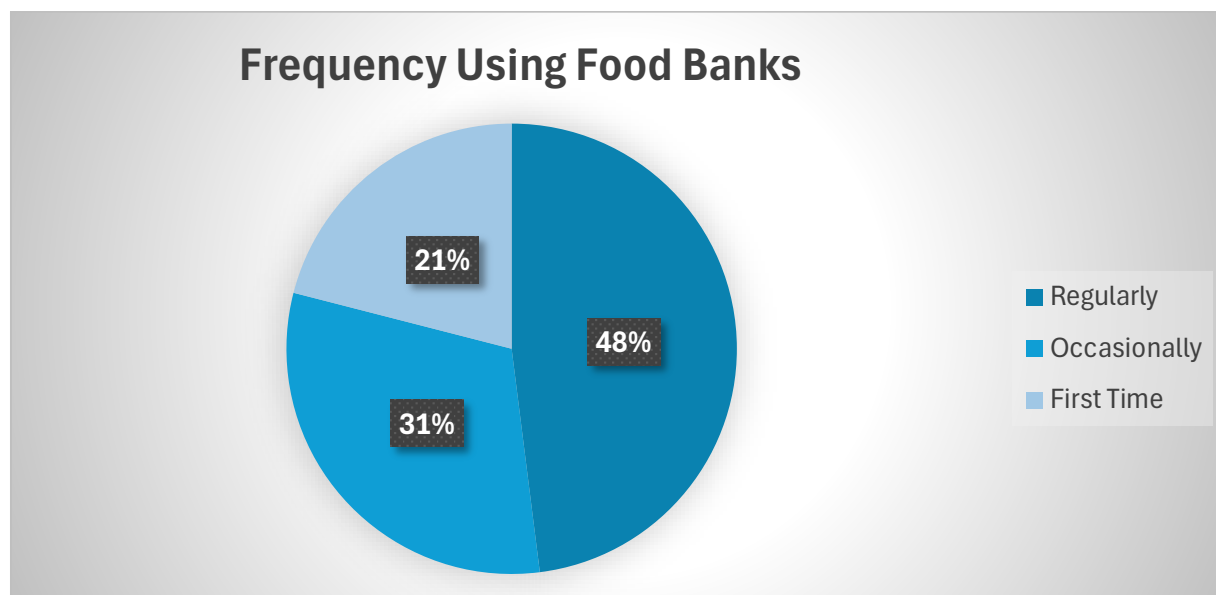


Figure 1. shows that almost 50% of the survey respondents reported using the food bank regularly, which is indicative of the needs and demands on food banks collectively. It is also suggestive of the need for alternative provision for people requiring this type of regular or sustained support, given that food banks have traditionally provided emergency/crisis support rather than a longer-term solution to food insecurity.

It should be noted that there are variations in regular use across the 4 food banks surveyed which could be linked to their location and accessibility; however, it would need further investigation to be confident of the reason for the differences (these have not been displayed to preserve confidentiality because of the small numbers involved).

Figure 2. Food Bank User Feedback: Experience and Impact

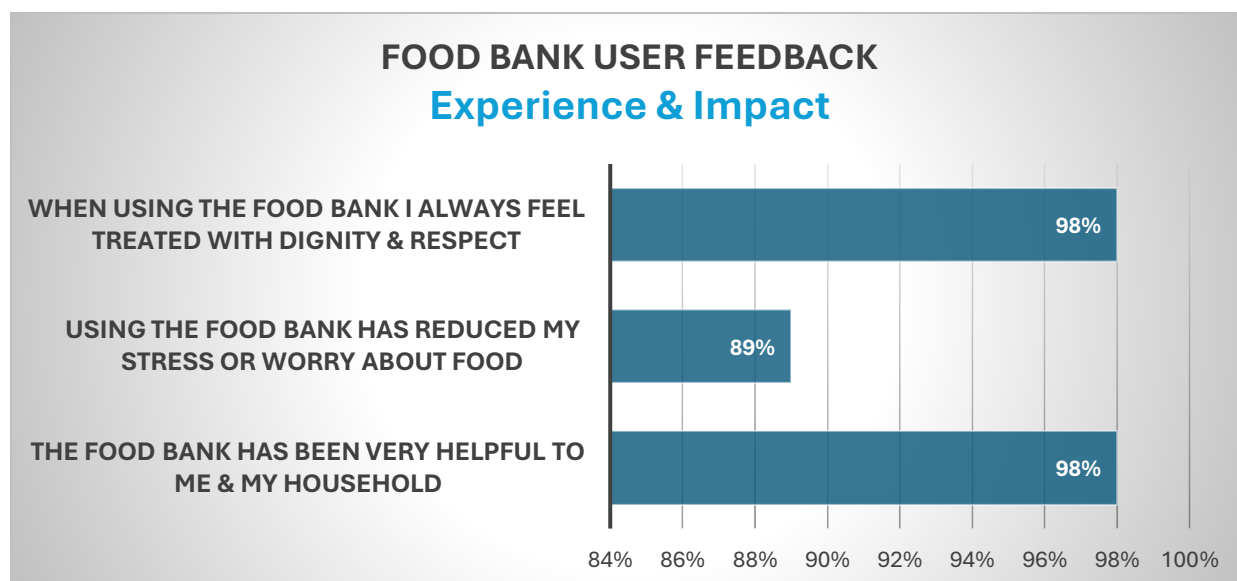


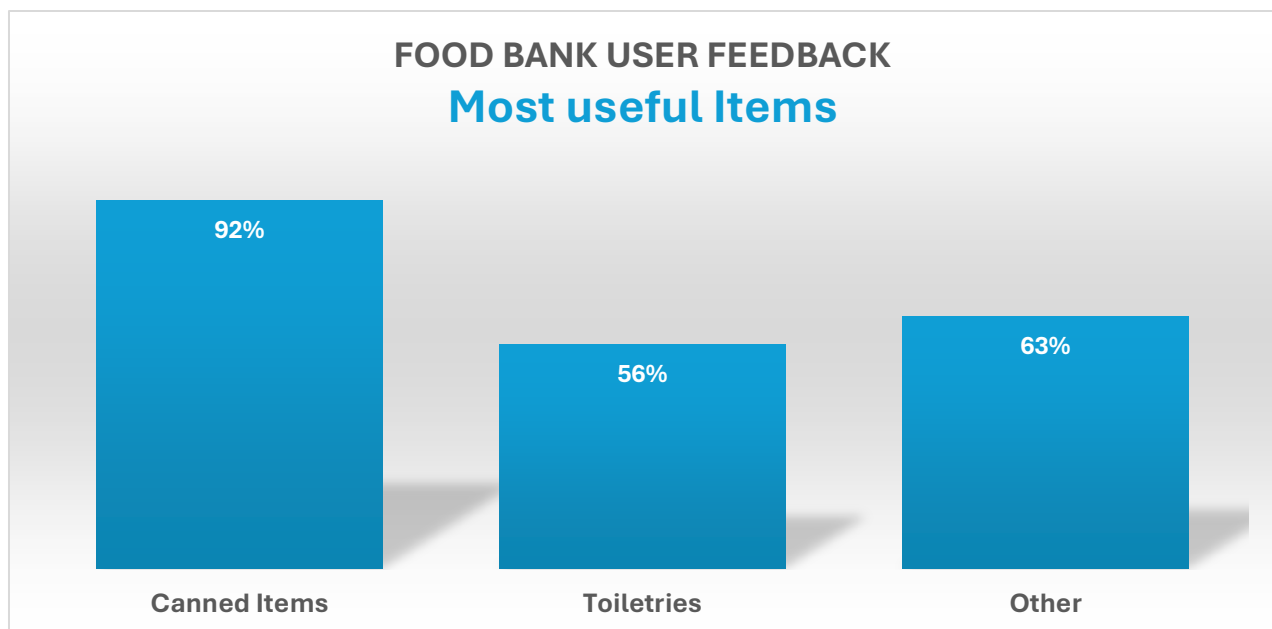
Figure 2., above, illustrates that 98% of food bank users find them **‘very helpful’**; with 100% saying their food bank has been **‘somewhat helpful’ or ‘very helpful’** when responses were combined. None of the respondents said the food bank had not been helpful.

Linked to this overwhelming endorsement of their food bank, users reported that their experience has had a positive impact on their stress or worry, specifically in relation to food, which confirms the important role of community food provision in the context of Public Health.

Of particular note, is the user feedback about the way they are treated at the food bank, with 98% reporting that they are **‘Always treated with dignity and respect’** and 100% responding ‘mostly’ or ‘always’ combined. This is heartwarming to read, and qualitative data collected from the free responses reinforce these findings, which will be explored in the next section.

Food bank users were asked which items they found most useful and Figure 3. sets out their responses.

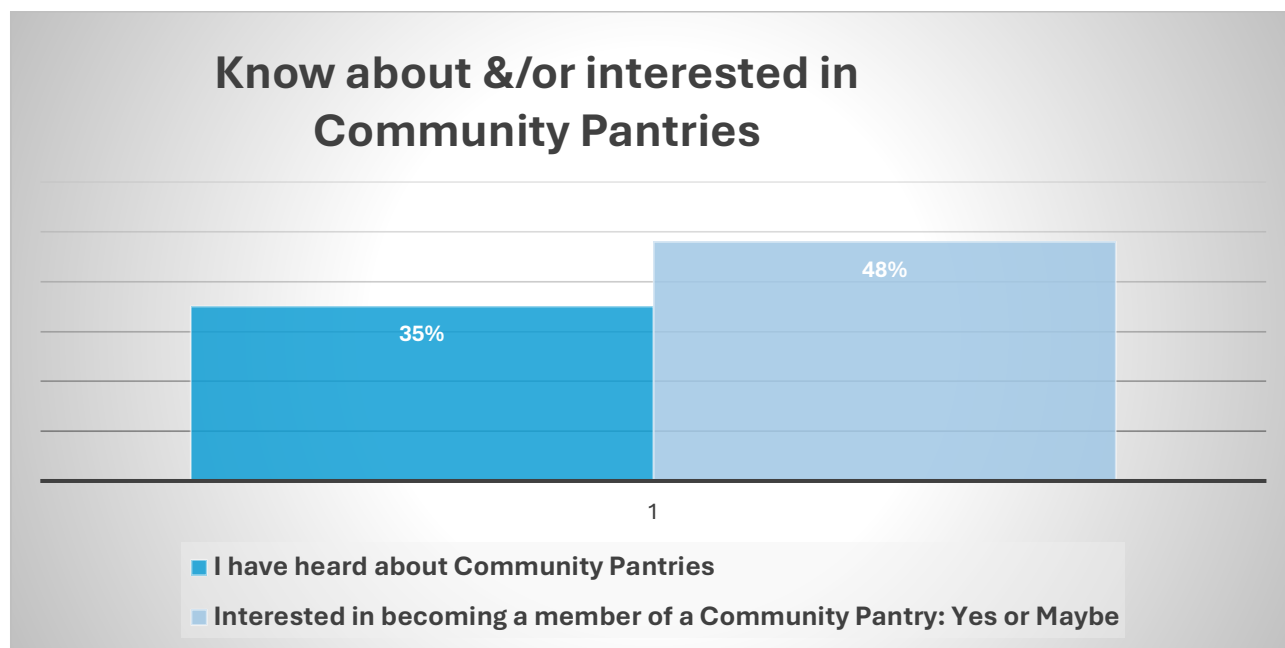
Figure 3. Food Bank User Feedback: Most Useful Items



The survey found that almost half of food bank users (48%) would be interested in joining a community pantry; this is particularly encouraging in the context of the regular use of food banks reported by service users.

Figure 4. below, displays the responses, and also shows that just over a third of food bank users (35%) have heard about community pantries. This suggests there is a need for greater publicity and promotion of the community pantries model in the food bank context, a finding that was echoed in the free responses to the survey, which will be discussed in the next section.

Figure 4. Food Bank User Feedback: Knowledge about and Interest in Community Pantries



What People Said: Survey Results - Free Responses

The free response section provides a wealth of qualitative data submitted by Food Bank users and provides information that is important for decision making and planning but also give an emotive and vivid insight into the 'lived experience' of many of the people using Feeding Derbyshire Food Banks.

As mentioned above, the free response section was guided by one question:

'What could we do to improve your experience of food banks?'

This was often left blank, perhaps because users could not identify improvements; however, when users did provide a response these were overwhelmingly positive, stating that the service could not be improved, and describing their food bank as:

'great' 'a great job' 'amazing' 'spot on!' 'a life saver'

In contrast, the final (blank) comments box elicited considerable response; the collated information from part of the survey was categorised into the following themes:

- Ethos and Culture
- Qualities of Staff and Volunteers
- Food Provision, and More!
- Additional Support Services, Complex Needs and Vulnerability

Ethos and Culture

The feedback users frequently referred to the food banks being a place where they helped and supported with much more than food. There was a consistent theme around not being judged, with a prevailing sense that this was more than just a neutral attitude but that there was an intention to create a safe, non-judgemental environment which helps to de-stigmatise the use of community food projects (Brennan-Tovey, et al, 2023):

'Trust keeps me stable' 'without judgment'

'(I) was nervous, made to feel comfortable'

'Very kind and reassuring people who genuinely care'

Qualities of staff and volunteers

There is evidently a direct link between the culture of the food banks and the qualities and approach of staff and volunteers who create the ethos. It is clear that this aspect of the food banks is highly valued by the service user, who took the time to write comments like:

'Good people – thank you' 'Always friendly to me' 'so helpful'

'always supportive' 'really kind' 'Y is a marvelous human! Xx'

Food Provision and More!

Although comment about food provision did not dominate the free response section it was still clearly valued by respondents; there was particular mention of the support given with allergies. There were also comments about the miscellaneous items that food banks offer from time to time, and, in particular, the occasional treat, which is well received.

Some food bank users mentioned other practical support they had received, including furniture and furnishings, household goods, like cooking and washing equipment, and even access to the internet and digital services through their food bank.

Additional Support Services, Complex Needs and Vulnerability.

There were many comments about the range of additional service provided through food banks, with assistance being given with financial matters, benefit advice and claims, as well as housing and homelessness.

It is evident that foodbanks are providing support with complex and challenging issues; for example, people shared highly personal accounts of acute situations involving eviction and discharge from NHS mental health services, which had placed them into a vulnerable state and where the food bank provided 'emergency support'. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that people used word like 'life saver' to describe how they feel about their food bank.

There was interesting feedback about the criteria for accessing food banks, with one user explaining they had not realised that they could use a food bank if they were working, and that they wished they had found out sooner as it would have helped their circumstance from getting worse. This particular finding resonates with the Community Pantry offer and suggest that more can be done to ensure people have clear information to prevent their situation deteriorating and only presenting to a food project when they are in crisis.

In Summary: Emotional Support and Gratitude

On an emotional level, the compassion and genuine care that people are shown in the food banks is heartwarming, but it was also clear from the findings that this is not simply a 'touchy-feely' outcome, it has a tangible effect on the wellbeing of people needing to use their services at challenging times in their lives.

Some of the survey respondents shared details of a highly personal nature describing the tough circumstances in which the food bank supported them. Others reported that they were 'anxious' or 'nervous' because they had not been to a food bank before, and even, *'(I) sometimes feel guilty coming'*. It was evident that people were reassured and made to feel comfortable whatever their reasons for visiting the food bank, a recognised approach for reducing stigma (Healthy Eating Research, 2025).

An outstanding feature of the feedback was gratitude, with the word 'Thank you' dominating the comment section and which is humbling in the context of how vulnerable people are feeling when they need to use food banks.

Conclusions

Although the food bank users feedback is drawn from a relatively small sample (responses: n=84) it is nevertheless of value because of the consistency of their responses to the majority of questions. This makes it highly likely that the results represent the experiences of food bank users in general, and across the Feeding Derbyshire Network. Of course, a larger scale survey would be needed to confirm this statistically but given the resource implications this is not necessary and the findings can still be interpreted with a degree of confidence.

In summary the findings of the survey confirm the following:

- ❖ Feeding Derbyshire food banks are highly valued by the service users who feel that the service is very helpful for their household.
- ❖ The ethos and culture of Feeding Derbyshire food banks is exemplary, and this derives from the approach taken by staff and volunteers; responses showed that food banks are places where people are treated with dignity and respect.
- ❖ The provision in Feeding Derbyshire food banks has a positive impact on individuals' mental and emotional wellbeing by tackling food related anxiety, worry and stress.
- ❖ Feeding Derbyshire food banks have a compassionate and caring ethos, resulting from the manner in which staff/volunteers treat people with dignity and respect; it is reasonable to assume that positive impact on mental and emotional wellbeing of people using the services.
- ❖ There is evidence from some users that their experience has helped to de-stigmatise food banks and address some misconceptions; with respondents saying they are less nervous and it has helped them to understand that food banks are open to working people who are experiencing financial hardship and not necessarily claiming benefits.
- ❖ Alongside this, the free responses mention misunderstandings and/or lack of information about community food projects for people unfamiliar with them, which suggests that there is work to do in terms of the messaging around food banks or, as expressed by respondents, 'the advertising of food banks'.
- ❖ The collective results show that the regular use of food banks is significant (48%) which indicates that the provision is not emergency support for some people, suggesting that alternative provision needs to be explored to offer a more sustainable solution to food insecurity.
- ❖ Responses also indicate that knowledge of the community pantry model is comparatively low, suggesting that further work is needed to promote understanding of pantries as an alternative to long-term food bank use.
- ❖ It is noted that there are variations in data collected on regular/occasional/first time use across the 4 food banks surveyed; the reasons for this are not clear and, because numbers are small, this needs further examination.

What Now? What Next?

Recommendations/Considerations for Future Action

Celebrate

- ❖ Celebrate the exemplary work of food banks in the Feeding Derbyshire network, and the contribution they make to the wider community food agenda.
- ❖ Review monitoring and data gathering approaches to find ways to improve response rate to surveys.

Community Food Projects and Stigma

- ❖ Consider how food banks, and all community food projects, can be supported with their approach to destigmatising the use of their services (Healthy Eating Research, 2025; Brennan-Tovey, et al, 2023)

Community Food Transition and Sustainability

- ❖ Review and further interrogate the information collected on regular use of food banks to better understand the reasons for this.
- ❖ Explore the community pantry model to support food bank users medium to long term; particularly where usage is regular and extends beyond emergency provision.

Communication and Promotion

- ❖ Review the communication and messaging associated with food banks to address misconceptions and build on the de-stigmatisation amongst local communities.
- ❖ Increase awareness and improve understanding of community pantries across the Feeding Derbyshire network.

Sources of Information

Brennan-Tovey, K, Board, E, M, and Fulton, J. (2023) Counteracting Stigma-Power: an Ethnographic Case Study of an Independent Community Food Hub. Journal of Contemporary Ethnography Volume 52, Issue 6 Dec 2023. [Counteracting Stigma-Power: An Ethnographic Case Study of an Independent Community Food Hub](#)

Feeding Britain (2020) Food and coping strategies during the covid-19 pandemic. <https://feedingbritain.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Food-and-coping-strategies-during-the-COVID-19-pandemic.pdf>

Feeding Britain (2023b) Where we work: Derbyshire <https://feedingbritain.org/location/derbyshire/>

Healty Eating Research (2025) How Stigma Impacts Participant Experiences with Food Security Programs <https://healthyeatingresearch.org/2025/12/how-stigma-impacts-participant-experiences-with-food-security-programs/>

The Trussell Trust 2020 Summary findings on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on food banks https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/06/APRIL-Data-briefing_external.pdf

Appendix 1: Food Bank Users Feedback Survey Questions

QUESTION NO.	TOPIC
1	How often do you use the food bank?
2	How did you hear about the food bank?
3	How helpful has the food bank been to you and your household?
4	What type of items are most useful?
5	Has using the food bank reduced your stress or worry about food?
6	Do you feel treated with dignity & respect when using the food bank?
7	Have you heard about the Community Pantry?
8	Would you be interested in becoming a Community Pantry member?

Appendix 2: Narrative Feedback from Food Bank No.5

Anonymised

Impact and feedback:

Our work has a measurable and lasting impact on individuals and families experiencing hardship and on the wider community. Over the past 12 months we supported 9,595 people, including 7,368 adults and 2,227 children. While many people accessing our services are adults living alone, a significant proportion (19.25%) are families with children directly affected by poverty and financial insecurity.

The immediate impact of our work is stabilisation at a point of crisis. Emergency food ensures households can meet basic needs while reducing immediate stress. Crucially, this support is combined with advice and early intervention, helping people address the causes of hardship rather than relying on emergency support alone.

Our Financial Inclusion project with [REDACTED] has enabled many people to improve their financial situation through income maximisation, benefit corrections and debt advice. Since April 2024, 424 people are expected to be £378,399 better off, and £997,288 of debt has been written off or managed for 258 people. Partner reports show that people engaging with this support are less likely to return repeatedly to the foodbank in crisis and more able to manage future challenges.

Feedback since August 2025 shows significant emotional impact: Before accessing support, 88.9% of respondents described feeling anxious, hungry or desperate. Afterwards, 91.4% felt supported through food, advice and kindness, and 94.6% reported feeling happier, relieved and listened to. 70.4% received advice in addition to food, and 66.7% believed their visit would reduce future need for emergency support. Since September 2025, only 9.3% of clients require more than five visits within six months, down from 15.4% previously.

People often tell us that they do not know where to start or how to navigate the system; our work helps people reach services they would otherwise struggle to access, in familiar local settings, reducing barriers and increasing the likelihood of follow-through. Our [REDACTED], which consists of our Signposting volunteers, a wide network of on-site specialised support agencies and Citizens Advice, provides guidance and reassurance to help people engage with the right services at the right time. We monitor impact through service data, referrals and partner, client and volunteer feedback to continually adapt our approach to local need.

The food bank also provide links to resources and testimonies which have been redacted to preserve anonymity.