

# Covid-19 Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance emergency food response

Report May 2020: 4 week period: Week beginning 4th May - Wk beg 25th May

## Overview

Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance (CFPA) quickly mobilised in late March 2020 to develop a structure of food support for vulnerable residents. CFPA is a collaborative network of organisations that have been working together on food access issues since 2018. CFPA published the first Food Poverty Action Plan for the city in 2019. CPFA have been meeting regularly throughout the crisis, and are represented on the City Council Reference group by Cambridge Sustainable Food

CPFA developed a three pronged approach to the current situation:

- Phone and online signposting service
- Establishing community food hubs - eight spread across the city. These are based at Barnwell Baptist Church, Abbey; The Edge Cafe, Romsey; Hope Church, East Chesterton; Church of the Good Shepherd, Arbury; St Andrews Church, Cherry Hinton; St James' Church, Queen Edith's; St Thomas Hall, Coleridge and St Paul's Church, Trumpington.
- Community meals/ shopping bag delivery service which grew out of the existing Holiday Lunch provision

## Current Situation

During this second month of operation we have consolidated the provision we are offering and are now considering what the next phase will look like. We are aware that the service in its present form represents a response to an emergency situation and is unsustainable in the longer term, however, although the initial urgency to find new ways to provide food for people is stabilising, an economic downturn is predicted. This, coupled with the furlough scheme ending soon - we are hearing that some large organisations in the City are already ending the furloughing of staff - means that poverty and food poverty is likely to become entrenched, further reaching and chronic in the not-so-distant future. This will represent a shift from directly attributable Covid related reasons for food poverty eg: shielding or unable to leave the house to direct financial and economic hardship caused by the downturn e.g. loss of income or waiting for benefits. Indeed, loss of income is the main reason that people gave for needing support from the community meals scheme in May.

Nationally, organisations, local authorities and the voluntary sector have been able to fund and organise resources for a short term response. Many are now finding that resources are running out, and the situation is still very unstable.

## Activities

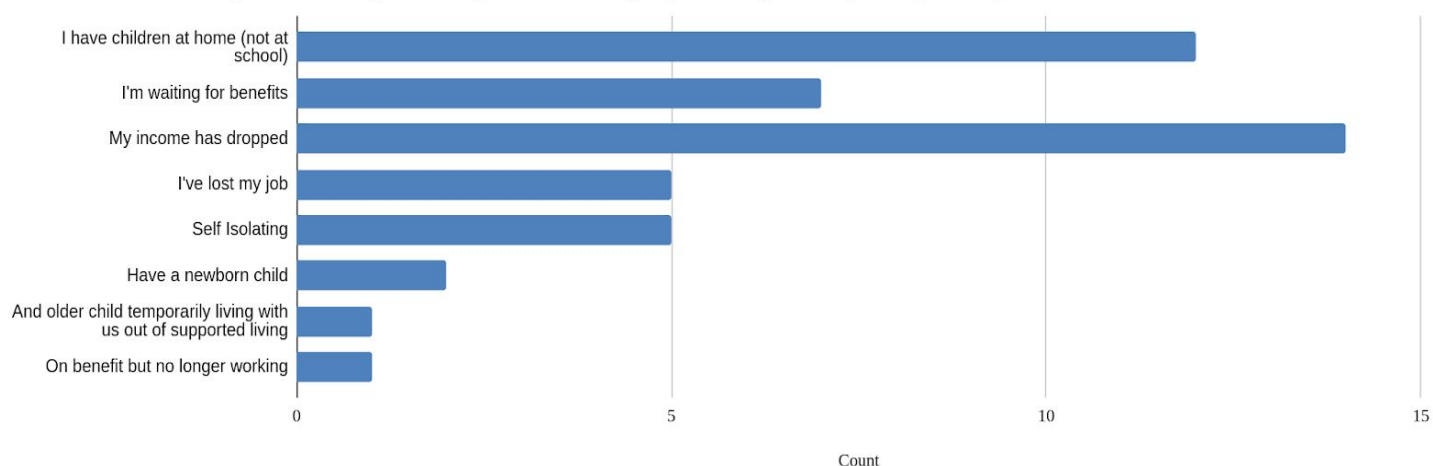
In May we received assistance and support from a range of organisations and local businesses plus a continued and fantastic volunteer effort. This included donations of food from Fortnum and Masons, Thomas Frank, Cambs Cuisine, Morrisons in Royston, Corpus Christi, CRC and private donations. Some organisations also set up pay it forward schemes: Cocobolo Coffee Roasters and Meadows Cambridge. We also started to work with Wood Green, Animal Charity to make sure pets were getting fed.

The Alliance continues to meet bi-weekly and is now considering the revision of the Food Poverty Action Plan in light of the current situation. Each organisation continues its own work and most participate in whatsapp group sharing resources and food between organisations. The hubs have started to meet every other week to discuss and share experiences.

## Community Lunches

We continued to supply community lunches to those that needed them. During May we saw an additional 24 applications from households, representing 84 additional people. Of those new households,  $\frac{2}{3}$  requested ongoing support while  $\frac{1}{3}$  requested one off support. The main reason for accessing the service was 'my income has dropped'

reason for accessing community meal by number of people: May 2020 (4 wk period)





Over the four week reporting period, we served a total of :

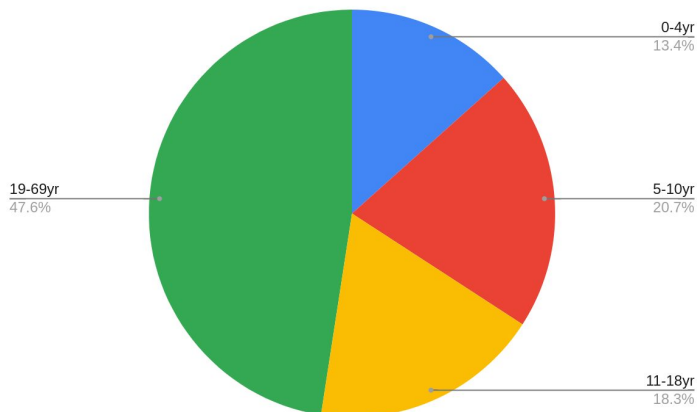
Meals: 2,212

Shopping bags: 252

#### Breakdown by postcode of meals and bags given out

Week commencing	4-May	11-May	18-May	25-May
CB4	229	213	230	242
CB1	66	75	75	77
CB2	35	43	33	33
CB5	49	49	49	54
Bags - shopping	68	53	64	67

#### Ages of people in households:



## Volunteers

We had 696 volunteer hrs of work cooking, preparing and delivering community lunches. We continued to have some of the best and committed professional chefs still on furlough to lead the kitchens at CRC.



## Phone and online signposting

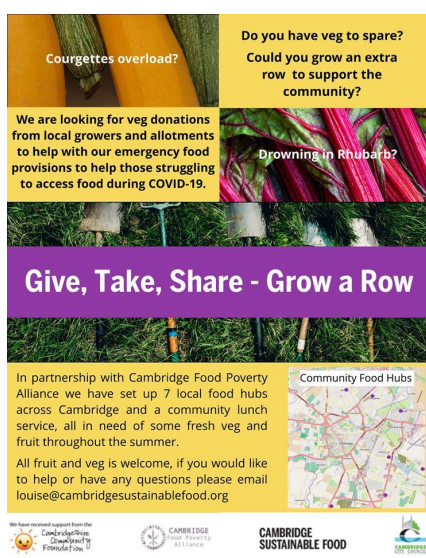
We have continued to offer support and signposting to people through our phone line 10am - 5pm weekdays and [update our web pages](#) with information and changing service data. We have seen an increase in the number of complex or multiple needs calls including those that are experiencing mental health issues, domestic violence and those with high physical needs. There are concerns that, although we are signposting and issuing food bank vouchers, these cases need extra support. We have also seen calls from outside of the City.



People are being referred from a variety of places including the NHS, City Council Housing dept and Mutual Aid groups. We also saw an increase in people getting in contact after the City Council sent a letter targeting families. Those with multiple needs are being referred on to other agencies where necessary and possible. We have recently seen an influx of migrant workers with no family support or no resort to public funds and are now losing jobs.

## Grow a Row

We have started a campaign to ask people to 'grow a row' for distributing fresh produce through the Community Hubs. This has resulted in St George's Street in Arbury setting up their own collection point for home grown produce, Cherry Hinton Allotments growing food for us, and other allotments such as Trumpington delivering fresh produce to the hubs. Co Farm have just planted out their new Community Farm and all produce will be circulated through the hubs this year.



## Food Hubs

We now have 8 functioning Community Food Hubs in the City. The Community Food Hubs act as a focus for the local mutual aid groups and voluntary sector to make sure those that need food are able to access it. Each hub is operating independently and opening times are coordinated to make sure there is coverage over the city each day (Mon - Sat).

[See here for details of opening times](#)

Weight of food in (kg) taken away or delivered	21,807
Number of people who visited a hub	3,638
Deliveries - bags to doorstep	297

## Stories and feedback

*"It has been a huge help to me and some meals have been exceptional. I have just got a promotion with work and my income has increased and would like someone else to benefit in my place"*

*" Thank you so much for the lunch received today. It was absolutely delicious!! Well done and huge appreciation from us to the people who created it. I told the smiley fellow who kindly delivered it that I will stop the help for the time being, as we can manage next week better than the previous. May I ask though if I find I'm in the position of needing for help again at any point in the time ahead how much notice I need to give, and would it be yourself I'd email"*

*"Please can you give me the ingredients for the curry?" (recipe cards and spice mixes will be going out soon)*

*"Thank you so much really helps eating proper food"*

*'Thank you once again to you and the great team for the assistance/support you have given to make tough challenging times easier'*

We were phoned by a resident who due to disability was unable to cook or go out. They told us that they had been living on pot noodles and had run out and so were unable to eat. We initially took some food there and then and put them on the delivery list so that they are now receiving meals 3 x weekly. We were also able to put the mutual aid group in contact with the Salvation Army so a volunteer could pick up a meal and deliver it to her.

We received a call from someone whose first language was not English and who was isolated, living alone and had lost her job as a cleaner. Her son had returned to their native country and had also lost his job. She was in tears on the phone at being able to get some help having never been in a position to ask for help before. We were able to find someone who was able to speak their native tongue and they are now receiving a weekly meal and a shopping bag.

## **Reports from partners and organisations around the City**

### **Cambridge City Foodbank**

There has been a 32% increase in the uptake of vouchers and a 52% increase in the number of people fed in April 2020 compared to last year. There were 734 vouchers / 1718 people fed in March and April 2020.

As the number of people covered by a voucher varies, it's possible to have a large increase in the number of vouchers but only a small increase in the number of people fed and vice versa. Cambridge Foodbank would normally see things easing off in April, especially if there is nice weather, but that did not happen.

There was an increase in Arbury, Abbey, Kings Hedges, East Chesterton as would be expected and there was also big increases in Queen Edith's, Newnham and Market, places that are not traditionally regarded as the "poor" areas of the city.

### **Free School Meals (FSM)**

Parents were offered supermarket vouchers in lieu of meals, although some schools have offered meals instead with varying degrees of success. There have been issues with the vouchers not being accepted in shops such as the Coop which many low income families use, vouchers not reaching people, codes not working and the need to print vouchers for use. Many of these early issues identified have now been ironed out, however with the announcement of FSM vouchers to cover the summer holidays these issues need careful monitoring.

The lockdown period (March - May) saw an increase of 199 new children compared to an increase over the whole year May 2019 - May 2020 there was an increase of 514 children claiming FSM

### **C3 Church**

C3 church has gone from an average of giving out 80 to 100 meals a week pre-lockdown to approximately 500 meals a week in May. They have given out over 1,100 portions of food from their fridge over the lockdown period.

### **Cambridge Ethnic Community Forum (CECF)**

During the lockdown period CECF have continued to issue food bank vouchers and nominate people for Fairbite, while delivery of emergency food is a new activity specific to the current situation. In the last month an estimated value of at least £4,000 of emergency food assistance has been provided in the form of 7 Food bank vouchers, 2 Fairbite referrals, a referral for meals to be delivered through the CFPA hub, 36 Tesco shop vouchers, 34 halal meat and shopping deliveries made - or collections arranged free to the beneficiaries, 14 lots of 1 month dry food packs delivered.

CECF have been working in partnership with the Cambridge Muslims COVID 19 Response, the Cambridge Central Mosque, and Cambridge City Food Banks and Fairbite to deliver diet-appropriate food to BAME communities, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

CECF have also provided considerable assistance through their own Refugee Hardship Fund.

### **Figures:**

#### **Ethnicity / National origin**

61% of these beneficiaries were asylum seekers or refugees,

26% were migrants

10% were from established BAME communities

3% were White English.



### **Other vulnerability factors**

38% were single parents

6% Domestic abuse or violence (DV) cases

33% were No Recourse To Public Funds (NRPF)

### **Geographical**

19% from the CB1,

16% from the CB2

39% from the CB4

16% from the CB5

7% from the CB7 East Cambs

3% South Cambs

### **Cambridgeshire's Local Assistance Scheme (CLAS)**

CLAS administered by Cambridge Housing Society (CHS) provides discretionary supermarket vouchers

In 2019 / 2020 (April 2019 to March 2020) they gave out 287 supermarket voucher awards worth

£24,660.

During lockdown 1st April to 9th June they gave out 155 supermarket voucher awards with a total value of £15,165. 64% of these awards were to Cambridge City households, highlighting the increasing numbers of people experiencing hardship in Cambridge.

CHS report seeing a new profile of clients needing help, people who have never navigated the benefits system. Historically CLAS clients are people on low income or on means tested benefits. People who were just about managing are at risk of being pulled into poverty.

Covid 19 has also highlighted how precarious the safety net is for most people and the differences in equality - those with fewer resources will be affected worse, for e.g. shortages in supermarkets leave people with no option but to do without or buy more expensive brands.

## Kings Hedges Family Support Group (KHFSG)

During lockdown KHFSG have been organising a food box of staples containing food such as fruit, veg, bread, milk, eggs costing £20 and are arranging delivery of a box to families who are struggling, including those who can only access more expensive shops than they would usually use at this time.

Anecdotally the main issues for families, particularly initially when the lockdown began, with regards to access to food are:

- The unavailability of certain foods in the shops when people were stockpiling. Also not being able to get hold of baby milk/formula
- The confusion around how and when they were allowed to leave the house to get their shopping
- Not knowing where they could access the help to have food delivered if they had to stay in doors, and also the inconsistency of the community fridges - both of these issues were quickly ironed out and i think now people are confident where they can access the help that they need.
- From a practical point of view and in relation to food vouchers for the food banks - many families only access the vouchers through KHFSG and don't know where else to get them.
- Children's centres were closed, so increased pressure on KHFSG to supply vouchers
- Families worried about feeding their children every day when normally they may get meals at school.
- There was confusion about the access and availability of free school meal vouchers