

Your Local Pantry Scheme (Lowestoft Food Network)

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Residents in Kirkley and surrounding area are experiencing an increase in cost of living across the board and are really having to consider 'heating or eating'. Issues were highlighted through conversations with church members at St. Peter & St. John Church, and the church family decided they needed to explore options in how they can help.

This led the church senior leadership team to speak with another local church, who had set up a community fridge scheme, to see if that was an option.

In addition, research began around similar type food projects, and they found the 'Your Local Pantry' scheme, which they felt was a more sustainable option. This was set up in December 2020 in the church hall and currently supports around 150 households.

What were the issues and how were these identified?

Conversations took place with concerned residents with members of the church family who were/are experiencing hard times financially due to a number of factors. Many of them are in elements of in-work poverty, whether that is a single or double adult household.

Residents were aware that the Foodbank is available but it is a very limited resource, as the individual needs to be referred to the provision. Residents asked what additional help was out there and the church felt it was the time to see what they could do to support their community.

How did local residents address the issue?

Residents were invited to become involved in 'Kirkley Pantry' as a volunteer at the project. Roles and tasks included front-of-house, personal shopper, stock replenishment and administration.

Volunteer recruitment had taken place during the application process, so that when this was all authorized by Your Local Pantry, the team members were trained across a variety of subjects including food hygiene and food safety.

What the project has also seen, is a number of pantry shoppers have become volunteers themselves.

The project has also helped volunteers gain employment through the skills and experiences they have learned at the pantry. Without the team of passionate and dedicated volunteers, this project simply wouldn't happen!

What was the outcome?

Using an ABCD approach was key to the success of both identifying the need AND creating the provision that supports local residents.

Members of the community wanted to become involved and are passionate about helping others. Some are or have had experienced the issues highlighted by residents so can identify and empathise with them.

Feedback from both shoppers AND volunteers have highlighted how it has made them feel more connected to people, given them a sense of purpose and provided a service that has helped alleviate some of those financial pressures.

What next?

Working with residents in other communities in Lowestoft and in partnership with other support services, I am already supporting additional churches in replicating the 'Your Local Pantry' model.

We have identified, again through the avenues mentioned above, that there is real need across the board and supporting residents at what is a real critical time, in supporting interested parties to make that happen.