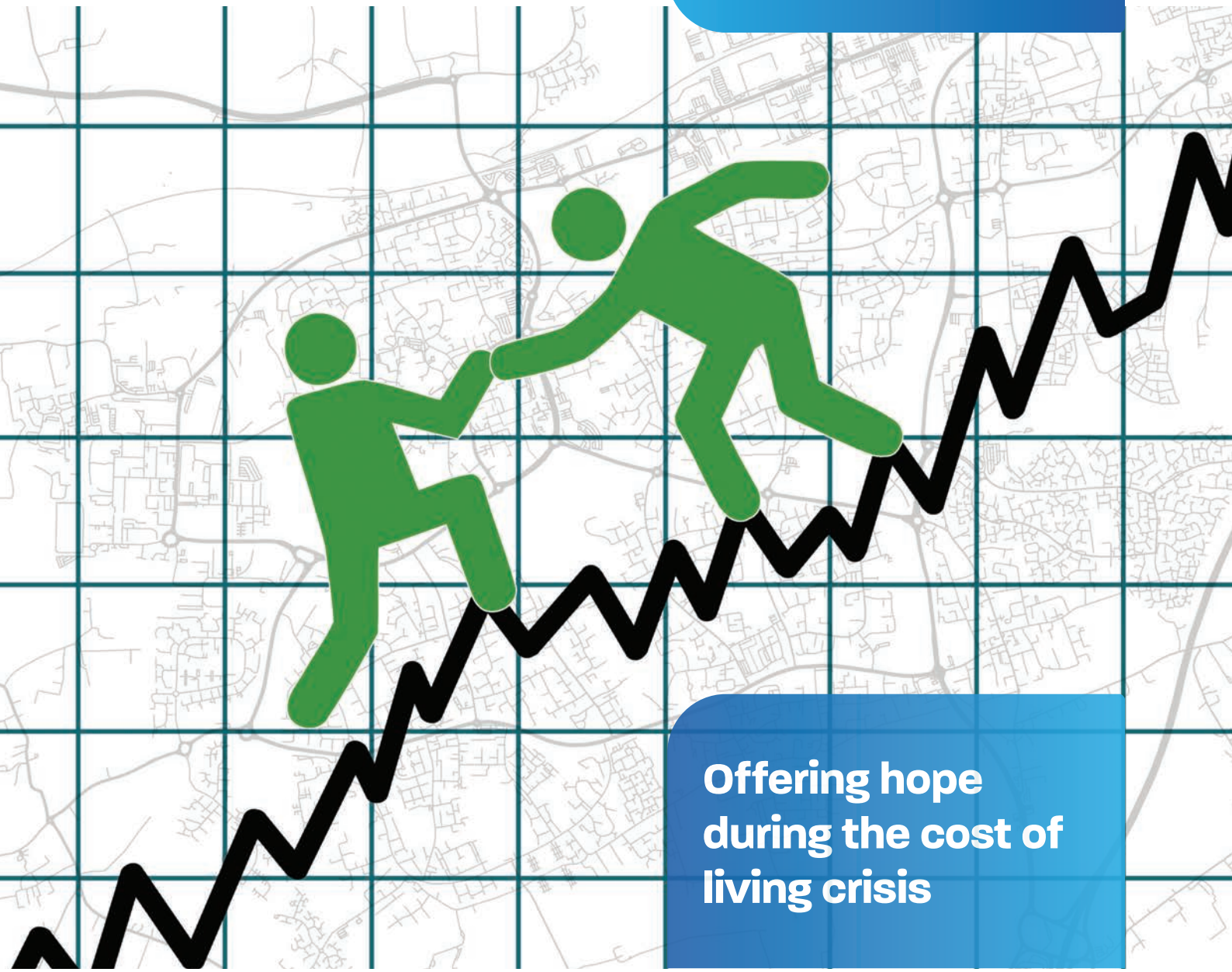
Michael Roberts Charitable Trust

Developing lives, enriching community

Bi-annual Review 2022-24



Offering hope during the cost of living crisis

STORE HOUSE developing lives, enriching community

WAYBURY OPEN DOOR

Harlow foodbank

HARLOW HIVE

BOUNTY CLUB

bump to five







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Our vision is that everyone can belong and participate in their communities, knowing that they are significant, valued, included and wanted.

Our vision is that no one should go hungry, or without the means to bring up their children, heat their homes or live in dignity. Anyone in that position should know that they are supported by those around them until things are good again.

This vision comes from our belief that nobody is excluded, unwanted or overlooked by God, whose love is revealed in the life of Jesus.

What a difference two years make...

Hello again! We usually report to supporters every year—but these last two years have been tough. In 2023 we put our heart and soul into supporting people in the town, prioritising two new initiatives in response to the impending cost-of-living crisis. Pressures of time meant that we couldn't complete our annual report that year. A quick check with supporters told us you might forgive this, as you shared this priority.

So this year our two-year review kicks off with this table—summarising just how far we have expanded and how busy we've been supporting Harlow:

- We have worked extra hard to protect the poorest from the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.
- We have done our best to innovate where possible: responding to greater needs in the town.
- We have increased our footprint in the town centre—serving significantly more people than previous years.
- We remain committed to efficient partnership working with other organisations, and this too has expanded in the last two years.
- Our support to those vulnerable to isolation continues. Maybury Open Door has grown in numbers, become more visible in town, and more adventurous in scope.
- We have grown in size, turnover, reach and impact – taking calculated risks to build our services eg the Bounty Club now buys and sells food at low cost alongside picking up surplus.
- The key to our success remains volunteer participation. Thanks everyone! At the same time we improved organisational efficiency to keep costs low – increasing our use of technology.
- We thank all readers so much for supporting us: for trusting that we will do the right thing for the town.

We hope that you will enjoy reading this report, and it will convince you that our heart and actions have been in the right place.

Finally, you may be used to seeing an introduction here from our CEO. This year it is in our reflections page on page 15.

	2022	2024
Numbers supported at Foodbank	7,045	9,910
Households helped by the Bounty Club	n/a	3,100
Number of Bump to Five parcels	200 *(first 6 months)*	923
Number of Bump to Five items	799 *(first 6 months)*	3,622
Regular attendees at Maybury Open Door per week	120	170
Number of pre-loved items sold at the School Uniform Exchange	n/a	5,864
Staff team	15	21
Organisational income / expenditure	£277,323 £253,113	£567,227 £552,988
Size of annual review	16 pages	20 pages *(read on...)*







Neighbours Helping Neighbours





Paying tribute to our MRCT Volunteers!

Our projects come to life because of the volunteers who freely give of their time to deliver our work.

We have approximately ten volunteers for every staff member in a project.

This year we feature them first in this report - before any summary of our projects. This is to convey the huge debt of gratitude that we owe them, and we think the town owes too. From 8.30 weekday mornings to 3.30 in the afternoons, our teams are buzzing around with vital items to support our neighbours in the town. They provide the back-up service to so many frontline workers referring clients to the Foodbank, as well helping to stop people arriving there through donated or low-cost items to help households stay afloat.









What are they doing?

Picking up / shifting / transporting
Food, supermarket donations, kids' items, furniture, any items that we can make use of and pass on to those who need it…

Sorting and packing
Checking dates on cans and packets, sizing up kids' clothes, getting the right mix of items into food parcels, sorting uniform by school and age…

Stacking and selling
Making our community supermarket attractive and accessible, supporting customers…

Cooking and caring
At the Bounty Café and Maybury Open Door, preparing food, offering good company and welcoming places to relax and belong…

Asking the public for support
On supermarket days, fundraising events, community fairs…

Delivering items to organisations and homes
Kids items, donations, surplus goods…

Advocacy and campaigning
Sharing concerns and making a change: for the people, with the people, through the people…

Funning and gaming!
Joining in with games and pastimes at Maybury Open Door!

Businesses Helping Harlow

Alongside nearly 150 regular volunteers we are supported by businesses and other groups who lend their time and talents to our cause on a regular basis. Others have gone a little further by lending vans, storage space, drivers, and shop space.

Partnerships in action



HTS Group

HTS are Harlow's Property and Environmental Services provider. From waste management to housing or hedgerows, their huge workforce are everywhere around town. We are so grateful that they provide us with free waste services so that the vast majority of our waste is recycled daily.

But more than that HTS give us our storage space for Bump to Five at their Riverway Headquarters, enabling us to receive, sort, store and repack items for children. It is large enough to hold thousands of items of clothing plus all the other furniture and household items we redistribute and their staff are ever-helpful and supportive – for instance opening up storage space for our unsold School Uniforms over the winter.



Lawsons of Whetstone

Now our sponsors and partners for seven years, this family-based building company continue to add huge value to our operations particularly at the Store House where they keep our forklift up to date and train its operators.

We would like to thank these companies who have volunteered at our Store House:

- 4Wall Entertainment
- Amazon
- Amey
- CAPCO
- Clarins
- Essex CC Business Services
- Equans
- GSK
- HardSoft
- Harlow Council legal team
- HSBC Bank
- HTS
- Land Sheriffs
- Metro Bank
- MMP
- Pearsons
- Simply Washrooms
- Stansted Airport Services



The Harvey Centre

Our work has taken a huge boost thanks to the generous support of the Harvey Centre in the last year. They could not have been more big-hearted and welcoming. Their team gave up their time to help us restyle the Maybury Open Door Centre and the former BHS shop, and offer daily support with waste management on site.

We are grateful to the head office team for ongoing support with publicity and oversight of our logistics.



CM17 Magazine

We were delighted to be voted 2022 -23 'Charity of the Year' in this great local publication, going into 15,000 homes every month. Readers became much more aware of our work, and we could update them on the town's needs and our expansion.









Maybury Open Door





25 years

A big milestone for a unique treasure...

Maybury is our longest running project and has been a Godsend to so many. Hundreds of lives have been transformed by its consistent support. They have found friendship, a place to belong and be valued, and the chance to contribute to their communities. We thank all those who have worked to achieve this year on year. From team members, visitors and those who regularly attend and open their hearts to each other, Maybury will always be a special oasis in the heart of Harlow.



When we last reported, the country was starting to emerge out of lockdown. Maybury Open Door regulars were slowly venturing back. It took quite some time for many to find the confidence to return.

We are pleased to say that two years later Maybury is blossoming! With a new project leader and new facilities, the mood is buoyant and the days are full of purpose and pleasure.

The drop-in attracts people from in and around Harlow, offering emotional, mental and physical support: from contacting health professionals; filling in forms, or simply a place to talk and be listened to. Our visitors now enjoy a wider range of activities than ever. People from diverse backgrounds - all ages, faiths and abilities can enjoy a stimulating day with high-quality lunch and drinks prepared by volunteers.



Check us on Facebook

Maybury Open Door is now more visible to anyone on line through its Facebook page. Search it out if you can and you will find yourself uplifted watching such a wide-ranging group of people having such a great time.



A new home in the Harvey Centre

In 2023 we made a big transition thanks to the offer from the Harvey Centre to take up residence in premises in a former restaurant. This new shop front is ideal for a drop-in and visible to all in the town. No longer will Maybury be Harlow's best kept secret!

The new premises (pictured here) regularly have around 60 visitors on Tuesdays and Fridays. It is directly opposite Harlow's town centre cinema, and we have occasionally booked out a whole Screen for a special Maybury showing!

In its other home at Harefield Church the numbers are similarly higher than ever. Visitors take part in all kinds of activities from making collective art-works to fitness instructors, African Drum and dance, enjoying entertainers, seasonal parties, animal visits and many other regular activities.

Maybury also raises awareness on important subjects, inviting other professionals to deliver informative talks e.g wellbeing, scam & hate crime awareness and digital skills. We are also seeing more of our regular attendees gain the confidence to become volunteers.

We are pleased to have received more funding, boosting opportunities for people to take part in new activities such as Chair Pilates, flower arrangements etc. Also subsided outings and trips offer opportunities to see places not usually possible for Maybury clients (due to financial, health related or family circumstances). Regular outings to theatre, cinema, tenpin bowling , seaside trips, farm visits and more offer fun days away in safe, non-judgmental, friendly groups that improve confidence and cohesion when we get back home.







"The whole place was buzzing with activity and the sound of care and friendship. Every table was sharing smiles and games. Almost standing room only. Well done everybody "

After 25 years Maybury continues to be a unique place to belong and flourish in Harlow. Our thanks go to all those who went before us, building this unique community for over a quarter of a century!

"I don't know where I would be without Maybury"

Thanks to these agencies who have helped with our activities over the past 2 years..

- All Nations Christian College
- Canalability
- Creative Mojo Ltd
- Digital Share / Mind in West Essex
- Efua Sey Cultural Academy
- Essex Police
- Essex Therapy Dogs
- Fawbert & Barnard Primary
- Free Cakes for Kids
- Gibberd Gallery
- Harlow Fire Service
- Harlowsave / Smart Advice
- Kintsugi Hope
- Local Linked Support Essex ACL
- Music in Hospitals & Care
- NHS – Covid vaccinations
- Peabody (Family Mosaic)
- Potter Street Baptist Church
- U3A
- Vitamind
- Volunteer Essex

Harlow Foodbank





Finding a way through tough times

Now in its 15th year, the Foodbank is busier than ever. More than six times busier than 2009. On one hand a great achievement, on the other a sad reflection of the times we are in.

This is a national trend – the economic climate has changed greatly over the last two years. Nobody needs to be told how much harder things have got nor who has been hit the hardest.

Like us, most food banks across the country are now giving out more than ever, and receiving fewer donations. And like most food banks, by the end of the financial year 2023 / 24, we were subsidising food by regularly purchasing items from local wholesalers to make up for dwindling donations in supermarkets.

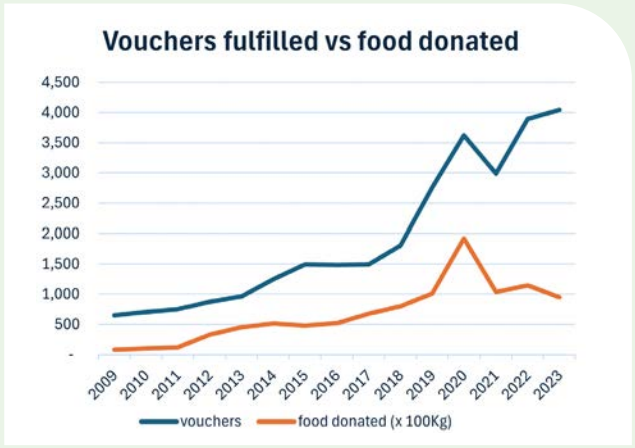
Locally, we are fortunate to have had a bonus in that our Foodbank could supplement parcels with some fresh food from Bounty Club pick-ups, which helped families considerably.

We have also been able to give Foodbank users a hand-up from dependency on Foodbank through introducing them to our low-cost food from the Bounty Club. This also lowered the pressure on our food stocks a little.

In September 2023, the Foodbank and Bounty Club began to open at the same time: weekdays from 10 am to 2 pm at St Paul's. This enabled our advisory services to support more households. The Salvation Army similarly extended their Foodbank operating hours on Wednesdays.

This meant that in St Paul's anybody using the Foodbank could see what was available at the Bounty Club and could consider going there the following week. There was a wide level of choice at the Bounty Club – unlike the Foodbank, which was welcomed. We continue to offer "extras" to foodbank users, such as toiletries, household products and other essential items.







Our storehouse stock levels



Financial Advice

This period also saw a change in the profile of those coming to the Foodbank for the first time. As economic conditions worsened more households 'new to poverty' have needed our support. Many were households who might have lived relatively securely for many years, but now bills were going up, credit cards were maxed, and income was falling. Historically, most users have been longer-term benefits recipients, but more recently we provided stop-gap help when both the bank account and cupboards were bare. For such reasons we have noticed a change in public perceptions of food bank use, becoming less stigmatised. The phrase "it could happen to any of us" is now more widely accepted.



In this period the Trussell Trust brought us invaluable help to support us, helping us to offer a Financial Caseworker - seconded from Citizens Advice – so that any visitor can get a professional review of their own financial circumstances. This has proven to be an amazing bonus for users.

Starting in September 2022, some discovered they were entitled to more benefits, some were helped to consolidate their debts, others in budgeting their way out of the crisis. As you can see from the table here, more than a quarter of those attending had a positive result with over £650,000 being adjusted to the benefit of Foodbank users. We estimate that over a third had the reason they needed the Foodbank remedied through this advice.



In 2022 -23 the Foodbank and Bounty Club combined gave out the food equivalent of over 1 Million meals

Outcome of financial caseworker support 2022 - 23

Total number clients supported	227
Most common financial issues:	
– Benefits entitlements	152
– Debt management	93
– Housing costs	43
– Budgeting support	41
Number expected to recover unclaimed entitled benefits	63
Total financial gains in this category	£124,176
Number of people whose debt was managed	49
Total amount of debt managed	£511,401
Number of people whose debt was written off	14
Total amount of debt written off	£48,204
Number estimated to no longer need the food bank after accessing advice and support	80

"There are many people who will put their pride in front of everything but aren't able to survive in the current climate. The foodbank is a life saver."

Although this has been a hard-pressed two years, we want to again pay tribute to the people of Harlow who have continued to extend hearts and minds towards neighbours in need, offering gifts of food and money to meet growing demands. As you will see on page 14, we continue to address the reasons why people reach this point of crisis. We look forward to a brighter time when we can close the Foodbank. Until then... thanks again!

Bounty Club





Our biggest development of the past two years has been the evolution of the Bounty Club. Originally a project rescuing end of life food for community groups, it has now become a five days a week low-cost supermarket for households on tight budgets.

The decision to make this transition was prompted by the growing need for low-cost food as the diminishing value of welfare benefits made it harder to meet the rising cost-of-living.

It was a challenge to discern the best route to take in shaping up this new service, but we couldn't do nothing. We have now helped well over 3,000 households in the town since we upgraded this service, and it currently saves families an estimated £25,000 a month.



"Extremely helpful and friendly staff - go above and beyond."





Minding our peas and queues

The new version of the Bounty Club opened each weekday by offering a once-a-week bag of low-cost fresh food for £2.50 to anyone who needed it in the town. We only publicised this through partner agencies who support communities experiencing poverty.

Soon word got around and within a couple of months there was a queue outside St Paul's church waiting for a share of the food we were picking up. We opened at 1 pm daily, yet on most days customers began arriving at the church door from 9:30 am. The sight of this queue became emblematic of the financial pressures facing the town.

Noticeably the service also supported segments of the population who might have found it impossible to take, as they saw it, "charity" from the Foodbank. They were happy to part with what money they had, but needed a boost to stay afloat when times are tough. Our tagline "Your weekly shop starts here" encapsulates our motive: 'come to us and get what we share out before parting with other cash'.

We remain hugely grateful to the companies who gave us access to their surplus stocks, allowing us to pass it on to those going hungry. Yes, we save them landfill costs and we help the planet by lowering levels of wastage, but the biggest benefit by far is to those who often don't know how they can get through the next week.

The food that we were re-distributing was also great quality and very healthy! We had a great range of vegetables and fruits which increased as time went on. More and more local organisations kindly brought food to us. Particularly in the summer of 2023, local growers recognised how valuable the service was and often brought vans of fresh tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and other beautiful foods to help people in the town. The response was very touching, and empowering for us.

"God bless you all. I can't thank you enough for Bounty!"

Transitioning to a supermarket

In August 2023 Essex County Council published a tender for funds to build a community supermarket service in the town. We won that bid and received £68,300 to set up a new service, keeping the name "Bounty Club" but expanding its offer.

The new service, a social supermarket, would sell longer life goods at about 70% of a low cost supermarket price and supply a share of daily collected fresh foods.

We put some of this start-up fund towards hiring St Paul's Church Hall, which previously hosted the Maybury Open Door drop in, to house the Bounty Club Café. Another portion of that grant was spent on a mobile supermarket van which launches shortly. This will visit less well-served areas of the town offering low-cost foods to those who are more isolated.





Moving out!

Alongside this development we had the logistic challenge of moving out of St Paul's church for a while whilst it was rewired! The solution came in January 2024 when we were blessed by Harlow Council who gave us free rental space in the former BHS department store in the Harvey Centre. This shop is quite simply enormous, and we inhabit about a fifth of its space.

In that area we have our Bounty supermarket with fresh food area and pre-packaged foods; the Harlow Foodbank; the Harlow Community School Uniform Exchange (opening on Wednesdays) plus an area for advice and guidance organisations (see pictures).

The new Bounty Club has increased our staff team by four staff members and a fantastic group of volunteers. Most of these have been coming to the Bounty Club for support, but now help to run it on a daily basis. The social aspect of the Bounty Club is slowly building as new Bounty Club members come along to the café to meet others. They also give us opinions on how Harlow can be better which find their way to the Harlow Hive! See page 14.



"Social enterprise"

In short, we have now built a social enterprise into the charity's regular operations. Social enterprises are self-sustaining initiatives that make enough money to keep going for community benefit. Because we are trading in this way our annual turnover has risen hugely. We now regularly buy a whole range of food to sell at low cost. This is effectively subsidised by trusts who support the social mission of the Bounty Club. We now have over 1,000 members and 500 weekly shoppers. We have good reason to believe that many of these have been kept from hitting crisis point and needing the Foodbank. Others have found their way out of Foodbank dependency by moving on to the Bounty Club.





Bump to Five

Bump to Five provides essential items for children aged 0 to 5 through taking in pre-loved donations and offering them to those who can't afford them.

After launching in 2022 the first six months saw us expand much more than expected. The success of that expansion was possible thanks to a regular supply of items generously donated by the people of Harlow and the surrounding areas. Soon we outgrew the Store House and moved out to new premises. We are delighted to have had this freely provided to us by HTS. The new space is big enough to store thousands of items ready for children who need support.

Using the same methodology as the Foodbank, families needing help were referred to us by frontline workers in contact with families around the town. Parents needing help could also call the Harlow Community Hub and have their details taken so that we could support them.

By 2023 our small team were working flat out. In that year one staff member supported by seven volunteers gave out 923 custom-made support parcels: responding to the requirements of each child and family. We calculate that 3,622 items found their way to children in 449 families that year.

The pressure has grown over the years with families returning as their children got older. We have given away hundreds of cots, even more pushchairs, tens of thousands of items of children's clothing. We continue to support families in other ways as much as we can.

"C said that she now feels she has everything they need, and this has helped with her bond with baby. Thank you for your amazing service and hard work."

Harlow Family Worker





In 2023:	
Total number of referrals	923
Number of families helped	449
Number of items sorted, packed and delivered	3,622
Clothes bundles	630
Prams, buggies, strollers	154
Cots	128
Safety gates	98
High chairs	66
Bouncy chairs	55
Sterilisers	40
Baby baths	38
Toiletry Packs	147

More than just 'items'

Children only have one start in life! All the research shows that the early years are uniquely formative. Their foundations set a marker for a child's future potential. We are confident that our intervention through Bump to Five is significant and transformative, offering families around Harlow the chance for their children to have as equal a start as possible to their peers.

This project also engages more families beyond Harlow than our other projects. There is no similar baby bank in the area, and referrals come from many miles away. We can only deliver to households in Harlow and nearby villages, but many social workers or support agencies from beyond our borders now come to pick up for their clients, and thankfully we have enough to help.

It has also been wonderful to discover how many parents in our vicinity recognise this value. Every day we reactive pre-loved items delivered with a huge smile on donor's faces, knowing that some other child will have a start like their own did, thanks to items with many more years' life in them.

HARLOW COMMUNITY SCHOOL UNIFORM EXCHANGE





Harlow Community School Uniform Exchange

2022:

In May 2022 we struck up a partnership with Rainbow Services and Phoenix Resources to support families struggling to afford School Uniform for the following school year.

We were aware that many schools offer a facility for passing on pre-used uniform, and also that the government had new guidance to require schools to keep prices low, but still parents were telling us how worried they were about affording the coming school year. Once schools closed in July these local opportunities were no longer available.

Phoenix Resources generously let us use one of their premises in the Harvey Centre, and we wrote to all schools offering to pick up any surplus uniform stock they had at the end of summer term. During July we picked this from schools alongside taking in donations from the public at various locations including Tesco. Soon we had plenty of stock for the shop, due to open in August.



We had great help setting the shop up thanks to 16-year-olds on the local National Citizens Service that summer, and with the help of more wonderful volunteers we were ready to open.

	2022	2023
Number of items sold	2,912	5,864
Number of purchases	452	1,624
Total income	£3,127	£6,396
Cost of delivering the service	Approx £2,600	Approx £2,800



2023:

Thankfully our trial in 2022 had proven that the venture was possible and beneficial to families. By July 2023 we had been offered our own premises in the Harvey Centre which we used for this purpose before handing it over to the Maybury Open Door. As you can see from the comparative statistics, the momentum of the previous year led to an anticipated awareness of the shop in 2023, and resulted in many more visiting us over August last year.

2024:

The shop is now open every Wednesday in BHS and should go live again full-time next August!

Paying its Way...

Items in the shop are kept to a minimum price. As you can see from the results above the average cost per item is around £1, with small items selling at 50p and larger items such as crested blazers at £3. Any income made has gone to support Bump to Five which currently spends over £5,000 a year on mattresses, which have to be bought new every time we give out a pre-loved cot or Moses basket.





Addressing the Causes of Poverty

Changing Minds

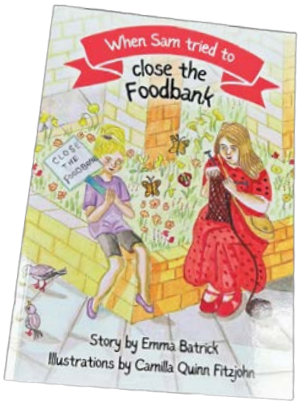
Our last annual report covered the launch of the 'Changing Minds' project, designed to give people a greater understanding of the issues that cause people to need the Foodbank. It was part of Trussell Trust's mission to address the relentless growth of food banks. What could be done to halt this? Should they exist at all? What is driving people to them? How can society address these factors and end hunger?

During the initial stages, 70 people shared what had led them to visit Harlow Foodbank. This built up a picture of the crises behind the referrals, turning statistics into heart-rending details, shedding light on the reasons for ongoing poverty for many. These continue to be used in our communications, revealing the intolerable cost of poverty to individuals and society.



Some of the 70 who took part went on to speak at the Harlow Poverty Alliance conferences – either through video or on panels, or to help to introduce or summarise the day.

These testimonies have also formed the basis of interactive materials for secondary schools, focused on the RE, PSHE and Citizenship curriculums, as well as packs for churches. A new school resource for Harlow primary schools has been released in 2024. This wonderful new story book, "When Sam tried to close the Foodbank" is written by Changing Minds project manager Emma Batrick and illustrated by local artist Camilla Quinn Fitzjohn.



Keeping people's voices at the heart, Changing Minds has now evolved into another project with Emma at the helm... Harlow Hive.





Harlow Hive

Harlow Hive is our contribution to Trussell Trust's national grassroots organising and mobilising project. It aims to empower people in the community to take action, bringing together people with a lived experience of disadvantage. By supporting them to campaign for change on the factors that compromise their life chances, it hopes to 'design out' flaws in the local systems which adversely affect them.

This project began at the beginning of 2024, and has an online presence (www.harlowhive.org) as well as face-to-face meetings at the Maybury Centre. It was kicked off by interviewing 100 people at the Foodbank and Bounty Club to discover the issues that feel are most holding them back.

1. Housing – unsuitable living conditions; temporary accommodation; permitted developments; council housing repairs…
2. Crime and antisocial behaviour
3. Concern at lack of things for teenagers to do
4. Disability and access issues
5. Transport – bus routes not suiting residents' needs
6. Cost of leisure and fitness activities

There is an appetite to create more community. Many recalled the Harlow of the past when the town centre wasn't so run down; the town felt safer, with more provision for young people such as playschemes. There is also concern that there is a lack of awareness of services and help available.

The next steps will involve participants taking ownership of the issues they are facing and to devise actions to make a difference.

We look forward to sharing where this takes us, in our next annual report.







Closing Reflections



In 2023 Heart 4 Harlow organised a morning's seminar called "What is the Gospel for Harlow?"

"Gospel" means "Good News". I was pleased to be asked to contribute as it is a question I often ask.

My talk reflected on the many unique qualities of Harlow: a New Town conceived and built from scratch, designed to give people a better future as they recovered from the trauma of war. It is a highly egalitarian town – and was once equally optimistic. But for many of the longer-resident population that shine has worn off. We now have 5,000 on the waiting list for council houses yet only 400 become available each year. There is negligible space for new ones. Rents and house prices rise ever higher and new estates on the edge of town are beyond the reach of many locals. Our work with the less well-off suggests that few expect things to get better soon.

It's also sobering that in the 2024 Council election fewer turned out to vote for the ruling party than the number who claim Universal Credit in the town. That suggests that the town is not expecting too much from the public purse just now.

"What is that to do with the Gospel for Harlow?" you might ask.

Well, in the big picture MRCT aims to create relief and hope for those in crisis and to empower those who appear to be forgotten and overlooked. Over the last two years we have had to recognise that the cost-of-living crisis has no short-term, magic fix. The country is too expended. Personal debt and national debt constrain us all. But some more than others. Whilst some tighten their belts, others could starve without help. These are our focus.

That's why our work is moving to become more inclusive of those impacted by poverty. Not simply handing out food but also working to help people help themselves and each other. To find shared power and shared solutions to shared problems. It feels like we are in a long-haul with so many forces working against equity and equality, it has to be done.

So our last word of thanks must go to those who unite in response. To those affected by poverty, to regular donors who offer solidarity though gifts of money, time and talents to keep our work going. And to those who have a heart for everyone in and around Harlow… from the newborn needing a better start in life to the isolated and elderly wondering whatever happened to their community?

Faith traditions are seldom started by people of high status or political power. Christianity is certainly no exception. It grew from the powerless who were uplifted by Jesus' demonstration of the good news: showing that all are equal in the sight of God. This continues to inspire us and we welcome all who value that ideal. To everyone who has come alongside that vision – from whatever angle, whatever faith or none, please continue to support us as we strive to make Harlow and its surrounding areas a place of optimism, neighbourliness and equity.

Kindness and goodness can seem in short supply in the world around us, but we witness it every day thanks to all those who show it through our shared actions. To most these actions speak louder than words. So we give thanks, and press on.

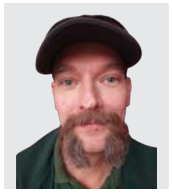




Andy Thornton
CEO MRCT

Our Staff Team and Trustees


Adam


Adrian


Alison


Andy

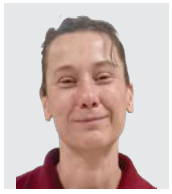

Chris


Clair


Corvus


Emma


Fernanda


Halinka


Jacqueline


James


Karolina


Liz


Marc


Moira


Patrick


Teresa


Trevor


Vicki

Head Office & Store House

Andy Thornton—Chief Executive, Company Secretary
Alison Keir—Operations Manager
Patrick Coppeard - General Manager, Foodbank and Bounty Club
Marc Edmans—Store House Manager

Harlow Foodbank

James Griggs—Site Manager Foodbank & Bounty Club
Keith Young—Volunteer Manager (foodbank & Bounty Club)
Emma Batrick—Organising and Campaigns Manager
Corvus Cole—Financial Caseworker (via Citizens' Advice)

Bounty Club

Trevor Stanesby—Bounty Fresh Food and Mobile Coordinator
Teresa Moss—Bounty Café Manager
Halinka Lendzion– Bounty Club Sales and Stock coordinator
Chris Redman—Site cashier & reception
Adrian Jones—Foodbank & Bounty Club Support Assistant

Maybury Open Door

Karolina Sadowska—Community Services Manager
Adam Jackson—Assistant Community Worker
Jacqueline Durkan—Support and Outreach Officer (MOD & B to 5)
Clair Forway– Assistant Community Worker
Moira Luff—Community Worker (Bank)
Liz Bellworthy- Community Worker (Bank)

Bump to Five

Fernanda Champness—Manager—Bump to Five
Vicki Andrews—Bump to Five administrator (+ MOD Bank)

Trustees


Jeanette Ehlers (Chair)


Teresa Knott (co-founder)


Rob Carrington (Hon Treasurer)


Gary Pattimore


Matt Parsons


Ayub Khan


Jokey Poyntz

All post-holders correct are at the time of publishing this report – June 2024. We would also like to thank staff and trustees who have contributed in the past two years – but have not featured them here to avoid confusion.

Our Partners on the Ground





Trussell Trust

Our Foodbank proudly affiliates to Trussell Trust. They support a nationwide network of over 1,300 food banks who together provide emergency food and support to people facing hardship, and campaign for change to end the need for food banks in the UK.

Between April 2022 and March 2023, food banks in the Trussell network provided almost 3 million food supplies to people in crisis, a 37% increase on the previous year.

Trussell support us with day-to-day guidance and the operating framework which determines how we deliver food support to the town. They also fund our Financial Caseworker and Organising and Campaigns Manager.

Feeding Britain

Feeding Britain is an award-winning charity who, like Trussell Trust envision a UK where no one goes hungry. They support a national network of 105 regional and local anti-hunger partnerships comprising more than 700 frontline organisations. They support charities like ours to pilot innovative and effective new projects and showing how severe or chronic food insecurity can be prevented, designing a road map for eliminating hunger from the communities we serve.

Feeding Britain have been central to our development of the Bounty Club as a social supermarket with the support of Essex County Council and central government Levelling Up funds.



The Harlow Community Hub

Launched as a coalition of Rainbow Services, MRCT, Citizens Advice and Mind in West Essex, and now with the West Essex Health and Care Partnership support and from Harlow Council, The Community Hub offers a range of services for people affected by crisis situations, as well as information on community and social activities, volunteering and health screening. We have benefited hugely from our partners in being on site three days a week giving other advice to Foodbank attendees.

Integration Support

This Harlow based charity supports vulnerable migrants and refugees to successfully integrate: removing inequalities and barriers between different races, origins and beliefs. Their partnership with us has been immensely valuable – giving regular assistance to Foodbank and Bounty Club users and helping us to translate our documents or give on-hand support to those just learning English.

St Paul's & Harefield Churches

Our longstanding and most faithful partners in the town! We have used their premises for our Maybury Open Door for over 20 years and Foodbank for 15 years in St Paul's. We hugely value the ongoing support from staff and congregation in both churches – they could not be more welcoming, encouraging and supportive.

Salvation Army Harlow

Similarly we are so thankful for our partnership with the Salvation who operate a parallel Foodbank service on Wednesdays alongside the St Paul's venue, enabling us to reach other clients and serve their constituency.

Harlow Poverty Alliance

Now in its third year this alliance of over 20 local organisations is chaired by our CEO and brings together professionals and organisational representatives to liaise and coordinate shared actions. They host an annual conference on the causes and effects of poverty in Harlow. Reports form this are available on the MRCT Website news section.





This review has catalogued so many exceptional partnerships and donations that characterise our work. Our momentum has been built on many years of strong community relations, giving us the capacity to respond to people in and around Harlow. We are so grateful for these partnerships – listed here by the projects they usually support

The Bounty Club is a social supermarket offering fresh and prepacked items a low cost. Operating from the town centre and through a mobile service, it also hosts a members café and advice services.

Brakes provide a wide range of surplus, short dated fresh food and meat, allowing us to access their stock and make it available to households through the Bounty Club & Foodbank. They have been truly amazing partners.

Bidfood provide a wide variety of surplus, short dated, soft drinks and fresh food for us to redistribute across the town. Through doing this they help schools, disadvantaged people and local agencies.

UK Salads have provided an assortment of fresh salad items each week which we can then distribute to clients at the Foodbank and Bounty Club. Their consistent support has helped thousands this year.

High Trees Packers' consistent generosity has enabled us to provide a supply of fresh potatoes through the food bank year on year. This is a hugely valuable resource to people in need.

Coop & Nisa supermarkets' local distribution centre regularly help us out with surplus foods, providing a vital boost to those we help.

Farmfoods in Harlow help us with bulk orders and regularly donate a little more to help our customers. Thanks!!

SOP import Asian foods ad regularly give us surplus to add to our ever-widening range of stock.

London Stansted Airport pass on surplus items that we can make available at the Bounty Club and Foodbank.

Valley Grown Salads generously give freshly grown food for Bounty users.

Guy and Wright generously give freshly grown food for Bounty users.

Agro Fruit and Veg generously give freshly grown food for Bounty users.

Harlow Foodbank works alongside front-line professionals to distribute food donated by the public to anyone referred to it. We are affiliates of the Trussell Trust, a national network of food banks operating with the same model.

St. Paul's Church in the town centre hosted our Foodbank for five days a week until December 2023 when we moved out for their rewiring.. We thank them for their huge support for us and for the people of Harlow. They are true allies and show constant flexibility and cooperation in our mission. Thanks so much!

Special thanks again to **Tesco** who have not only allowed us to pick up a huge amount of food from all the supermarkets around the town but they also top up the amount given by donors in the store with a further 20% of financial contribution to help with our running costs. They, and their customers have been phenomenal this year.

Thanks too to **Sainsbury's** for faithfully providing a place for their customers to contribute donations of food to our food bank, day in and day out. Thanks for keeping them safe when they overflowed many times this year!

Many thanks to **Asda** in the Water Gardens for such warm cooperation in providing a receptacle for donations from their customers. Again, this year these overflowed and fresh ones were provided when full.

Greenways Eggs continue to provide a supply of fresh eggs each fortnight which helps to complement the range of non-perishable food we give to our Foodbank referrals.

Lok'n'Store have supported our work since we opened in 2009 and are currently provide a drop off point for food donations throughout the year. This has been a consistent and fantastic resource, thanks so much!

Poundland have been an invaluable community partner since 2017. Providing a wide range of non-perishable foods, toiletries, household items, sweets and drinks, these add important extras to local people in crisis.

Mayfield Bakery - we love these guys! Twice a week they bag up left overs for us, providing beautiful bread and cakes to people at the Foodbank!

Thanks to **Waitrose** in Bishops Stortford who help us gather donations for Bishops Stortford Foodbank.

Based on the edge of town, the Store House hosts our offices as well as a copious two storey storage space for food and other items that are donated to us.

Land Sherriff's approached us at Christmas to support families in need. They ended up buying beautiful Body Shop cosmetic gifts for mums (often the most overlooked) who came to the Foodbank. This was a very thoughtful treat… they also lend us their big vans for special occasions! Thanks so much!

We want to thank our colleagues at the **Bishop's Stortford food bank** for our ongoing close working partnership. This allows us both to get the best out of working in neighbouring towns, sharing ideas and resources to the full.

Thanks to **iRead books** for donating thousands of children's, puzzle and colouring in books as bonus items for the Foodbank and also to other agencies we partner with across the town.

Maybury Open Door is a drop-in centre for people who value help in socialising. Through a team of staff and volunteers offering activities, outings, refreshments and social support we provide a place to relax and belong on three days per week.

We are so grateful to the team at the **Harvey Centre** for giving us such great support alongside an amazing new shop of our own.

Bump to Five provides essential items for children aged 0 to 5 through taking in pre-loved donations and offering them to those who can't afford them.

HTS provide us with storage space for our donated items, enabling volunteers to come and sort them at their premises. They have also helped us store the school uniform items over the winter, provided volunteers for our Supermarket days, moved heavy shelving units at the Bounty Club, and provided us with waste disposal and recycling on a daily basis. Amazing!

We love **Rainbow Services**, Harlow's central support charity for all charities and agencies in the town. Their close working relationship on the Community Hib and other projects adds value to the Foodbank and Bounty Club every day.

Phoenix resources take items we can't give out in Harlow and send them to countries in Africa to benefit children in countries with very few resources. This means nothing goes to waste and we are so grateful for their ongoing partnership.

SES Group provide a hugely generous party for Harlow children who might not get a present at Christmas. They warmly invite anyone we have helped over the year and hundreds go!

The Michael Roberts Charitable Trust is the parent organisation that runs the projects operated above. Founded in 1998 by Teresa and Gary Knott, the Trust has flexibility to respond to a wide range of needs in Harlow and the surrounding areas.

We cannot thank our partners at **Lawsons Builders** enough – sponsoring our vans and helping to maintain the storehouse – Lawsons passed on a new van to our fleet and renewed our forklift truck in this period. This family-run business exemplify generosity and inconspicuously change many lives in our town.

We are deeply grateful to **Harlow Council** and also to the **Mulberry Trust** for underpinning the costs of running the Store House.

We would like to thank **Bristol Street Motors** who diligently support us by offering free services and cost price repairs to our fleet of 3 vans. They keep us on the road!

THANK YOU!

Acknowledgements





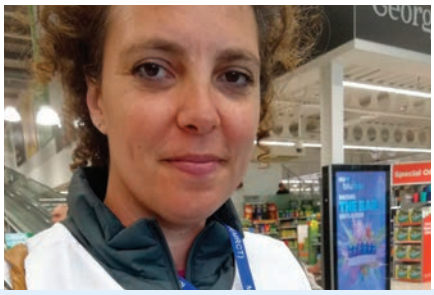


Alongside the many others inside this report – we would also like to thank even more who have helped deliver our work over the past 2 years.



Bishops Stortford Foodbank
Blue Pig Creative
Church and School Partners who collect for the Foodbank
Church Langley Church
Church of the Holy Innocents, High Beach
Community Embrace
Councillor Dan Swords
Country Food Trust
Create Identitee
DA Jones
Dorringtons
Employability
Essex Association of Local Councils
Essex Community Foundation
Essex County Council
Front-line referral agencies
Gateway Freedom Church
Ghana Union
Greenways Eggs
Harlow Activities Trust
Harlow Baptist Church
Harlow Citizens Advice
Harlow Council
Harlow Guides, Scouts & Rangers
Harlow Health Centres Trust
Harlow Pet Foodbank
Harvey Centre services team
High Beach Church, Epping Forest
Ian Tompkins
Integration Services
LIDL Harlow
MIND in West Essex
Mulberry Trust
Old Harlow Coop
Olympic Foods
Our awesome volunteers!
Our hundreds of regular donors!
Passmores Academy
Pets at Home/Blue Cross
Phoenix Resource Centre
PlaneSaver
Potter Street Baptist Church
Rev Martin Harris
Robert Halfon MP
Rodect Pest Control
Rotary Club, Harlow Tye
St Mary's Churchgate Street
Stansted Airport Passengers Trust
Stansted Airport Services
Stuart & Kathryn Tinney
Swire Trust
Terence Higgins Trust
The Community Fund
The Poor's Trust
The Postcode Places Trust
U3A
UK Health Agency
Volunteer Essex
YourHarlow
Living Wage Foundation







MRCT Michael Roberts Charitable Trust

Michael Roberts Charitable Trust
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Registered Company No: 3439299