



## North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund First Year Report 2013/14



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### Background

The North Yorkshire Local Assistance Fund (NYLAF) was launched on 1 April 2013 by North Yorkshire County Council to replace the discretionary Social Fund scheme managed by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The Welfare Reform Act 2012 abolished the Social Fund and meant that new locally based provision would now be delivered by local authorities instead of the DWP.

The Social Fund previously provided crisis loans, crisis loan alignment payments and community care grants – cash for general living expenses and to see people through during times when there were issues with their benefits.

The NYLAF provides emergency support for vulnerable adults to move into or remain in the community, and to help families under exceptional pressure to stay together. The NYLAF does not replicate what was previously provided by DWP. No cash payments, crisis loans or community care grants are available. Awards are made in kind, for example by supplying vital household goods and basic necessities. Available items include essential items of household furniture and equipment, beds and bedding, food vouchers, clothing vouchers, utility top-up vouchers, utility reconnection charges and essential home repairs.

A customer may apply for up to two awards of emergency food and/or utility top-ups in any twelve month period. For other items provided under the fund, a maximum entitlement of three items (including a maximum of one white good) may also be awarded within the same twelve month period.

Applications to the fund are made through authorised agencies. It is the role of authorised agencies to assess the applicant and identify them as eligible and vulnerable. It is expected the authorised agencies will see an application to the NYLAF as part of a package of support. The application takes the form of an online form which was designed by Charis specifically for the NYLAF. The agent is responsible for filling out the details of the form with the applicant present.

The awards are delivered direct to the customer unless specified otherwise (some customers may choose to have their goods delivered to the agency). Charis Grants are responsible for communicating with the customer when the goods will be delivered. Food vouchers and utility top-up vouchers can be delivered within 24 hours. For other items such as white goods and furniture these are usually delivered within 11 days of the application reaching Charis Grants. The average delivery time is 7 days.

The NYLAF [webpage](#) contains a leaflet advertising the fund which is regularly updated, a leaflet listing other possible avenues for support and a list outlining what items are available from the NYLAF.

### **Summary of activity 2013/14**

Total applicants:	2,796
Total applications:	3,211
Total unsuccessful applications:	20

The total applicants is different to the total amount of applications as the total amount of applications includes applicants who have applied more than once on separate occasions. The unsuccessful applications were either due to being deemed ineligible, out of region or they are applicants who have already received their maximum entitlement from the NYLAF.

Total items awarded (including food):	4,616
Food awards:	1,581

Expenditure was low in the first few months of the year, but in the second half of the year the NYLAF came under increasing financial pressure and the total spend was 105.7% of the equivalent budget for these six months. Due to the high spend a decision was made to remove rent deposits and rent in advance from its provision and to restrict white goods to one award per application.

### **Updates & Changes to the fund**

The fund has had to adapt and evolve throughout its first year in order to better serve its client group, deliver on budget and react to issues.

#### ***Rainbow Centre***

In August 2013 the NYLAF entered into a partnership with the Rainbow Centre food bank in Scarborough. The Rainbow Centre is responsible for providing first time food parcels to applicants in Scarborough town. The Rainbow Centre is open five days a week and is well placed within the community to assess an applicant's needs and provide them with extra support and advice in addition to the food parcel provided by the NYLAF.

### ***Utility top-up***

Utility top-up was introduced in November 2013. This provides the applicant with the option of applying for an emergency voucher to pay for their gas and/or electricity. The fund provides £28 for an individual and £45 for a family. These amounts were reached by looking at the average household energy bill. It is hoped a utility top-up will last the customer for a minimum of a week. Since introduction utility top-up has proved very popular. 721 awards have been made accounting for 25% of the total number of awards made since November 2013.

Utility top-ups can only be used on a person's utility meter. No cash will be given to the customer.

### ***Rent deposit***

From February 2014 rent deposits / bonds were removed as an available item from the NYLAF. This decision was taken due to the increasing financial pressure on the fund and also due to the fact that district councils have the option to provide this using Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). Rent deposits were one of the funds most expensive awards and it was hoped removing them would relieve some financial pressure on the fund.

### ***Information Sharing Protocol***

The information sharing protocol has now been sent out to all agencies. This enables authorised agencies to contact Charis Grants to find out whether a client who is eligible for support from the NYLAF has made an application within the last 12 months and as such whether there is any entitlement remaining. This is hoped to be particularly useful in instances where a client is receiving support from various agencies. Please be aware this is an optional procedure and is not to be used for every client only for those who you think may have already applied to the NYLAF.

If you would like to be part of this information sharing protocol please email [nylaf@northyorks.gov.uk](mailto:nylaf@northyorks.gov.uk) with your agency name and a telephone number for the agency.

### ***White goods***

Beginning in March 2014 applications were restricted to one white good per application as opposed to the previous possible three. Applicants are still eligible to apply for three goods but only one of these can now be a white good. This decision was taken to relieve financial pressures on the fund and try to keep the fund within its monthly budget. White goods account for the most popular award and the most expensive.

White good awards:	1,593
As a percentage of all awards:	34.5%

## ***Food awards***

In March 2014 the way the NYLAF provided food awards changed. Up until this point food awards were made in the form of a food parcel. These parcels were delivered to the applicants address and varied in size dependent on the size of the family. Enough food was contained within the parcel to last for at least five days.

Unfortunately the supplier of these parcels withdrew for financial reasons and alternative suppliers have proved hard to find. As a replacement the NYLAF now provides food vouchers to applicants. These vouchers are set at a certain value depending on the size of the family. When making the application the applicant is asked to state which supermarket is the most accessible for them and a voucher is issued for use at that supermarket. The supermarket can either be ASDA, Morrisons, Sainsbury's or Tesco. These vouchers provide the applicant with the opportunity to buy fresh produce.

Food awards are the second most popular requested type of item behind white goods, but are the most requested single item.

## ***Using the NYLAF***

This is a reminder that the NYLAF is there to be used after all other avenues have been explored. The NYLAF is primarily an emergency fund which is to be used in the event of an unexpected crisis.

## ***White Good & Furniture Delivery***

There have been recent issues with applications being submitted for white goods and furniture when a client is yet to move into permanent accommodation. Awards have been granted and distributed only to find out that the clients proposed move has fallen through, or the award has reached the property before the client has moved in.

This has resulted in the items having to be cancelled or another delivery having to be made. This cancellation or second delivery, costs the NYLAF and uses up valuable funds.

Please do not submit an application for these hard items before the client has moved in to their property. Awards arrive very quickly, usually taking no more than 7 to 11 days.

## Breakdown of Awards

### 1 Items awarded in 2013/14 (% of awards)

White goods:	35%
Food (Including food issued by the Rainbow Centre):	34%
Utility top-up (started November 2013):	16%
Furniture & beds:	11%
Clothing:	3%
Rent deposits (withdrawn February 2014):	1%

## Examples of help provided by NYLAF

1. "J" is a single male who came to the Rainbow Centre for support after he had recently experienced a fire at his accommodation and had, effectively, lost everything. It transpired that the Landlord was not insured and absconded from the town – leaving the property inaccessible and the client effectively homeless.  
The Rainbow Centre undertook a full assessment of the individual's case and issued him with clothing, access to a telephone to make practical arrangements and under the NYLAF programme, a food parcel. The emergency food parcel allowed the client to eat for a week whilst staying in temporary accommodation until more permanent accommodation could be found.
2. "P" is a single mother with two young children dealing with the fall-out from an abusive relationship with her partner. She was initially referred to the Rainbow Centre's money advice service due to spiralling debts and compounded fines for late payment but was only in receipt of child benefit and child tax credits. As part of the intervention by the Rainbow Centre she was assessed as in need of practical support and was issued with a family food pack under the NYLAF programme.  
Although still a distance from a stable family situation, the food pack and intensive support from the Rainbow Centre have ensured the family have been able to stay together and the children's situations have been closely monitored. The food provision bought time in a crisis and chaotic situation and ensured that some practical needs were addressed quickly.
3. "K" was a teenage parent and now has two children, boys aged four and three. She has a very troubled past and lost her home when she was sent to prison. For the last two years she has been living in her parents' home with the children. Conditions were very poor due to overcrowding. When "K" finally became homeless she was given a new house but was still on benefits and couldn't afford to furnish it. A NYLAF grant got her off to a good start. She was given a washing machine and a bed for her youngest child who had never had a bed of his own. A utility top-up also helped her through the first few days when finances were

particularly tight.

Her son is now sleeping in his own bed in his own room. Mum, who has not been in trouble for more than four years, is keeping on top of the washing and the house is clean and tidy. The children were able to have their first ever tea party.

4. "A" is on Pension Credit and fled domestic violence, taking her granddaughter with her under the recommendation of Leicester Social Services. The expectation was for "A" to keep her granddaughter safe from witnessing or being involved in any abusive situations. The pair initially moved into refuge accommodation but have since moved into a local authority house.  
"A" received a fridge/freezer and a washing machine from the NYLAF as she was unable to fund these items herself due to her limited funds and her only income being her pension credit. The items she received have contributed to "A" and her granddaughter being able to make a fresh start.
5. "G" receives DLA, Mobility and Carers allowance. He was abused both physically and mentally at his previous home and so fled to Scarborough. Whilst in Scarborough he was supported in fully furnished refuge accommodation where he had a six month tenancy. When this came to an end "G" moved to an unfurnished local authority permanent accommodation. "G" had saved some money in this time from benefits but needed help with a fridge/freezer and a food pack which the NYLAF awarded. The items reduced the burden on "G" during his transition to permanent accommodation.
6. "J", a young single parent to three girls, has used the children's centre for years but has only ever engaged with two-year funding. Despite our efforts, she would not engage with courses or family activities. "J" problems started when she took out a loan with an on-line loans company. . It spiralled out of control and she needed the help of a charity to apply for a debt relief order. She turned to the Children's Centre in desperation when she couldn't afford her electricity bill. A utility top-up got her back on her feet and we were also able to get her a replacement bed for one of the children. NYLAF helped again when her cooker burnt out and she had no way to fund a replacement.  
While completing the NYLAF application, the Parent Support Adviser spoke to mum about her future and what she could do to become more financially independent. Mum said she lacked the qualifications needed to get a job. The PSA suggested she should try a Functional Maths course. Mum agreed and is still studying. She says she wouldn't have been on this path without the conversation sparked by the NYLAF application.

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Enquiries: [nylaf@northyorks.gov.uk](mailto:nylaf@northyorks.gov.uk)

Public information: [www.northyorks.gov.uk/nylaf](http://www.northyorks.gov.uk/nylaf)

Partner updates: [www.nypartnerships.org.uk/nylaf](http://www.nypartnerships.org.uk/nylaf)