

Halesworth Community Larder

Sara Azeem and Louise Biddiscombe recently had the pleasure of visiting Halesworth Community Larder, where they met with Emma Healey from Halesworth Volunteer Service and Karen, a dedicated volunteer. A *community larder for all*, Halesworth Community Larder is a warm and welcoming space where visitors are greeted with a warm smile, a delicious cup of coffee, and the reassurance that they will be supported and listened to—no matter their circumstances.

The Beginnings

The larder was initially set up by the church during the Covid-19 pandemic as a response to growing needs within the community. It was a safe shopping space for elderly people hesitant to visit supermarkets. After the pandemic, the larder continued in a smaller capacity at the church hall, where the community could donate food, connect with others in a safe environment, and access support. It was a beacon of support for all, especially those who had lost their jobs during Covid.

Thanks to Covid response funding and generous food donations from the local community, the larder was one of the first to offer fresh fruit and vegetables. They are open to everyone and operate on an inclusive, trust-based ethos. People are not required to prove financial hardship, and are asked to donate funds of food only if they can. They embody the philosophy of bring what you can, take what you need, ensuring it is a safe place with no stigma or judgement.

How it works

The larder runs three mornings a week—Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday—from the church hall, where it is permanently located. Stock includes fresh produce, ambient goods, and ready meals. They have freezers for storage of ready meals and they keep a close eye on use by dates and then freeze, where possible.

Volunteers manage the amount of food that people take; one bag is allocated to two people and two bags for a family. In addition to providing food, the larder offers a welcoming environment, complete with coffee, a small kitchen area, and private space for chats. Volunteers regularly signpost users to other organisations for financial advice and additional support.

Sourcing

The larder's food comes from a variety of supportive partners: FareShare, who provide surplus food, and previously from Saxon House, They now work with Ankose, a wholesaler supporting community food projects. They stock fresh produce from their local fruit and vegetable supplier, a local allotment scheme, and Berry Farm, an organic co-operative who provide them with seasonal vegetables. They will soon receive produce from Wakelyns Agroforestry Farm, where a larder user is potentially going to volunteer. These lovely connections highlight how the larder creates opportunities for its users in different ways, while supporting the local through partnerships with local producers.

Volunteers

The larder has 25 regular volunteers who work on a flexible rota, typically covering one shift per week or fortnight. The larder is also supported by Halesworth Volunteer Service; their website allows members of the public to donate funds to the larder.

Looking forward

Emma shared some of their exciting plans to further the larder's impact next year. They are very keen to combine their community lunches with the larder, with a vision to create a lunch club for older people. They are due to have their kitchen refurbished and are exploring opportunities for larder users to batch-cook meals. The larder recently applied to Tesco funding to promote healthy eating through nutritious snacks and healthy baking. To ensure that they take a holistic approach to support, they are also considering joining the Warm Handover Incentive (WHI).

With its welcoming atmosphere and forward-thinking plans, Halesworth Community Larder is more than just a food resource—it's a lifeline for many. We are committed to supporting them, and similar projects, to continue their invaluable work.

