'They gave me hope': As 'appliance poverty' bites, this charity is helping people 'out of the hole'

The scale of appliance poverty in the UK is 'staggering', warns Trevor Brown, chairman of Linking Help with Hope (LHH)

CHARLOTTE ELTON | 17 Feb 2024



Appliance poverty is hitting increasing numbers of people. Credit: Unsplash / nrd

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For most of us, cleaning, cooking and stocking the fridge are chores. But to millions of Brits gripped by appliance poverty, such unremarkable activities are a luxury.

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“This has an absolutely huge impact on people. How will you feed your children? How will you wash your clothes? It can ruin a family’s lives… we help them out of the hole.”

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LHH want to tackle this scourge, one appliance or bed at a time. The charity – founded in 1908 as League of the Helping Hand – provides low-income disabled people with grants of up to £300 to purchase essential household items. The Big Issue is an LHH sponsor and can direct applicants to the charity.

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More than two million households – some 4.8 million people – live without basic appliances like fridges, freezers, cookers and washing machines, recent Turn2Us research shows.

This includes 1.9 million people living without a cooker, a figure that rises to around 1 in 20 people earning under £35,000 a year. Some 2.8 million people live without a freezer (1 in 10 people under this pay threshold), and around 900,000 people don’t have a fridge (1 in 30).

With disabled people three times as likely to be affected by appliance poverty, the most vulnerable people are the most adversely impacted. According to End Furniture Poverty, 25% of all Black and Black British people are living in furniture poverty, as are 26% of those

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“The welfare system is full of holes,” he said. “We can’t fill all of those holes, but we help who we can.”

“For example, we supported a mother who had two children, both of whom were incontinent. She didn’t have a washing machine, so life was basically intolerable. We provided her with one, and that made a hell of a difference.”

Beds are another issue for many families. The number of families who have asked their local council for help with beds and bedding has more than quadrupled in the last five years, according to new analysis, with more than 10,000 families turned away last year.

LHH are a small charity, providing some 259 grants in 2022-23, and cannot fill these gaps alone. But government supports are drying up.

Recent research by End Furniture Poverty found that the household support fund – slated to end on 31 March – provided 62% of all local welfare assistance in 2022, which includes requests for bedding and appliances.

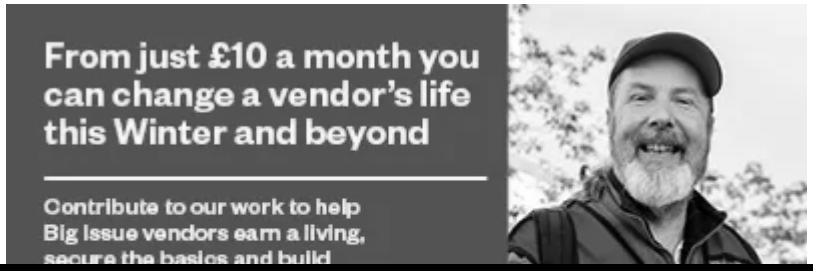
“There is a real possibility of a funding ‘cliff edge’ for crisis support,” EFP warned.

As the vacuum grows, charities are sadly all the more vital. LHH offer “more than just money” to those that they help, Brown explains.

“We provide these grants, but we also provide this emotional support – check in with them, help them get other assistance – which is what makes all the difference to some people,” Brown says.

“These people may be in complete isolation. Suddenly, someone actually cares.”

57 year-old Jilly – who suffers from arthritis and cancer – is one of LHH’s beneficiaries. Her husband died four years ago, and her progressive disabilities left her reliant on benefits.



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“Having always been the ‘giver’, this change [was] extremely hard, I find it almost impossible, to receive or ask for help,” she said. “LHH has given me hope, they have turned my existence into a life worth living.”

The mum-of-three’s cooker broke just a few days before Christmas, nearly forcing her to cancel the festivities.

“With my small savings and help from LHH, I was able to purchase a nearly new cooker on Christmas Eve,” she recalled. “LHH really saved not only Christmas, but the rest of the year.”

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If you can't visit your local vendor on a regular basis, then the next best way to support them is with a subscription to the Big Issue. As a social enterprise, we invest every penny we make back into the organisation. That means that with every subscription, we are supporting people in poverty to get back on their own two feet.

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