

THE BMJ APPEAL 2020-21

"Without good nutrition, children's health and life chances worsen"

The BMJ's appeal this year supports the Independent Food Aid Network, a charity that has helped food banks and other community meal providers throughout the pandemic, writes **Jane Feinmann**

Food poverty didn't start with covid-19, but the pandemic has exacerbated the problem—putting children's health at risk and dramatically increasing demand for food banks, including those represented by the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN).

Kirkcaldy, a town 11 miles north of Edinburgh where one in four children lives in food poverty, saw a 70% increase in the number of families attending the local food bank between May and June. "It shows how close to the cliff so many families live from day to day," says Joyce Leggate, chair of Kirkcaldy Food Bank, a member of IFAN. Jen Coleman, a manager at the Black Country Food Bank in the West Midlands, who has seen a similar rise in demand, says, "We see so many people who are so embarrassed, but say 'My kids are hungry, I don't know what else to do.'"

In October, an open letter signed by more than 2000 members of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health warned of the impact of nutritional deficits on the health of children and young people. "Good nutrition is at the heart of health, wellbeing, and development for children and young people," the letter said. "Without it, children's health outcomes worsen, and with that, so do their life chances."

Estimates suggest food banks will give out six food parcels every minute this winter—300 000 more than last year. But IFAN is clear the solution to food poverty will come through family income. It has been running a "cash first" project in several Scottish regions since June. Chelsea Marshall, senior project officer, says the aim is to "improve access to cash based options for those experiencing food insecurity—enabling them to shop with choice and dignity."



RICHARD H SMITH

IFAN members and other stakeholders are supported to develop a local "Worrying about Money" leaflet. This provides a step-by-step guide to existing financial entitlements, as well as temporary lifelines and assistance. "We're extending this work into England so more people can reach financial entitlements rather than a food bank referral," says IFAN coordinator, Sabine Goodwin. "Just £250 would help support the development and publication of one of these leaflets."

Another option being explored by IFAN's cash first project is providing vouchers as well as food parcels. "A £500 donation would allow an IFAN member organisation to purchase shopping vouchers for local shops that enable not just choice and dignity but healthier food options too," says Goodwin.

Covid-19 has exposed the desperate need for, as well as fragility of, the food banking system. A donation to IFAN can support independent food banks and a vision of a fairer system. Please give as generously as you can.

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Cite this as: *BMJ* 2020;371:m4758

Support the Independent Food Aid Network's frontline and advocacy work

DONATE ONLINE:
www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/BMJ

Would you like IFAN to communicate with you via email in relation to this donation? If yes, please add your email address.

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

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For information on how IFAN stores and uses your data visit www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/privacy-statement



Please return to: *Independent Food Aid Network, 58 Standen Road, London SW18 5TQ*

Title _____ Forename _____ Surname _____

Address _____

Postcode _____ Telephone number _____

- ☐ £50 helps IFAN member organisations distribute emergency food parcels to people unable to afford food
☐ £100 supports IFAN to advocate on behalf of its member organisations and campaign for change
☐ £250 supports IFAN's member organisations to purchase food and other essentials to distribute on the frontline
☐ £500 contributes to the day-to-day running of IFAN
☐ I'd like to donate £ _____

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