



and surge by 500 per cent during lockdown as elderly and vulnerable people have sought help.

The number of people receiving support from Shildon Alive food bank in the Diocese of Durham has increased fivefold to 500 a week since the lockdown. Founded seven years ago by St John's Church, in the town of Shildon, the food bank has moved to home deliveries only during the pandemic. The food bank receives supplies through the FareShare surplus supermarket food scheme, as well as other donations from supermarkets, independent retailers and wholesalers. Cash donations are used to buy in additional food. It has a headquarters in a former shop in the town, with freezers and has managed to distribute large donations – including 1,000 litres of milk delivered in the first week of lockdown and a large consignment of vegetarian burgers - with the help of town council drivers.

Paula Nelson, project manager, said the parcels, made up of fresh food as well as tinned items, are packed to make sure they serve the needs of the recipients with a note added to ask how they are coping, and inviting them to get in touch if they need more. The rise in demand is attributable to older people who are self-isolating with a sharp increase in recent weeks from households that have lost their income because of the lockdown.

"What I love most is the care that is put into assembling the food deliveries to make sure, for example, where there is a family, that each child receives a piece of fruit," she said. "We send a note in each box – and we often receive a note back saying 'thankyou so much, you have been a lifeline'.

"At this time of year hundreds of people in Shildon, including schoolchildren would be working in our community gardens – another scheme founded by the church – but this is not possible because of the restrictions. Working on food deliveries has been a really positive thing for us to do to help people."

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