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**REACH Campaigns for Continued Support for Low Income Households**

*Reach Community Projects, based in Haverhill, Suffolk, marks “Who Uses a Food Bank ? – Awareness Week” by launching its campaign for the continuation of the Household Support Scheme along with the call to “Guarantee Our Essentials”*

According to REACH’s own findings, one of most effective government initiatives in recent years has been the Household Support Fund whereby local councils are funded by central government, to the tune of £842 million in this current financial year, to support vulnerable households with the cost of essentials.

In Suffolk, this has enabled the county council to continue with the provision of Free School Meal Vouchers and the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme while housing support is delivered through district councils and there is extra support for food banks.

However, there has been no formal confirmation that the Household Support Fund (HSF) will be carried forward after 31st March 2024, despite the Chancellor’s indication in parliamentary questions following the 2023 Autumn Statement.

Speaking at the launch this week of REACH’s campaign for the continuation of the HSF, their Engagement & Advocacy Lead, Saffron Carter, said “This type of local crisis support, delivered by the council, has been a lifeline in Haverhill for people facing hardship, hunger, and unexpected costs.”

Continuing with specific examples Saffron explained that “While we can support with emergency food, debt and welfare support, there is often a complex number of issues people are facing and where there may be gaps, the HSF provides critical support. In particular, the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme, which provides cash grants and white goods; approximately 90% of our clients are signposted to complete an application to help access further support.

“The Free School Meal vouchers during school holidays have also provided vital support for many families, with many telling us that the vouchers have helped buy food for the whole family, not just the children. Having the choice of where to shop and what to buy is also a far more dignified experience than a food parcel. It is therefore imperative that this campaign gets central and local government to see the sense in its continuation.”

REACH is not alone in calling for the extension of the HSF but is teamed with the Trussel Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in the “Guarantee Our Essentials” campaign which seeks to have an Essentials Guarantee enshrined into UK law. This would mean that for all those receiving Universal Credit there would be a solid guarantee that they would be able to afford life’s essentials – food, heating and other fundamental costs.

As part of this campaign, REACH is asking its supporters to sign the Trussel Trust petition, [www.trusselltrust.org/get-involved/campaigns/guarantee-our-essentials](http://www.trusselltrust.org/get-involved/campaigns/guarantee-our-essentials) , **calling on UK political party leaders to support the introduction of an Essentials Guarantee within Universal Credit to ensure that the basic rate at least covers life’s essentials, such as food and bills.**

Saffron continued “With the persistence of the cost of living crisis and finances further being squeezed we are seeing many people in our community needing to access emergency food and this is not right. At REACH in 2023, we fed 2037 people, compared to 1580 in 2020, before the cost of living crisis began, this represents an increase of 29%. Behind those numbers are families and individuals who do not have enough money to afford life’s essentials”.

Launch of this special campaign is timed to coincide with “Who Uses a Food Bank ? - Awareness Week” in which REACH will be contacting local organisations and councillors to gather support.

ENDS

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*REACH Community Projects (registered charity 1169108) was founded in 2010 by Henry Wilson MBE, a lifelong resident of Haverhill. The charity aims to help people facing financial crisis in Haverhill and the surrounding areas by meeting needs and reviving hope. As well as operating a foodbank (part of the Trussell Trust national network) and providing emergency aid (help with utilities, basic bedding, and kitchenware through partnerships with other organisations), REACH works longer term with clients to help them rise above and out of their crisis. This includes offering debt and budgeting advice (Reach is part of the Community Money Advice network), signposting clients to other appropriate support (help with mental health, homelessness, legal advice etc.) and supporting clients in other ways including helping them to complete forms, apply for jobs, accompanying them to court hearings and more.*

*For further information, contact Emma Wilkins, Communications Team Leader, REACH Community Projects.*