



Feeding our Communities Now and Beyond COVID-19

In the UK, the last month has been described as “the worst in living memory.” While we are all feeling the impact, the most vulnerable in our communities have been worst affected. Statistics from [The Food Foundation](#) paint a shocking picture.

- 1.5 million Britons reported not eating for a day due to a lack of money.
- 3 million were in households where someone had been forced to skip a meal.
- 1 million people reported losing all their income because of the pandemic – with over a third of them believing they would not be entitled to government help.
- 1.2 million applications for Universal Credit have been made in last three weeks alone – daily claims are up by 30,000.
- Food banks have seen demand double and even triple over the past two weeks.

Against this bleak backdrop, the local church is working harder than ever to fill the gap and respond to need on a local level. We’ve compiled top tips, to help churches take action now and develop a long-term strategy to respond to food poverty.

Be Flexible



In the last few weeks, everything has changed including the way we support those who need help accessing food.

1. **Where is the need greatest?** By taking a ‘hyper-local’ approach, you can connect with community groups at a ground level to find out where the need is greatest.
2. **Be agile and open.** You may be getting lots of offers for food, finances, expertise and volunteers. While you mustn’t cut corners when it comes to safety and safeguarding, be open to working in a more agile way to connect need and response.
3. **Engage new volunteers.** Your regular volunteers may be self-isolating, but are there others who have been furloughed who could help out? Engage them now and they could be a real asset in the future too. Sometimes, people just need to be asked!
4. **Repurpose buildings.** While your church building may be closed to worshipers, you may be able to use it in other ways. Could it be used to store food? Do you have a large kitchen where meals can be safely prepared?
5. **Know your limits.** It’s vital that you and your team stay safe. You may have to reduce the number of volunteers in your warehouse, extend your hours to meet the new guidelines, or send referrals to other organisations. It’s important that you follow these rules and don’t run yourselves into the ground.



6. **Who can you work with?** There's no point in duplicating work, so look to collaborate with others, even those who you wouldn't normally work with.

Useful Websites

Trussell Trust have great resources on responding to food need

<https://www.trusselltrust.org/get-involved/start-a-food-bank/>

Yourneighbour.org have good advice on looking out for your volunteers

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Y1lAzVwoU1KceuCq33Xyl5FMUOd8XkNE/view>

NCVO provide volunteering best-practice

<https://www.ncvo.org.uk/ncvo-volunteering/i-want-to-volunteer/volunteeringcoronavirus>

The Food Foundation has a range of valuable resources

<https://foodfoundation.org.uk/>



Partnership



During the [Cinnamon Connect Webinar](#), we heard from 78 church leaders, 91% of whom have already entered into new partnerships as they respond to the COVID-19 crisis.

There is no point in duplicating effort, so look to collaborate wherever you can to extend your reach and maximise impact.

1. **Local Council.** Councils have all developed their own COVID-19 response plans and will have funds and resources available, as well as information about those in need of support. They are a vital contact and are looking to fund organisations working in partnership.
2. **Community Groups.** Community groups include organised initiatives with their own premises, right through to individual street Facebook groups. They can help with everything from identifying needs and providing kitchens to organising food collections and sourcing volunteers.
3. **Supermarkets.** Most supermarkets have a dedicated community champion who can help you bypass bulk buying restrictions to get the food you need. They can also help with food donations and even distribution.
4. **Local Shops** Smaller shops also want to help. While they may not be able to provide masses of food, they could help with distribution or put you in connect with local wholesalers.

Useful Websites

Link to **local authority** COVID-19 funding allocation

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/876273/Covid-19_additional_funding_allocations.pdf

FareShare help to connect supermarkets and foodbanks

<https://fareshare.org.uk/>

The **Independent Food Aid Network** has up-to-date research, news and information

<https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/>



Build Community



Our needs are interconnected and providing a food parcel may meet just one of them. When we build a community that's founded on relationships, we can begin to support the wider needs of individuals, families and communities.

- 1. People want to help.** The nation wants to help – as we saw from the incredible response to the government's appeal for volunteers. People want to feel part of their community and there are many ways they can safely get involved – be it in a food bank warehouse, collecting food donations locally, or just chatting to someone on the phone.
- 2. People want to connect.** Community also matters to those who are benefitting from your service. You might not be able sit down with them over a cup of tea, but it's still important that they see a friendly face, even from a distance, or can chat over the phone.
- 3. Think long term.** Look to develop long-term relationships with those you're working with now. Even when lockdown ends, life will be very tough for many, many people. We'll have to work as a community, so think about how you can develop these relationships in the future.
- 4. It's about human dignity.** Ultimately, we want to show individuals that they matter. Through your support you can help restore their dignity and build their sense of self-worth.

Useful Websites

Find out how **Thrive Together Birmingham** are bringing people together to support one another in the city.

thrivetogetherbham.org/who-we-are-thrive-together-birmingham.html

Smethwick CAN is joint response from local churches to tackle poverty, increase aspiration, provide opportunities and support the most vulnerable.

<https://www.facebook.com/smethwickcan/>

Beyond COVID-19



Beyond the immediate crisis, the Office for Budget Responsibility warns that the UK economy could shrink by 35%, with 2 million job losses and unemployment at 10%.

Demand for services, like food banks, is likely to continue so churches need to think about what support will look like in the long-term.

- 1. Act justly** – Micah 6:8 calls us to “act justly and love mercy.” As churches continue to respond to the real and pressing needs within communities, they can also seek to change the systems that perpetuate food inequality and prevent many escaping the cycle of poverty.
- 2. Continue collaboration.** Start chatting with those you’re partnering with now about how you can work together in the future. Think about what’s working really well and how you can develop it when restrictions are lifted.
- 3. Local food economy.** What is already on your doorstep? As you tap into local resources, think about how you can possibly expand these connections. Are there local allotments that you could develop as a way to get people together to grow the food they need?
- 4. Food pantry.** Across the country there are a number of food pantry schemes where members pay a few pounds a week and can come and shop for themselves. It’s a great way to give people a sense of pride as they see that what they have to give is valuable.
- 5. If you had to stop, restart.** You may have had to stop your food project for any number of reasons, but there is no reason why you can’t restart it in the future. Start thinking now about what you will have to do to get it up and running again.

Useful Websites

Learn more about **Food Pantry** initiatives

<https://www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk/about-us/>

*We hope the website links we’ve shared will be useful to you. It’s worth just mentioning that we’re not responsible for the information they share..