



Briefing: Food Support over Christmas 2022: Feeding Liverpool network report

In January 2023, as part of Feeding Liverpool's Emergency Food Providers Network gatherings, Feeding Liverpool facilitated a session for the network to reflect on the provision of emergency food support in Liverpool across the Christmas period. The following briefing contains a summary of the network's reflections on the Christmas period in 2022 and proposals to improve provision in 2023. 32 people from a mixture of community groups, foodbanks and referral agencies contributed to this briefing paper. This briefing note will be distributed to Liverpool City Council's Poverty Action Group and the Good Food Plan taskforce to support preparations for Christmas 2023.

What worked well in 2022:

Greater Coordination:

- The network valued Feeding Liverpool's Christmas Meals Map and Christmas Support Page (new for 2022). The Christmas Meals map was viewed over 6,000 times in December 2022 (5,000 via Google Maps and 1,200 via Feeding Liverpool's website). The Christmas Support Page support page was a useful signposting tool for referral agencies who were unsure what food support was open over Christmas. It was viewed 1,600 in the last two weeks of December 2022.
- The network also valued Liverpool Charity and Voluntary Services' (LCVS) support services page for information beyond food support.

Practical support:

- Feeding Liverpool's distribution of the Household Support Fund to community organisations enabled groups to increase their provision of food support over the Christmas period and therefore to cope with increased demand. This enabled community groups to increase the provision of hot community meals and of Christmas hampers.
- Some organisations found it effective to work with local schools to identify families who would benefit from a Christmas Hamper.
- As people were reluctant/unable to use gas or electricity to cook due, organisations were able to provide the only hot meal some people would eat that day.
- Some foodbanks (e.g. North Liverpool Foodbank) reported that their systems for picking up foodbank referrals (via an answer machine system with a nominated team member checking this regularly) went smoothly.

- Some organisations reported increased financial and physical donations compared to 2021 e.g., Whitechapel were able to supply 200 food bags in the two weeks running up to Christmas, solely from donations = an increase from Christmas 2021.
- Several organisations gave double food parcels / double pantry shops in the week before Christmas – they felt this was an effective way to sustain households over the Christmas period, to cover closure etc.

Challenges

- **Access to emergency foodbank vouchers:** Challenges for some residents needing to access emergency provision during the bank holidays as referral agencies and council support lines were closed e.g. The Big Help found themselves receiving calls from outside their usual catchment area, as people were phoning round wherever they could, due to places being closed/no phone contact available. However, the network acknowledged the importance to balance staff time off, importance of breaks etc, with places being open and available to contact.
- **Lack of clear information sharing:** organisations reported a lack of awareness by some referral agencies, and some support staff, health professionals about what services are available and open over the Christmas period – they suggested that regular training/updating of processes needed.
- **Donations**
 - Some organisations reported a decrease in donations, for a number of reasons, including middle classes now being unable to donate as much as they are also feeling the effect of the cost-of-living crisis.
 - Even when some people have had a higher amount of donations, these aren't stretching as far as they used to because of increased demand.
 - The nutritional quality of donations can be especially poor over the Christmas period with a glut of chocolate and sweet treats. Particular frustrations were raised by groups who pay for surplus food donations only to be given (amongst other things) hundreds of boxes of chocolate.
 - Last minute donations in the few days before Christmas meant staff/volunteers rushing to create parcels, package this up, waiting for these donations so they can see what gaps they have, and then needing to rush out to fill those gaps a day or two before Christmas, and then hand them out. This creates exhaustion in charitable food aid organisations.
- **Predicting uptake levels:** Some pantries found they had availability and stock but not getting the uptake they expected/that they know is out there. New Beginnings Improving Lives CIC found that having both foodbank and store, the foodbank use was reduced but store use increased – even though had supply but couldn't transfer this over to the store.
- **Fear of charity staff burnout**

Proposals for Christmas 2023:

- **Tackle root causes of poverty:** we need to decrease demand for food support (not just at Christmas but across the year). As a network we want to communicate that reducing the demand for our services should be the top priority of our local council and national government.
- **Food aid should not be the only solution:** A foodbank parcel should not be seen as a 'solution' to the presenting crisis. Proper care needs to be taken (and appropriate services need to be staffed and open) to support residents who experience a crisis over Christmas.
- **Earlier coordination:** The network asked Feeding Liverpool to arrange a meeting of emergency food providers in September to establish a group plan, see what individual organisation plans are and pool ideas for the 2023 Christmas period e.g. The Drive did this locally and found it very effective.
- **Doubling up in provision in weeks before Christmas:** Some organisations suggested that groups should give extra in the weeks before Christmas in acknowledgement that services might be closed immediately after Christmas, e.g., The Big Help provided parcel tokens/cards five at a time, to be filled in and then given out when needed, rather than one at a time.
- **Improved education of donors:** Need to educate donors / have coordinated communication, so that they don't give bulk of donations in the days before Christmas (which leads to volunteer exhaustion) and give nutritionally appropriate donations.
- **Increased awareness and advance communications:** Need clear briefings of council workers, referral agencies, nurses, doctors etc of what exists, where they can find out information and who to refer to. Referral agencies need communication in advance, rather than at the last minute trying to find answers/communicate with foodbanks etc.