

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Each year I set my task to look back with a view to reporting to you good folks on our work, challenges, success and the need you all help us meet. This is year 17 for me and the saddest year yet as I look back on the broken lives, desperate single mums and dads and the total lack of hope for the future. Two weeks before Christmas we made a very sad achievement, we gave away 440 food parcels over 5 periods of 150 minutes. When my foodbank manager told me I quietly cried, so much need, so much heart ache and so much pain. The joyful bit apart from giving the food was to see parents faces light up when we gave them presents for their kids, all wrapped up and new. We also gave tins of chocolate, Christmas selection bits, and a gift for Mum and Dad. We also gave a little glimmer of hope in a world that had trapped them in poverty, destitution and foodbanks.

Alongside this we provided debt

and money advice, housing support, PIP claims and appeals, benefits appeals with considerable success, but even with a team of 7 advisors we had a 3 to 4 week waiting list. (We now have a team of 8 but still have a 2-week minimum waiting list). We're so grateful to Trussell Trust, Asda, The Weston Foundation and many others who are funding our team of 8 advisors, they are busy every day and I'm proud of them dealing with such sadness and hurt as people share their stories of need, they are amazing. My advice staff are continually up skilling their qualifications and this is mainly due to our 10-year partnership with Community Money Advice (CMA) who help us equip staff to deal with the growing need.

Much of our advice work has had to adapt during Covid with our centre open less days to protect our staff and volunteers, but they still work a full week including days at home.

Our clients' needs are met via phone, WhatsApp, email, text, internet etc. and this has been warmly welcomed as clients see their needs still being professionally met and outcomes positively changing their lives. We are looking at present to what extent we re-open the centre as clients and agencies are appreciating the way their needs are met. But the forefront of any change is the need of those who look to us for help.

The foodbank and the 5 satellite foodbanks have faced their most dramatic year, giving away over 130 tonnes of food to destitute people in food poverty. David our foodbank manager has worked hard with his team to make sure we have enough food to ensure everyone is fed. As need grows this is getting harder each week with bigger families and greater need, so many not having enough money to meet their living costs. A scenario this winter has been where families who have adults working cannot eat and heat their homes, some also face a trinity of need: eat, heat or wash clothes,

this is a challenge most days, parents go hungry so kids eat. We've stories of mums and dads crying as they are so hungry and lay in bed wondering where to get the next meal. This is a situation you may not have faced or may never face, but this past year those of us who are part of the network of Trussell Trust foodbanks gave away 2.1 million food parcels. **"IT'S WRONG"**.

This is WRONG in today's world. **"IT'S WRONG"** in every way that parents cry themselves to sleep due to hunger. **"IT'S WRONG"** that families sit on the sofa huddled up with blankets and coats to keep warm because they can't afford to have the heating on.

"IT'S WRONG" that our benefit system is not fit for purpose and individuals and families don't have the dignity of choosing where to shop and choosing their own food. While it's awesome that so many of you donate food and money so that we can give the food away in your name to so many. **"IT'S WRONG"**.

"IT'S WRONG" that wages don't allow families and single people to live with dignity and are able to

pay their way. Some sneak food into their home from the foodbank and open tins and packets of food whilst the rest of the family are out or occupied because they don't want them to see the brand or the date written on the packets and tins. In the foodbank we write dates on everything to make sure everything is used in order so as not to waste anything. Each person is grateful to have the food but, **"ITS WRONG"**.

"IT'S WRONG" that kids grow up being bullied at school because parents need to get clothes from our clothesbank, or the kids feel embarrassed when they're with friends who are wearing more modern clothes and they have donated clothes. **"ITS WRONG"**.

I think you can guess I'm making a point. Can I ask you a couple of favours please? Will you continue to support us as we daily stand at the forefront of need and try to make a difference? Secondly can you keep asking your councillors and MP's to do something about the poverty that is prevalent in our country, food poverty, utility poverty, hygiene poverty, and old

age poverty? Many of these dear folk are so down or suffering mental health problems, they no longer have the hope or confidence to tell local politicians the problems they face. Will you be their voice and speak up against poverty? Thank you.

In closing I want to thank all who have donated money or food and clothes, those trusts who have given us grants, the contracts we have been able to be part of to meet needs, the schools, children's centres, places of faith, businesses, office workers and so many of you who have given online or through bank credits we thank you all.

Thank you to the vicar of St John's Church, Sparkhill PCC and congregation for letting us use the community facilities of the church building to meet the needs of so many. Thank you to our Trustees who have helped us to maintain and follow the laws and regulations required by the charity commission. Thank you also to over 200 volunteers including our Parish Nurse who all make it possible for Narthex to do so

much. We value you all. Thank you also to our partners whom we work with so well to help bring change to our communities.

Thank you to my staff team who have worked so hard this year, often putting themselves in danger of Covid and the nasty effects it has on people, to Sandra and David my managers who have led with professional and competent ways that ensures our staff are supported.

July 2022 will be the end of my privilege of serving our communities of Sparkhill, Sparkbrook, Springfield, Tyseley and so many parts of Birmingham South. I have been here for 17 years and it's time to hand on the baton to Patricia our new Chief Operating Officer who is learning the ropes here at Narthex. I think she will be fine.

I am very sad to leave; I have grown to love the communities Narthex works in and you will all have a special place in my heart.

Thank you for the privilege.



Nigel J Brookhouse
Chief Executive Officer

