

Caring Hands - some facts and figures from Diane Bennett - November 2024

Diane Bennett, who runs Caring Hands, has provided us with facts and figures to give us an idea of the state-of-play as we come to the end of 2024.

I have made a few bullet points below:

- Referrals can vary quite dramatically each month but range from 100-150 each month, but is increasing each month at the moment.
- As you can imagine there have been a number of issues which have impacted the work of food banks and charitable food aid – increase in utility costs, increase in fuel costs, increased food costs – Caring Hands is no exception.
- Last financial year we provided over 1500 food parcels and anticipate reaching 1600+ in the current financial year.
- Referrals to the baby bank continue to increase.
- When we receive a referral for a food parcel, more often than not now, there is also a request for a full household pack – toiletries, cleaning materials, laundry detergent and toilet rolls.
- We now receive far more referrals for family food parcels than single food parcels – although referrals for single food parcels are increasing rapidly.
- Attendance at the drop-in diner on Mondays and Wednesdays averages around 50 meals per session. We are now open on a Friday for a 'light lunch' and provide around 30 meals
- We now have a new resource bank which is a Pet Food Bank, in partnership with Blue Cross and Pets at Home (where there is a collection point) and so far have supported over 300 pets (just cats and dogs at the moment). The aim of this partnership is to help people keep their pets so that shelters are not overwhelmed with abandoned pets.
- We provided nearly 300 Christmas Hampers/Gift Bags during Christmas 2023, which is the most we have ever provided. We will be inviting nominations again shortly and anticipate providing 300+ this year. We have been able to secure a unit at The Valley to be able to put the hampers together this year.
- We were able to provide a Christmas Day Lunch 2023, and provided around 50 meals. We are planning to provide a Christmas Day Lunch again this year – places will be limited as we can only seat 32 people at The Lighthouse now, although we also provide some 'takeaway' Christmas lunches for a local sheltered housing complex.

The Lighthouse:

- The food and resource banks have been operating from The Lighthouse since October 2022 and we moved completely in February 2023, so all our services now operate from The Lighthouse.
- In addition we can now offer showers, laundry, meeting room, lockers, phone charging, health and wellbeing hub.
- As part of our vision, we are looking at the IT provision for service user use. We will also be starting to offer basic cookery skills sessions and re-start the shopping and eating on a budget course.

Diane concludes:

“Thank you all so much for your continued support to Caring Hands. We really would not be able to do what we do without the love and support of so many people in our local community”.

Diane Bennett