

WEST LOTHIAN FOOD NETWORK

BACKGROUND

In June 2019, back in the good old pre pandemic days, a Scottish Daily newspaper reported that there were 8,551 children living in poverty in West Lothian. That is out of a total population (adults and children) of 181,000. There were approximately 23,000 people in total in poverty.

You can imagine that this situation has become much, much worse since Covid -19 started. The pace of increase is so great that it exceeds the ability to keep pace with estimates of numbers affected. However we genuinely notice the increase in our clients numbers.

It is worth remembering that of people born into poverty 2/3 remain in poverty for the rest of their lives.

So what does poverty mean? It means that the total income does not equal the amount necessary for people to live on (Simply to live ...nothing else). So how does this happen? You can easily look up the "Minimum Wage" and compare it to the "Living Wage "(scottishlivingwage.org) or look up "Zero Hours contracts" or look up the amounts received from Universal Credit. The majority of clients are "working poor"

Despite the efforts of the Chancellor many people are losing their jobs or are actually receiving "zero hours" (and therefore zero money). On top of this Universal credit takes 5-6 weeks to materialise). Job loss or Zero hours will result in financial crisis for those affected. Poverty means you can't "save for a rainy day" and that has resulted in a major increase in the need for the WLFB resources . The First Minister said, at her daily briefings that people who were struggling during the pandemic should contact their local council. Thankfully they are doing that and so the WLFB has to respond.

HOW HAS WLFB RESPONDED TO COVID?

Start of 2020 -3 full time & 4 part time staff and over 250 volunteers. However most of the Volunteers were shielding so could no longer operate the 12 drop in centers located throughout West Lothian (inc St Andrew's RC , Livingston)

During Covid-19 9 full time & 8 part time & 50 volunteers. The increase in full time employees is because of the Food Network (which WLFB operated on behalf of West Lothian CouncilSee later).

There are now 2 main organisations that potential clients can present to in order to obtain help.

- The Advice Shop (operated by West Lothian Council)
- Citizens Advice

In both cases people will have their finances and / or benefit entitlements professionally checked. They will be signposted to advisory help and support.

If they are experiencing difficulties in feeding their families they will be advised to attend their nearest Food network outlet.

If they are in complete financial crisis they will be referred to the WLFB where they will have DELIVERED TO THEIR RESIDENCE, WITHIN 24 HOURS a food parcel that includes a Minimum of 3 days supply of non-perishable food (some choice is possible as are dietary requirements), it is all nutritionally balanced, free of

charge and quantities are based on family size. The first package will include a card containing saying "For I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in...Matthew 25.35"

"A couple were referred to WLFB. They had "managed all their lives" and were now in their 60's and on Zero Hours contracts which were (during Covid) no longer providing a living. Their case was referred to WLFB because the husband had collapsed at home and was hospitalised. The woman was referred to WLFB and our support person phoned to ask questions about food preferences. It was Tuesday and it transpired that the woman had not eaten anything since the previous Thursday"

Our team was just about to go home but stayed on to make a parcel and deliver it.

Up to October 2020 the number of parcels provided (6,602) had exceeded the amount provided in the whole of the previous year. Approximately 33% is for Children. That is > 500 crisis events per month ...and increasing.

The Foodbank also operates an excellent Charity Shop in Whitburn. It is another place that parishioners can donate goods for sale (<https://westlothian.foodbank.org.uk/locations>)

The WLFB is also the chosen partner and is contracted to West Lothian Council to operate the Food Network, which is part of the council's anti-poverty campaign. Through the contract, WLFB receives funds and concessions dedicated to use within the Food Network. You can read about the Food Network on the accompanying document.

HOW CAN YOU HELP?

Demand growth is a bit like Covidexponential! So if you can give it then your help is needed and appreciated. Prayer is always helpful.

You can leave food donations in the church porch. I will be picking up every Tuesday when I go to work in WLFB in the afternoon.

If you visit the website <https://westlothian.foodbank.org.uk/donations> you can see how to donate moneyer you can give money to the Saint Vincent de Paul and specify that you want it to go to WLFB.

Throughout December, the Deans Warehouse will be open on Saturdays to receive material donations. You can also join in the Advent Calendar initiative (see Website).

If you want to participate in any WLFB initiative but have any difficulty please do not hesitate to contact me (mobile **07942873190** or j.f.odwyer@googlemail.com)

Thank you for taking the time to read this

Jerry O'Dwyer (Member of the Board of Trustees of WLFB and Secretary of our Saint Vincent de Paul Conference)



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