

Good work from the volunteers at Goodtrees Neighbourhood Centre

We visited the fabulous volunteers involved with the Goodtrees Neighbourhood Centre to find out what they are doing at the moment.

In just one week at the beginning of the pandemic, they distributed 2500 packed lunches to families, elderly and those with health conditions, 180 meal kits to families, 70 meals to homeless people, 70 bags of essentials to families, 30 hot evening meals each day for the elderly, kept up with the young people they regularly engage with by social media or one to one FaceTime support and also helped the Cyrenians to deliver food from their 'pantry'.

And they keep going. They no longer have access to Goodtrees Neighbourhood Centre as the council has closed the doors there, but the Tron Kirk in Moredun has made their hall available to them for as long as they need it.

If you have anything to donate to them please leave it in the Gilmerton branch of Morrisons or drop items off to the church where they are now working. The Minister of the Tron Kirk, Cammy MacKenzie, has been extremely helpful, and has himself been helping to pack lunches for distribution. There is more information on [Facebook](#) and you can [donate to them here](#).

In the last few days, some copies of The Edinburgh Reporter's

April issue were also included in the packs and sent to those receiving meals and packed lunches. Thank you so much to John Beatson and his small army of volunteers for that help.



Goodtrees volunteers Blair, Russell, Ellis, Jonathan and John at the Tron Kirk taking a welcome break to read the April edition of The Edinburgh Reporter..

We asked John, who is the Youth Services Manager at Goodtrees, what he and his helpers have been doing.

He said: "We've got 500 packed lunches per day going out. They're being delivered to us by Social Bite, and we're getting them out to vulnerable families, elderly, and those that are affected by poverty.

"And on top of that we're doing 100 meal hampers a week. These are specifically for vulnerable families or those who are isolating. What the guys are doing just now that they're making up a bag that's for a pasta meal and one for curry. We're including recipes and the essentials that go along with that.

"We've also bought 180 prepared meals per week for the elderly and these are delivered with essentials like toilet rolls."

Goodtrees have partnerships with Cyrenians, Social Bite and Morrison's for food of different kinds and also paper bags to deliver it all in. Morrison's are delivering a pallet or two of food every week.

But where Goodtrees started from was as youth workers. So they are also busy keeping in touch with the young people they are normally in contact with, on digital platforms such as Zoom or one on one FaceTime support.

John explained: "A lot of young people that we work with, especially teenagers, are vulnerable and have chaotic home lives, so it's important that we're able to keep that that

link with them.”

Goodtrees have done all of this with a small team, so that they can minimise the risk both to people that they are going to and also to the rest of the team.

John said: “They’ve been working really, really hard. In the first week, it was hard, but now we’ve found a rhythm with it and it’s flowing well. What’s been really nice about it is when we go round some of the doors to visit some of the families that we’re supporting. Similar to the rainbows that you see they now have the Goodtrees logo in their windows just to say thanks. The community spirit here is fantastic.

“As before we’re trying to grow our services and reach capacity, because we’re getting an influx of referrals from so many people that are in so much need. Of course we’ve got a limited capacity at the moment, but that’s something that we’re just trying to work on. We will be looking to The Scottish Government or the council to see if they can support it in any way.

As well as free lunches and items to make a meal with, Goodtrees have also teamed up with Cyrenians who run a pantry service. When this was introduced in 2019 Cyrenians Pantry coordinator Michelle Dennis explained how it works: “The pantry model operates a membership scheme where people sign up for only £1, and can choose ten items from our pantry for an additional £1.

“The pantry offers dignified access to affordable food on an ongoing basis. Stocked in the first instance by our Fareshare depot we’ll be looking to expand the offering by bringing new partners on board as we develop.”

Goodtrees Neighbourhood Centre joined with other groups from Valley Park Community Centre, Gilmerton Community Centre and Gilmerton & Inch Community Council to present a deputation to the Education, Children and Families Committee on 3 March

2020.

Led by Stephanie Malone the Chair of Goodtrees Neighbourhood Centre, they presented their case for an award of a third party grant that they had applied for. Ms Malone said that the south of the city, where 21,000 people live in poverty, had only been recommended for 21% of the city's budget and that the north had been given far more. Lennon was one of the secondary school pupils who are volunteers at the centre and who spoke emotively to the committee. He handed a petition signed by 1397 people to the committee and said: "I really feel upset that something I know and love, and the council won't fund us the fair amount. The worst thing about it is that the staff at the centre are not like friends, they are like family.

"If the council want us to stay off the streets and out of trouble, then that is what we do with the groups at Goodtrees, so if they don't give us funding then we will all get in a lot more trouble and we will be on the streets because there is nothing else better that we can do. It gives us something to look forward to at the end of the day. Goodtrees have helped me, because I used to get into a lot of trouble, and I'm sure they helped other people too. We've got more people in poverty and we need more funding for our groups."

The committee decided to delay making any allocation of Third Party Grants until May. If the coronavirus lockdown continues, then it is possible that the council's leadership panel will make these awards.

You can help by visiting their [JustGiving](#) page here or by donating food to the food bank at the Morrison's branch at Gilmerton.

And now the volunteers have been kitted out with protective suits!

