



Halton & St Helens
Voluntary and Community Action

SHORT SUMMARY IMPACT REPORT *of* **HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUNDING IN THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR**



JULY 2024 - MARCH 2025



**ST HELENS BOROUGH
COMMUNITY FOOD
PROVIDERS ALLIANCE**



#STHELENSTOGETHER

Introduction & Context

In response to the increasing pressures of the cost-of-living crisis, the **St Helens Together Food and Wider Essentials Assistance Grant** was launched to support local residents facing significant hardship. Rising food and energy costs, combined with stagnant incomes, meant that many individuals and families found themselves unable to meet even their most basic needs.

Delivered in partnership with **St Helens Council** and facilitated by **Halton & St Helens VCA**, the programme distributed over **£120,000** of **Household Support Fund (HSF)** funding through two grant rounds. Local voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) organisations were invited to apply for grants with one organisation applying for **£850 and others up to £10,000** to deliver direct support to people in their communities.

Over the course of the programme:

- **18 organisations and 26 applications** funded across both rounds (some organisations applied in both rounds).
- More than **2,000 individuals** were supported.
- A wide range of needs were addressed, from food insecurity and poor nutrition to personal hygiene, isolation, and the mental health effects of poverty.

The approach focused not only on immediate relief but also on continuing to empower local groups to work **compassionately** and with **long-term impact in mind**.

Grant Application & Delivery Process

The grant process was designed to be **simple, equitable and community-led**, enabling organisations already embedded in their communities to respond quickly and flexibly. Applicants were assessed based on:

- Their ability to identify and reach those most in need.
- Plans to meet immediate needs related to food and essential items.
- Consideration of how the grant would complement or enhance existing services.

Grants were given to **local groups** especially those who support people who often miss out on help, like **older people not claiming benefits**, or **young people without family support**.

By working together and involving people from different organisations in the decision-making, the process made sure funding went where it was needed most and could make the biggest difference.

Impact Summary

1. Alleviating Hardship and Meeting Basic Needs

Across both rounds of funding, organisations provided vital support in a variety of forms:

- **Food vouchers, parcels, and pantries** offering both fresh and ambient items.
- **Personal hygiene products, clothing, school uniforms, shoes**, and cleaning supplies.
- **Baby essentials**, including full Moses baskets, early reading books, and toiletries.
- Hot meals and snacks served in warm spaces and community hubs.

This support made a **tangible difference** for people often facing difficult choices—such as whether to eat or heat their home.

- **“A mum had been eating plain pasta so that her children could eat — they benefited immediately from the fresh and ambient food provided.”**
- **“I hated asking [for food parcels] but knowing we had meals and packed lunches was stronger than my pride.”**

One community centre used their grant to equip a kitchen that could make **light lunches like soup and toasties**, while also providing takeaway meals for families. Another group supporting people experiencing homelessness purchased a **freezer and blender** to reduce food waste and improve nutrition by offering **smoothies to clients with dental issues or limited diets**.

At a local college, students struggling with food insecurity were provided with **Asda vouchers**, clean underwear, and hygiene items. In several cases, this support was the **difference between continuing their education or dropping out**.

2. Supporting Mental Health and Reducing Isolation

Poverty can take a heavy toll on mental health. By providing dignity, comfort, and connection, the funded projects also helped people feel **less isolated, more valued**, and **able to cope**.

- **Community hubs and Warm Spaces** created opportunities to gather, share food, and access additional support.
- Meals were served alongside **life skills workshops** covering topics like resilience, communication, mindset, and emotional wellbeing.

- Individuals who had lost confidence or were wary of services began to re-engage with their communities.

One organisation shared that **“feedback is difficult as these families are isolated, bruised and wary of any external engagement. The main feedback is tears, gratitude and genuine thanks.”**

- **“The meals have been a lifeline for kids who are not eating properly and in some cases hadn’t eaten since breakfast.”**
- **“The support we have been able to provide has made a massive difference to the students who have been in desperate need of support with the basics to enable them to continue their studies.”**

One young person simply said:

- **“Buzin the grub. Thanks for my tea and doggy bag. Less hungry and smiling.”**

Others spoke about **feeling safer and more secure**, knowing that there were people looking out for them.

- **“I don’t know what I would have done if I hadn’t come to Clair. She helped me straight away... she doesn’t judge, she just helps. It’s a good job she is around because lots of us would be lost without her.”**

3. Enabling Collaboration and Laying Foundations for the Future

While the focus was on emergency support, many organisations used the grant to **build long-term capacity** and establish more sustainable forms of help:

- Essential equipment like **fridges, freezers, and shelving** was purchased to meet food safety standards which will allow them to store more so they can help more.
- **Community fridge and freezer projects** were launched or prepared for future opening.
- Food providers coordinated efforts to **extend hours** or make services open to all, reducing stigma and removing referral barriers.

Organisations receiving Household Support Fund have worked together through the St Helens Community Food Providers Alliance and have feedback **“By targeting referrals, sharing resources, and coordinating distribution, we created a more efficient support system. Promoting collaboration over competition maximised the impact while preventing redundant services.”**

This strategic use of funding means that the impact will be **felt long after the grant period**, through **stronger local partnerships** and **better access to essential resources**.

Stories of Hope and Humanity

Beyond numbers, the real story of the Household Support Fund is told in the moments of care, trust, and transformation that happened between volunteers and residents:

- A **child had a birthday celebration** thanks to volunteers who sourced age-appropriate gifts when the parent couldn't afford one.
- A **grandmother caring for her grandchildren** received food support that eased her burden and ensured the children were fed after school.
- A **woman experiencing domestic and financial abuse** accessed food and essentials at a critical moment—she hadn't eaten in four days.

“The funding has had a transformative effect on our provision to the homeless community.”

“The grandkids loved it today. Thank you so much for everything you do. Just fabulous people.”

These stories illustrate that **a small amount of funding, placed in the hands of trusted local groups, can have a deep and lasting impact.**

Conclusion

The Household Support Fund has been **a powerful example of community-led crisis response**. It has provided immediate relief to thousands of people across St Helens while empowering VCFSE organisations to collaborate, innovate, and build for the future.

At its heart, this work is about **restoring dignity, building trust**, and ensuring that **no one faces hardship alone**. Through food, warmth, and kindness, the community came together—and proved what's possible when local people lead the way.

Thank you

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