

Livingston based charity The School Bank gearing up for its busiest season

As schools close their doors for the summer holidays a West Lothian charity is gearing up for its busiest season.

The new school year will bring additional demands as families face the cost of kitting their kids out with school uniforms.

While the holidays are a time of excitement for many families, for many more it's a time of anxiety – a full basic school uniform costs around £140 .

The School Bank, a Livingston based charity, expects more than 1,000 referrals of families needing help with the costs of providing uniforms for the new term.

The School Bank is a volunteer-led group aiming to improve the lives of children in families in West Lothian experiencing financial hardship by providing them with a brand new school uniform and other equipment.

Project Manager Collette Moran told the Local Democracy Reporting Service: "We work tirelessly to ensure every young person in West Lothian can attend and fully participate at school. We want to help every child thrive."

Over the past eight years the charity has supported over 8,000 families facing financial hardship, providing new uniforms, jackets, shoes, and school bags.

She said: "This summer we are bracing ourselves as we expect to receive around 1,000 referrals for uniform packs for children returning to school in August."





School Bank collaborates with various community professionals, such as schools, charities, social services, Women's Aid, and the Advice Shop who have referred over 2,000 young people in the past year alone. Demand is rising every year.

Colette told the LDRS: "Our packs are more than just a bag of clothes. Our packs combat low self-esteem and exclusion, can significantly reduce the risk of bullying, and improve school attendance by providing items that allow children to take part in activities they previously were unable to."

She added: "Demand is rising steeply as more families are

feeling the effects of rising costs. That's why we launched a school uniform donation appeal last month asking the community for donations of new and gently used uniforms. "We are grateful to everyone who has supported our appeal so far but we need more support to help us ensure we can fulfil every referral we receive. "

Most local schools operate their own " school banks" providing uniform items such as blouses, shirts, winter coats.

The West Lothian charity not only provides clothing packs from cash and clothing donations, it also acts as a parental champion in the campaign for practical and affordable uniforms.

The charity strives to make uniforms affordable. Some schools demand specific hard to find, colours for polo shirts or school shirts. Others require expensive PE kit which can only come from specific suppliers with a hefty price tag.

One local primary's parent council voted to incorporate a kilt. As Collette pointed out, the kilt costs £14 which some can afford but others cannot, so they have to rely on the alternative of a grey skirt.

"We are immediately taking away the point of the uniform," said Collette

For Collette the key questions for a uniform is "Can I buy it on the high street? and Is it comfortable?"

Some schools have rigid and "old fashioned" rules such as a ban on leggings, or short sleeved shirts and blouses, a demand for badges on sweaters and polo shirts or a rule for blazers.

According to Collette: "All of these things work to create barriers for families, many of whom have to find the uniform costs for two or more children."

There are also mixed messages from the schools of what is acceptable and what isn't, which can confuse teenagers in high school and their parents.

A glance at social media each August brings you a host of "home you go" posts with pictures of miserable teens sent home for the wrong shoes or wrong hair styles. At its heart lies the divisive nature of the demand of uniform and its impact on young people who are developing their personalities.

It also hammers home the financial inequalities a growing number of families face.

A West Lothian Council spokesperson said: "Over 90% of the schools currently have a pre-loved uniform bank, as part of our work to reduce the cost of the school day.

"This is one of many programmes to help parents and pupils which includes school clothing grants, free school meals, breakfast clubs and educational maintenance allowance.

"Where schools do not have a uniform bank run directly by the school, they often have arrangements with their Parent/Staff Association (PSA) or local church, for example.

"There has been a move, in some schools, from the provision of outer uniform garments only, to include PE kit, footwear, underwear and personal care products. Party clothes, Halloween costumes and Christmas jumpers are also provided in some schools.

"Schools are increasingly considering how and where garments can be easily or freely accessed by children, young people and parents and carers, in order to remove barriers and reduce stigma.

"Most schools offer pre-loved items at no cost with some offering the option of a discretionary donation. In the few schools that have an associated cost, this would typically be

around £1 per item. The majority of school uniform banks run daily.

“Some schools have a small stock of new uniform items which they will allocate in a targeted way, according to need.

“Schools are improving communication methods to highlight the support they can offer in relation to uniform, for example including standing items in school newsletters and in some instances, including a QR code that enables parents/carers to access support in a discreet manner. Schools have been asked to promote the School Clothing Grant to their school communities and the School Bank West Lothian has been actively promoted as a source of additional support.

“All schools are undertaking action to mitigate the cost of the school day based on the needs identified through consultation with their school communities.”

At the School Bank charity, Collette said: “ There are a number of ways you can help West Lothian’s School Bank charity this summer :

1. **Sponsor-A-Child and Buy a Uniform Pack** – Click this link to register <https://bit.ly/49fueWt> to receive details of items required for a child who has been referred (typically 3-6 items). After purchasing the items, drop them off and delivery will be arranged.
2. **Fill-A-Bag with Vital School Supplies** – such as socks, tights, pencil case, stationery, and a water bottle. After you’ve packed your bag (you could use a school bag or drawstring gym bag), simply drop it off at one of the numerous red drop-off points across West Lothian, conveniently situated in various supermarkets and community establishments. <https://schoolbank-westlothian.org/drop->

[off-points/](#)

3. **Make-A-Donation** – donate to The School Bank West Lothian and items will be bought on your behalf. For example, £18 could buy a 5-pack of white shirts for a teenager, £45 would buy a pair of school shoes and a jacket. The estimated cost of a full uniform pack is £140, although all donations are gratefully received. Click this link to donate: <https://rb.gy/mfj4tc>

4. **Recycle Uniforms** – ‘good quality’ pre-loved uniforms are welcome that still have plenty of life left in them, including jackets (except items with school badges, blazers, or kilts). Items can be dropped into one of the red drop-off points across West Lothian. <https://schoolbank-westlothian.org/drop-off-points/>

For further details, email admin@schoolbank-westlothian.org or visit the Facebook page “TheSchoolBankWestLothian” or website at <https://schoolbank-westlothian.org>.”

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter