

Farnborough Foodbank with Mick Shea

Mick, who set up the Farnborough Foodbank with his wife, Sue, began by extending an invitation to anyone wishing to learn more about their operations to visit their base at St Christopher's Church.



He went on to explain that Farnborough Foodbank is entirely staffed by volunteers, 30 in all, and that he personally works around 30 hours per week in summer and as much as 55 hours in winter. Because there are no wages to pay, funding is sufficient at present, though the situation is likely to change with the introduction of Government initiatives

such as Universal Credit and the benefits cap.

Farnborough Foodbank is a franchise operating under The Trussell Trust, a Christian organisation that takes its inspiration from the Bible (Matthew 25: 35 & 36), though they are happy to work with all faiths or none.



Mick told us how the food bank idea began in Salisbury in 2000, when Paddy Trussell used his garden shed to store provisions, with the aim of providing three days of emergency food to local people in crisis. The Farnborough Foodbank still provides that today.

The foodbank collects donations of non-perishable food, plus essentials such as toiletries and nappies, from individuals, supermarket collection days, churches, religious and secular Harvest, Christmas and Easter festivals, schools and businesses. Some of the local businesses who contribute are: Costco, Sainsbury's, Fluor, IBM and S C Johnson. Twelve local churches also support the foodbank.

At their depot in the former Browning Barracks, the food is weighed in then sorted by date ready for distribution. Parcels are made up for families, people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation (kettle boxes) and for the homeless (cold boxes). The greatest number of boxes distributed in one day was 37, and the foodbank will try to accommodate individuals with special dietary needs and pets. On one occasion, they even managed to put together a starter pack of household goods for a rehoused family, working with a number of other local organisations.

School holidays bring a big increase in requests, as parents struggle to feed children who usually take at least one meal at school during term time.

Frontline care professionals, such as health visitors, social workers, Church pastoral workers, doctors, school pastoral leaders, carers, and probation officers, identify those in need of emergency provisions and issue foodbank vouchers.

These are red, which makes forgery very difficult, and can be redeemed for three days' supplies. Three such parcels can be claimed within a six-month period, though there's a little flexibility to provide more in cases of exceptional need, in keeping with core Christian values.

Volunteers at the foodbank centre provide another invaluable service by offering a friendly cup of tea and a sympathetic ear. They can signpost claimants towards a wide range of support services, and, if asked, they will also pray with them.



The scale of the operation is impressive. Between April 2014 and March 2015, a total of 3,356 people received provisions, with 34,684kg of food distributed. And a total of 93 referral agencies partnered with the foodbank.

An exciting new initiative at Farnborough Foodbank is their *Eat Well Spend Less* programme, run by Sue Shea, a six-week free cookery course for those on a low budget. The course includes basic cookery

lessons, plus advice on food budgeting, hygiene and nutrition. The aim is to avoid dependency by giving people the skills and confidence to manage on limited means. North Camp Methodist Church hope to run a similar course, and Creating Futures has also expressed an interest.

To learn more about Farnborough Foodbank, visit the website:
<http://farnborough.foodbank.org.uk>