

Warwick District Citizens Advice Food Bank Report 2015-16

Analysis of the profile and
circumstances of the clients
we gave food vouchers to
between June 2015 and June 2016



**citizens
advice**

**Warwick
District**

Research and Campaigns Team Food Bank Report 2015-16

For the second year in a row, the Research and Campaigns Team at Warwick District Citizens Advice has compiled a list of the clients to whom we gave food bank vouchers over a 12-month period. We have looked at their case records, analysed their profiles and looked into the circumstances that led to them require a food voucher from us. This year we have been able to compare the results with last year's findings.

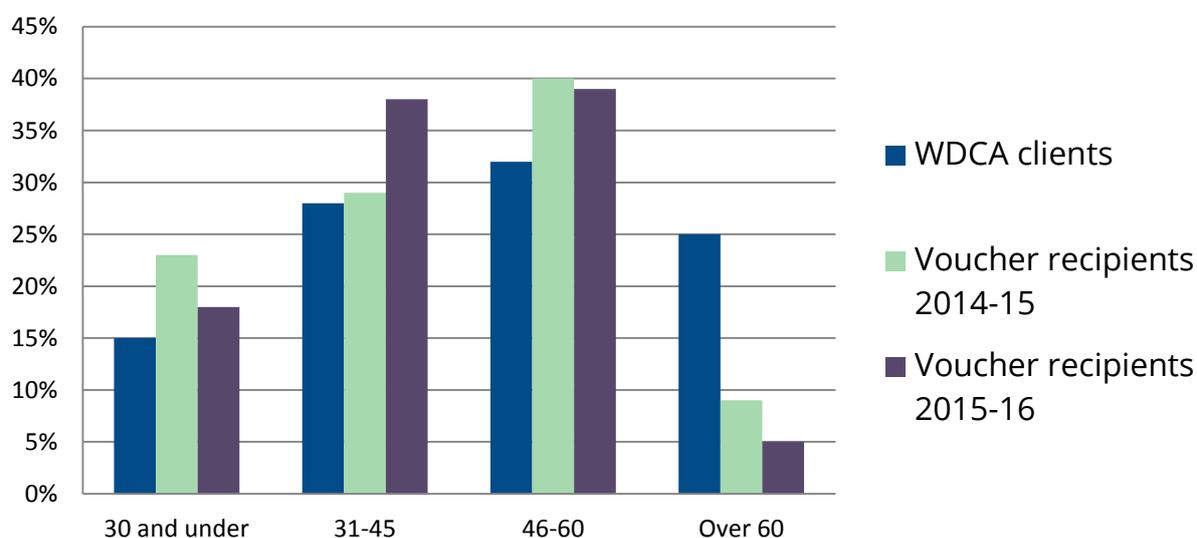
Numbers

Warwick District Citizens Advice issued **192 vouchers** to **122 individuals or families** between June 2015 and June 2016. This is an increase of 42% in the number of vouchers, and an increase of 30% in the number of recipients compared with 2014-15.

Profile information

Clients who received food vouchers from us were of all ages between 18 and 73. As was the case last year, the largest age group (39% of claimants) was the 46-60 age group: this is also the largest age group represented by Warwick District Citizens Advice clients in general. We note that we rarely give vouchers to those over 60; the fact that benefits for pensioners have been protected in the Government's welfare reforms may be one reason for this.

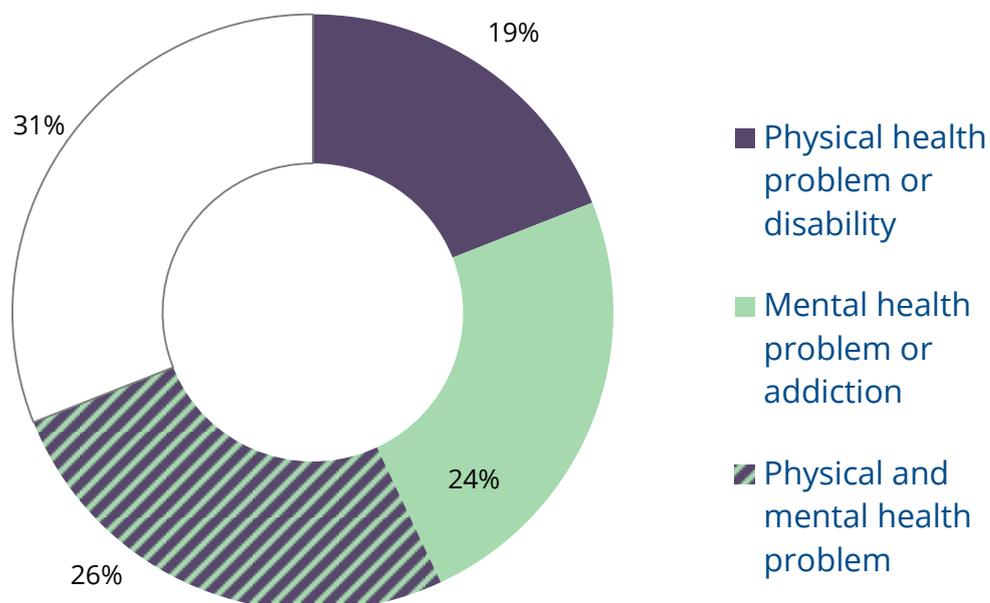
Food voucher recipients by age



As was the case last year, the **majority of food voucher claimants were male (60%)** whereas men represent only 43% of our clients in general.

Again, there was a strong, and concerning, trend in that **the majority of clients requiring food vouchers (69%) reported having a disability or long-term health problem**. This compares with only 39% of WDCA clients in general, and only 21% of the England and Wales population.

Food voucher recipients reporting long-term health problems or disabilities



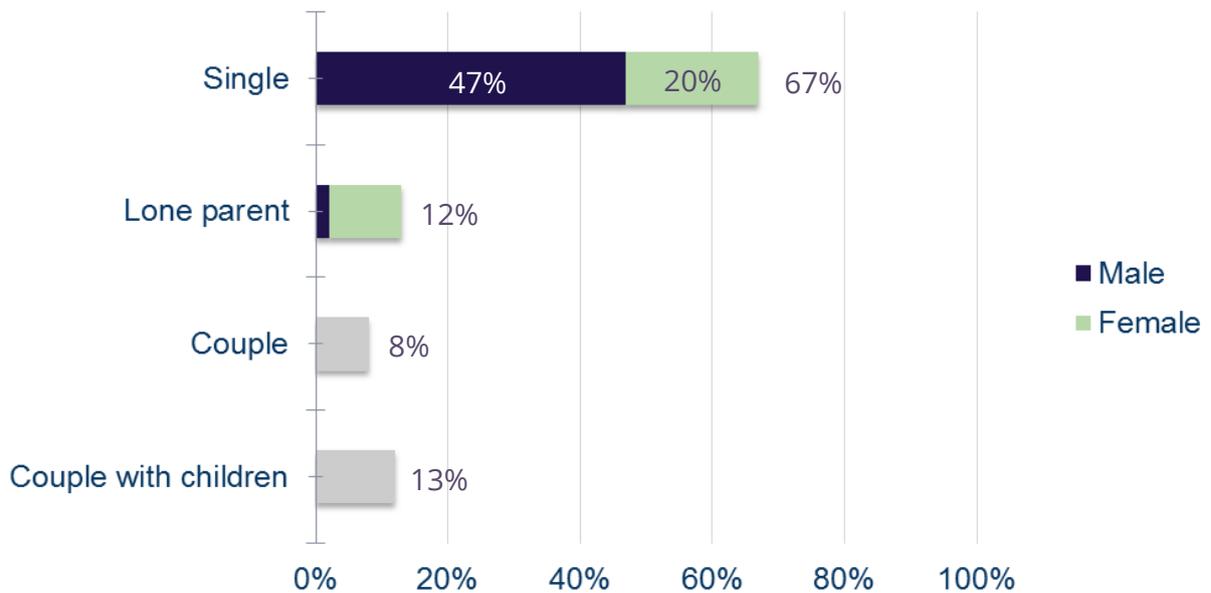
As we would anticipate, being based in Leamington Spa, most of our food voucher recipients (53%) came from Leamington (CV31 and CV32). 20% came from Warwick and 1% from Kenilworth. **18% were homeless**, which is a higher percentage than last year (15%).

The largest numbers of food voucher recipients came from two of the Warwick District Wards with the highest levels of social and financial exclusion: Brunswick and Crown. However, wards such as Milverton, which have a higher than average level of social and financial inclusion, were also well represented:

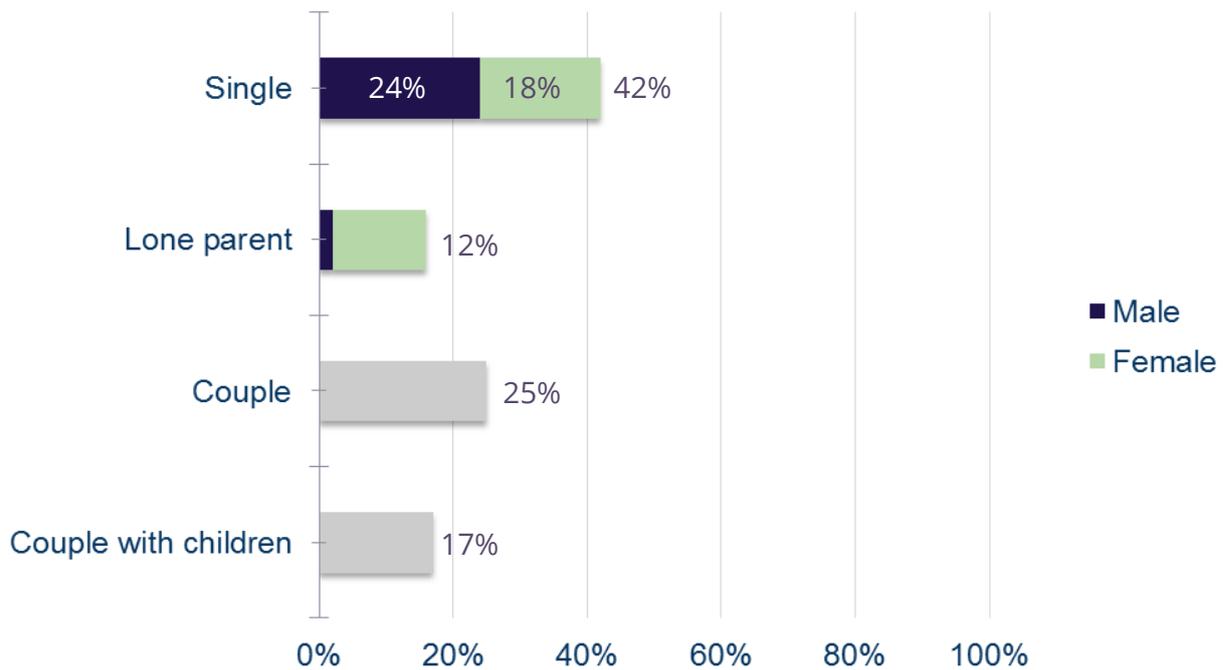
Warwick District Ward	% of recipients
Brunswick	17%
Crown	14%
Milverton	10%
Leam	8%
Aylesford	8%
Sydenham	6%
Clarendon	6%
Saltisford	6%
Emscote	4%
Newbold	4%
Southam	4%

The majority of food voucher recipients (67%) were single people with no dependants. **Single men form the largest group (47%) of all food voucher recipients** whereas they represent only 24% of WDCA clients overall. The next largest groups are single women, couples with children and lone parents. 55 children were fed using food vouchers from us this year.

Food voucher recipients by household type



WDCA clients 2015-16 by household type



Client circumstances

As with last year's report, there were often various factors contributing to the need for a food voucher. Here are the trends we identified:

- 71% of food voucher recipients were claiming, or trying to claim or challenge a decision on the main sickness benefit, **Employment and Support Allowance** (52% - up from 42%) or Jobseeker's Allowance (19%).
- 65% of cases involved difficulties repaying debts – often priority debts. In many cases large deductions from benefits to repay debts were leaving the claimant without enough money to pay for essentials such as food.
- 23% mentioned **family problems** including relationship breakdown or domestic violence as a key aspect in terms of requiring a food voucher (12% last year).
- 20% of food voucher recipients were experiencing delays in their benefit payments (13% last year) and 14% had been sanctioned.
- 20% of recipients cited **employment problems** (delayed or unpaid wages, zero hours contracts, low pay, hours of work reduced) as being a key factor contributing to their financial difficulties (19% last year)
- The **under-occupation charge** (also known as the "bedroom tax") was a contributory factor in 17% of cases (11% last year).

Case Study 1

Client M, aged 48, who is homeless, has been signed off work by his GP having developed a neurological problem as the result of an accident. He had tried to claim Jobseeker's Allowance but was told by Jobcentre Staff that he did not appear to be well enough to work and that he should claim Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

He tried to claim Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) but scored zero points on the 'limited capability for work' test. We helped the client challenge this decision via the 'mandatory reconsideration' process, during which time ESA was not payable and he had nil income, thus relying on food vouchers to eat.

Case Study 2

Client C is a lone parent with 3 children. She left her relationship 3 years ago due to domestic violence. She works part-time but is suffering from depression and so is currently off sick and only receiving Statutory Sick Pay. When we first interviewed her she had fallen behind on rental and Council Tax payments due to her low income and her Landlord had started repossession proceedings. We helped her claim additional Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction to partially compensate for her lost earnings, helped her apply for discounts off her water and energy bills and helped her set up manageable debt repayments to stop the possession proceedings on her flat, but she benefitted from a food voucher whilst we helped her get back on track.

Case Study 3

Client A suffers from COPD, anxiety and depression and also struggles to cope with forms and paperwork. He failed to attend a medical assessment due to having a panic attack and so his ESA (and Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction which were linked to his ESA claim) were all stopped. The client gave the reason for his failure to attend but this was not accepted by the decision maker. Whilst he challenged this decision he had nil income and was reliant on food vouchers. His benefits were all eventually reinstated and we also helped him apply for Personal Independence Payment and set up repayments towards the rent and Council Tax arrears he had also accrued.

Universal Credit

Last year we predicted a rise in food voucher usage with the introduction of Universal Credit. UC was introduced in the Warwick District jobseeking area in October 2015 and so far only affects single jobseekers. At the time of writing we do not know when it will be rolled out to include ESA claimants and families with children.

We have had queries from 30 UC claimants between October 2015 and June 2016 – 8 of these claimants so far have required one or several food vouchers. In half of these cases this was to cover the initial 5-7 week delay in receiving the first payment – in 3 cases it was because of large deductions due to debt repayments and in a further case we issued several vouchers due to the double-counting of wages and other administrative failings at the processing centre and subsequent underpayments of benefit which it took several appointments to rectify.

We will continue to monitor this as the roll-out of Universal Credit is progressed.