



2023

AMURT UK UPDATE

LONDON PROGRAMME



2023 SUMMARY

2023 was a particularly challenging year for our service users due to the ongoing cost of living crisis. In London, 21% of adults were facing food insecurity and 800,000 children were living in poverty. Large numbers were struggling to heat their homes, often having to decide between 'heating or eating'. According to official figures rough sleeping also increased by 23% in London in the last quarter of 2023 compared to the last quarter of 2022 and we saw this reflected in our own service.

AMURT UK helps to reduce food poverty and insecurity amongst vulnerable children, families, households and the homeless across London.

In 2023 AMURT UK prepared and distributed 20,616 warm nutritious plant-based meals, 1500 nutrition bars and several hundred tonnes of fresh food ingredients serving over 9000 homeless and

vulnerable people affected by the poverty crisis in London.

We also distributed warm clothes and bedding and offered a signposting service to those struggling.

In total we made the signposting service available at 95 distribution sessions in 2023 and supported 46 service users with requests for support they needed.

AMURT UK's activities are almost exclusively run by dedicated volunteers. In 2023, 2100 volunteer shifts by over 150 volunteers were filled, making up over 3500 hours of volunteer time.

AMURT UK'S MAIN SERVICES: WARM MEALS, NUTRITION BARS, OUTDOOR LIVING ATTIRE/ESSENTIALS & SIGNPOSTING

AMURT UK produces hot, tasty, nutritious plant-based meals every single Thursday. Most of the fresh ingredients are donated by the Felix Project and City Harvest. This produce would otherwise go to waste. We also distribute very high-quality bread donated by Fabrique bakery and Casey's Bakery in East London.

Warm Meals: Kitchen Upgrade

2023 saw a big upgrade of our kitchen facilities and distribution points. It became clear from speaking to service users there was a need for a warm place to be able to sit, eat and socialise when receiving our warm meals. In response, by October 2023 we had secured a reciprocal partnership with The Salvation Army and moved our production to their kitchen in Lower Clapton which has a big open dining room space to distribute food from. This means that we now have 3 distribution points in Lower Clapton, Cazenove Road and Lincolns Inn Fields. We have also continued to provide meals to other community partners in Hackney such as the Greenhouse GP surgery and Streets Kitchen.

The improved kitchen facilities allowed us to increase food production in line with demand. We increased it from 374 meals/week in January 2023, feeding 156 service users to 502 meals/week in December 2023, feeding 246 service users.

That is an increase of almost 34% in volume of meals and 58% in numbers of service users benefitting. The increase in volume of meals and numbers of service users is steadily increasing into 2024.

We started having two meal sittings in the cooking hub in Lower Clapton every Thursday. One at lunchtime and the other as an early supper. Many service users come as soon as we open and stay until closing. They love that it is a warm, welcoming space with many friendly faces. They can sit and eat in peace or over a social conversation with other service users or with one of our befriending volunteers.

Having our own warm space to distribute meant that we get to sit and talk with our service users, ask them about their day and their needs, make them feel valued and build trust which has many benefits both for their sense of well-being and for us being able to tailor our support services to their needs.



Vita Bites - nutrition bars with a difference

2023 saw us develop our corporate offering around Vita Bites production. This has meant that over the last year we have worked with a wide range of teams from corporate organisations to prepare, cut, wrap and label the Vita Bites. These healthy, delicious nutrition bars, invented by our nutritionist back in 2020 continue to help our service users boost their health and immune system and can substitute a meal when another cannot be found.

This offering is mutually beneficial as we at AMURT UK are able to produce these bars and serve them as an accompaniment to our meals to Londoners struggling with food insecurity. At the same time, our corporate partners get a chance to support team building, improve employee engagement and bring a sense of fulfilment and fun for their employees.



Outdoor living attire and Signposting



In 2023 we distributed 151 warm coats, 579 thermal hats, gloves and socks and 90 warm and waterproof sleeping bags. We were been lucky enough to partner with Team up London to get many donated items such as coats.

We also made a regular signposting service available for service users throughout 2023. Up until October most Thursdays we would have at least one signposting/befriending volunteer available during two distribution sessions in Cazenove road. Since moving to our new cooking hub and distribution point in Lower Clapton, our signposting and befriending volunteers have been available there. In total, we made the signposting service available at 95 distribution sessions. Over the year, we supported 46 service users with signposting and additional support.

AMURT UK'S INCLUSIVE VOLUNTEERING POLICY

One thing that came out of our conversations with service users, is the common need of many of them to build self-esteem and confidence, and to improve their sense of well-being and worth as human beings. Also, to reduce a sense of loneliness and isolation that so many experience. In response we took on an increasing number of service users as volunteers in 2023.

We are dedicated to being inclusive for all volunteers irrespective of the challenges they may face and in 2023 we worked hard to improve the way in which we include people in volunteering. This effort from our volunteering service goes above and beyond what many other organisations can offer.

We worked directly with wellbeing practitioners, local mental health services and the probation service to ensure that volunteers (who might not be considered

suitable for certain other volunteering opportunities) were welcome to join in with our activities if it was safe for them to do so. To this extent we welcomed volunteers who themselves were struggling with home and food insecurity; those facing a range of addiction issues; asylum seekers & refugees who had escaped very difficult situations in their home countries and were being accommodated in temporary spaces by the Home Office. We also welcomed people facing a range of mental and physical health challenges in addition to neurodiverse volunteers who needed various adjustments to be made in order for them to be able to participate (this was made easier as our volunteer coordinator has a background in teaching those with special needs).



THE IMPACT AMURT UK HAS MADE TO PEOPLES' LIVES: 2023 CASE STUDIES

Service users feel respected

One thing which is clear from all the conversations we have had with service users is that while the meals are a vital part of our service, it is not just about that. We regularly received feedback that they feel seen and respected when they come to our meal distributions. For example 'Patricia' explained to us that she goes to a lot of different distributions and she is used to having to be aggressive and fight to be served and is often made to feel like a beggar.. However, when she arrived at our cooking hub in Lower Clapton she soon realised that she could relax and know that she would be served without needing to fight or beg for it. She often repeated to us that she felt like a queen when she came to us because the place was warm and she felt respected and taken care of in a way she has not experienced before.



Reducing stress and loneliness

When Jen first came to us she appeared very anxious and nervous and explained how she was in desperate need of fresh food. She was experiencing such financial hardship that she couldn't afford to buy fresh ingredients and she was concerned about not being able to eat a balanced diet. The first Thursday she came she was welcomed and her sense of relief when she was able to go home with two meals and two bags of fresh produce and bread was palpable. She managed to make the produce last all week. By her third visit she really opened up. She said the financial strain she was under was beyond stressful and it was making her feel very unwell. She was out of work, felt lonely and stressed and lived only minutes from our cooking hub. We suggested she become a volunteer and she jumped at the opportunity.

There were two lovely outcomes after her first volunteering session. The first was that she wrote a message to our WhatsApp group saying how happy she was to meet and be welcomed so warmly by everyone. The second was that she wrote to our volunteer coordinator directly to reiterate her message to the group and to express how keen she was to continue as a volunteer and how much better the experience had made her feel. She now attends regularly and is looking forward to completing online higher-level food hygiene training that we can provide for her, free of charge. She hopes that this experience and further training may enable her to also secure some employment.

THE IMPACT AMURT UK HAS MADE TO PEOPLES' LIVES: 2023 CASE STUDIES

Providing healthy food and more

David explained that he used to work but had to quit due to medical reasons. He had specific medical needs associated with the fact that he was a cancer survivor and he was also diabetic. He was isolated at home living by himself and told us that he loved to come out to collect meals from Cazenove Road as it meant not only a delicious healthy meal but also a chance for him to talk to somebody and that this transformed his day, his sense of wellbeing and also his mental outlook.

He would collect tokens from the council that enabled him to collect food items from other food banks but most of what he was given was unsuitable due to his diabetes. He said the food that he received from AMURT UK was in his words: "a total game changer for where I am in my life right now". This is because he had to be very careful of his stomach related medical issues and he knew the food AMURT UK served had no processed sugar content, was high in fibre, was good for you and wasn't going to have any "nasty ingredients". He said AMURT UK was "a league above any other organisation in terms of the quality of the meals you provide and it just makes the world of difference to me".

He made the meals last all week. He explained that when he had worked he used to give £50-60 a month to charities such as Marie Curie and that when he got back to working he would love to make a donation to AMURT UK's London Feeding Programme because he had experienced the difference we make to people's lives.

Addressing mental health needs

Jez was referred to AMURT UK by his Wellbeing Practitioner. He was living as an in-patient at an East London hospital having been sectioned under the Mental Health Act. He had struggled with mental health problems for some time and had over a year previously been involved in a physical altercation. He had served a very short prison sentence and was formally deemed to pose no physical threat to others whatsoever. His Wellbeing Practitioner was very confident that volunteering would be good for Jez who was released from hospital for specific purposes. After meetings with the practitioner we decided to give Jez a chance. He was brilliant, very enthusiastic, hard-working and respectful. He attended every week for many months before securing permanent part-time employment with the NHS. He has since moved out of hospital and is in permanent accommodation and keeps in touch with our London Feeding Programme. He always mentions how important being part of our team was for him.

