

School uniform schemes run from Church of England parishes are reporting growing demand as families prepare for the start of term.

School uniform 'banks', often working alongside other projects in churches such as food banks and breakfast clubs, are attracting more donations and providing help to an increasing number of parents.

The Community Wardrobe, founded at All Saints Church in Murston, Sittingbourne, Kent (Canterbury Diocese), has grown from 600 items of clothing donated in 2016 to more than 5,000 items this year.

The scheme works with other churches and groups ranging from the local council, a social housing provider, schools and charities including Christians Against Poverty.

Parents donate school uniform and a network of volunteers iron and wash the clothes – with a second-hand furniture charity, the Neighbourhood Furniture Store, laundering more than 50% of clothing this summer and the Mothers' Union offering to iron and fold hundreds



Rev Lesley Jones, Team Vicar at St Michael's Church in Sittingbourne, who introduced the Community Wardrobe, said families faced a range of financial pressures.

"We have had a really generous response from parents as they know how tough it is. This is about parents helping parents with the church facilitating and supporting this much needed partnership," she said.

At St Michael's Parish Church in Chell, Stoke-on-Trent, (Lichfield Diocese) a school uniform bank provided uniform for 137 children last year and is expecting to cater for more by the time term starts. The uniform bank has been run alongside a 'Summer's Kool' scheme providing hot meals for 100 parents and children two days a week over the summer holidays.

Rev Chris Coune, Chell Parish Vicar, said: "This year we have already kitted out 130 children and we are expecting a higher figure by the time term



William Temple Church in Wythenshawe, Manchester, (Manchester Diocese) acts as a venue to a uniform swap scheme run by Clare Byfield, a children's and families support worker for the Methodist Church. The project, run alongside a breakfast club in the church, has grown and now handles thousands of items. It won a recycling award from Manchester City Council.

Rev Stephen Edwards, Team Rector of Wythenshawe, said: "The uniform swap has been a life-saver for many families who are struggling financially, often choosing between food, uniforms and other essentials."

St Mark's, North Road, St Helens, in Liverpool Diocese, (Liverpool Diocese) started its 'unicycle' school uniform scheme last year. Members of the congregation wash and iron the uniform and staff the scheme at the church, run by former Health Visitor Sue Corner.

Area Dean of St Helen's, Revd Dr Chris Daniel-McKeigue said: "The congregation members have been both encouraged and inspired by being involved. Unicycle is more than an ecologically sound solution to clothing poverty - it is love in action."



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