

# A helping hand in tough times

**T**O MARK the fifth anniversary of the IW Foodbank, I was issued with a challenge — to live on nothing but the emergency supplies they provide for three days.

I had no idea what to expect. Would I be walking away with a tin of beans and a pat on the shoulder wishing me luck? Would I be starving after three days?

For a number of IW people, this is the reality they face.

To date, the organisation has fed more than 21,500 people in crisis, including more than 8,000 children, with more than 200 tonnes of donated food.

For foodbank manager Hannah King the fifth anniversary is not something she wishes to celebrate.

“In an ideal world, we wouldn’t need to be here,” she said.

However, it is a chance to recognise the work of volunteers and the generosity of those who donate food.

“We are so thankful to everyone who donates food or finances to keep the charity running and to our amazing volunteers for their sustained support, which has enabled us to continue to help local people in crisis,” Hannah said.

“We are very fortunate to have 234 volunteers, all local people, who either work in the warehouse sorting food donations or help to run the foodbank distribution centres by engaging with clients, packing and distributing food.

“They are an absolute godsend and demonstrate foodbanks really are run by the community for the community.”

When I visited the IW Foodbank headquarters in Cowes, I found this to be true. The place was full of hard-working volunteers donating hours of their time to provide a service that is, unfortunately, essential to some Islanders.

And those weren’t the only volunteers, there are dozens more who run the seven distribution centres around the Island.

At the headquarters, in Love Lane, there is the office, the warehouse, sorting rooms and a



**JAMES WOOLVEN** learns more about the vital work of the IW Foodbank and its volunteers.

**BEHIND THE NEWS**

community cafe.

There is also a textiles recycling centre, where second-hand clothes are sorted, cleaned and sold for rock-bottom prices. Perhaps one of the most important things they sell there are school uniforms, which cost only 50p an item.

The textiles centre sells all kinds of items, even curtains and bedding. Hannah told me about a man who had been referred to them and didn’t have the money to buy a suit for his father’s funeral. They were able to provide him with one that had been donated to them.

“It really touched me that we were able to help him out,” said Hannah.

At the community cafe, tea, coffee and snacks are sold, all for discretionary donations, to help out those who can’t afford much. The foodbank even runs cooking classes, providing tips on healthy, cheap eating.

I was surprised by how much the foodbank has to offer and the efficiency with which it is run.

Everything that comes into the warehouse has to be checked to make sure there is no damage to the food or packaging and to ensure the food has not been opened and is still in date.

They cannot distribute anything that has passed its



CP reporter James Woolven collecting his box from foodbank manager Hannah King and, below, an application form showing the allowance for one person. 0616-J617859

**The foodbank is currently in need of:  
tinned potatoes, fruit squash, tinned sponge puddings,  
UHT milk, coffee, jam, tinned custard and fruit juice.  
For more information or to donate funds, visit the website,  
[www.isleofwight.foodbank.org.uk](http://www.isleofwight.foodbank.org.uk)**

use-by date or that has been opened.

The food is then sorted into sections and shelved in order of use-by date.

Everything that comes in and goes out is weighed and recorded, so the foodbank maintains accurate records. All this is done by volunteers.

When I was handed my three-day box, I was relieved to see there was plenty to keep me going. I would not be going hungry.

There was a box of Weetabix for my breakfasts, plus tea, coffee, sugar and UHT milk. There was a good selection of tinned food, a packet of pasta, a packet of rice, a multipack of Mini Cheddars and even a packet of biscuits.

The only thing I was short

of was the milk. I finished the last drop of my one-litre allowance on my Weetabix on the third day and had to go the rest of the day without milk for my tea — hardly the end of the world.

There was more than enough food to survive on but, inevitably, with no fresh fruit or veg, the meals were a little bland.

The foodbank distribution centres do not have the facilities to refrigerate or freeze food, so the only items they can distribute are long-life shelf items, such as tins, dried pasta, rice, cereals, long-life juices, squash and UHT milk.

With no herbs, spices, salt, pepper or any fresh ingredients, there was very little real cooking involved. Most meals involved slinging

the contents of different cans together and heating them up. For example, one evening I made a stew with a tin of meatballs, a tin of tomatoes, a tin of peas and a tin of potatoes. That made enough for dinner and for lunch the next day.

Each day I had Weetabix and UHT milk for breakfast with a cup of coffee. On my first day I had a microwavable pot of chilli con carne and a tin of fruit cocktail for lunch, and for dinner I had pasta with a jar of pasta sauce, a tin of tuna and a tin of sweetcorn.

On the second day, I had a tin of spaghetti hoops for lunch and a pack of Mini Cheddars. For dinner I had the meatball stew. On the last day, I had the stew leftovers for lunch and a tinned chicken and mushroom pie with a can of beans for dinner.

So I certainly didn’t eat badly. The foodbank does a good job of providing a more or less balanced selection of food and offers enough of it to get the recipient through a rough time.

The boxes are varied depending on the number of people eating from them and any dietary requirements they may have.

Foodbank boxes are provided through a voucher system. Vouchers are given out by front-line care professionals so the foodbank itself does not process applications for free food.

Vouchers can only be spent at the foodbank three times in any six-month period, unless there are

**Food Allocation Form: One Person**

Volunteer: Sarah	Voucher No:	Date:
<b>Item</b>	<b>Allocation</b>	<b>Amount given</b>
Coffee	Small	1
Tea	Small	1
Soup (can / packet)	2 Standard	2
Potatoes / Instant Mash	1 Standard	1
Tomatoes	2 Small	2
Fruit Juice / Squash	1 carton / bottle	1
Fruit	2 Small or 1 Standard	2
Vegetables	2 Small	2
Pasta Sauce	1 Small	1
Sponge Pudding	1 Standard	1
Rice Pudding	1 Standard	1
Custard	1 Standard	1
Baked Beans	4 Small	2 large
Spaghetti	1 Small	1
Fish	1 Small	1
Meat	2 Small	2
Or-Vegetarian	2 Small	
Sugar	500g	1
Milk (UHT/powder)	1 carton / pkt	1
Rice / Pasta	500g	1
Biscuits	1 pkt	1
Cereal	1 pkt	1
<b>Extras when available (suggested)</b>		
Jam		
Toiletries		
Pet food		
<b>Client signature to confirm food received:</b>		

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**The emergency supplies James lived on for three days.** 0616-J617855

exceptional circumstances.

This means people cannot live long term on the food the foodbank provides, it is only meant as emergency provisions for when an individual or family is going through a crisis period.

One of the most common reasons families use the foodbank, Hannah told me, is when money is tight but they have just enough to get by, pay day to pay day, until they are hit by an unexpected bill — the car breaks down, for example, or the boiler packs up.

When there is no breathing space to cushion family finances, the support the foodbank provides can be just enough to get them through a tough time.

“It’s so important a foodbank can be there when it feels like there’s nowhere else to turn,” Hannah said.

And that is exactly what the foodbank does.

It is worth remembering that most of us are just one pay day away from crisis.

If you wish to donate to the IW Foodbank, there are food bins in most Island supermarkets.

Right now, the foodbank needs tinned potatoes, fruit squash, tinned sponge puddings, UHT milk, coffee, jam, tinned custard and fruit juice. They have plenty of beans, tea, pasta and cereal.

For more information or to donate funds, visit their website, [www.isleofwight.foodbank.org.uk](http://www.isleofwight.foodbank.org.uk).