

## **Holiday hunger: so much more than food**

The Welcome Network has been on a clear mission since 2017 to help tackle holiday hunger in west Cheshire.

Cheshire West and Chester Council is funding the project until 2024, with the Welcome Network connecting more than 200 individuals, community sector organisations and public sector services.

This project is unique, with a long-term strategy in place to help people access the food they need, and key partners include Healthbox CIC, West Cheshire Foodbank, Mid-Cheshire Foodbank, Cheshire West Voluntary Action, Citizens Advice Cheshire West, Feeding Britain and many others.

Stephanie Ellis, Manager of the Welcome Network, said: “We’ve seen that the most sustainable way with limited resources to build food provision is to work together across different sectors. We want to make sure there’s an offer that is coordinated and no one is left to go hungry.

“It’s fantastic to see the support of local businesses this week and I hope we can work together in the future. By working together, we can make sure there is food provision and something people can rely on when they need it most.

“There’s huge merit in working locally with communities and existing groups.”

## **COVID-19 and planning the future**

With many community groups available day in, day out all year round to support people who need to access food, the Welcome Network has been offering grants of £1,000 to give them a boost from October half-term to next Easter.

Chester Football Club Community Foundation, Holy Trinity Blacon, GGO Community Bungalow in Winsford and Rudheath and Witton Together have already benefited from grants. They’re all signposting people to wider support services in the local community.

The Welcome Network is also working to build people’s confidence in cooking and cooking on a budget, making sure healthy and affordable food is available and accessible for people.

One of the Welcome Network’s key partners, Citizens Advice, is working with community food providers and offering advice and support right in the heart of communities through the community access points recently set up during the pandemic, allowing people to reach the services they need more easily.

Stephanie added: “We know there’s enough food to go around in this country and we know there are many organisations, people and projects that are working to support people.

“We believe long-term change is possible with changes to policy and creating a safety net that is fit for purpose.

“We’re working with our partners to develop a food strategy that builds on existing strengths and the hard work of people in west Cheshire. It looks to show the connections, synergies and opportunities for working together.

“The strategy has three key themes: community, food and change. These are three strands in their own right and aren’t mutually exclusive.

“Working together and shaping a provision that listens to those with lived experience will hopefully create both short-term and long-term change.

“We want to live in a borough where everyone has access to affordable and healthy food in a dignified way so they’re able to make a decent meal.”

For more information about the Welcome Network and the valuable work it does, visit: [welcomenet.co.uk](http://welcomenet.co.uk).

