

# A REVIEW OF CHRISTMAS 2024

## Hamper Pack Project: 15-20 December

The project actually began long before we packed the hampers - first, we had to find a new venue, as the Salvation Army (where we had happily been ensconced for over a decade) had made it financially impossible for us to stay there, having decided to charge us £4000 for the 8 days we required. Fortunately, it did not take us long to find a new 'home', and this year we were hosted by Battle Abbey School, in the beautiful grounds of Battle Abbey.

Next came the nominations: a plethora of local agencies (including health visitors, social workers, schools, support bodies, etc) were contacted, and asked to nominate families and individuals in need in the Hastings and Rother areas, which they duly did, and by the end of November we knew that we would need to provide 798 food hampers, along with toys for those families with children, for which we budgeted. This number would eventually climb to 851 - more of that shortly.

We could not deliver this campaign successfully without the active involvement of our volunteers, who do whatever needs doing, and our partnership agencies, who nominate for their clients and support the deliveries. We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you!

An increasingly important part of the hamper pack week is the supermarket collections, which take place in the weeks preceding the pack - the food and money raised through this allowed us to pack the extra 53 hampers for which we had not budgeted. Late nominations and emergencies will always happen, and your generosity allowed us to fill this need.

As the nominations were happening, we set out to ordering the food which would fill the hampers, and encountered another difficulty - access to the Abbey meant that our supplier's lorries could not deliver the food, which they had always done before, so back to the drawing board it was again! We arranged transport of 19 pallets full of everything we would need to pack what would ultimately be 851 hampers. Many, many people came along to help us do this on the Sunday before the packing began, including members of Hailsham Young Farmers, charity trustees, and other volunteers. These volunteers gave up their time not only willingly, but happily - and Sunday's mood was to set the tone for the whole of the 2024 campaign.

So, on Monday 16 December, we gathered to begin the week. First things first, welcoming the volunteers! Every day, we had 20-25 volunteers, for whom nothing was too much trouble. This year, for the first time, in addition to our loyal and reliable regular volunteer cadre, we had corporate volunteers for every single day - we very much appreciate their help, and it is leading to us working with them in ways to improve how we deliver what we do. We not only welcomed local commercial firms such as Balfour Beatty, Littlewoods Fencing, and Triangle Fire Systems, but also

government sections - the Department of Work and Pensions, and the Ministry of Housing.

We started by building up the boxes we would need to make the hampers - these were provided to us free of charge by SAICA in Reading; volunteers had rented a van the previous week and delivered them to the Abbey the day before we began.

We had also received non-perishable food donations from schools, churches, local businesses and individuals which boosted our food supplies and added even more Christmas cheer to our hampers. Over the following five days, we packed and distributed the hampers, with the invaluable support of volunteers, often using their own transport. All volunteers and agency workers made this happen efficiently and effectively with little fuss, lots of fun, and the odd hurdle to overcome such as extra food runs, a cold snap, and late nominations due to families in urgent need. Tesco kindly donated 'bags for life', which were used to make up two bags of food for recipients instead of a boxed hamper; for the increased demand, and for those people for whom boxes were not practical to transport.

Included in every hamper destined for a family were toys sourced to fit each family's individual needs, with information provided from the agencies as to exactly how many children, along with their ages and genders. This year, we sent out over 1000 toys with the 850 food hampers. Although we bought many of the toys from charity funds, we were helped massively by the More Radio Toy Appeal, and donations from individuals who responded to our urgent call for help.

Beyond a shadow of a doubt, this year's Hamper Pack Project was our most successful yet, not only in terms of what we delivered, but in organisation, coordination, and overall interaction by everyone who participated. Many thanks again to Battle Abbey School, and we look forward to joining you again in December 2025!

## **Santa's Grotto: 21 December**

This year, our Santa's Grotto (designed and built by a wonderful group of volunteers) was also in a new venue; His Place Community Church in Hastings, to whom we are so very grateful for extending such a warm welcome to us.

Many of the recipients of our food hampers also have children, and these children are warmly welcomed by us to come and see Santa, to have treats and fruit, and to receive a wonderful gift- wrapped present from the Big Man himself. They also received a chocolate selection box, and what was for this year a new initiative - a 'lucky dip' bag filled with little toys, from which the children were each allowed to choose one toy. This was a huge success, and the children enjoyed it enormously.

We were also joined, after lunch, by Rosie the Little Grey Pony, who was impeccably behaved. She allowed children to stroke her, and have their photos taken with her.

Literally several dozens of children joined us in Santa's Grotto; children who otherwise might have been denied a visit to see Santa before the big day - and the delight on their faces made every bit of effort worthwhile!

## **Christmas and Boxing Day 2024**

A team of volunteers went into His Place on Christmas Eve to set up our halls for Christmas and Boxing Days, making it as festive and as jolly as possible. Both days saw volunteers and guests chatting, eating, playing board games, watching movies, listening to the entertainment, dancing and generally having fun. This year, we also provided many services for our guests, including medical advice, mental health advice, hairdressers, hand massagers, and even an optician. It was a wonderful atmosphere, and we hope that it gave many a Christmas to remember in a year which, like many before and many still to come, has been difficult and at times fraught. The weather, being grey and damp, meant that we really were able to provide shelter for our guests, which was much appreciated by all. Teams of volunteers were supported and organised by committee members on each day. It is clear that everyone worked so hard and played their role - thank you from us all.

Adam, our legendary chef, assisted by an extra chef each day and a team of kitchen helpers, created his usual magic. It is estimated that over 100 hot lunches were enjoyed by our guests on Christmas Day, and almost the same number on Boxing Day. Local fruit / vegetable and meat distributors, as well as the local college, help to make it run smoothly, with fresh, good quality ingredients.

We continue to be successful due to the hard work and dedication of the lead volunteers, local agencies, supporting organisations, and the trustees. The website team from FreshOnline are an invaluable resource as they have supported our charity with the maintenance of our website, and continue to offer free guidance and support, adding regular updates.

If you are reading this and are interested in our charity, and would like to get more involved throughout the year and / or at Christmas, then please come along to the AGM in the spring of 2025 (date yet to be confirmed - please keep an eye on Facebook and our website for that), and sign up to become a lead volunteer or get on the mailing list for support over Christmas. If you cannot attend the AGM then please contact via the website Contact Page and we will get back to you as soon as possible.