Interview with Lisa Banger and Marie Muldowney, joint founders and co-ordinators of I-HOPE

Question -What is Ihope ? How did its start ?

Iminster Helping Other People Eat

I-Hope was created in April 2020. We had an idea to supply food to families, where they could help themselves every day to a few items. We grew very quickly by receiving donations from supermarkets. When Covid 19 happened things changed. We knew that this service was needed but we had to change the way in which we provided it. We started to deliver the food parcels and make food parcels up ready for families to collect within a certain time slot. Since we have started we have supplied **approximately 500 food parcels** to our most vulnerable families.’ Better foods’ (a food charity) recognised the service we are providing and they helped us by donating money for a new fridge freezer. This enables us to have more food storage and reach out and connect to as many local people as we could.

**Question- What motivates you?**

Wanting to be able to provide food not just for the children but for their families. It’s not all about learning and curriculums it’s extending to their homes, looking after families. We just want to help as much as possible. It’s very important.

**Question - Will you expand and how ?**

We would like to expand by providing hygiene and personal care products like toothpaste, deodorants, soap etc.

Before Covid we were about to do some receipt cards, really basic ideas. For example how to prepare some fruits and vegetables like avocado. How to make simple meals like cottage pie, and instructions how to use herbs etc.

**Question – How did you find suppliers?**

We collaborated with ‘Fairshare’ and ‘Neighbouly’ which are companies that the main supermarkets use to distribute where the food donations go. They then message every week to say there is a collection ready. We then collect, and come in the following day and set up the tables of the lovely food.

Before lockdown we would bag up food and ring around the families and give them a time slot to collect the food. During lockdown we set up tables outside the school for families to come and collect the food.

**Question – How do families get the food? Is it free?**

The food is completely free; no vouchers just turn up and take what you need.

**Question – Have any particular families stuck in your mind?**

There was a particular family where the parents took turns to eat to ensure the children eat daily. And this is not that uncommon!

Another family – a single parent had no money for food, heating etc. She had nothing, it was heart wrenching. The whole staff put together to help her. But it was a short term solution.

By creating Ihope it would give continual support to who needs it. They can rely on it, we really do want to help, we want to nurture the families, and we don’t want anyone to struggle to eat. We will help whenever, whoever we can.