

Aston Nechells Foodbank Covid-19 lockdown update

The purpose of this appendix is to provide a snapshot of the last few weeks that have seen major changes in the Foodbank associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and in order to explain and indeed appreciate the huge contributions made by donors and volunteers.

Temporary Closure of Ward End Distribution

Unfortunately many of our key volunteers at Ward End have had to stop and we have decided to close that distribution centre with immediate effect and concentrate resources at the Nechells (Monday) and Aston (Friday) distribution sessions. Ward End will restart when we have the resources to do so.

We are not alone in this, our experience is replicated at the other Trussel Trust foodbanks in the City with many reducing the number of distribution sessions and one (B30) changing to home delivery.

Volunteer Impact

The Foodbank is 100% volunteer run and is going through significant changes at this time, namely 50% of our volunteers fall within the group that government has decreed have to self-isolate, therefore we found ourselves with a shortage. Fortunately a number of new volunteers have stepped forward, generally people unable to work because their firm has temporarily shut down, meaning our running sessions remain well staffed for the time being.

Protecting Volunteers

The health of our volunteers is very important to us and we wish to ensure they have the adequate resources to carry out their roles. Therefore we have supplied hand gel and soap that is being well used. We are also enforcing social distancing which is assisted by both distribution centres having plenty of space outside for queuing.

Aston & Nechells Operational Changes

The Nechells (Mondays 12-2 30pm) and Aston (Fridays 12 30-2 30pm) sessions do remain open however we have made necessary changes to our function in order to comply with government advice.

On arrival voucher holders are handed a numbered ticket whereby to comply with social distancing requirements voucher holders are being asked to queue outside and are only entering the building one at a time for voucher validation when their number is called. The process has been speeded up by pre-packaging food parcels ready to go for the majority of our clients needs.



Photo - Aileen Davis manning the Aston front desk



Regrettably but not unexpectedly demand has increased. To cope the referral system has been adjusted. The principle remains that a voucher is required from one of our 160 partner agencies. For some time the busiest advice agencies have used a computerised referral system; this has been adapted slightly to make it paperless. Generally agency staff are working remotely via the telephone and internet so when the voucher is digitally completed a code is issued instead of a paper voucher and an email sent to the foodbank by the existing 'e-referral' system. When the client presents at the foodbank with a code this is verified quickly via the internet.

Photo left. Happy client at the front of the queue with red voucher and shopping bag about to enter the Aston Salvation Army Centre

Food Shortages

With many of our main donation channels such as churches, mosques and schools closed, very little food is being donated. This situation is compounded by the cancellation of big collection at the end of season

Aston Villa home game, our annual Grand Central (Network Rail) drive and our food collection at Tesco in Aston Lane. Our permanent Collection Points do remain open and fruitful at Tesco's in Aston Lane and Sainsbury at Mere Green. But food stocks are quickly becoming exhausted and we need roughly £3,000 per month to make up the gap by purchasing food.

Food Home Delivery

A significant number of people in home isolation have been contacting the Foodbank asking about home deliveries. We have been in touch with the emergency planners in the City and understand they will be setting up a centre for dealing with home deliveries.

In addition the Trussell Trust B30 foodbank is offering home deliveries and so are a number of the independent (not Trussell Trust) foodbanks. Therefore at this present time we are not offering home delivery and will continue to direct client to other support outlets.

Some Good News

We have been overwhelmed by the willingness of unexpected sources to support us during this trying time. We have received a number of cash and bulk food donations and we want to state on record our sincere appreciation of these gifts. In time we can share the growing list of anecdotes and stories of generosity but now we want to touch on a few below.

A number of urgent appeals have been issued and during the week commencing 30th March we received 4 large donations from

- Grantham Yorke Charity - £2000
- Crucial Sauces Ltd (a Nechells firm) - £2000
- ASDA emergency money via Trussell Trust - £1,500
- Heart of England - £1,500.

In addition we have managed to acquire food from the now closed B30 foodbank and collected a car load of Easter chocolate treats from Mondelez (Cadbury).

Our local community have been in touch to offer support also, for example Salts Medical arranged for their van with a driver to call at a local warehouse and purchase some food lines that the warehouse was short of.

Our Trustee Kerry Lenihan has mounted a Facebook and Twitter campaign asking for cash donations via the 'Just Giving' link <https://www.justgiving.com/cando413> These donations can be gift aided enabling the government to help. This is being well used and hopefully that will continue.



Photo – Martin Piovesana of MB Plumbing admiring the huge Easter donation from Cadbury

Immediate Needs

We are very much determined to stay open as long as possible, to do so we have the following immediate needs:

Food – Generally the long life goods we are short of are those that are being rationed by supermarkets. If you do not need any of those when doing your shop please use your allowance and buy some and donate to the foodbank. As time moves forward restrictions are being loosened so if possible we'd really appreciate any spare goods.

Money – Due to a shortage in food donations we require cash funds to purchase missing lines. Our website has a giving link <https://www.justgiving.com/cando413> which is very easy to use. There is also the opportunity for the government to contribute if you are able to use gift aid.



Photo – Happy Volunteers ready to open the Aston Salvation Army Centre last Friday 3 April

N Cripps
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