

FOODBANK VOLUNTEER SURVEY 2024

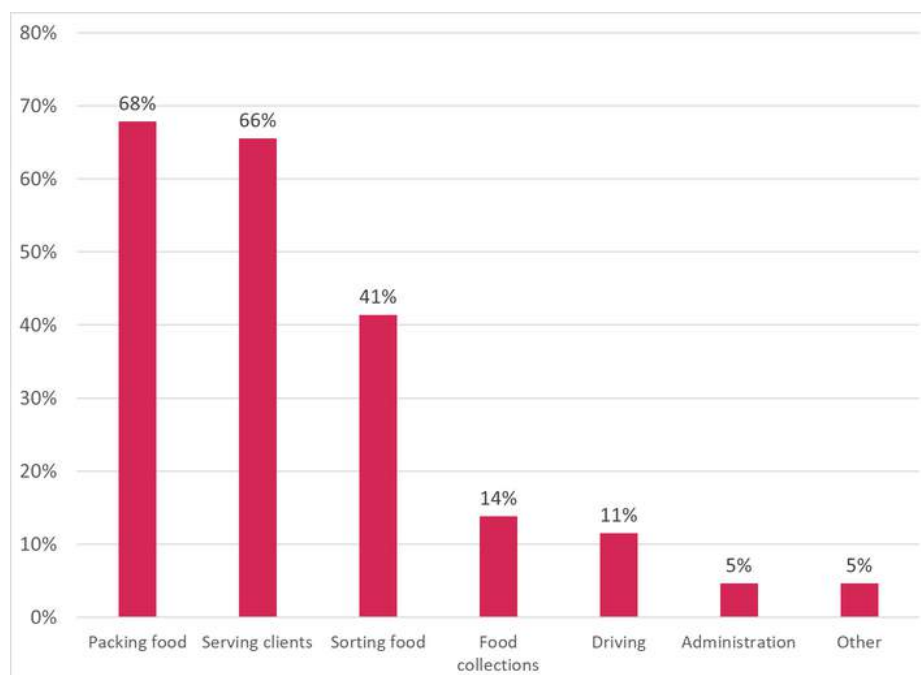
Introduction

Volunteers are the heartbeat of Good Company, helping to collect, sort and distribute food and toiletries to hundreds of families every month. Without their enthusiasm, energy and hard work – week in, week out – we would not be able to provide this critical support to people in our community who are experiencing financial hardship.

This report presents the key findings from a survey of our foodbank volunteers, which was carried out in June 2024. All our volunteers were invited to participate in this online survey on at least two occasions via email, and we received a total of 87 responses – around a third of all our volunteers. Responses came from volunteers at all five of our foodbank centres - Banstead, Epsom, Ewell, Leatherhead and Tadworth - as well as 19 responses from those who help out at our hub/warehouse off Ruxley Lane.

Our volunteers are involved in a wide range of activities in the distribution chain, with packing food and serving clients being the most common – see below:

What type of volunteering are you involved in?



About our volunteers

Just over half of our volunteers (51%) help out about once a month, 23% come along 2 or 3 times a month, and 20% help every week or more. The remainder – around 5% - volunteer more occasionally, when needed.

The majority of respondents have volunteered with us for three or more years, including nearly one in five who have been with the Foodbank for more than ten years. The remainder - around 44% of our volunteers - have joined us more recently within the last few years.

When asked an open-ended question about why they started and continue to volunteer for the Foodbank, people cited a wide range of motivations, including:

- Wanting to give back to the community (25 respondents)
- Feeling compassion and wanting to help others less fortunate (20)
- Doing something worthwhile in their retirement/ spare time (19)
- Enjoying spending time with other volunteers and clients (17)
- Valuing the ethos and work of the charity (13)
- Wanting to tackle the injustice of inequality and food poverty (8)



People often started volunteering because they wanted to do something to help those in need, and then their commitment has been cemented by the relationships they develop with other volunteers and by seeing the need and impact of the charity's work with their own eyes. People's primary motivation is to help others - but in doing so, they benefit themselves from the camaraderie and their involvement in something worthwhile and fulfilling – see below some of the individual responses.

“

“I wanted to feel like I was doing something helpful and making a difference... I keep volunteering because I get so much from helping, the need is still there, and because all the volunteers I work with are such a joy to spend a Saturday morning with.”

[Leatherhead volunteer]

”





I wanted to help others less fortunate than myself. Whilst it can be upsetting to see circumstances people are in, it is rewarding to see a smile on somebody's face when you hand over a shopping bag of food, or simply chat to them."

[Epsom volunteer]



"As I live alone, I thought I would like to volunteer to help in the community. I really enjoy the friendship and camaraderie in the warehouse and like to think that we are helping people in some small way and making their lives a little easier." [Hub/warehouse volunteer]



"After retiring, I wanted to volunteer somewhere that I felt would be useful and serve my community. I have enjoyed the commitment and am proud of my involvement in an agency that does its best to improve the lives of people in different circumstances."

[Ewell volunteer]



"To interact with my community and to feel as though I am doing what I can to support those around me. I continue because I love people and I get to see them regularly each week and we have fun."

[Tadworth volunteer]



"It's a means to 'give back' and I enjoy working with the team."

[Banstead volunteer]

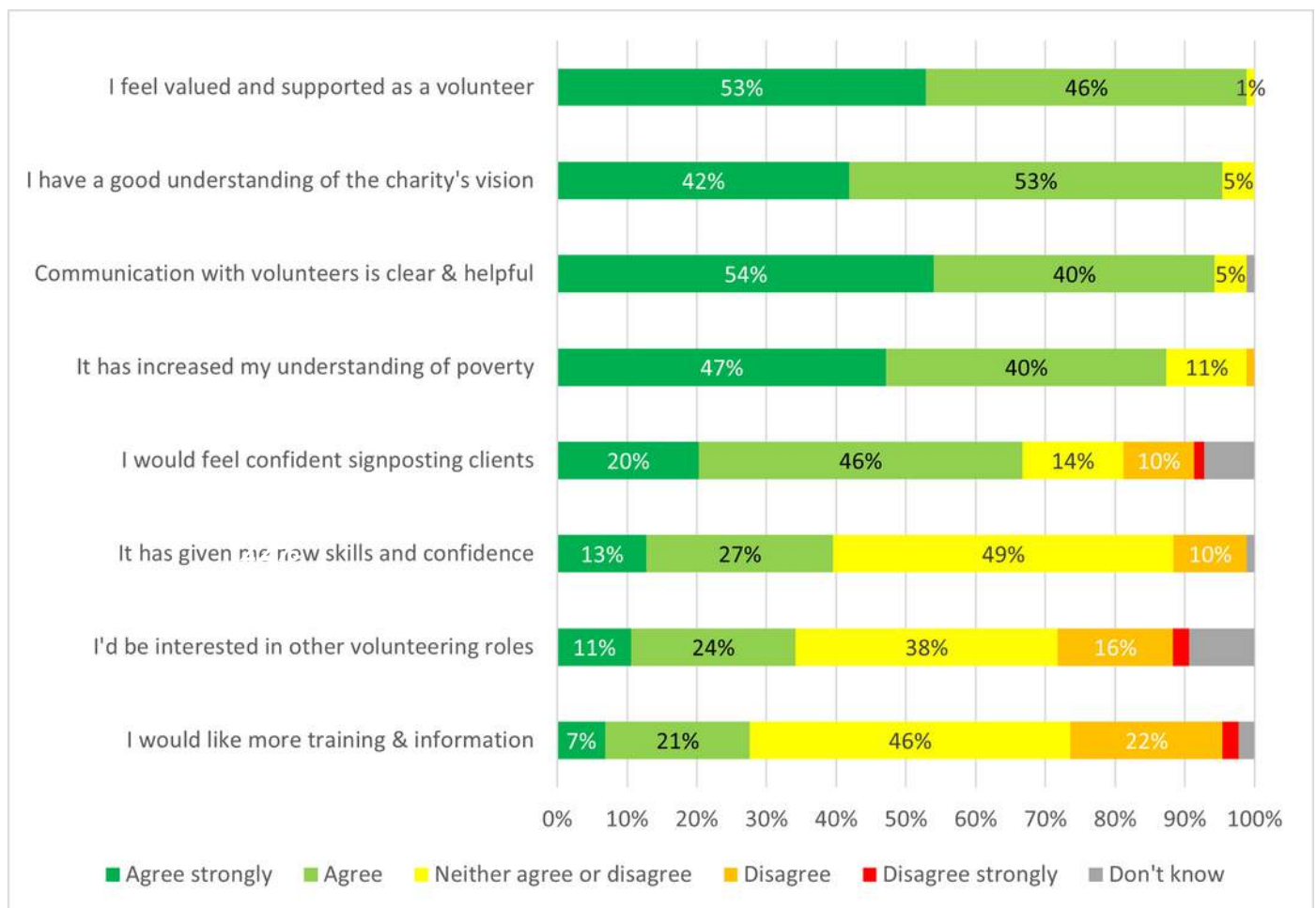


People's experience of volunteering

When asked a series of statements about their experience of volunteering with the Foodbank, nearly everyone (99%) said they felt valued and supported in their role, and agreed that the communication with volunteers is clear and helpful (94%).

Encouragingly, 95% of respondents also agreed that they had a good understanding of Good Company's vision and values. This has been a high priority in recent years as we have expanded our operations substantially and established a fresh vision for the charity, which is focused on addressing the underlying drivers of foodbank use as part of our commitment to a poverty-free future for Surrey.

Do you agree or disagree with these statements about your volunteering experience?



When asked, in a follow-up question about how they would explain what Good Company does to someone who had never heard about us, many of the responses demonstrated a deep understanding of the charity's aims, including our focus on tackling the root causes of poverty and reducing the need for the Foodbank – see box below.

How would you explain what Good Company does?



“A well run organisation that seeks to provide practical help to the most disadvantaged in a way that is non-judgmental - not only by giving much needed supplies, as required, but by assisting people to get back on their feet by helping to tackle the underlying issues affecting their situation.”

“Our food banks provide compassionate, practical support to people in crisis to tackle the root causes that lock people into poverty and build people's resilience, so they are less likely to need a food bank in the future.”

“Good Company supports people in the community experiencing financial hardship by providing emergency food provisions, support and advice through food banks and liaising with other bodies to help them get out of poverty. Ultimately the goal is to end poverty.”

“It is a place where you can find support if you are finding life difficult. It will initially help with the provision of food for your family, but will strive to signpost you to some of the many services which might help you deal with the root issues which have resulted in your current need.”

“It's not just a food bank, but is there to assist and support as needed with no judgement. Each client is made to feel welcome, valued and respected.”



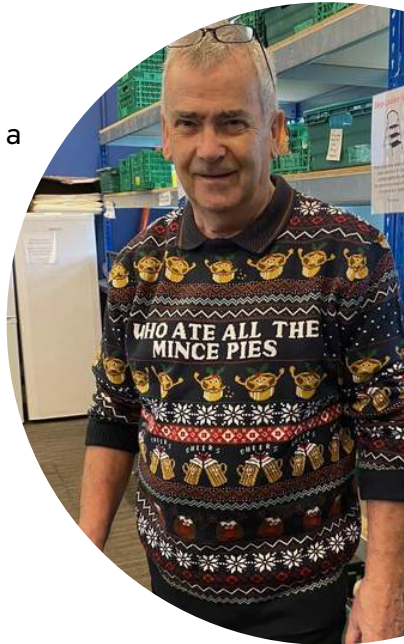
Investing in our volunteers

In support of our three-year strategy, we have put considerable time and effort into training our volunteers, to increase their awareness of the issues facing our clients and equip them to do effective signposting. This investment appears to be paying dividends, with 87% of respondents saying that they “have a better understanding of why and how people are struggling”, whilst 67% of volunteers are “confident about signposting clients with additional support needs” (including 74% of those in client-facing roles).

As we seek to strengthen the charity’s focus on our prevention, participation and influencing work, we will be looking to involve our volunteers even more, particularly where they have relevant skills and knowledge. The survey shows that a significant minority of volunteers – up to a third – would be interested in other volunteering roles and further training opportunities.

When asked if they had any specific skills or knowledge that they would be willing to use to support Good Company’s work, 56% of volunteers said they could help with administrative tasks. These skills are perhaps under-used, given that only 5% of respondents said they were currently helping us in this way. In addition, about 1 in 10 respondents said they might be willing to help in a variety of other ways, including research, campaigning, HR and social media. A small number of volunteers mentioned fundraising, finance, and facilitation skills.

Overall, 70% of volunteers said they were “very satisfied” with their experience of volunteering with the Foodbank and 27% said they were “satisfied”. Asked what they valued most about their experience, people said they enjoyed listening to and helping others, working as part of a team; seeing the impact on clients; meeting new people; and doing something worthwhile.



“Meeting people who I would not normally encounter in my day-to-day life.”

“Listening to others who have not been as lucky in life as I have, and trying to help them in any way possible.”

“I enjoy working with the other Foodbank team and volunteers and also seeing the impact their work has on clients.”



Only three people did not say they were satisfied with their volunteering experience, with one of them citing concerns about volunteers not always having enough to do and about the quantity of processed food being distributed to clients.

There were also a number of suggestions for improving people’s volunteering experience:

- a debrief at the end of the session to gather feedback on what is working/not working.
- more information on the difference the charity is making locally and what we are doing to influence policy and lobby for change.
- more interaction with paid staff – “sometimes it feels a bit ‘us’ and ‘them’, although this is improving”.
- an annual check in with one of the central team “to see how we are finding it and if we want to get involved in anything else.”
- more training and information on where or how to signpost clients.



The final comment is for Jackie, our volunteer manager, who is also a volunteer herself:

“A shout out to Jackie whose emails are so good and help to make me feel very connected to the Foodbank. And thank you to all the volunteers and workers. Everyone is very friendly, which creates a nice atmosphere.”



About Good Company

Our Mission is to lead our community towards a poverty-free future, while supporting those who need our help. We work for the prevention and alleviation of poverty through the following activities:

- Five food banks: providing emergency food and other essentials to people in crisis who are referred to us. We also signpost and refer clients to local agencies that can help them address other needs.
- Support Work: offering holistic support to help people address complex underlying needs and to help reduce reliance on the Foodbank by offering practical and emotional support and advocating for clients.
- Epsom Pantry: a member-led community shop offering choice and low cost, nutritious food alongside community activities and volunteering opportunities to help people build financial and emotional resilience.
- East Surrey Poverty Truth Commission: bringing together those with lived experience of poverty and leaders from organisations who make decisions that affect people in poverty, to increase our understanding of poverty and seek transformative culture change in our community.
- Epsom Refugee Network: building networks of support for refugees and asylum seekers through social events, English classes and partnership working.

To find out more about what we do, and to read stories shared by people with lived experience of poverty, please go to: www.goodcompany.org.uk

Compassion

Building communities that listen, care and empower.

Justice

Influencing local policies through participation and culture change.

Hope

Increasing people's financial resilience and developing pathways out of poverty.



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