

Focus on Foodbanks in Kent

Working together to reduce the need for Food Banks



Foodbanks from across Kent came together again for a second time this year to explore how they could work together and support the voice of their clients. Eight Foodbanks were present and all agreed the benefits of working together to amplify their voice.

Engaging Kent agreed to continue to fund and facilitate the creation of a formal Foodbank Forum for Kent for the year ahead. Engaging Kent already supports the Older Peoples' Forums, the Mental Health Forums and funds the Kent Physical Disability Forum. This wider network provides Forums with the added benefit of being able to come together to collaborate on issues which affects them all, such as homelessness.

What did we hear and what are we going to do about it?

UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Not everywhere has Universal Credit as yet, but Foodbanks in affected areas are reporting a 54% increase in demand combined with worrying stock shortages.

What are we going to do about it? Raise awareness of growing food poverty in Kent with an evidenced paper for social policy makers and commissioners across Kent. Collaborate to evidence the impact of Universal Credit on Kent residents.

SOFA SURFERS

Foodbanks are seeing significant increases in the number of people reporting that they are sofa surfers in the past 12 months.

What are we going to do about it? Other Forums are also raising the issue of sofa surfers, especially the Older People's Forums. Engaging Kent will bring all the Forums together in the Spring to discuss a collective response. In addition, the Foodbank Forum will seek a meeting with seniors leads for homelessness to discuss the issues.

LOCAL RELATIONSHIPS

We heard about the importance of positive local working relationships. Foodbanks are by default becoming an important part of the social care system providing care and support beyond food. We heard examples of constructive working relationships between Foodbanks and Local Authorities, but this was not replicated across Kent.

What are we going to do about it? Engaging Kent is currently meeting with District Councils to help broker relationships with their local Foodbank wherever possible.

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MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

All Foodbanks reported feeling unprepared for the volume of mental health support that they need to provide to clients. Many reported crisis situations that they were not equipped to deal with and the lack of support from mental health crisis services. Some Foodbanks have mental health services visiting such as Porchlight offering support in East Kent.

What are we going to do about it? Foodbanks to share experiences with Healthwatch Kent to enable them to raise the gaps in provision directly with mental health providers and commissioners. Engaging Kent to facilitate working relationships with other Mental health providers. Engaging Kent will seek funding to offer mental health first aid training for the Foodbank network.

What Next?

- All Foodbanks to share examples to support the Food Poverty paper.
- Engaging Kent to explore how best to raise the issue of Food Poverty with KCC Members.
- Once agreed, information about the reality of food poverty in Kent will be shared with all KCC Members alongside an invitation for KCC Members to visit their local Food Bank.
- Engaging Kent to seek a meeting with KCC in Feb to discuss Food Poverty and Homelessness on behalf of the Food Bank Forum.
- Engaging Kent to co-ordinate a meeting with all User Forums including Older People, Mental Health and Physical Disabilities to explore how Forums want to work together on key issues that affect you all such as homelessness.

With thanks to the following Foodbanks who have been involved to date:

Faversham Food Bank, Make a Difference Maidstone, Trussell Trust, Dover Food Bank, The Community Storehouse, Salvation Army, Sittingbourne Food Bank, Family Food Bank, Restoring Hands, Food for Thought, Pembury Community Larder, Tonbridge Baptist Church Foodbank, Dartford Foodbank.

If you want more information or to make contact with your local Foodbank please contact Nicky on nicky@engagekent.co.uk

