



**FOOD BANK REFLECTIONS —
TRANSITIONING FROM FOOD PARCELS TO FOOD VOUCHERS
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**



AFRIL Helping Hands Food Bank
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AFRIL'S REMIT

AFRIL exists to improve the lives of refugee, asylum seeking and vulnerable migrant families in Southeast London including victims of trafficking and gender-based violence through holistic support and community-based projects.

We are a small, grassroots charity supporting over 500 people a year to lift themselves out of poverty and rebuild their lives in the heart of our community. We meet crisis needs, deliver longer term flexible programmes to address the underlying problems that lead families to be in crisis, and deliver projects that improve health and wellbeing, and promote integration within the local community.

Projects include our Foodbank, Allotment of Refuge and wellbeing art group; Casework Advice and Advocacy; Immigration legal support, and Rainbow Club Saturday school

On first approaching AFRIL, 70% of families were on an extremely low income, with 28% in receipt of no income whatsoever, relying on charities or friends. 66% were without settled housing including temporary accommodation, sofa surfing or, increasingly, street homeless. Those with housing are often a whole family living in one room with no access to green space.

HELPING HANDS FOOD BANK

Run by staff and volunteers from AFRIL, and St Peter's Church, Lee, SE12 8HQ

Established in November 2017 as a 'traditional' food bank giving out pre-prepared food parcels, toiletries, fresh fruit and vegetables and nappies

In 2019 we had 25 members registered and funding to give out 20 parcels per week

During the pandemic, food parcel deliveries increased to 35 weekly

In August 2022 40 families were registered, some only coming fortnightly due to capacity

Felix Fareshare and Lee Greens (now Sutton Community Farm recipient

Since Sept 2022 we have moved to providing supermarket vouchers alongside fresh fruit and vegetables from Felix and our Allotment of Refuge. We still deliver traditional food parcels to a small number of housebound members (expectant or new mums or people with limited mobility)

THE CRISIS: AUGUST 2022

Supermarket delivery cancelled with less than 24 hours' notice

2 volunteers visited 6 supermarkets to get food parcel basics

No guarantee of weekly stock

Imminent volunteer and staff burnout

Week 2: supermarket vouchers given out with bags of fresh fruit and vegetables

Week 3: revisited the business model and budgets – remodelled the costings

Week 4: consulted with members to change the delivery model

REVISITED FOODBANK COSTS / GRANT FUNDS

Calculated the weekly cost to provide core food bags

Calculated the typical cost per food bag per week

Factored in weekly travel expenses to members @ £5 per adult

Factored in costs of supplying nappies and baby wipes per month to 16 families

Confirmed combined funding available (church and AFRIL)

Calculated cost of vouchers to replace core food parcels

Agreed all families to receive vouchers every collection

Devised new offer to all families



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Devised new model to assist all families every collection

CHALLENGES AND TOUGH DECISIONS



The business case dictated:

Move to fortnightly collections to redirect saved travel costs to vouchers

Move to bi-monthly nappy and baby toiletry deliveries to redirect savings to vouchers

Consultation with members:

Feedback – fairer everyone gets a little less, so everyone gets something every collection

“We know you are doing your best and we support you”

(currently spend £180 travel costs and £780 on vouchers per fortnightly collection)

Currently 36 families receive vouchers and 3 – 4 members receive food deliveries

THE NEW SUPERMARKET VOUCHER MODEL

SEPT 2023



Families received Aldi vouchers in £5 denominations (£10, £15, or £20 depending on number of adults and children per family)

Each family receives a bag of fresh fruit and vegetables and can choose from surplus fresh food from Felix, Lee Greens (Now Sutton Community Farm) and AFRIL allotment

We deliver nappies and baby wipes to parents that need

Adults receive travel expenses (£5 per visit)

Feb 2023 additional funding meant we increased vouchers by £5 per family per session:
£15, £20, £25.

LEARNING AND UNANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

Vouchers gave us stability, taking away much of the anxiety and stress out of delivering the foodbank for staff and volunteers at a time of crisis and challenge

Feedback from clients told us they much preferred the choice, dignity, flexibility and healthy options for fresh and culturally appropriate food that this gave them

helped us continue to support families to access their right to good quality, culturally appropriate food regularly

Brought some dignity back to being a member of a food group

Made the food bank more accessible to people who are street homeless or sofa-surfing

Better helped mums needing baby milk

Move to cash first offer

More time on alternate Saturdays for staff to focus on other food bank projects

CASE STUDY AND CLIENT QUOTE

In August 2023, Fatima contacted the foodbank in great distress. She was recently bereaved; now a single parent with her first baby aged 3 months and awaiting her asylum decision.

She had approached other foodbanks that were unable to provide baby milk. Fatima was unable to work and did not have money to buy enough milk or nappies for her baby. When asked how AFRIL could help her, she replied **"I just want to be able to buy milk for my baby, that is all."**

Fatima is now a regular foodbank member, and the supermarket vouchers she receives allow her to buy food for herself and milk for her baby. AFRIL also provides nappies and baby toiletries. She recently wrote a letter of thanks: "To AFRIL foodbank team members, you've been so kind, and it is much appreciated." Fatima and her daughter have been welcomed and 'adopted' by the other Nigerian mums at the foodbank.

Annual AFRIL survey 2022 client feedback on the food bank:

"I love the way you guys change the food items to voucher card and I think is the best way and people can get the things they want by themselves"