

Background Information



Good Company (Surrey) Trust is working to support people in our community with a mission to create a poverty free future.

History: Epsom & Ewell Foodbank was launched in October 2012, following research into whether there was need for a foodbank in our community. It has grown to include five centres in Epsom, Ewell, Leatherhead, Tadworth and Banstead. To date we have fed 60,000 people and demand is rising.

Good Company (Surrey) Trust: We are a Trussell Trust franchised foodbank. Trussell support a nationwide network of over 400 foodbanks across the country. We started as a project of Ewell Christian Fellowship Trust, however due to our growth and development into other areas we created a new trust called Good Company (Surrey) which incorporates all our projects. Epsom Pantry is part of the Your Local Pantry Network.

Background: In 2023 we distributed food and other essentials for over 10,00 people through our food bank centres. The pandemic and now the cost-of-living crisis have had a dramatic effect on all our work, nearly doubling demand for the foodbank. Our desire has always been to work towards a community without a need for a foodbank, however the massive increase in demand for our services has made this more challenging than ever.

Originally people who found themselves in food poverty were offered up to three vouchers in a 6-month window, with the expectation that this was all that was required prior to accessing benefits and addressing other issues, such as mental health and/or debt problems. However, as time has gone on we have realised that food insecurity has become much more entrenched, and can remain a major problem even for households who are in paid employment.

Five years after starting the Foodbank, we began to talk actively about how we could reverse the growth in foodbank use, as we believe no community should be reliant on emergency food aid. At this point, there were not many initiatives or much conversation around working towards closing food banks, just about opening more. We began to talk to our clients about their needs and commissioned research around what could be done to understand more about how people can

get trapped in poverty. As one commissioner said to us *'You don't wake up one day and think, today I'll live in poverty!'*

Initiatives started in response to identified needs in our community:

- Offered more than just food e.g. toiletries, pet food, fresh food donated from supermarkets with short life span.
- Employed Support Workers to help people to address the underlying issues that were often keeping them in poverty.
- Launched the Epsom & Ewell Refugee Network
- Ran a cooking course called "Eat Well Spend Less"
- Launched a Digital Inclusion project during the Covid-19 pandemic
- Provided seasonal support (Christmas vouchers, Easter, and school holiday support)
- Energy support scheme along with energy 'top-ups'
- Ran the second phase of the East Surrey Poverty Truth Commission
- Piloted and rolled out our Cost of the School Day project
- Launched the Epsom Pantry and opened Banstead Pantry in 2024.

We estimate that through our activities we support approximately 4000 unique people and have over 36,000 supportive interactions a year.

The Need for Change: We believe it is morally and ethically wrong to simply increase the scale of our operation to match demand. To do so would mean that we have become part of the problem. We feel we need to take different approaches, not just stimulate a conversation, but start meaningful activities looking for long-term solutions to poverty in our community and create an exit strategy for the foodbank, matched with the projects we are already delivering.

Fortunately, here in Surrey the problem is not as prevalent as in other areas of the country - but it is as stark - and we believe that the eradication of poverty can only happen if we actively make it happen.

Surrey is a unique area and we sense that if change is achievable anywhere, it's here, where the resources and skills needed to eliminate poverty could be channelled in the right way.

If you would like to know anything else or have an informal chat, then please do contact us.

Jonathan Lees
Founder & Managing Director