



Baby banks: Supporting babies and young children through the cost-of-living crisis

Introduction

Over 200 baby banks operate in local communities across the UK supporting thousands of babies, children and their families with high quality re-used clothes, buggies, beds, toys and books.

They have a long-term role to play as community networks that can facilitate the reuse of baby kit and clothing as a positive contribution to the environment as well as building a more resilient support system for parents with young children.

However, right now, they're on the frontline of the cost-of-living crisis, supporting families in desperate need of essentials.

Little Village, which runs a network of baby banks across London, has carried out a survey of UK baby banks to identify the impact of the current cost-of-living crisis on the families they're supporting, and the baby banks themselves.

Cost-of-living survey results

The survey asked baby banks about the impact that the cost-of-living crisis is having, or is anticipated to have, on the families they support. Of the 55 baby banks that responded, over 90% said that 2022 is their busiest year yet, with many stating that the cost-of-living crisis is to blame.

When asked what they thought about the Government's support package to address the cost-of-living crisis, including the new unit price cap on energy bills, 72% of baby banks said this was too little, too late and that the support package won't help those already in poverty.

"Families who have been just about getting by, with one or sometimes both parents working, are now finding themselves living, or at risk of living, in poverty. Often they are just above the threshold for free school meals or additional support, this means they have to pay for everything, costing them thousands more than a family below the threshold. We are seeing increasing numbers of this type of low income family coming to us for school uniform, or clothing or shoes for residential trips or forest schools." (baby bank in the North East)

Shocking circumstances

The survey also revealed some of the shocking circumstances experienced by families supported by banks, including:

1. A family **using sanitary towels as nappies** as had no spare money to buy nappies (baby bank in Somerset).
2. A mum of three who was unable to afford to heat her home so **comes to the baby bank to keep warm** for a few hours. The family take the bus from one town to another a few days a week to keep warm (baby bank in Derbyshire).
3. Child with a **grade 3 pressure sore** due to extreme rationing of nappies (baby bank in the North East of England)
4. Several families who are **not giving their children a hot meal each day** as they can't afford to turn the oven on (baby bank in Oxfordshire).
5. Mother **sitting in the dark all day** with nothing turned on at all until the children came home from school (location not provided)
6. A parent **reusing nappies after the baby had pooped** in it (baby bank in Gloucestershire).
7. A family requesting a bed as their **child was sleeping in a drawer** and they could not afford to provide one (baby bank in Lincolnshire)



8. A mum **using tissue paper for sanitary wear** (baby bank in Lancashire)
9. Family **rationing calpol** as they couldn't afford it (location not provided)
10. A family whose **seven year old was sleeping in a travel cot** as they couldn't afford a bed. There were two families living in the same house. The baby bank couldn't provide a single bed as there wasn't space for one, so they provided a mattress for a toddler bed which was better than a travel cot (location not provided).

Survey findings

- 91% of baby banks said they see children wearing ill-fitting shoes or clothes (ie no coat or shoes too small)
- 89 % said families are unable to afford basic hygiene products (soap, toothpaste, bubble bath)
- 87% said families are unable to pay the bills
- 83% said families are forced to ration nappies
- 79% said families are unable to heat the home
- 73% said children are going hungry
- 70% said children have no safe place to sleep (ie sleeping on floor or in bed with parents or siblings)

The impact on baby banks

"The amount of donations is significantly falling as less people can afford to be generous. More and more people sell their used baby equipment and clothes instead of donating them to charity, also significantly less people can buy us nappies, baby formula, toiletries."
(Baby bank in east London)

"I feel that the cost-of-living crisis is also affecting the ability of volunteers (time needed to work more, time needed to help children/grandchildren), the amount of donations we receive (people donating less "expensive items" such as cots, prams)."
(location not provided)

"The existence of our baby bank is under threat. This is due to increases in the cost of utilities at our base and recent failures to secure grants to help with these overheads. We've asked for feedback from funders and have been informed that it (not securing the grant) was purely due to the increased numbers of applicants." (baby bank in Somerset)

Conclusion

Energy bills have just risen again and winter 2022 looks likely to be the worst on record for families trapped in poverty. With families telling baby banks they can't afford to put food on the table and pay the bills, baby banks are needed more than ever to help to provide some of the essentials families need for their babies and young children.

Along with improved support for families in poverty, including uprating benefits to the rate of inflation, more affordable housing and childcare, the work of baby banks needs to be recognised and funded, so that this vital frontline work can continue helping families through the winter.

People in communities across the country can also play their part by donating much-needed cash to enable baby banks to continue to support growing numbers of families.



£ 8 buys essential basics we have to buy new such as nappies, toiletries or bottle teats

£ 21 covers the cost of delivery direct to a family's home, including a bed and buggy

£ 35 buys a cot mattress and bed linen to ensure a child can safely sleep in a preloved cot

£ 310 will pay for the sorting, cleaning and packing of everything needed by a family expecting a newborn baby, including a new cot mattress and a buggy or sling

Donations of excellent quality pre-loved kit and clothing are often in short supply and volunteers are needed to help sort, pack and deliver items to families.

Find your nearest baby bank here: <https://littlevillagehq.org/uk-baby-banks/>