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and crisis

Thank
You!



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We're so grateful to you for your fantastic support in the twelve months to June 2020, which has been truly life-changing for so many. You helped 'Dave' battling mental health issues and addiction, to turn his life around. And you helped 'Jane', a self-employed businesswoman – she never thought she'd need to turn to a charity until lockdown hit and she couldn't work. They share their stories on the following pages.

Covid-19 has brought us a few extra challenges too. Many more people needed food boxes during lockdown, but restrictions also meant we had to close our Resource Centre, our main food distribution point. To ensure that nobody went hungry, we swiftly set up a food delivery service. In March, we fed 53% more people (179% more children) than in March 2019! But then village communities began setting up pop-up foodbanks, and government interventions such as increased Universal Credit and free school meal vouchers kicked in, and things settled a bit.

And, with our team working from home using phone and video conferencing, we continued to help scores of people with client aid, advice on benefits, form completion and debt counselling.

The most common reason behind the need for food boxes is debt - it's crushing, it robs people of hope and leaves them feeling powerless and trapped. We helped 83 clients with serious, paralysing debt last year, including 'Clare' (see page 8), whose financial troubles almost drove her to suicide. Now, thanks to your support, she is debt free, along with 22 other clients. We'll continue to journey with the other 60 until they are debt free too.

We really couldn't do what we do without the wonderful help of our volunteers. They include school children, Scouts, staff from local companies and regulars like George (see page 10) who has a such a cheery nature and 'can-do' attitude. We've missed you so much during lockdown – now, with new safety measures in place, we're really looking forward to welcoming you back!

We have reopened the Resource Centre so nearby clients can come and collect food again. We're also continuing to run the food delivery service to those further afield until we're able to reopen our village 'hubs', an initiative we started before lockdown and which enables us to serve more people in rural areas.

With the economy rapidly declining, more people than ever will need help in the coming months. On page 11 we outline how we're preparing. If you're affected, please do get in touch and let us help you too - our contact details are on the back page.

Whether you donate, volunteer or help in other ways - thank you for being a vital part of our team.



Henry Wilson MBE
– Projects Director

Cover: Sandra, our Foodbank Manager, and George, one of our volunteers, going to collect food donations.

Opposite page: Our friendly team of Community Outreach advisors (left to right, Justine, Philippa, Jo and Ann) help clients to get back on their feet.

"In March, we fed 53% more people (179% more children) than in March 2019!"



About REACH

REACH Community Projects is the first port of call for anyone in and around Haverhill who is facing debt, poverty or crisis.

We offer practical help in an emergency - food, utility payments and aid (through partnerships with other organisations such as Acts435). We also offer holistic help with the underlying issues, such as debt counselling and budgeting advice, help with accessing and applying for benefits, or writing job applications.

If our clients need additional support with, for example, mental health, bereavement, domestic abuse, housing, legal or tax issues, we can also connect them to others who can help.

Whatever their situation, we journey with our clients for as long as they need us, restoring their dignity, reviving their hope and empowering them to get back on their feet again.

You helped Dave* to believe in himself

Some clients face an enormous challenge to turn their lives around. Dave grew up in a children's home where he was abused. He turned to drugs, alcohol and crime and went through prison and serious mental health issues. But with your help and ours, he's now found a new, positive pattern for life.

We met Dave when he walked into the Resource Centre. He'd been given a room in Haverhill, after being homeless in another town. All he had was a methadone prescription and the clothes he stood up in. He didn't know anyone and he had no furniture. Could we help? We did.

He wasn't eating properly so we gave him food parcels, and he started dropping in regularly just for company.

"REACH gave me more than food and practical help – they gave me the opportunity to meet other people, to volunteer."

We introduced him to a mental health worker who really helped him. We invited him to volunteer at the food bank. When his uncle died, we found him suitable clothes to wear to the funeral.

Dave went on to successfully complete rehab. He's been clean for nearly two years and now mentors others trying to beat addiction. He met Denise, they got a home together in Norfolk and he's looking for a job.

Dave says, "REACH gave me more than food and practical help – they gave me the opportunity to meet other people, to volunteer. It gave me a purpose, some kind of normality. I was a suicidal wreck but they believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. For years I hated myself, but now I am alright with being me."



You made a hard time easier for Jane* and her children

The economic impacts of Covid-19 restrictions have changed the circumstances of thousands, including Jane, who never thought she would need to ask a charity for help.

For years, Jane had managed to juggle running a successful business with being a single parent to three children. But when lockdown came, government restrictions meant she was no longer able to continue her work, and her income dried up overnight.

All Jane had to live on was a bit of child benefit. She swiftly applied for Universal Credit – but never having been on it before, she was unaware that it might take up to five weeks before she would receive a payment.

Meantime, she was watching the bank balance rapidly dwindle, until she no longer had enough money left to buy food.

By the second week in April Jane had run out of options and didn't know what else she could do. Through doing a bit of research, she discovered REACH and got in touch with us for help.

We delivered a large food box to her, along with some Easter eggs. It was all the help she needed, just to plug the gap before her first Universal Credit payment, but she was so grateful.

"Wow, thank you so much...This has removed a huge worry from my mind."

"Wow, thank you so much...This has removed a huge worry from my mind. I am overwhelmed and emotional by what generosity we have received.

"My family are amazed too. We are super happy to have Easter eggs; I'm crying emotional tears. Thank you very, very much."

Sign up to get more good news stories and updates at www.reachhaverhill.org.uk/subscribe



*N.B. Client names, photos and minor story details changed to protect their privacy.

How you helped to change lives

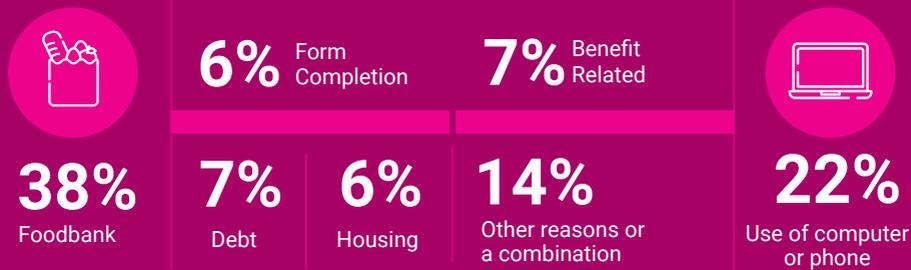
July 2019 - June 2020

*Versus July 2018- June 2019. The Resource Centre closed from mid-March 2020 and we moved to a delivery service, hence the decrease in Resource Centre visits and increase in home visits against the previous year.

Resource Centre



Main reason for visit



REACH in the Community mobile outreach service



Main reason for visit



Foodbank



Client Aid (via Acts435)



REACH Money Advice



You helped Clare* to rebuild her life

Many REACH clients are single parents trying to bring up kids on their own. Clare split from her husband after his behaviour became unbearable. He had always paid the rent, and she and her four children struggled to manage on their own. Soon, she was deep in debt.

Clare says, "I racked up a big bill on my catalogue. I owed money to my husband's dad for my car, I was behind on my rent. I had come to a point where I got stuck I just didn't know what to do.

"I lost loads of weight and ended up in hospital. The day after I came home, my daughter was in a serious car accident where one boy had to be cut out of the car. That hit all of us badly.

"I was suicidal. I planned for the kids to go to their dads and started buying tablets to overdose on. I was in a really dark place.

"But I phoned REACH for help. They brought me food parcels. I got help with my depression. We went through everything that I owed, what I was paying out and what money was coming in.

We did a debt relief order to write everything off, and sorted out my budget. I'm in control of our money now and my kids are happier because their mum is happier. I feel much more positive about the future."



"I want to thank REACH and all their supporters for helping me to find myself again, to rediscover hope."

You helped Sandra – now she helps others

We aim to revive our clients' hope and help them achieve their potential. Sandra has certainly found a new lease of life since she was a REACH client a few years ago. Today, she runs our foodbank!

When Sandra's marriage ended ten years ago, she felt frightened and vulnerable – looking after herself and four boys was a huge personal and financial pressure. She came to the REACH Resource Centre for a food box. The support and kindness she received moved her to tears.

Sandra took a full-time art degree, planning to go into teaching. But she couldn't find work that would fit around her family and pay enough to live on. So she decided to volunteer with REACH.

She says, "Volunteering and being part of a great team really helped to rebuild my self-confidence and sense of identity (which can sometimes get a bit lost when you have four boys to look after!)"

In 2019, Sandra became our Foodbank Manager.

She says, "This role is so 'me' - REACH volunteers are all ages, from all walks of life and there's such a wonderful community spirit! I particularly love helping the younger ones to discover the best in themselves and learn new skills. And I've got lots of ideas on helping young people avoid poverty too – I want them to learn about budgeting, and to use my skills as a former chef to teach them how to cook tasty, healthy meals using ingredients from a food box."

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You helped George become a star volunteer

We are blessed with over 117 regular volunteers who between them give more than 7,000 hours of their time a year. Covid-19 lockdown excepted, we try to offer volunteering opportunities to everyone, young or old, able bodied or with disabilities.

George is one of our volunteers who has some learning difficulties. He started volunteering for us in March 2018. At the time, he was still at the Priors School in Bury St Edmunds and was carrying out his Silver award for the Duke of Edinburgh scheme.

Once he completed his award, he carried on volunteering with us. And we're delighted that he's now become our first supported intern in partnership with West Suffolk College!

George says, "I came to the foodbank when it was in the other place. It was a lot further to walk. It's not hard work, there's no pressure, I like to come down twice a week if I can. I like packing the boxes and sorting out the food but best of all, I like going out in the van with Sandra. Sandra is helpful and funny and tells me jokes."

"It's not hard work, there's no pressure, I like to come down twice a week if I can."



Future plans

In the coming months, as the effects of Covid-19 restrictions hit the economy, we're preparing to face what could be our biggest challenge yet...

Furlough payments are being phased out, and initiatives that have been such a lifeline to so many - school meal vouchers, payment holidays and suspension of evictions - are ending. In their wake, unemployment and debt are likely to bring misery to many thousands of people from all walks of life. We're expanding our team in readiness to help them in every way we can.

But some people, especially those struggling to accept a change in circumstances, may initially be reluctant to contact us.

So we're also setting up online self-help guidance, budgeting tools, videos and webinars for them to use - but visitors will be able to ask our staff for advice at any point via a live webchat feature. In essence, it's a virtual hand-holding service which will help us to help more people, and support clients who would rather stay anonymous.

We won't be able to resume home visits for a while, so we're looking at using the Resource Centre for socially-distanced face to face debt appointments. Given that 22% of Resource Centre visitors last year wanted to use the computers and phone, we're also considering how we can safely set up part of the Resource Centre for this specific purpose.

Longer term, we're exploring how to help more people than ever to rise above poverty and debt - or, even better, evade it in the first place. Ideas include budgeting courses aimed at teaching adults and children about the pitfalls of debt and how to avoid it; pushing for better local mental health provision (poverty, debt and mental health issues often go hand in hand); setting up more village based 'hubs'; and, given that high rents tip so many into debt, finding new ways to help with housing.

We hope you'll continue to journey with us as we seek to offer ever more effective help to people threatened by poverty and crisis, helping them to get their lives back on track.

Make a gift – give someone a hand up!

Right now, someone in our community has lost all hope in the face of poverty or debt. Your donation will give them the gift of hope and help. It could make today the day they'll forever remember as being a real turning point in their lives.

www.reachhaverhill.org.uk/donate

Keep up with the latest news and stories!

Make sure you don't miss out on latest developments, opportunities to help and stories of how your support is helping people facing poverty, debt and crisis to rebuild their lives – sign up to get updates at www.reachhaverhill.org.uk/subscribe



Thank you to our funders!

We are very grateful to all those who funded us, including:



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