

Community Sharing in a Cost of Living Crisis

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Introduction

Human Appeal is a UK charity founded in 1991 with the aim to save and transform lives at home and abroad. To do this requires insights from research and surveys that can help the charity sector navigate the socio-economic landscape. The purpose of this white paper study is to provide insight and understanding of how local communities can support each other amid the ongoing cost of living crisis.

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, which saw many families and businesses face financial pressures, the cost of living crisis has further exacerbated this strain over recent years. Despite reports that inflation has now fallen to a 'normal' level, many families are facing the ongoing challenges of food prices, debt, and energy bills among stagnant wages.

However, Britain has long been considered a charitable nation. Research by the Charities Aid Foundation ranked the UK the third most charitable country in the world, behind only Indonesia and Myanmar. With this in mind, we conducted this research not only to understand UK attitudes to charitable giving, but equally to gain insight into how local communities might be able to lend a hand to one another during difficult periods.

Our findings reveal that attitudes to giving remain strong in communities, even whilst UK households continue to make cutbacks. Communities are the bedrock of our society, and our study highlights just how charitable our country is. The potential this offers is vast, not only in alleviating immediate financial strains for families, but equally to reduce social impact and galvanise communities around the country with small acts of generosity.



A word from our Deputy CEO

Over the last year, families have faced many financial strains as a result of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. For some, this means being unable to provide food or purchase necessary household items.

We commissioned this research to showcase the vast potential of community sharing; not only to relieve families and individuals of urgent financial difficulty, but equally to bring communities together in times of hardship. In our findings we see the tremendous commitment of UK families to help those in their local community by engaging in community sharing.

While it's the dispiriting context of the cost-of-living crisis that led us to this research, in it individuals can find stronger bonds of community, whilst addressing a pressing need across the UK and in the charity sector as a whole.

Owais Khan
Deputy CEO
Human Appeal



Background

The cost of living crisis has had a significant effect on many countries and communities around the world. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, which left many in difficult financial straits, the cost of living crisis has further exacerbated this situation for households and businesses alike. Some will feel its effects more than others, with lower-income individuals experiencing the consequences most acutely, however across income levels people are being forced to make financial cuts and everyday sacrifices. Food and household items are often the first areas people will look at in order to cut down on costs but forgoing basic human needs can lead to serious health issues. Despite minor improvements to inflation in the UK, the effects of the cost of living crisis don't appear to be improving. With this in mind, a question that arises is, can the problem be meaningfully addressed by sharing resources within local communities? Consequently, are there positive implications of this prosocial behaviour for long-term social activity and sustainability?

In the UK, almost half of average households have items they consider to be 'unused', with a collective £48 billion worth of household goods gathering dust in the nation's attics, spare rooms and garages [1]. Sentimental value and the feeling of wanting to save items in case they need them in future are the main reasons people are hanging on to so many unused items, but the power of community sharing has now been proven. New research commissioned by Human Appeal and conducted by YouGov sheds light on the positive difference community sharing of unused items can make in the current economic climate. Overwhelmingly, some 84.1% of UK respondents were happy to donate some of their 'unused' household items if they knew the items were going directly to someone local who needed them. Highlighting the positive qualities of human nature, we see that many people are willing to let go of sentimental and useful items in a cost of living crisis if they can rest assured it is for the greater good of their local community.

A significant outcome of this collective endeavour is that collaborative educational models can be developed for young adults to gain appreciation of employing community engagement as an investment in sustainable communities [2]. Consistent utilisation of this response as a means of addressing community needs can positively impact upon the development of a culture of giving which is beneficial to all communities in the long term. Not only would it assist in addressing immediate needs, but sharing with others can also create emotional bonds that would bring a community closer together.

[1] [Brits are hoarding £48 Billion worth of unused household items \(responsesource.com\)](https://www.responsesource.com)

[2] [Community and Environmental Sustainability: Collaboration and Interdisciplinary Education \(ojs.uwindsor.ca\)](https://ojs.uwindsor.ca)

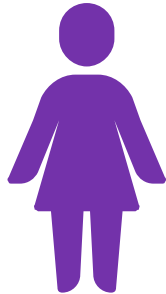
Methodology

YouGov, the international online research data and technology group, surveyed a total of **2,087** households in the UK: North, Midlands, East, London, South, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The figures are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+). The survey was carried out in March 2024.

GENDER

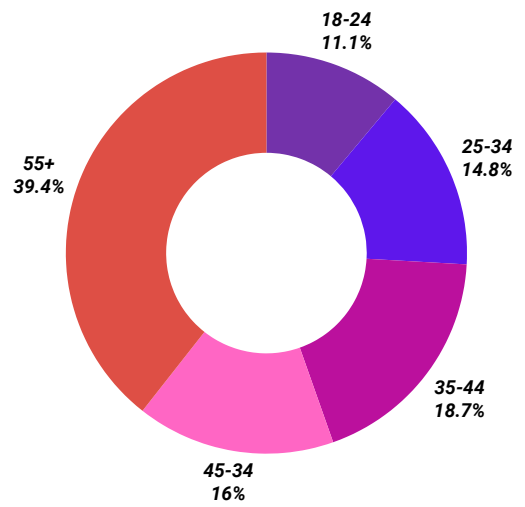


48.5%
MALE

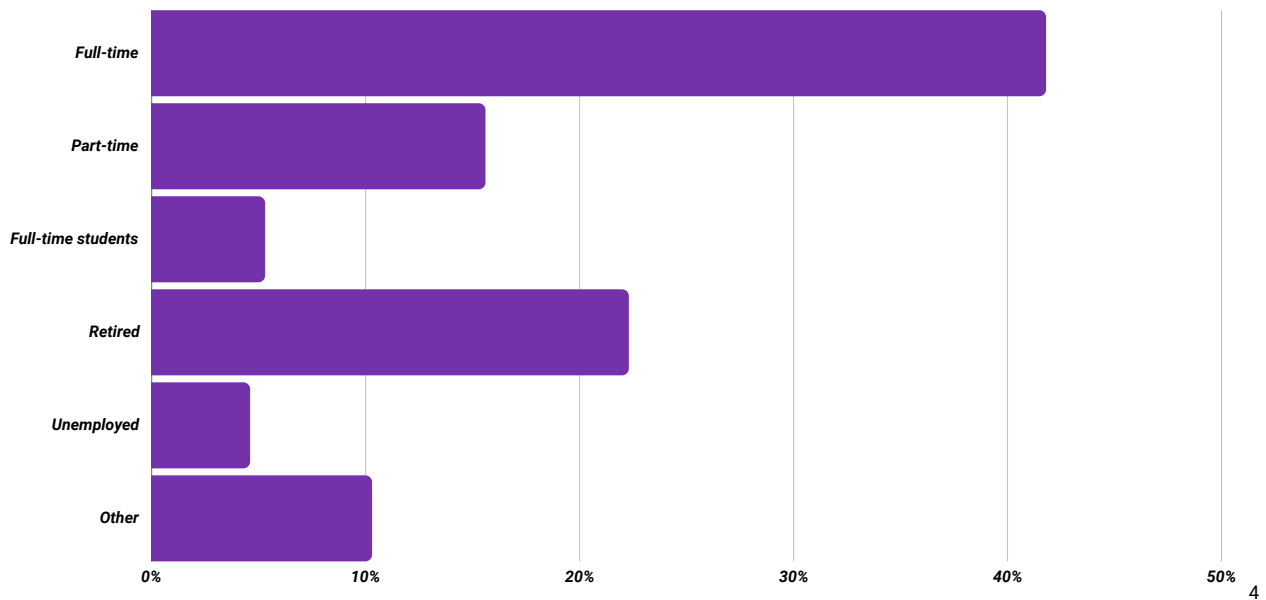


51.5%
FEMALE

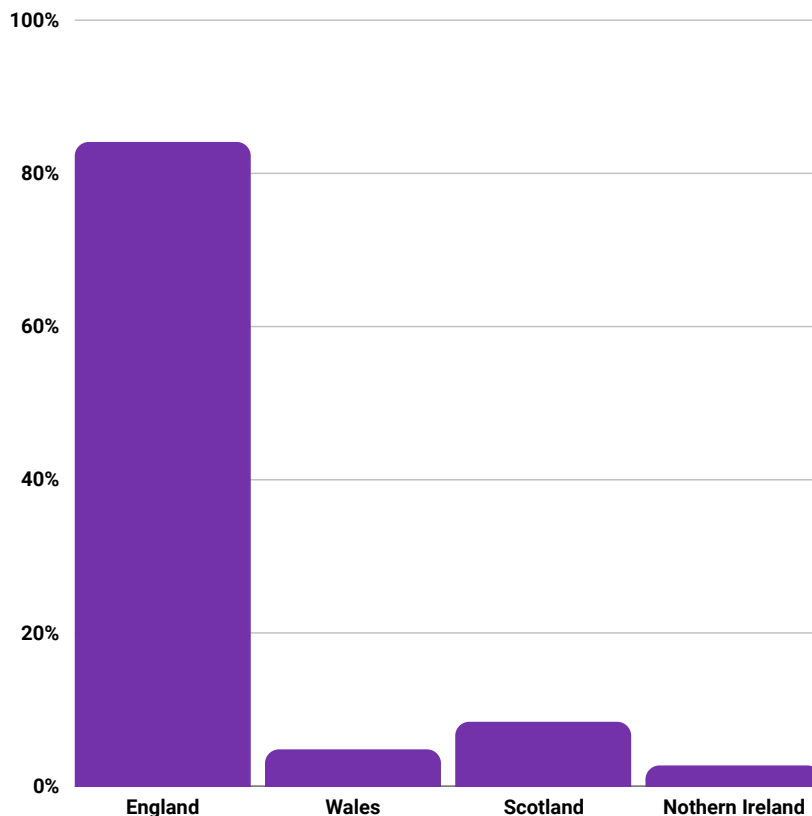
AGE



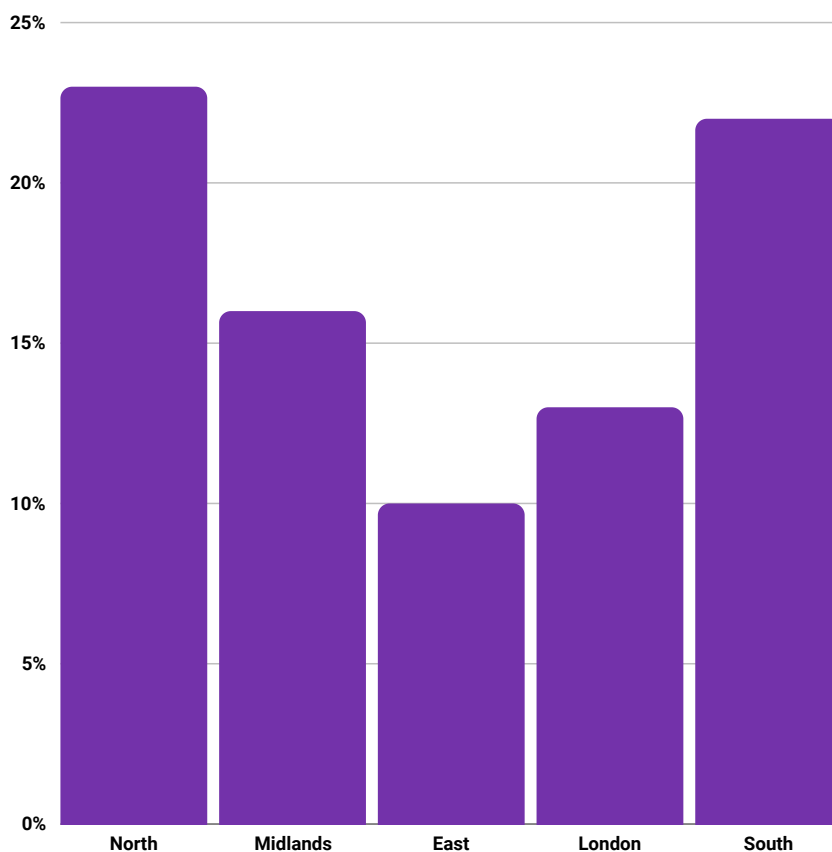
WORKING STATUS



COUNTRY



UK REGION



UK Cost-of-Living Crisis

The inequality gap widens each year as the cost of living crisis continues. To demonstrate this point, with respect to income inequality, households in the top 20% had an average of £83,687 equivalised disposable income whereas households in the bottom 20% of the population had on average of £13,218 [3]. This stark discrepancy indicates that it is becoming harder for certain households to meet their basic needs. Whether it is putting food on the table or paying necessary household bills, the cost of living crisis has made meeting these needs more difficult and for some, unattainable.

Beyond financial difficulty, another major knock-on effect of the crisis has been its negative impact on the social lives of affected individuals and how this threatens to unravel the fabric of communities. Key areas of life which may experience negative fallout as a result are social mobility in the form of progression in one's career, the pursuit of education, vulnerability to crime and the possibility of leisure and travel.

In a 2023 report which focused on the social impact of the cost of living crisis, the National Centre for Social Research (NCSR) found that even though government intervention has tried to address the impact of increasing inflation, the standard of living for UK citizens has still declined. The NCSR cautions that although we might be seeing some ease in inflation, long-term action is warranted to address enduring damage facing our health, economy and society [4].



[3] [THE SCALE OF ECONOMIC INEQUALITY IN THE UK \(equalitytrust.org.uk\)](https://www.equalitytrust.org.uk)

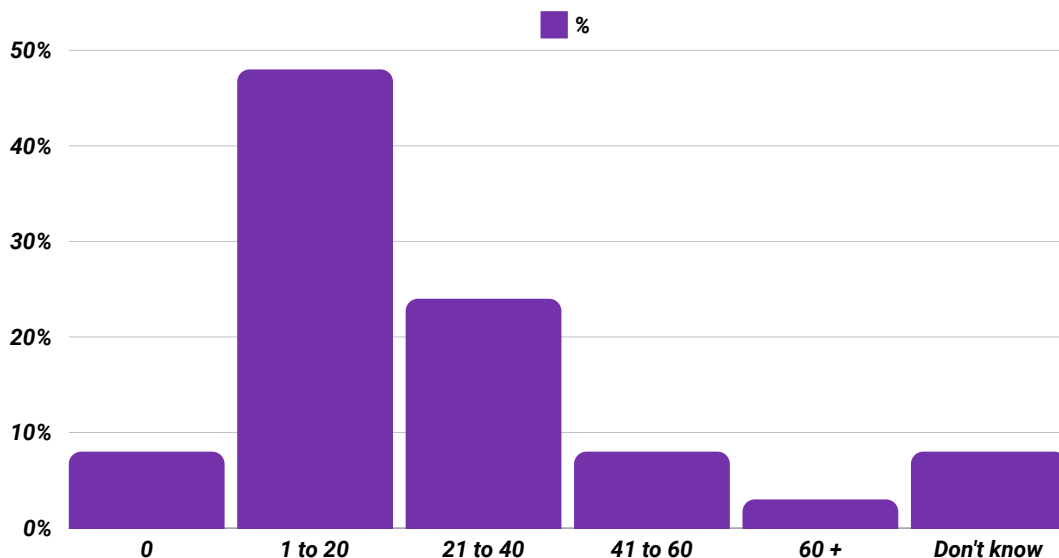
[4] [The Price We Pay: the social impact of the cost-of-living crisis \(natcen.ac.uk\)](https://www.natcen.ac.uk)

The potential of community sharing

Alongside government intervention where available, another vital mechanism for coping with the effects of a cost of living crisis is community sharing. Many UK residents are in possession of objects that have little to no practical use to them, but which can be of great value to others. Among these items can be clothing, books, children's toys, tools, furniture, and household appliances, alongside food. Our research revealed that in the UK, the potential for sharing these general household items is abundant. This untapped asset can make great strides in dealing with both the urgent lack of food and household items in households, while also encouraging sustainable practices that reduce waste and foster an ecosystem of sharing community resources.

What is the status of unused items as these currently exist in UK households? When members of the UK general public were asked about such items, 48.3% reported an average of 1% to 20% of unused items in their household currently. Some 24.1% reveal that between 21% and 40% are untouched, and a further 8.4% have 41% to 60% and 3.3% have more than 60% of dormant items. Cumulatively, this tells us that a total of 84.1% of respondents had unused items at the time of the survey which could benefit others.

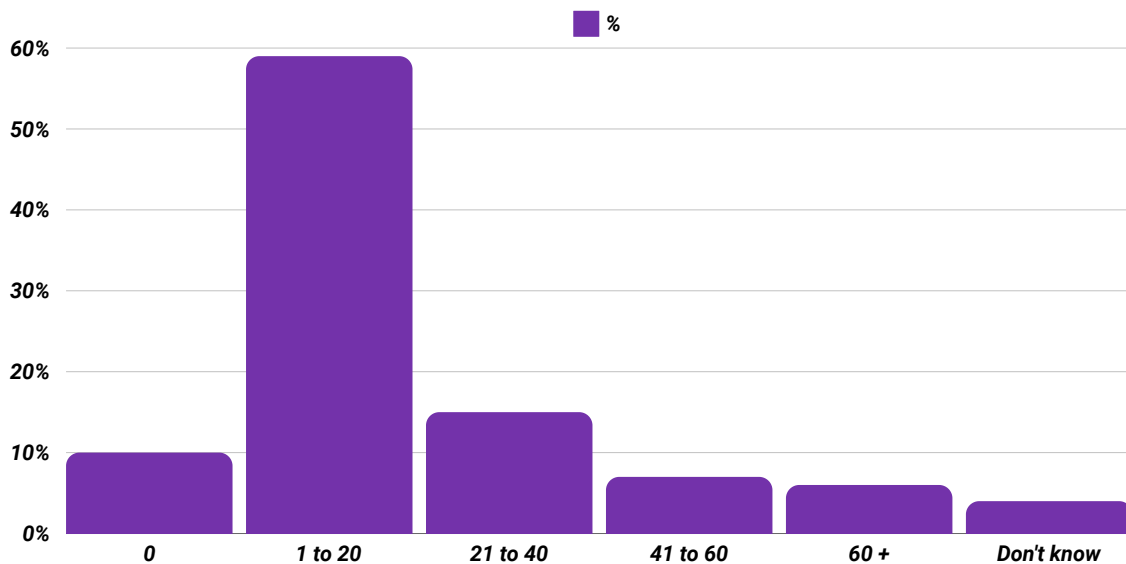
Average unused items per household (%)



In light of these figures, a critical question is whether owners will be willing to share their belongings with others in need. Donating unused household items offers a swift and effective way of helping members of local communities manage the effects of the cost of living crisis.

When asked to keep the percentage of unused items in mind, a total of 86% of these participants would be willing to donate to others in need. Of these, 58.7% revealed that they have an average of 1% to 20% of donatable items while a further 15.1% indicated that they possessed between 21% to 40%. Additionally, some 6.7% are in possession of 41% to 60% items while 5.5% state that a whopping 60% of items in their household could be donated. This means that UK households are in possession of a vast array of items that could potentially be made available for community sharing.

Average unused items that could be donated per household (%)



In 2023 the Trussell Trust conducted a survey on food insecurity in the UK. It reported that one in seven people across the UK has experienced food insecurity either individually or as a household. The dire consequence of this figure is that approximately 14% of the UK population is facing significant cutbacks as a direct result of the cost of living crisis [5]. In light of this concerning state of affairs, and that there also exists a large number of unused items across UK households which residents would be willing to donate, an implicit potential exists for community sharing as a strategy to address the cost of living crisis.

[5] [Hunger in the UK \(www.trusselltrust.org\)](http://www.trusselltrust.org)

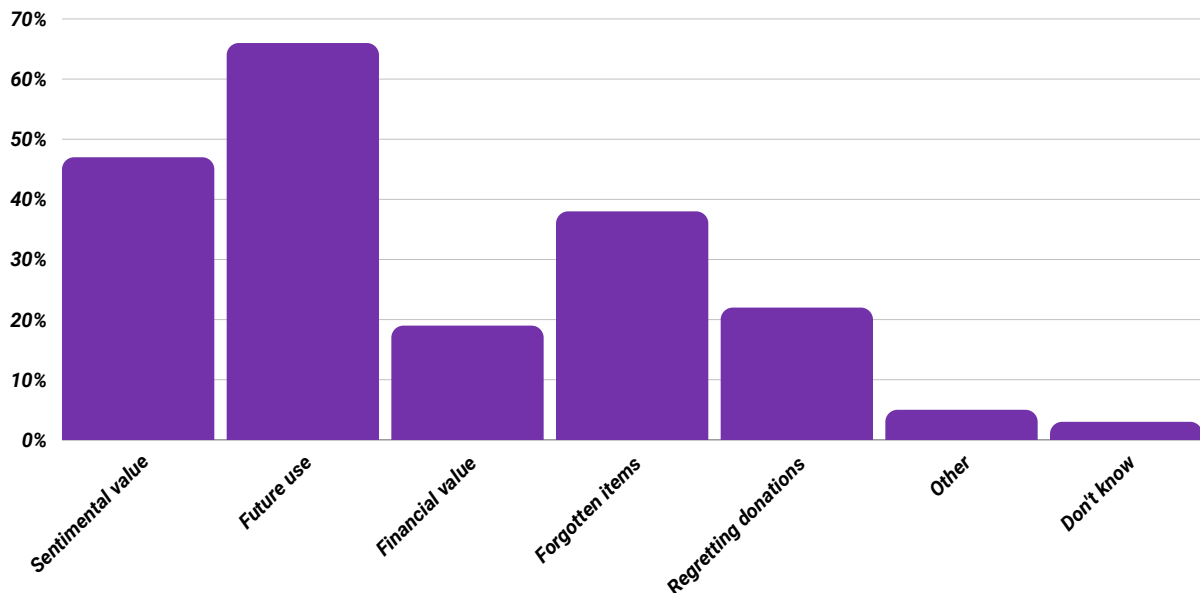
Resistance to letting go

Although the survey makes a strong case for community sharing of unused items, there remain reasons for which our respondents admit they would be less amenable to donating their household goods.

Some 65.7% of all participants are hesitant to donate household goods because they believe they may need them one day and would like to make sure they will be readily available to them should the need arise. Another 47% have attached sentimental value to their household items and feel unable to part with them. Some 19.1% felt that the items they owned were too valuable to give away. Equally, 37.7% stated that they tend to forget about items they have stored away. Finally, some 21.7% fear giving away items only to end up regretting it later.

What this data indicates is that there are a number of factors which contribute to resistance to part with household items across the UK. That being said, a sense of community spirit and helping those who live nearby plays a significant role in the minds of individuals, which could overshadow this reticence to part with certain items.

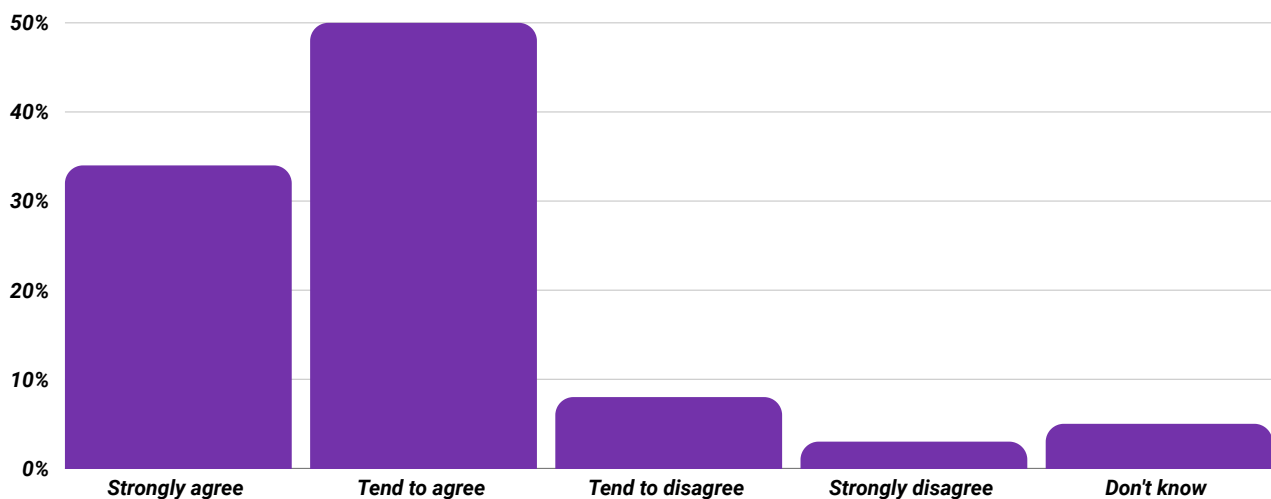
Reasons for keeping unused items



Keeping it local

Fortunately, when participants were asked how they feel about their items directly benefiting a member of their local community, nearly all of them responded positively. 50.2% tended to agree and 33.9% strongly agreed that they would be happier and more willing to share unused items knowing that they were making a difference to a member of their local community, making up a resounding 84.1% of all respondents. These findings reveal that there is a stronger motivational factor for sharing within local communities than donating without sight of where and with whom items may end up. Even taking into account the resistance to giving items away for free, this strong sense of community spirit plays a significant role. Not only does this highlight the extent to which community sharing can benefit local communities, but equally reinforces the power of community spirit and fraternity, even in the face of financial pressures.

I would be happy to donate items to someone local (%)



State of affairs: Overall Findings

As expected, more than 80% of respondents acknowledge that they have varying numbers of unused items in their households. Moreover, almost two thirds of respondents (63.8%) agree that they are overdue for a declutter, which may unearth further belongings that could be made available to others.

While there is some resistance to parting with items that have sentimental value, there is clear evidence that sharing unused items can prove beneficial to the donor as well as the recipient. As our survey found, the latter appreciates the value of useful items in addressing the negative effects of the cost of living crisis and the donor benefits from the emotional fulfilment of assisting members of the community who are in need of assistance.



The Future: Sharing Moving Forward

The cost-of-living crisis puts a serious strain on many families in the UK and there is urgent need to embark on a programme of change to address this ongoing challenge. The results of our research indicate that undertaking localised community sharing projects across the UK can help combat some of the adverse effects of the cost-of-living crisis, especially when deployed alongside already established government initiatives.

The reality is that as long as the present cost-of-living crisis continues, the demand for sharing within communities will continue to grow. It is clear that there is an abundance of unused items sitting in UK households that could provide tangible value to someone who is struggling. The responsibility falls on us, members of the community, to be proactive and selfless about the items we currently own and ask if they would be of better use to someone else. Equally, the onus falls squarely on organisations which collect and distribute items. They have a responsibility to ensure that these essential household items go directly into the hands of the most vulnerable members of our communities.

As our research also showed, members of the average UK household are likely to feel positively knowing that their unused items would directly benefit a member of their community who is in need of essential household items. This provides a motivational element to the act of giving and also supports the rationale of contributing to human welfare. Furthermore, it would be beneficial for the general public to raise their level of environmental awareness and concern for sustainability by selecting representatives who demand corporate social responsibility from organisations within a sharing economy [6].

By decluttering and sharing unused household items, we perform a small act that results in a massive positive impact to someone's life during a time of need. This is a win-win situation on all sides and is a step forward to a brighter future for ourselves and generations to come. The long-term impact is that although community sharing can assist households in addressing urgent needs, there is also the added benefit that this might be just what is needed to prepare communities for future challenges. It also offers great social value to have a workable philanthropic project which makes use of available resources in the most efficient manner and in doing so, limits possible wastage that would likely otherwise occur. Such an environmental impact not only benefits individuals and households, but also communities globally.

[6] [The sharing economy promotes sustainable societies \(www.nature.com\)](https://www.nature.com).



www.humanappeal.org.uk

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