



LIFE CAFÉ PROJECT



“Bringing life, joy and hope through great food and a helping hand”

Impact report
April 2020-August 2021

OUR JOURNEY

We have been on a mission to serve our community since April 2020, with some amazing achievements so far. As a church-based Project, sharing the love of God with people is at the heart of everything we do and will continue to be at the heart of our future.



APRIL 2020
Our covid response
(aka The Life Café
Project) was launched

When the national lockdown began, Celebration Church partnered with other local churches, charities, and community support networks to find a way to provide emergency food provisions to vulnerable local people. By the end of our first week, we were sending out 23 hot meals per day.



APRIL 2021
We celebrated the delivery
of almost 8,000 free meals
to people and families in
need

When we celebrated our first birthday as a project, we had provided almost 8,000 meals free of charge to people in need—through rain, shine and even snow! Our services were mainly accessed by people self isolating, shielding, or those struggling with food poverty due to lack of work opportunities and free



MAY 2021
We developed our meal
support into a brand
new offering: Recipe
Boxes to cook tasty
meals at home

As the government roadmap out of lockdown started to help people get back out into a 'new normal', we noticed that people didn't need cooked food anymore, but that some families needed help to access healthy meals. This is why we changed our product from cooked meals to recipe boxes, providing families with the portioned ingredients and instructions that they needed to make delicious dinners together.



JUNE 2021
Our community support
activities diversified
from just food to include
an after school club for
local children

Through building on our relationships with the local primary school and church network, we began to provide diversify our services to provide more than food. We launched a weekly afterschool club for local children as well as holding a week-long summer activity event full of fun!

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Though we have enjoyed being able to provide a range of essential support to many people, there are some stories of change throughout our Project that we are especially excited about. It has been hard to narrow down to just a few highlights! But we hope that these stories give a glimpse into what our Project has achieved...

'Helpees' becoming 'Helpers'

Many of the families that we have helped through the financial hardship of lockdown have been keen to give back in some way. This heart is most beautifully demonstrated through T, a single mum who received our food support on and off through lockdown, and once she was able to come and joined us as a volunteer. T and her young daughter became regular helpers in preparing our recipe boxes for other local families. Spending time with this special family helped us to really get to know them and build a great friendship which we hope will last long into the future.

Feeding body, mind and soul

We were heartbroken to receive a referral early in lockdown for a vulnerable man living alone. Through confusion over the restrictions, he had only been eating a slice of bread from his freezer every day to make his food last. Once we started providing daily cooked meals for him, his care for himself improved greatly and he even attended online mental health support offered throughout the pandemic. The change in his wellbeing was evident to his referrer, who mentioned that mostly what he wanted to talk about each day was the tasty dinner he'd had!

*"Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves."
Romans 12:10*

K, future chef to the Queen!

One family who has received our food support consists of a disabled mum and her 9 year old autistic son. Due to mum's mobility issues, K has been doing the majority of the cooking with our recipe boxes. He has now decided that he loves cooking and wants to be a chef when he grows up. Specifically, he has big aspirations to be the Queen's chef and has been researching the cooking staff at Buckingham Palace! We are so encouraged that these recipe boxes may have inspired such big dreams and helped him to find something which could be a lifelong passion.

Kindness has no age limit

As we became more established in our community, we began to serve as a 'matchmaking service' between people who wanted to help and people who needed help. We were particularly excited when a family got in touch to say that their children had chosen to spend their own pocket money on Christmas presents for less fortunate local children. We were thrilled to be able to collect these gifts, and bless them to some of the families that we had gotten to know through food support. Becoming a core source of help in our community gave us the chance to make this 'match' happen.

OUR TEAM

Our project ran solely on volunteers for the first six months, before we took the plunge and hired three staff members. This was primarily to protect the longevity of our work and ensure that we could keep it going when most of our volunteers went back to work after furlough. Over the course of the project, we have had over 65 volunteers involved, all of whom have given generously of their time, skills and compassion to serve local people.

Here's what some of our team have to say about the Life Café Project...



I got involved in the Life Café Project as a family member recommended me to the team and I was currently furloughed from my main job as a cook at day centres for the elderly. It gave me the opportunity to give to the community some time and it also kept me focused on my skills and abilities. It was a pleasure to work with a dedicated team who were passionate about their work. Sarah

Getting involved to serve alongside the team gave a glimmer of hope during the unknowns of the pandemic, to help others who were struggling. The Project enabled me to do something practical to help and allowed me to focus on positive things rather than the gloom of the pandemic. I loved baking the 50 mini Christmas cakes for the Christmas boxes. I enjoyed working alongside like-minded people to serve and show God's love in a dark time. Thank you for your words of encouragement, our times to discuss God's word and always a place where there was joy and laughter. Pray God's continued blessings upon you and look forward to other opportunities to meet and serve together in the future. Gill



My time at the Life Café started as just something to fill the endless amount of time I seemed to have in the lockdown, something to get me off the sofa! But I didn't have to be there long to see that it was going to end up so much more than that. Even in the first few days I could see the real love that the whole team had for the project and the community they were working in. The lengths that everyone was willing to go to, above and beyond what was expected of them made it stand out from any other similar projects I have ever seen. Seeing the relationships that we as a team were able to build with volunteers who generously gave their time, and people we served in the community honestly melted my heart. Yes we were providing food and that in itself would have been "enough" but it was so much more than that, being an ear to listen or a shoulder to lean on for those that needed it. And that's before I even start about the Jesus bit! Knowing that the heart of the project was driven by a passion for Christ was inspiring. Whenever there were issues we came together in prayer, I've never met a group of people more on fire for Christ than this team, doing life together with them was maybe the best thing to happen to my faith walk for years. I am proud to call myself a part of this amazing project, I will never forget the people and the work we did. Roy

OUR PARTNERS

Our community support has been underpinned by many valued partnerships with fantastic local churches, charities, and community groups. We have been blessed with financial donations, resources, and venue spaces that have kept us at the heart of the community.

Throughout the project we have built up strong networks to help local people to find the help that they need. One such network is the Bridge People; comprising of __ churches, charities, and local services offering a diverse range of support to families. This is something which we aim to continue to develop long after the covid-19 pandemic, so that it becomes an accessible and valuable resource to vulnerable people.

Below are some testimonies from our partners about working alongside us in the community...

"Working with the Life Café Project has allowed us to continue to strengthen ties to local charities for our families. A great achievement for us as a partnership has been providing recipe boxes for a small selection of families over the summer, allowing the project to advertise a free summer club to which some of our children attended, supported staff during the January lockdown providing them with a wholesome lunch and knowing there is someone to discuss vulnerable families if needed." **Treetops Primary Academy**



"I have seen first-hand how this project is addressing the very real need in the community of Park Wood, an area of multiple deprivation. The team always go above and beyond to ensure those using their service feel listened to, and cared for- they have a refreshing 'can do' attitude and nothing is too much trouble. They are providing so much more than just a healthy homecooked meal- invaluable as that is- they are also spreading hope and kindness at an incredibly difficult time. They are always willing to signpost on to other agencies, such as ours, if needed, and recognize the strength of working in partnership."

The Princess Project



THE NUMBERS

Here are some interesting facts and figures about our Project to give you an overview of our achievements in numbers. We, however, find it important to remember that each 'number' represents a real person in our community, a real life touched and impacted.



Our team drove over **700** meal delivery routes at their own financial expense

Our befriending volunteers made **80+** phone calls to vulnerable isolated people, sometimes they were the only person the individual had spoken to in days



Our kitchen team cooked and portioned over **8,000** soups, mains, and sides



The majority of households that we supported were families with children

We partnered with over **15** organisations including local churches, mental health charities, support for single mums, local businesses, and the borough council.



We received close to **£100,000** in financial donations and grants to fund our services



Our volunteer drivers delivered **70+** essential prescriptions to people who could not leave home

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE NUMBERS

The heart of our Project was always about showing kindness, care and compassion to our community. We wanted people to feel supported in a time of uncertainty and difficulty. Mostly, we wanted to give in abundance, to demonstrate God's abundant love. Below are messages from some of those that we helped during the pandemic...

"I just want to say thankyou because it's really made a difference to my mum's life ...long story short ...a while back my dad died. Mum lost the house due to being scammed online and was homeless for a while, she's only just getting back on her feet ...she works as a volunteer and she barely has any money to keep her going each month so the meals you guys have provided her has made a real difference to her life. I just want to say it's an amazing job you're all doing and I just wanted to thank you because it's made such a difference."

Daughter of a vulnerable individual living alone who received our cooked meal deliveries

"I am finding the recipe boxes really helpful. I have recently left a mental health facility where I lived for two years and I am trying to get used to living independently. I had no idea about cooking, but these recipes are really easy to follow and having everything prepared in the pots makes it manageable for me. Now that I have cooked the meals once I feel confident that I could do it again myself, it makes me feel really good! Thank you so much".

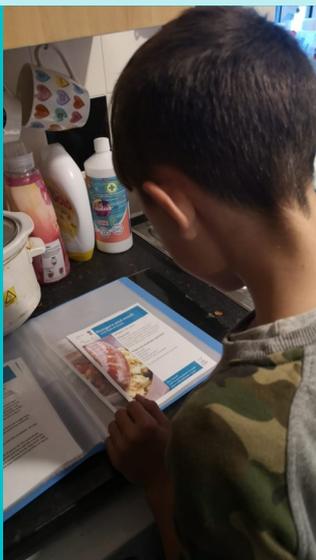
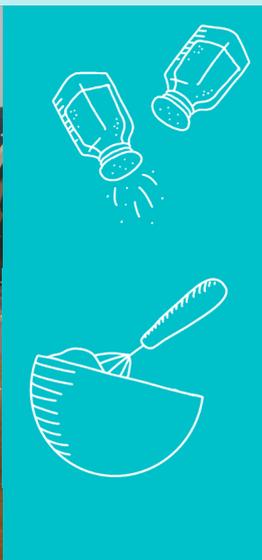
Local vulnerable individual living alone who received our recipe box deliveries

"Me and my son have loved having fresh ingredients to be able to make fresh food ourselves. There are so many recipes that have become family favourites in our house! Things we never would have tried before."

Mum of a family who received our recipe box deliveries

"Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

John 6:35



NOT JUST THE EVERYDAY

As well as meeting the essential daily needs of local households, we made an extra effort at Christmas and Easter to celebrate those special times of year.

Christmas Dinner in a Box

As a Christian project, Christmas is an important celebration of hope and love. Therefore for Christmas 2020 we decided to offer something more than our regular hot meal. With thanks to funding awarded to us by KCC Counsellor Gary Cooke, we created a full Christmas dinner with all the trimmings, including a starter, dessert and handmade Christmas cake, for anyone who may otherwise miss out on celebrating this special time of year. Our team of volunteer cooks, packers and drivers worked tirelessly on Christmas eve to provide 85 full Christmas dinners in beautiful red gift boxes, each hand-tied with personalized Christmas decorations so that each person knew that it had been prepared especially for them.

As well as this, we provided 20 Christmas stockings full of crafts and toys for children to enjoy during the school holiday. We also purchased, wrapped and delivered over 30 bespoke gifts for individual children in our community.

"A huge thank you for what you did for my children over Christmas. They were really, really made up and the dinner was amazing! Really appreciate it. Thank you so much, you guys are amazing."



Easter Rays of Sunshine

As with Christmas, Easter is also a very important time for Christians. It is a time when we celebrate life and a fulfilment of the hope that Jesus came to bring. We decided to get creative in sharing this message with local families by assembling some 'grow your own sunflower' kits and delivering them with our food provisions. These, as well as being healthier than the usual Easter Egg gifts, hopefully serve families with an important reminder of the new life and love offered by Jesus. As much as we enjoy being able to meet the physical needs of those in our community, our mission is to support their spiritual growth, too.

OUR FUNDRAISERS

We received a number of generous grants and donations to keep our Project afloat, however we also delivered some practical fundraising initiatives to increase local awareness of our presence.

Takeaway menu

We wanted to generate some income to support our free community meals, and so our top chef put together a tasty takeaway menu including sandwiches, paninis, salads, a variety of breakfast dishes and some signature favourites including carbonara and the 'Life Café Burger'. These were huge hits gaining us regular custom from some of the local businesses near to our venue, as well as hungry locals residents too!



Barista coffee Bar

We were fortunate to have a volunteer who has been trained in barista style coffee, so we launched a coffee takeaway fundraiser. This was hugely popular with local supporters, especially our Christmas coffees including Peppermint Hot Chocolate, Gingerbread Lattes and more! Our volunteer trained up others in our team, to enable us to serve delicious coffees every day as well as upskilling our lovely volunteers at the same time!

Mother's day afternoon tea

We took advantage of the restaurant closures on Mother's Day 2021 and decided to offer an afternoon tea delivery. We prepared a delicious selection of sandwiches, cheese straws, cakes, and scones with all the trimmings and delivered them around Maidstone. This was our first 'event' of this kind and we were delighted to have to expand our capacity to meet demand!

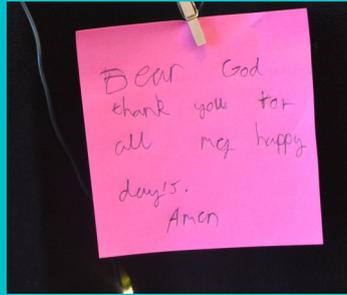


MORE THAN A MEAL

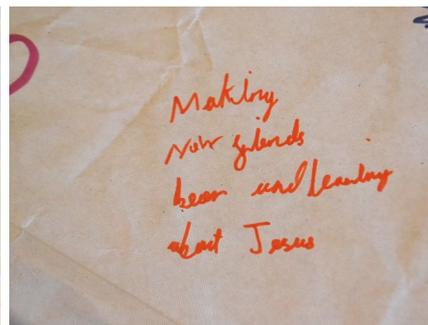
The last few months of our Project brought big expansion to our service provision. Through the amazing relationships we built with local churches, schools and community groups, we were able to offer more than food provision to our community.

Kingsquad

Through relationship with local charity, The Family Trust, we were able to relaunch a popular free after school club teaching primary-aged children about the Bible. Due to covid guidelines, we capped capacity at the club to 15 children, and were oversubscribed within the first week! We had an amazing term with the children, giving them a bit of normality back after such a long time of home schooling and missing out on spending time with their friends in a caring environment. Many of the children were already keen to sign up again for the new school year!



CELEBRATE Summer



We wanted to build on the relationships we had formed with local families by offering a free of charge week of fun for the children in Park Wood. Thanks to donations from the Maidstone Lions Club, the HAF Programme and many local supporters, Celebrate Summer gave children a week full of crazy games and activities, messy challenges, tasty food and teaching about Jesus. We loved having the children help us prepare lunch each day and watching them try different foods, even helping us tidy up after meals each day! Our volunteers were amazing at supporting each child, and helping them to make fab summer memories after a tough 18 months. Each child was also gifted a bible of their own so that they could continue their 'adventure with God' throughout their young lives and beyond.

"The best thing about this week has been making new friends, eating tasty food and having loads of fun!"

The Life Café Project brought like-minded individuals and organisations together to serve vulnerable people during the difficult covid-19 pandemic. We are delighted with what has been achieved as a united community, and we credit each and every person involved with the successes that we celebrated together.

*Featured on BBC
South East news and
BBC Radio Kent*



THE FUTURE

Though the Life Café Project has drawn to a close, we are excited about the platform that it has created for us as a Church to serve our community.

We have lots of plans to continue to build relationships with local families and individuals, and pray that God will continue to guide our steps as we seek Him in all that we do as His hands and feet. Keep up with our next projects via our website:

www.celebrationchurch.org.uk

“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.”

1 Peter 4:10, NIV