

FRESH FOOD REPORT

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THE OFFER

Black Country Foodbank offered our 26 foodbanks and local community groups the opportunity to apply for up to £500 worth of funding to purchase fresh food items. The fresh food could be given out alongside food parcels or could be utilised as part of food related projects, e.g. cookery or plot to plate. The Fresh Food Micro Grants supported individuals and families experiencing financial hardship, food insecurity, and other complex personal challenges.

WHY

Black Country Foodbank wanted to help improve access to fresh food for vulnerable people accessing our foodbanks and local community projects. We know that through food insecurity, people are often forced to eat low quality food or not enough food, leading to malnutrition.

We know that obesity is as much a sign of poverty as being underweight. Malnutrition, hunger and overweight doesn't just affect people's physical health, but also their life-chances, self-confidence and mental well-being.

Access to free fresh food can play a role in helping to reduce some of the health inequalities faced by vulnerable people accessing our foodbanks and local community projects.

CRITERIA

Beneficiaries of the project had to be people experiencing financial hardship within the Black Country (Dudley, Sandwell, Walsall or Wolverhampton areas). Funds could only be spent on purchasing fresh food items (not ambient). We were unable to fund additional project costs such as venue hire, staffing costs etc. We were able to fund seeds and compost to grow fresh food. Funds had to be spent within 6 months of receipt.



"I have a long-term health condition, which means I need to take care of myself. I can't live off tinned food forever, so I come to Kingswinford; they have fresh food."

GRANT DISTRIBUTION

A total of **31 micro grants** were awarded to **28 different** food banks, groups and organisations.

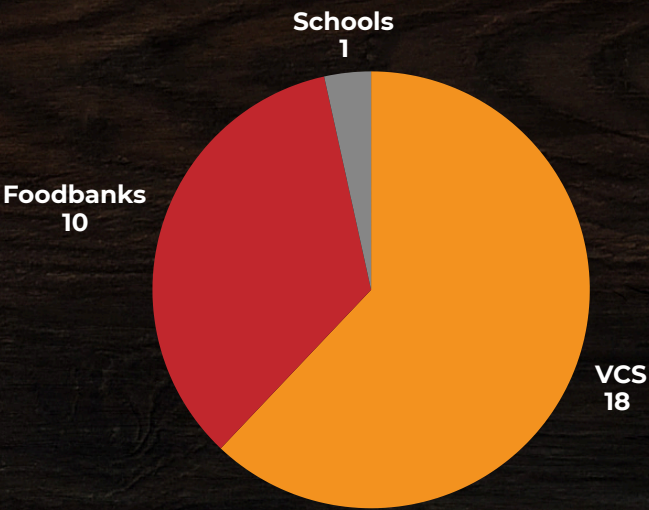
*3 have received a second micro grant. 1 wishes to remain anonymous.



The total grant award was **£14,991**

Generation Impact	Creart	High Oak Youth & Community	Home Start Dudley	Wordsley School	Kingswinford Foodbank	Netherton Foodbank
Apni Zaroorat Community Association	Amblecote Community Church	Welcome Group	Tynning's Lane Church	EWA Foodbank	Fountain of Life Foodbank	Refresh Foodbank
YMCA	Just Straight Talk	Cadrene	Hot House	Life Central Foodbank	Restore Foodbank	South Street Foodbank
DCFA	Team Pumpkin Boxing	Connect Project	Phase Trust	Take a break Foodbank	Replenish Foodbank	

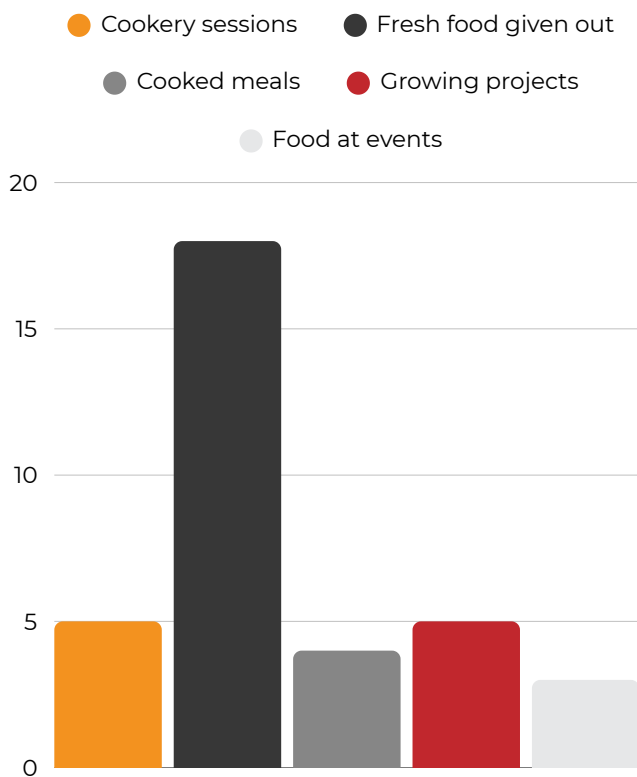
“For some children that come here, it’s the only fresh food they have access to.”



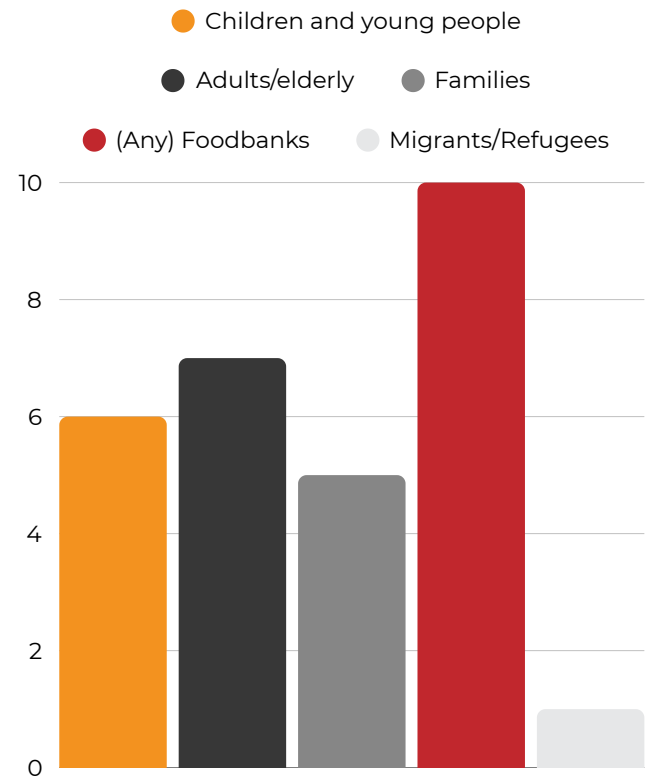
GRANT DISTRIBUTION

The grants have been utilised in various ways to support children, young people, adults and families experiencing financial hardship:

How the grants have been utilised:



Groups supported by grant recipient:



"I cannot thank you enough, I can now have something to eat. You have really helped me, and I was in bits but I will feel better now. Thank you"

KEY THEMES AND IMPACT

All grant recipients were required to provide BCFB with feedback on:

- **Who received support**
- **The reasons why support was required**
- **How it impacted the people they support**

Feedback can be summarised under the following themes:

Financial Hardship and Vulnerability

- Energy bills, low income, and debt were common reasons for food insecurity.
- Most recipients were unemployed or unable to work due to health conditions.
- Recent life crises like bereavement, relationship breakdown, and housing moves contributed to instability.
- Some individuals were facing benefits sanctions, waiting periods, or had no access to public funds.

Groups Supported included

- Parents with young children (some home-schooling or single parents)
- People with disabilities or mental health issues
- Those with limited or no cooking facilities (e.g., using air fryers, broken cookers)
- Young people transitioning to independent living
- Refugees, migrants, and people with dietary needs (e.g., Halal, gluten-free)

Social and Emotional Impact

- Recipients expressed deep gratitude, often stating they didn't know how they would manage otherwise.
- Dignity and pride were significant themes; many found it difficult to ask for help but appreciated the support.
- The experience often boosted confidence, reduced isolation, and provided mental health relief.

Health & Wellbeing Impact

- In some cases, healthy hot meals were provided featuring meat, vegetables, and fruit.
- Prioritised individuals most affected by the cost-of-living crisis.
- Some projects brought people together around food which promoted mental wellbeing, community integration, and interfaith friendships.
- Participants appreciated the opportunity to socialise, build self-esteem, and reduce isolation.

Case Study: Fresh Produce Hampers to Families in Need Tyning's Lane Church (Walsall)

This initiative provided 10 families with large, fresh produce hampers—items that are often out of reach due to high costs. These hampers offered a healthier alternative to low-cost frozen food and were hand-delivered to families known to be in need within our community.

Background

Rising food prices have made it increasingly difficult for many families to access fresh and nutritious food. Many rely on cheaper, processed options simply because they are more affordable. Recognizing this need, we aimed to:

- Increase access to fresh produce.
- Reduce food-related financial pressure.
- Offer dignity through thoughtful, personal delivery.

Action Taken

We sourced high-quality fresh produce, prepared large hampers with a variety of fruit and vegetables, and personally delivered the hampers to the homes of 10 selected families.

Family Reactions

The response from families was overwhelmingly positive. Many expressed surprise and gratitude for the type and quality of food included. Here are a couple of direct quotes:

“Hiya lovely, was nice to see you today. And the food hamper was amazing.”

“This is incredible. I can’t thank you enough at this time of need for you to be able to sort this for our family. It’s took such a pressure off us. I’m so grateful.”

“This has been a God send I truly cant thank you enough”

“Honesty this is incredible I cant thank you enough for this is just amazing”



Impact

- Provided relief during a financially stressful time.
- Enabled families to enjoy food they otherwise couldn’t afford.
- Strengthened community trust and connections through personal outreach.

Conclusion

This small but powerful initiative has had a significant impact on the lives of 10 families. By offering fresh, nutritious food directly to those who need it, we helped lift some of the burden and showed that their needs matter.

Case Study: Nourish and Nurture Cookery workshops at Harry's Community Coffee Shop

"We know that access to fresh food is extremely limited for many of our service users and customers. In addition, many lack the knowledge, skills, and inspiration to prepare healthy, nutritious meals from scratch. This project was designed to act as a change agent—empowering participants with the tools and confidence to make healthier food choices, improve their wellbeing, and ultimately enhance their life chances."

A total of £500 was allocated for purchasing fresh ingredients for cooking sessions and providing meal packs to participants, promoting long-term healthy eating habits.

The project involved 38 parents and children through weaning classes, cooking workshops, and pizza-making sessions, fostering social connections and skills development among participants.

Participants reported increased confidence in cooking, enhanced social interactions, and continued use of recipes at home, indicating a successful impact on their lives and community ties.

"It's wonderful to watch my children being creative making pizza and it makes a change to see them without there device in hand.as during the Holidays everything to too expensive to take my children to, especially when I have more than one child. So they spend most days on their devices."

"I feel I have learnt so much from the sessions and feel more confident with feeding my baby different foods and textures. I was surprised at the foods like honey that can't be given to babies under 12 months old, so I am thankful for this information."



Case Study: Provision of fresh food to people supported by Just Straight Talk

This initiative provided 15 families and/or individuals with fresh food shops. Here are a couple of examples where alias's have been used to protect confidentiality:

Steve...

Steve hadn't eaten for 4 days due to lending £400 off a Loan Shark and needing to pay £1200 back all in one go. Steve needed this money to get go Cumbria to see his sick father who is living in a care home. Steve is now living in poverty due to this payment. Steve also can only eat a gluten free diet which also costs him more money. I completed a basic food shop in Asda and Steve's feedback was "I cannot thank you enough, I can now have something to eat. You have really helped me, and I was in bits but I will feel better now. Thank you."

Naseem...

Naseem currently claims universal credit and PIP due to her poor mental health. Naseem is in £16,500 worth of debt and most of her money is going towards paying these debts off. Naseem's landlord has also recently put her rent up to £900 per month and she is struggles financially, I have supported Naseem to sign up to her local council housing list to seek cheaper accommodation. Today I have completed a fresh food shop purchasing Halal meat as this can be quite expensive.



LEARNING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Learning:

- Fresh food micro grants have been easy to administer amongst BCFBs network of food banks and trusted partner projects, compared to the logistical challenges BCFB would encounter if we decided to stock and distribute fresh food.
- The most popular items purchased have been fruit and vegetables.
- A couple of food banks have been purchasing eggs as they are easy to store, nutritious and versatile.
- The grants have enabled people facing financial hardship to have access to free fresh food via 28 different agencies and food banks across the Black Country.
- The grants have been utilised in a variety of different projects meaning that it's been possible to reach a wide demographic in terms of age and ethnicity.
- Feedback from projects has stated that the fresh food has impacted positively on people's social and emotional state, in addition to their physical health and wellbeing.
- Growing projects have been popular with partners wanting to help people learn to be able to feed themselves.
- Grants have enabled some agencies to carry out personalised fresh food shops for people they support who find themselves in a crisis, helping to meet cultural and dietary requirements.
- Some people travel to food banks who distribute fresh food as it helps them to better manage their long term health conditions, even if the food bank is further away.
- Some agencies and community groups have been able to support people and families who would not otherwise attend a food bank or would be too fearful to ask for help.
- Food banks and partner agencies have all expressed gratitude, sharing how easy the grant application process was and that it has made a positive difference to the people they support.

Recommendations:

- Growing projects are best launched in Spring time and some partner projects may benefit from peer learning to enable them to boost crop production.
- Some food banks were slow to come on board and not all have. We need to further understand the reasons for this to see if they could be supported to distribute fresh food in the future.
- Explore how fresh food grants could compliment the distribution of slow cookers to be purchased via Household Support Funding.
- Continue to explore further collaborations involving fresh food, e.g. community food gardens and cookery workshops.
- Continue to roll out fresh food grants on a continual basis whilst funds allow, subject to receiving feedback from the grant recipient.