

### Operational overview of 2020/21

Unlike the last few years, where we have seen a year on year increase in referrals to the foodbank, in the financial year April 2020 – March 2021 we experienced our first, ever drop in numbers. It's no coincidence this time period covers the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact has been felt across all aspects of our service.

The lockdown magnified the cracks in society and those most deprived have been hardest hit. Schools, churches and most organisations closed. Supermarket shelves were bare, limits were placed on food and public transport was affected. People were furloughed and lost incomes, others were shielding and the majority of people didn't leave their homes. As our partner agencies closed their doors it became increasingly difficult for clients to access direct support, including foodbank referrals. This contributed to our drop in numbers and had an impact on our supply of food donations.

Within days we lost almost 90% of our volunteers and our Blairgowrie centre was forced to close for 5 months. We were classed as an essential service so we had to find new ways of working to ensure we could continue to operate. We changed our hours and introduced phone and email referrals to make it easier for our clients to access a parcel. We relied heavily on our remaining volunteers and some new ones; everyone worked longer hours and in smaller teams. Clients were served at the door and our in-house signposting services were suspended.

Across our 2 centres, **referrals were down 8%** (*See Table 1*). The **number of people we helped feed was down 14%, from 6226 to 5380**. The largest reduction was seen in referrals for families, with **the number of children fed down 26%**. 55% of our parcels go to people living alone, an increase of 5%, and the main reason given for people requiring a food parcel is still low income and benefit changes/delays. We **received 80 tonnes** of donated food (up 30%) and **distributed 73 tonnes** (up 18%), mainly as emergency food parcels, which have increased in size, but also to other groups helping feed people.

The source of our food donations has changed vastly (*See Table 2*). As a result of restrictions; churches, businesses and individuals no longer bring food into our centres. Instead, 75% of our food now comes from collection points in the supermarkets. Morrison's are a new addition and have been a great support to us and now rank as one of our largest. For 10 weeks in the first lockdown we received a weekly donation of food from a Tesco/Trussell Trust initiative, bringing in over 11 tonnes of food. Warehouse space became a problem and last summer we hired 2 storage units to house our surplus stock, one of which still contains a few items of soup and pasta.

There have been some positive outcomes from the pandemic, including an increased awareness of people living with food poverty and an outpouring of generosity from the public. We benefited directly; receiving a huge increase in both food and cash donations and offers of help. Dozens of new community groups, larders and 'Give or Take' boxes appeared in towns and villages across Perthshire, providing food and other

support to those in need. These groups offer a different service from a traditional foodbank and can often function as an intervention *before* people reach a crisis point. They also reach those in rural communities who struggle to access our service. We are grateful for the support these groups offered during a difficult year, helping the community and taking the pressure off our service. Perth & Kinross Council also had an emergency food response and at its peak was feeding 300 vulnerable families a week. Although demand for emergency food increased, the intervention from the council and these groups helped cushion our service and also explains our drop in numbers.

A month after our Blairgowrie centre closed, with the help of the PKC Blairgowrie Housing Team and some of our volunteers, our parcel distribution restarted from the Housing offices until the St Catharine's Centre reopened in Aug 2020. We are grateful to Bronia and Frances who got us up and running again and continue to operate our twice weekly service and coordinate the volunteers. The proportion of referrals we have received at our Blairgowrie centre has steadily decreased (down from 12% to 8% of all referrals). This has, in part, been a result of the disruption to our service but most likely due to the advent of 2 community groups in the locality - BaRI in Blairgowrie and 'Food For Thought' in Alyth. Like many of the new groups that emerged in the pandemic, they offer a variety of free/cheap, fresh and cooked food within their communities.

As lockdown eased, increasing numbers of referrals were requested for people testing positive or self-isolating. The council stepped in to help and a limited delivery service started last October. Special thanks to Liz Stewart who effortlessly coordinates this with help from colleagues and a team of volunteers. At its busiest in Jan 2021, Liz and her team delivered 60 parcels. Demand for deliveries has decreased, along with restrictions and infection rates, and we are due to review the future of this service soon.

The number of agencies referring people to our service reduced drastically last year - **>70% were received from only 8 Referral Agencies** (See Table 3). The introduction of a new community support phone and email service by the council was a huge help, giving people easy access to information, benefit payments and referrals to their nearest foodbank. Most recent figures show this service now accounts for 52% of all referrals.

### **Future**

- Make sure anyone who needs an emergency food parcel knows how to get one.
- Find ways to reach those struggling to access food help, particularly in rural areas.
- Encourage effective signposting to help resolve the underlying causes of food poverty and this should reduce demand for our service.
- Build on the good relationships we have with the network of food groups, our referral partners and the council.

A combination of the new groups, the council support line and reinstating our own in-house signposting services should help provide improved service for clients reduce the need for foodbanks. As the last year has shown us, we all benefit from working together.

**Table 1. Number of people fed, parcels issued, food in and out**  
1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 (vs 2019/20)

	2020/21	2019/20	Difference
<b>Total People Fed</b>	<b>5380</b>	6226	<b>↓14 % ( -846 people)</b>
- Including Children	1500	2026	↓26 % ( -526 children)
<b>Parcels Issued</b>	<b>2815</b>	3060	<b>↓8 % ( -245 vouchers)</b>
<b>Food (tonnes)</b>			
<b>Donations</b>	<b>80.7</b>	61.9	<b>↑30 % ( 18.8 tonnes)</b>
<b>Purchased</b>	<b>2</b>	3.4	- 1.4 tonnes
<b>Distributed*</b>	<b>73</b>	62	<b>↑18 % ( 11 tonnes)</b>

\* Includes emergency parcels and stock redistributed to other food groups

**Table 2. Top 7 Food Donors 2020/21**  
(account for 75% of all donations)

FOOD DONOR	Total Food (tonnes)
Tesco Blairgowrie	12.4
Tesco Edinburgh Road	11.8
Tesco/Trussell Trust Covid	11.1
Morrisons, Perth	10.1
Tesco Crieff Road	9.8
Asda, Perth	3.9
Anonymous donations	3.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>62.3 tonnes</b>

**Table 3. Top 8 Referral Agencies (2020/21)**  
Accounting for over 70% of all referrals

AGENCY	Type of Agency	% of total referrals
0345 30 111 00 helpline*	PKC	27%
CATH services	Charity	17%
Harm Reduction Service (Drumhar)	PKC/Hillcrest	8%
The Salvation Army	Charity	7%
PKC Blairgowrie Housing**	PKC	5%
PKC Criminal Justice	PKC	3%
PKC Greyfriars Hostel	PKC	3%
Emergency vouchers (people without a referral)	Charity/in-house	3%

\* New referral route established in April 2020 as a result of the pandemic.

\*\* Operated our Blairgowrie service for 5 months while our centre was closed.