

Christmas Report 2020

Although the unprecedented Covid pandemic may have changed aspects of VSL's Christmas Project 2020, it was still recognisable in its engagement of the community and ability to help vulnerable individuals and families within the borough of Lewisham. In total VSL reached over 2915 people, up by around 500 on the previous year, an increase that was expected given the financial implications of the ongoing health crisis.

Volunteers donated their time to once again help make the project a success, despite the challenges posed by the need to social distance and limited numbers of people helping at any one time. We continued our partnership with the Lewisham Salvation Army, who kindly allowed us to work out of their church halls, cooked and prepared Festive Christmas Eve meals, and generally provided invaluable support to the project. This was also the first year that we hired a worker specifically to manage the Christmas Project.

The wider community did their bit to pitch in as well; schools, churches and local businesses donated items and money, and the Mayor highlighted VSL's Christmas Project in his Winter Appeal, garnering greater support in the form of monetary and toy donations from generous people living within the borough.

More so than ever we would not have been able to reach so many people without the help of our volunteers and the Lewisham community, so thank you! Although the increase in numbers of people who needed our help is unfortunate, we are glad we were able to work with referrers in the borough to provide food, toys, supermarket vouchers and other gifts to vulnerable individuals and families affected by economic hardships brought about or exacerbated by the pandemic.

Funding and in kind donations

Due to the Covid pandemic it was necessary to adapt our approach to how we raised money and collected donations. Several of our regular trusts and funders were unable to provide us with money this year, and so we had to turn to other avenues to make sure the Christmas Project was a success.

- The Mayor of Lewisham supported VSL as one of the two charities highlighted in his Winter Appeal. Specifically he asked the people of Lewisham to donate toys and gifts for children. We received a huge response, collecting more donations of toys and money from the public than we have in previous years.
- In total 445 people donated through Virgin Money Giving, our online donation page.
- Reverend Edd from Holy Trinity Church held a 'Reverse Santa' collection; with the help of a volunteer driver he collected toy donations from people's houses, while dressed as Father Christmas!
- Young people from Millwall Football Club collected donations of food outside a supermarket in September.

- Jay's Budgens and the Co-op in Crofton Park both kindly hosted our regular food donation points in their shops. Tesco Catford held a toy donation point one day in November.

Volunteering

Due to social distancing guidelines it was necessary to reduce our normal number of volunteers helping to sort and pack food and toys ready for delivery. We had 20 volunteers working in bubbles spread across four days of the week. PPE and hand sanitisers were supplied and available at all times. Volunteers also helped to deliver items out using their cars and minibuses, and 18 drivers helped deliver the Christmas Eve meals.

Unfortunately we were unable to invite any school children to our venue this year, however they were still able to support us by making up food hampers with items we delivered to their schools. 24 young people volunteered from Millwall Football Club through their NCS programme. We are happy we were able to continue to engage younger people in volunteering with the Christmas Project.

Hampers, toys, vouchers in numbers

The following items went out to people in the borough:

100 food hampers (Big Red Boxes) for families with 5 or more family members were packed by Kings Church and distributed through VSL. A further **59** were packed by VSL.

573 £15 supermarket vouchers were given to families with 3-4 members.

467 food hampers were delivered to elderly and vulnerable/isolated service users.

830 children received a toy, and **405** teenagers and vulnerable young adults received a gift/voucher.

78 residents of a local hostel supporting people with mental health difficulties received gifts and toiletries.

90 people received a Christmas Eve meal delivery.

In total we supported over **2915** people through the Christmas Project.

Christmas Eve Meal Delivery

Unfortunately we were unable to host our regular Christmas Day lunch gathering in conjunction with Churches Together Sydenham and Forest Hill. Instead we worked with the Lewisham and Catford Salvation Armies to deliver a festive meal on Christmas Eve to 90 vulnerable and isolated adults within the borough. The meals were prepared by the Salvation Armies, had a turkey or vegetarian option, and came with a quiz, Christmas cracker and a Christmas cake.

Thank you to:

Lewisham Parochial and Almshouse Charities

Lewisham Salvation Army

Holy Trinity Church

Lee Charity of William Hatcliffe

Lloyds Bank

Awards For All

Local schools, churches and businesses

...and the individual sponsors for their generous contributions

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