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ST GEORGE'S DAY

Borough Market marked St George's Day on Monday by celebrating the Turkish-born Roman soldier's international heritage with food, music, stories and theatre. For the full story see page 32



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HARRIS: WE ARE
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Hike in food bank use

Manager: People's money just isn't stretching anymore

BY KIRSTY PURNELL
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The number of emergency supplies given out by food banks across South London has rocketed in the past year, new figures show.

Southwark food bank usage has increased by 30 per cent, Norwood and Brixton food bank by 19 per cent, Lewisham by 17 per cent and Wandsworth food bank by 11 per cent, compared to a national rise of 13 per cent.

Southwark food bank chief executive Chris Price said: "Universal Credit is the main rea-

son for this increase. It's been rolled out fully in this borough.

"There is nothing quite like people being able to buy their own food, but people are being denied that dignity.

"Our staff and volunteers are being offered group counselling to help deal with hearing awful stories that they can't do anything to help."

But in Lewisham and Wandsworth roll-out of Universal Credit has not begun, and in Lambeth the roll-out is only partial, yet there has been an increase.

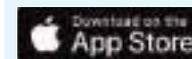
Carol Bostridge, Lewisham food bank manager, said: "It's a real mixture of things. There are people who are earning but can't cover bills. People with benefit problems, people with no recourse to public funds, zero hours contracts. People's money just isn't stretching anymore."

Jennifer Jones, 60, uses the food bank because she is left with just £70 per month after paying rent and bills.

She had to leave her job in transport due to

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'It's difficult to lay everything down and tell your kids you have failed'

FROM FRONT

ill health last July and has been deemed as having limited capability to work.

"I've only been to the food bank a couple of times because it's very demeaning," said the Clapham resident.

"It makes you feel like there's nothing left when you have to resort to that kind of thing.

"I'm a mature woman. I've brought up my family to just find myself in this position."

Jennifer, who has children but has never told them, said the situation worsened in September when she was put on Universal Credit.

"It's not a nice place to be," she said. "I don't see any way out. They classed me as having limited capability to work and I only have £70 a month after bills.

"It's very difficult to lay everything down and say to your kids that you've failed."

Sandra Heather, 53, has to pay £1,000 a month for the accommodation she rents in Coldharbour Lane, Brixton.

She only earns £887 per month from her job as a passenger assistant on school buses. The rest is made up by Universal Credit.

She has Type 2 diabetes which means skipping meals is dangerous for her.

She said: "I've been using the food bank for less than a year.

"I always try to put the bills first and then food comes later. I skip meals. I try not to because of being diabetic."

Sandra has high blood pressure, arthritis and water retention in one of her feet and can only walk for 10-15 minutes without experiencing pain.

She said: "I'm looking for another job so I can earn more money but because of my health I struggle to find anything."

Brixton volunteer team, from left, Maureen Wiltshire, Christina Campbell, Alison Campbell, Janet Duggan and Elisabeth Radke. Inset, three donors to the food bank



Project lead of Norwood and Brixton food bank, Elizabeth Maytom, said: "We don't want to be here forever.

"It doesn't have to be this way – with a benefits system that catches people before they fall into crisis, and secure work that provides people with enough money to cover the cost of essentials, (the end of the need for food banks) is possible."

Lewisham food bank manager Carol Bostridge said: "There must have been a huge increase in the past three months because when I checked in December the increase was only about six or seven per cent.

"People's money isn't stretching." Dan Frith, Wandsworth food bank manager, said: "It's depressing to see so many in hardship. We're longing for the day where we aren't needed."



Volunteer Elisabeth Radke, who lives in Streatham

What is Universal Credit?

Universal Credit is a payment to help with living costs. It's paid monthly – or twice a month for some people in Scotland.

You may be able to get it if you're on a low income or out of work.

Whether you can claim Universal Credit depends on where you live and your circumstances.

If you already get benefits Universal Credit will replace the following benefits: child tax credit, housing benefit, income support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA), income-related employment and support allowance (ESA), working tax credit.

If you currently receive any of these benefits, you can't claim Universal Credit at the same time.

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