

PE1571/C

The First Base Agency

6 Buccleuch St

Dumfries

DG1 2AH

Scottish Charity No : SC 033690

'Helping the community to take care of itself'

8 October 2015

A SUBMISSION TO PETITION PE1571 (Food Bank Funding)

BACKGROUND

The First Base Agency is a small independent charity based in Dumfries. We have been issuing emergency food parcels for almost 13 years. From 2003 to 2010, we handed out an average of 1200 food parcels per annum. Since the Welfare Reforms, demand for food parcels has risen sharply and over the last 12 months we have handed out just over 5000 emergency food parcels.

We issue three types of food parcels, all of which contain enough food of three and a half days

- A 'Cooking' food parcel for clients who have at least a microwave to heat food with.
- A 'Non Cooking' food parcel for clients with no power.
- Family food parcels which are made up according to the size of the family and the age of the children.
- We also supply dog food, cat food, basic toiletries, sanitary ware and nappies.

The first time any given client requests emergency food, we always give them a food parcel whilst at the same time signposting them to appropriate support agencies who can help them. After their first visit, we require clients to be referred by one of the twenty local agencies who direct their clients to us.

We do NOT operate any kind of quota system.. Our policy is to issue emergency food for as long as emergency food is required.

Over the last two years we have established a series of satellite collection points in a number of towns across the region. These are either charities or local libraries.

75% of our food parcels are collected from our main base in Dumfries. 25% are collected from our satellite collections points.

FUNDING

The non food costs of running our emergency food project are about £40,000 per annum – rent, wages, office costs, utilities, professional fees, volunteer costs, and bags and boxes. At current levels of demand, this represents a cost of about £8 per food parcel issued.

The annual cost of the food that we hand out is £50,000 – an average of £10 per food parcel. We are spending an average of £5000 on bought in food. The balance - £45,000 – is donated by the local community.

We receive £4000 per annum from the local council and we have recently had an £86,000 award from the Big Lottery (sadly all used up now). This kind of large award is very unusual indeed. Normally we are involved in a constant regime of fund raising and the majority of sums we receive are less than £1000.

It is very rare indeed that we have funds in place for more than six months of running. Our position is always precarious and over 13 years we have hardly ever been able to build up any reserves.

This situation is stressful for staff, volunteers and clients. We recently had to address a £15,000 funding shortfall for this financial year. Obviously we had to raise public awareness of this and the news caused huge concerns for many of our food parcel clients.

OUR VIEW.

Foodbanks are now an integral part of the Welfare State. We receive many referrals from the staff of the Job Centre, the Homeless Department, the NHS and the Social Services. These state employees always tell us that their departments no longer have any emergency funding to help their most vulnerable clients in times of dire need.

Foodbanks are now the final safety net of the Welfare State. This situation is often described in rather disparaging terms – we hear a lot of statements about the ‘national disgrace’ of foodbanks. We vehemently disagree with this sentiment. It is indeed a disgrace that so many citizens of Scotland require emergency food relief in 2015.

Foodbanks themselves are certainly NOT a disgrace. Instead they are a community led response to a growing problem. Good foodbanks offer a perfect conduit for those in the community with means to help those without means. We believe that for every person in any Scottish community who lacks a tin of beans to eat for their dinner, there is a member of the same community who is happy to donate a tine of beans. Our job is all about linking Person A with Person B. A good Foodbank must ensure that there are many easily accessible donation points for food and equally accessible access to emergency food for those who need it.

Good foodbanks are extraordinarily cost effective and efficient. We only have 2 paid members of staff – the majority of the work of collecting and delivering donated food is carried out by 50 unpaid volunteers. Were a local council to undertake to issue 5000 emergency food parcels per annum, the cost would probably be at least 5 times more than our costs. The community is very much willing and able to help those in need. Foodbanks enable communities to achieve this.

HOW MIGHT THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT HELP?

Firstly, we feel it is important that the Scottish Government acknowledges that foodbanks are indeed a vital part of the Welfare State and will be so for the foreseeable future. It is illogical and unfair not to provide foodbanks with any regular, direct funding when hundreds of millions are spent on other elements of the Welfare State – Social work, NHS etc.

SO HOW COULD HELP BE PROVIDED IN A SIMPLE, MANAGEABLE AND INEXPENSIVE WAY.

We feel this could be achieved very simply.

1. The Scottish Government recruits one full time staff member to co-ordinate its direct Foodbank support.
2. The staff member personally visits the 60 or so main foodbanks in Scotland to confirm they are viable operations which provide good service to their communities. Any Foodbank which meets a basic set of requirements is added to a national register as an ‘Approved Foodbank’.
3. Approved Foodbanks would be able to raise a monthly invoice for £8 for every emergency food parcel they have issued and forward these invoices to a Scottish Government accounts department. This sum would represent the running costs – rent, wages, power etc. In our view, a well run Foodbank should be able to secure the vast majority of the food it needs from the local community. This involves work – we speak to many community groups, church congregations, offices, schools and local food businesses. We also work closely with the local media who are hugely supportive. If a Foodbank puts in this work, there is no reason why they should have to buy in significant amounts of food. Attracting funding for basic running costs is much harder. Many funders shy away from basic running costs and are forever choosing only to fund new projects.
4. If the economic situation in Scotland were to improve, the invoices from the ‘Approved’ foodbanks would become smaller as demand drops. The key thing for the foodbanks is that these monthly invoices would give us a regular income which could be relied on. This would mean all approved foodbanks could focus all of their efforts on providing excellent service and securing food supplies from the local community.
5. The sixty main foodbanks in Scotland will hand out approximately 200,000 emergency food parcels per annum. Were these parcels to generate invoices of £8 each, this would mean an annual cost of £1.6 million. That does not seem to be

such a large sum when it is compared with the costs of other areas of the Welfare State. Such an arrangement would have a profoundly beneficial effect for foodbanks. It would give us certainty, stability and security. This seems an ideal area for the Scottish Government to once again lead the way in the UK.

I very much hope that these proposals will be considered and I would be more than happy to come along to the Parliament at any time to answer any questions in person.

Mark Frankland
Manager
The First Base Agency