

## Helensburgh & Lomond Foodbank – Update from the Foodbank - January 2021

The Helensburgh & Lomond Foodbank continues to provide support to those in our community who find themselves short of money to buy food. We are recognised by Scottish Government Guidelines as an essential service and have remained open throughout the Covid Pandemic offering a Give and Go Foodbank Service. Due to Covid restrictions we had to redesign our service and are no longer able to offer a Café style service or face to face advice services for Foodbank users. We now make up the food bags in advance and have them ready for pick up by those who attend, a one-way walk-through service is in operation. Advice leaflets are included in the bag to signpost people to other who can help. No referral or appointment is required and everyone who comes receives a bag of food appropriate to the size of their family. The drop-in service is open on a Monday and Friday from 10.00am until 12.00 and on a Thursday evening from 6pm until 8pm at the Helensburgh Community Hub (Red Cross Hall). Also, on at the Howie Pavillion in Rosneath on a Wednesday afternoon from 1pm until 3pm.

Our volunteers ensure all Covid precautions are taken to keep themselves and those who attend safe. We must operate with fewer volunteers to reduce the risk of transmission of Covid and are grateful to the small team of volunteers who have worked so willingly to make sure that no one in our community needs to go hungry during these troubled times. We would like to thank all those who have supported the foodbank to allow us to be there for all those who come to us. Thanks to the generosity of the local community, we have sufficient non-perishable food items in stock to keep us going for the next few months. We have been astonished at the level of support given to the foodbank in both food and cash donations. We have increased the amount of food we offer those who attend, increasing the food bags to a full one-week supply of food and we now include fresh produce such as cheese, eggs, fresh fruit and vegetables which we purchase from local retailers. The Gingerbread Man very kindly supplies fresh bread from his bakehouse for every session, this is much appreciated. A recent analysis of the contents of our basic foodbag by a student dietician at the University of Glasgow confirmed it meets nutritional standards and energy requirements providing a well-balanced diet.

During November we issued **200** bags each containing a 1-week supply of food to those who attended our service at Helensburgh Community Hub (Red Cross Hall) and Howie Pavillion, Rosneath. In December this increased to **245**. In addition to the weekly bag, we provided a full Christmas Dinner and a full New Year's Day lunch the following week. There were 140 special festive food bags issued in December. A £20 fuel allowance was given to all along with their festive food bag as we know that many must choose between heating or eating. The increased cost of both fuel and food during winter presents a real challenge for those on low incomes and those who rely and benefits to feed themselves and their families. This is especially the case when students and school children and parents are working from home when additional fuel costs result from more hours of heating and lighting being required.

Helensburgh & Lomond Foodbank are part of Argyll & Bute Community Food Forum who in collaboration with Argyll & Bute Council, Alienergy and Bute Advice Centre are offering telephone access to a Welfare Rights and Energy advisor. This will help those who are eligible to access the new Flexible Food Fund and where required assistance with benefit appeals or help to access the Scottish Welfare Grant Fund or low-cost energy supplies. A single telephone call will link the person to a range of services while usual sources of support are closed or more difficult to access. As more people find themselves on lower incomes they may be entitled to benefits or need help to negotiate the Universal Credit process and Benefits System. We are pleased to be able to support this initiative which we hope will help more people to access their entitlement. We have also collaborated to produce a leaflet on "Worrying about Money" which signposts those who attend to services which will help to increase their income to allow them to buy food. These leaflets are included with the Foodbags to help to make up for the lack of face-to-face advice at the Foodbank during this time.

The Foodbank is also putting posters out to inform the wider community of where and when they can access the Foodbank as we anticipate that there will be an increase in demand, and many may not be aware of how to access us.

We urge anyone who finds themselves short of food or short of money to buy food to come to the Foodbank we have plenty of food available for all who attend. We are a voluntary organisation run entirely by volunteers, no referral or appointment is required. Just turn up during our opening times and we will be pleased to help, we are a friendly and confidential service we can offer you food and leaflets to signpost you to others who can help you with other needs.