

Prudhoe Town Council

By Email

4th September 2020

Dear Sarah

Outcome from our 'Feeding Prudhoe and Mickley Initiative'

Firstly, I would like to thank Prudhoe Town Council for supporting our program this year with funding. This is the first time that any such large scale program has been implemented in our town and so it was somewhat of a learning process for us at the Friends of Eastwoods Park and Miners Lamp to see what worked and what didn't.

Although, given our experience during lockdown of providing and delivering 1100 meals to elderly and vulnerable people across Prudhoe and Mickley had given us some experience of the challenges of large scale meal services. The benefit this time was that we were able to spread this over a longer period instead of just one day per week.

I think it was also a great way to ensure that whilst we support our elderly residents during lockdown, we could now support our younger residents during the school summer break.

We started our program on Sunday 26th July and this ran weekdays through to Friday 4th September. We decided to continue it to 4th September as not all schools returned on Wednesday 2nd September.

During this period we have supported 98 families with 997 meals. The actual figure is much higher than this and we estimate it to be around 1200 meals, as children whose families had not booked via our booking page were provided meals on an ad hoc basis.

Meals were varied and included both a hot food element, drink and snack, we also provided a drinks dispenser with soft drinks available 7 days per week for free for children.

Of the 98 families we provided meals for;
66% were from West Wylam Ward
14% from Prudhoe Hall Ward
8% from Prudhoe West & Halfway Ward
5% each from Castle & Eltringham and Castlefields and Low Prudhoe
2% from Mickley Ward



Meals were provided for children up to age 16, and an even spread was seen across age ranges from under 5's, 5 to 9yr old, 10 to 13 year olds and significantly less provided to 13yr to 16yr olds.

Of the 98 families we have supported only 40% are currently in receipt of free school meals, 50% of families reporting that they are currently suffering financial hardship.

A more detailed breakdown shows;

18% of families in receipt of free school meals reported they were suffering financial hardship compared to

54% of families who are not in receipt of free school meals, who reported they were suffering financial hardship

This is a worry difference, and we are aware from families feedback that the financial impact of the coronavirus pandemic is now having a significant affect on household finances, with some families suffering now complete loss of income from job losses. For example;

A 'new' family who approached us for support during lockdown, where previously able to just survive on 100% wages, with furlough this loss of 20% income resulted in them falling into debt and financial problems. We supported this family through our food bank during lockdown and most recently with our free meals. Unfortunately, as furlough continued, and income was to be reduced further to 60% the families main earners employer was unable to make up any additional salary due to loss of trade. They have now been made redundant and lost all household income.

Another family, who we have 'intermittently' supported through our food bank following the introduction of Universal Credit accessed our free meals and reported that they would not have been able to afford uniform for their children had it not been because of the free meals we were able to provide.

We were distressed to hear from a single mum who came to collect free meals for her children who our volunteers could see was in distress herself. When engaged she reported that she had only £1.50 left to last her two weeks. We encouraged her to take items from our pay as you feel market for free, and we then provided support through a food parcel from our food bank. This lady was a single mum, whose ex partner had reported her to social services for child neglect because of her financial situation, she was clearly in distress and we signposted her to the Northumberland Community Hub for advice to ensure she was receiving all benefits she was entitled too and for any other support.

Finding Balance

Whilst we have supported 98 families throughout the period. 27% reported that they were not in receipt of free school meals and were not suffering financial hardship.

You may ask why then were they accessing the free meal service?

We wanted to ensure that our service was not seen in any way as solely for those in receipt of free school meals or facing financial hardship. We felt it would encourage more people to access it by removing stigma attached to schemes like this, that is also why we

avoided using language such as 'holiday hunger'. We also wanted to ensure that anyone who needed our support could access it hence providing meals on an ad hoc basis.

We feel this was a success given the figures above showing 54% of families facing financial hardship are not in receipt of free school meals. Compared to 18% of families in receipt of free school meals.

With the campaigning work by Marcus Rashford who saw HM Government extend the free school meal vouchers throughout the summer which eased financial hardship for many families. It did not remove it completely. As has been shown by our data, a much greater number are facing financial hardship who are unable to access government support such as free school meals.

I think it is also important to be mindful of the social and mental health benefits of schemes such as this and measure it against feedback we receive, as I have detailed above. The financial cost is small but the social and mental wellbeing of a single mother with only £1.50 to feed her two children for two weeks is immeasurable.

Again I would like to thank Prudhoe Town Council for supporting this program and hope they will support future programs as we are able to develop them in the future.

Kind regards

Russ Greig

Russell Greig
Secretary and Project Manager
Friends of Eastwoods Park
Miners Lamp Community Cafe and Hub