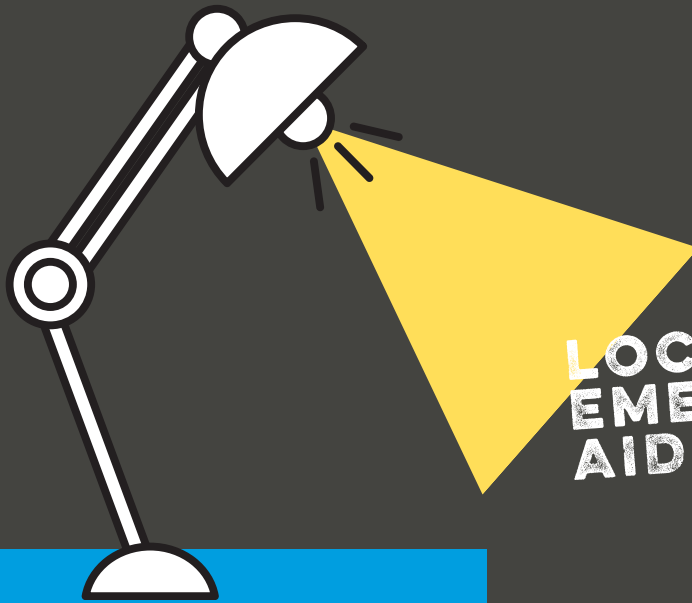


COVID-19: A VIEW FROM THE FOODBANK



DECEMBER 2020





**LOCAL NEED FOR
EMERGENCY FOOD
AID HAS DOUBLED**

SUMMARY

Since the beginning of the pandemic, we've seen the need for emergency food aid double across Wandsworth Borough - as a growing number of local households have been swept into severe hardship by loss of jobs or hours, illness, and benefit payments that fail to cover the cost of essentials like food, rent and bills.

During the first lockdown in March-July, we provided emergency food aid and essential toiletries to 1217 individual households referred to us in crisis - 7 in 10 of whom had never had to use the Foodbank before.

More recently in November and December, we've been providing up to 300 seven-day emergency food supplies a week to local people

and families. 4 in 10 emergency food supplies have been for children.

Since the end of March, when Covid-19 meant we had to close our five food bank centres to guests, our volunteers have been delivering emergency food supplies to people's homes, to try to keep everyone as safe and well as possible. Home delivery meant we could increase our emergency food supplies from 3-day parcels to 7-day parcels from May, as people didn't need to carry them home themselves.

Covid-19 has shone a harsh light on pre-existing causes of poverty

Our Foodbank Advice Project has seen a similar huge spike in need, and is providing expert advice and casework to help people referred to us to resolve the problems causing severe hardship - including problems around

housing, benefits, employment, domestic abuse, debt, and harsh visa restrictions of no recourse to public funds. This Foodbank Advice Project, in partnership with Citizens Advice Wandsworth, is a vital part of what we do.

But no charity can replace the dignity and efficiency of being able to buy the food you and your family need. Emergency food aid is not a solution to poverty and hardship.

We want to see the end to poverty and the need for our Foodbank. We want to see secure work that pays the real Living Wage; benefit payments that cover the cost of essentials; and a strong local lifeline of emergency local welfare assistance from Wandsworth Council to help residents stay afloat in hard times.

Covid-19 has shone a harsh light on already-existing causes of poverty and food bank use. We must use this light to find ways and policies that end poverty and the need for food banks - in Wandsworth, and across the UK.

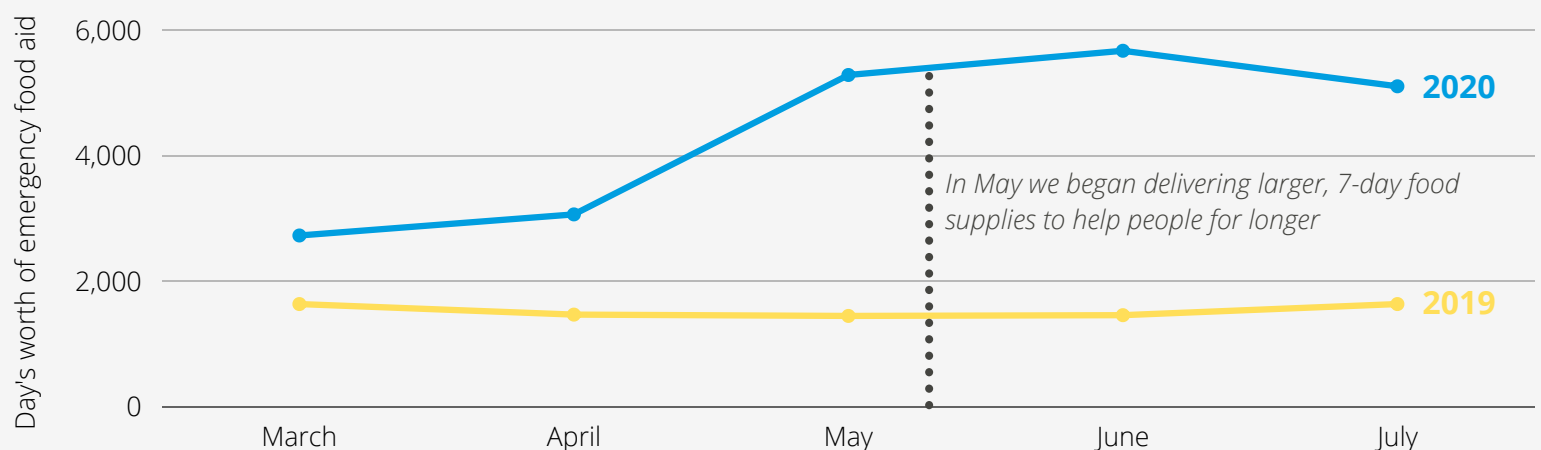


Emergency food aid is not a solution to poverty and hardship



LOCKDOWN 1.0

During March-July 2020, we saw people's need for emergency food aid soar across Wandsworth Borough, and that need is continuing.





During the pandemic, although we're supporting more people than ever, the cause of their need for emergency food aid remains the same: a lack of money for food.

In lockdown 1.0, almost half of people were referred to us due to 'low income. The top five causes of low income cited by our referrers were:

- Benefits not covering cost of essentials (cited by 65% referrers)
- Household costs increasing beyond usual income (51%)
- Loss of job due to economic impact of coronavirus (46%)
- Low-paid or insecure work not covering cost of essentials (43%)
- Impact of immigration policy of no recourse to public funds (40%)

Many people we spoke to who were claiming Universal Credit for the first time, were shocked at how low benefit payments were. The minimum 5-week wait for Universal Credit (UC) first payment, deductions for debt to government (eg UC Advance loans),

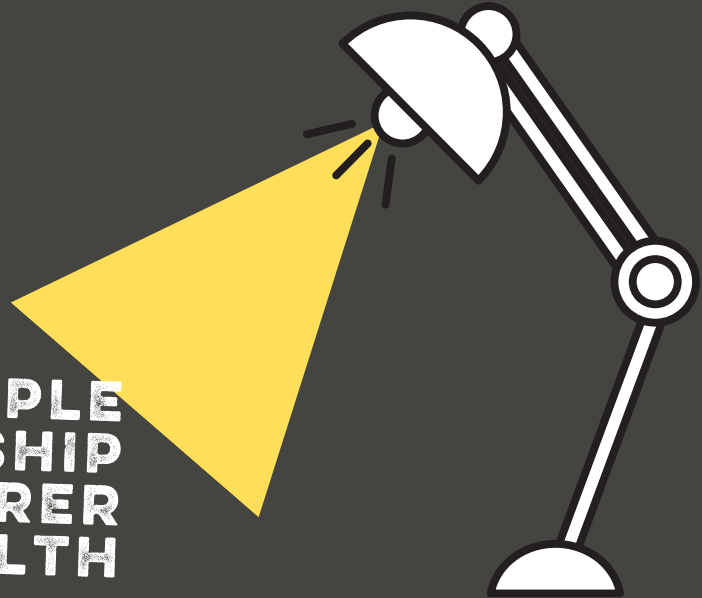
2 in 3 referrers said benefits not covering essential costs caused emergency food aid need

benefits not covering full rent costs, and the impact of the benefit cap, all led to households needing emergency food aid, said our referrers.

It's vital the government strengthens social security so it's the lifeline we need when storms hit, including keeping the £20 Universal Credit uplift.

“ I've worked for nearly 30 years and never asked for a penny in my life. But the benefits I receive don't cover basic rent for private accommodation in London. To realise that I am ludicrously short was a massive eye opener. It definitely increased my anxiety. During lockdown I had to skip two meals a day to make it last. I cannot afford my rent, council tax or my bills. They are all on hold. ”

3 IN 4 PEOPLE IN SEVERE HARDSHIP EXPERIENCED POORER MENTAL HEALTH



Covid-19 has shone its harsh light on the pre-existing health impacts of poverty, with the Health Foundation reporting that people 'living in the nation's most deprived areas, who already had poorer health, are now at risk of worsened long-term health outcomes and intense financial hardship as a result of the pandemic'.

People we help, and professionals who refer to us, report that poverty is severely impacting local people's health and wellbeing.

During the first lockdown, 1 in 3 people we supported had gone one or more days' without eating before being referred to the Foodbank, including people with pre-existing conditions like diabetes and cancer.

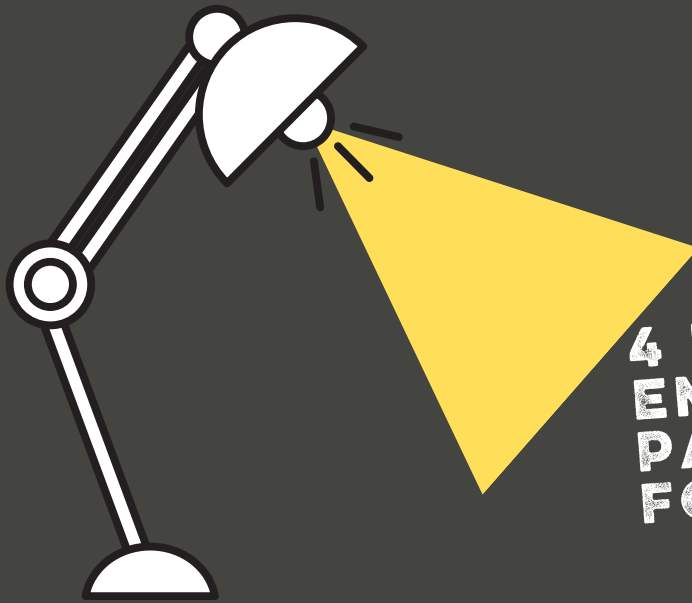
7 in 10 people said they'd been forced to make poorer nutritional choices because of lack of money.

3 in 4 people experienced poorer mental health: we spoke to many people in severe distress. Alarming, 1 in 4 referrers reported suicidality as an impact of financial hardship and poverty that they saw in their clients during the pandemic.

Poverty is severely impacting local people's health and wellbeing

It's clear that to protect children's and adult's mental and physical health, we must protect them from poverty and hardship. We need a local anti-poverty strategy as part of public health policy.

“ I can't work as I am a full-time carer. Normally my husband would be at the day centre and then I turn all the electrics off, but the day centre is shut so the electricity bill has gone up. I've had really bad panic attacks. The GP phoned and he put in a Foodbank voucher for me. It's best if you need the Foodbank that you don't leave it until you have nothing. But you don't want to ask for help before you need it. ”



**4 IN 10
EMERGENCY FOOD
PARCELS WERE
FOR CHILDREN**

During the pandemic, 4 in 10 emergency food supplies we've delivered have been for children.

In the first lockdown, we provided basic food and essentials to 1154 individual children across Wandsworth, whose families had been pulled into severe hardship.

The stress on parents is huge when incomes are too low to cover the cost of rent, food and essentials. Half of parents we helped had skipped meals so their children could eat; 1 in 4 referrers reported children going without basic essentials they needed.

Two-thirds of people we helped had borrowed money to buy food, and 1 in 3 had been unable to pay their rent.

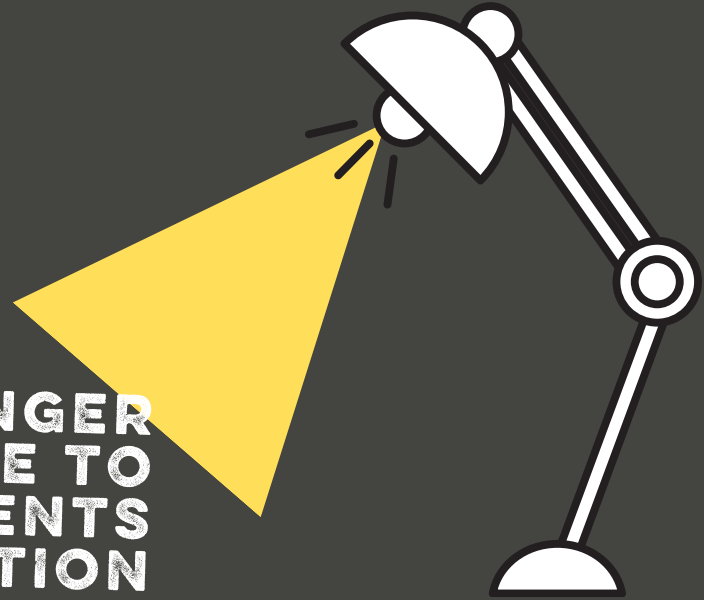
During the first lockdown, many parents were hit by the triple impact of not being able to work because schools were closed; households costs increasing with children at home; and shops running out of cheaper food.

Half of parents skipped meals so children could eat

Government-funded supermarket vouchers for children on Free School Meals (FSM) helped some in lockdown, but many families on low incomes didn't qualify. While we're pleased that Wandsworth Council is now providing FSM supermarket vouchers during the Christmas and February half-term school holidays, we believe many children will need this support in Easter holidays too.

“ I do private cleaning jobs as and when I can but it's no work, no pay - and I haven't been able to work during lockdown. My husband's furlough money wasn't in for a few weeks so we were very worried about having empty shelves and not being able to feed our child. We were frightened of getting into debt or being evicted. The Foodbank helped until the furlough money came in - we're very grateful for the help. ”

WE NEED A STRONGER LOCAL LIFELINE TO PROTECT RESIDENTS FROM DESTITUTION



Since April, Wandsworth Council has received £3.4million in government hardship grants for residents - including a £836,000 Covid Winter Grant in December 'to directly help the hardest-hit families and individuals, as well as provide food for children who need it over the holidays'.

Throughout the pandemic, we've welcomed the opportunity to meet with Council staff and leaders: to share what we're seeing, and to urge the Council to ensure this money reaches the pockets of residents hit hardest by the impact of the pandemic.

We shared that only 1 in 7 households we helped in the first lockdown had also received a crisis grant (vouchers for food and fuel) from the Council's

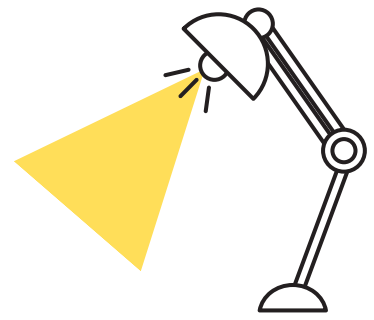
local welfare assistance scheme, the Wandsworth Discretionary Social Fund (WDSF). And that less than half of Foodbank referrers (44%) referred clients to the Council's WDSF as well.

Only 1 in 7 people we helped also received a crisis grant from Wandsworth Council

We welcome steps that Wandsworth Council has already taken to make the WDSF more generous and accessible. However we ask it to continue to strengthen and invest in the WDSF, recognising that local welfare assistance is a vital mechanism that – when delivered well – provides a powerful safety net for residents, and can prevent a financial emergency from escalating into a more sustained crisis.

“ When coronavirus happened, I lost my work kitchen-fitting. I was given £60 to survive on for the month. I had to borrow from my previous boss, I begged him. I applied to the Discretionary Social Fund and I still haven't heard. They say there's a queue. If it wasn't for the Foodbank, I would have faced some serious problems. But the Foodbank can't support the whole of Britain: they can't feed the whole nation. ”

We want to say
a big **THANK YOU**



OUR VOLUNTEERS

It's hard to find enough words to express our love and gratitude to our volunteers, who've given so much time and energy to support local people - all driven by a shared sense of compassion and justice. Thank you, everyone.

OUR GUESTS

Despite the severe hardship and stress that people were experiencing, so many took time to call or text us to thank us and everyone who'd given to help them. Special thanks to each one who shared their experience for this report.

OUR FOODBANK ADVISERS

A huge thank you to our incredible Foodbank Advisers Sylwia, Salah and Mikal, and their small team of volunteers. You - and the whole of Citizens Advice Wandsworth - have worked tirelessly to support people referred to us with expert advice, casework and kindness.

OUR REFERRERS

Thank you for taking time to refer people who've been pulled into hardship, alongside your work as teachers, doctors, support workers, children's centre staff, local charity teams... And for using our new online referrals!

OUR COMMUNITY

None of this would be possible without the extraordinary generosity of individuals and families, churches, schools, businesses and grant-funders. Your kindness continues, and inspires us every day. Thank you.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The information in this short report comes from structured interviews with 93 households who had to use Wandsworth Foodbank during the pandemic; an online survey completed by 121 referral agencies (60% statutory services); and data from 1,994 Foodbank voucher referrals received during March-July 2020.