

Southern driver leads festive fundraising charge

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Southern Rail train driver Laura McDonald has led a festive food, gift and toiletry donation drive at the rail operator's Selhurst and Norwood driver depots to support two local food banks.

Helped by Selhurst Area Operations Manager Simon Bott, three weeks' worth of goodies were handed over to Purley Food Hub on Thursday 13 December and to Croydon Community Food Bank on Friday 14 December.

Laura set up the collections to support the local community over the festive season.

Laura said: "I just hate the thought of people going hungry at this time of year. Food banks are really struggling because of the amount of people using them. We have 301 drivers at these depots and this is a lovely opportunity to give back to our local community.

"Some people have donated money instead which is great – I collected nearly £100 in the first five days! That also meant I got to go to shopping myself so could make sure I picked up the most-needed items," she added.

Steve Hunt, Administrator at Purley Food Hub, said: "Sadly we have never been busier at Purley Food Hub than we are now, so we are most grateful to Laura and her driver colleagues for collecting food for us. The donations will put a smile on the faces of people caught up in crisis this Christmas time."

Since opening in 2013, the independent food bank has provided 130,500 meals and helped more than 14,500 people in crisis, with food donated by people in the local community, as well as schools, businesses, churches and collections held at supermarkets in the borough. Run by volunteers from Purley & Kenley Churches Together and the local community, the food bank has seen a 41% increase in people going to them for help, made up of referrals from job centres, Croydon council, hostels, refuges, nurseries and children's centres.

Fatima Koroma, Project Manager at Croydon Community Food Bank, said: "For people in a crisis there has always been a need for our service. We have been here through a recession and austerity measures, providing packages of food and other items. We rely on the community to support us to support others and are appreciative of all donations."

The Croydon Community Food Bank provides support and relief to people in crisis. The organisation is hosting its sixth Christmas event this year, helping to tackle social isolation at Christmas time and ensure that some of the poorest in the local community get access to support and gifts at Christmas.