



Development stories



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and Jane Perry
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Introduction

The Your Local Pantry network supports over 100 Pantries across the UK. In a nutshell, Pantries soften the blow of high living costs, and create the conditions for communities to grow and thrive, by bringing people together around food.

Your Local Pantries have been running since 2013, and we have a lot of experience in helping organisations to set up and support Pantries. We have a tried and tested plan to support you to set up a Pantry and a positive approach centred on our values of dignity, choice and hope.

We charge an initial partnering fee for our support to help you to do this and a yearly membership fee.

As you explore whether we are the right partner for your organisation and community, you might find these development stories from our 2023 social impact report entitled *So Much More* helpful.

You can read the full report at www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk/social-impact-reports

The Vale Pantry, Dorset



The Vale Pantry is located in a rural area of Dorset, which is a new type of location compared to most Pantries that are located in towns and cities. Access to the nearest big supermarket involves a 25 mile round trip; around 15% of people in the local area do not have cars, and public transport is unreliable. People drive to the Pantry if they are able to, and offer lifts to people who do not have transport. The Pantry now have their own van which they call 'Pantry on Tour' (pictured). The van goes out to people who can't get to the Pantry itself.

"People come to us or we go out to them."

Carole, founder and trustee, The Vale Pantry, Dorset

The Vale Pantry has its own Citizen's Advice worker (working with the Pantry for 12 hours a week). Carole says the adviser is always busy, working with members to help them to 'get back on their feet', and aiming to change their circumstances for the better.

The Vale Pantry run a variety of activities throughout the year, including a children's cookery workshop in the school holidays, which teaches them to make a meal, from scratch, for their parents. They also run a support group for parents with autistic children. The Pantry provides mentoring to members, and also works closely with Dorset Council children's and adult's services, the mental health team and local schools.

The Pantry has worked with a range of people including people with life-limiting illnesses and homeless people (whom the Pantry has helped to find homes and employment). Carole says that there are many stories of people who are in a much better place since joining the Pantry.

Last year the Pantry secured funding to help people living with fibromyalgia; this enabled a group of people with the condition to access hydrotherapy once a

week for six months. People from these groups made friends and continue to support each other. This summer the pantry is planning to run an eight-week health and wellness programme, including activities like outdoor yoga.

A local farm provides the Pantry with their excess fruit and vegetables, and in return Vale Pantry has a scheme which gives members and their families the chance to spend some time helping at the farm during the growing season (watering, weeding, etc.) and enjoy a meal together at the end of the day.

"... And I just wanted to say a massive thank you to all of you for helping us this past year. We're so proud. Rob has now passed his apprenticeship. We've really appreciated it from every vegetable to every pack of nappies. We hope the next family finds you as helpful as we did."

Vale Pantry member



Freedom Foods, Northern Ireland

Freedom Foods run Pantries in Lurgan and Portadown, Northern Ireland. Sharon is the Pantry Volunteer Coordinator at both Lurgan and Portadown Pantries. Lurgan Pantry has been open since March 2022, Portadown Pantry officially opened in February 2023 (but started serving members in November '22). Sharon says she recently noticed a change in the Portadown Pantry sessions, after being open for a few months: **"...it felt a lot more relaxed, people were more settled and started to trust us and each other."**

"They're chatting, they know us by name. It's just like it's all started to just come together ... and yes, they come to shop, but it's more than that ... It's people not judging them, folks just chatting to them, asking them about their families, just treating them just like we would expect to be treated ourselves."

Sharon says Portadown Pantry is a very social spot, they have some big sofas where people gather to talk to each other ... **"People spot each other there, some may already know each other, they sit and chat."** Freedom Foods also run cookery classes which have helped members to get to know each other and make friends, while learning new recipes and trying new ingredients from the Pantry.

"I honestly think that people's lives seem so hopeless at times. Life can be so dark and stressful ... I physically see the change in people when they use Pantry. It changes all of us, to be honest."

"So, I like to think that it's a little glimmer of hope. It's a wee bit

of God's love in action for the church. It's showing people that really everyone's treated the same."

Sharon tells us about one member who came to the Pantry one week and didn't have any money for his membership. He was embarrassed and didn't want to tell the volunteers about this, but he asked if he could take food from the 'free' section (which includes food that is past its sell-by-date). The Pantry staff chatted to him and agreed he could still have his usual Pantry shop and pay the following week. When he came back the following week Sharon said she could see the change in him, **"he was completely different, he had his money for both shops and was happier and seemed more confident. I wonder if he responded to the trust we placed in him."**

"When you look and see how other people are really struggling just to get through life with the basic things, I just think there's a little glimmer of hope and that little bit of trust that is built up and it gets stronger and stronger."

Emmanuel Church is connected to Portadown Pantry and runs a community café once a week which Pantry members are encouraged to attend. This gives people the chance to get to know other members, volunteers and staff.

"... it's really important that the volunteers really buy into it ... I call it the ministry of Pantry ... this is a ministry; this is actually a really important thing to do. Volunteers are really enthusiastic



• Portadown •



• Lurgan •

about it because you can't do it without a good set of volunteers who really embrace the ethos of what we're trying to do."

Sharon tells us about one volunteer who got to know some members at the Pantry and said later she would never have had contact with them in the past (due to the divisions in Northern Ireland); but meeting at the Pantry she didn't know who they were or where they were from, they were able to talk on an equal level.

"... she said '... that's how far I've come. 10 years ago I wouldn't have broken bread with those people, and thought I don't have anything in common with them'. But she said '... that's how far I've come in this time, because I can just see the humanity there'. At the end of the day that is what we're there for. Just to be a bit different in a cold world, a bit of salt and light."

Sharon explains how the support and community aspect of the Pantry is equally as important as the food provided: **"... the relationship and trust, and then knowing they can come back again if they need it. Pantry is a safe place."**

Paradox Centre Pantry, Chingford

The Paradox Centre Pantry was launched in August 2020. The Pantry is part of the wider Peabody Community Foundation, and is based at the Paradox Community Centre in Chingford Hall. Peabody works in partnership with a range of organisations and the local community to host a wide variety of services and activities at the Paradox Centre, including a social prescribing Wellbeing Café, accessible fitness classes, ESOL courses, a social club (The Callaloo Club), early years parent/carer groups, youth clubs and financial inclusion advice.

The Pantry team refers members to other services, as needed, for example the Pantry works closely with Clean Slate, an organisation that provides financial advice to people struggling with their economic circumstances, the local baby bank for people in need of nappies, baby food and other items, and the social prescribing café (based in the same building as the Pantry), for people who are experiencing mental health problems or social isolation.

Ellie, the Pantry coordinator at Peabody, says that the Pantry

benefits people in lots of ways. For example, one family joined because they were struggling financially, but since becoming members they have also become involved with the ‘stay and play’ group for young children and their parents, which has helped them to make friends and get information and support around infant feeding.

Ellie thinks that it is difficult for most Pantry members to save money at the moment. The Pantry helps people to have enough food each week, but the cost-of-living crisis has made saving incredibly difficult. Ellie explains that Pantry members have said that the Pantry has helped them to ‘just about manage’, and prevented their situation from getting worse.

Over the winter months, the Paradox Centre Pantry partnered with Waltham Forest Council to help people save money on their energy bills (by providing home insulation and energy saving kits to as many members as possible). This initiative was very popular among Pantry members:

“... the popularity of those, and the waiting list we had, I think

was reflective of how tough it is really for people at the minute.”

Ellie

Ellie says that there is a really strong volunteer team at the Paradox Centre Pantry, some of whom have been there since the Pantry opened in 2020.

“Friendships are one of the biggest benefits that people get from the Pantry. We have lots of members who donate items to us ... so when they bring those they’ll stay for a cup of tea and meet people that way.”

“... we’ve done coffee mornings and people always bring in shared food so that we can have an informal team lunch and that type of thing.”

Ellie

“I have made a lot of friends here. I am now a member of the wellbeing cafe and [social] club.”

Barbara, 84, Paradox Centre Pantry

“I’ve come every week for three years. I’ve joined the social club too. I have a tea or coffee and see lovely people.”

Matora, Paradox Centre Pantry





• North Edinburgh Arts •



• Edinburgh •

Family membership scheme in Edinburgh

Pennywell Pantry and Fresh Start Pantry, Edinburgh, initiated a family membership scheme that enables bigger households to pay extra membership money, and in return be able to shop for more produce at the Pantry. The scheme started as a temporary initiative in the summer to help families with children with the extra costs of the school holidays. However, the idea was so popular that it became permanent. Family Membership usually costs an extra £1.50 on top of standard membership and families pick an extra 4 or 5 items with their Pantry shop. Standard membership is £4.50 and family membership is £6.

Tanya and Sharon (see stories opposite) have become friends since joining the Pantry and talk about the friendly atmosphere. They say people come for their shopping but they also get support, advice and friendship.

The Pantry coordinators shared the learning from the family membership scheme with Your Local Pantry staff. It was then written up as a guide for other Pantries to use and learn from, as part of our commitment to encourage peer learning and sharing of great ideas across the Your Local Pantry Network. Family membership has now also been implemented in other Pantries in Northern Ireland and England.



Tanya's story

Tanya is the coordinator, and also a member, at Pennywell Pantry, Edinburgh. She lives with her husband and three children. She says that the Pantry makes a big difference to the food her family eats. The family membership means that she is able to get a lot of fresh fruit and veg from the Pantry, as well as meat and some basic supplies such as washing powder. Tanya says shopping at the Pantry helps her to save money on her food shopping, which helps her to pay other bills.

Tanya says the family membership is particularly helpful because she has three children; she is able to get more food for her growing family and buy handy snacks for the children to take to school, as well as nappies for the baby. Tanya says her children are able to eat fresh food twice a day because she has family membership.

Tanya told us that even though she is working, it is still a struggle to manage her household finances (rent, gas, electric, etc.). Her home is quite cold, so in the winter she has to have the heating on for the children and the baby. Tanya says that being a Pantry member has helped her financial situation, she is able to source food and household items from the Pantry, which means her budget is not so stretched. However, she still does not have any money left over to save, or put towards treats, all of the money goes on bills, food and clothing, etc.

“We don't have choice to spend or keep some money for something like a children's holiday.”

Tanya says that before joining the Pantry she was struggling with her physical and mental health, after having a series of operations, and after having her youngest child. Since starting her work at the Pantry she is feeling a lot better: **“I am totally different. I love life.”**

Sharon's story

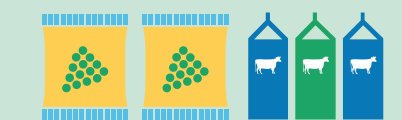
Sharon is a volunteer and has family membership at Pennywell Pantry. Sharon says she has been struggling financially, particularly due to the increases in energy prices. Sharon says that joining the Pantry has improved her financial situation. Family membership helps Sharon to get enough food for her family, so she doesn't have to spend so much at the supermarket, which makes it easier to pay her other bills.

Sharon appreciates being able to get cat food at the Pantry because it can be expensive at the supermarket. Sharon says she is able to get a lot more for her money at the Pantry, especially with recent increases in the price of food. Sharon said that she does not have any spare money to save, or put towards special occasions like birthdays and Christmas.

Sharon suffers from mental health problems and being a volunteer at the Pantry has helped her to get out of the house and make new friends.

“If I wasn't a member or a volunteer ... I used to just sit in the house and not go anywhere.”

Now she volunteers two days a week, chats to the customers and gets to know them, offering them support and a friendly face.



Epsom Pantry



Epsom Pantry is a welcoming community hub, built around food, offering affordable and healthy food, access to information, support, and opportunities to volunteer and learn new skills. Epsom Pantry was opened in May 2022 by the charity Good Company which also runs five food banks, the first opening back in 2012. Good Company realised that there was a gap between food banks and any other food support.

Good Company decided to set up the Pantry to help people with the next step, reducing dependency on the food banks. They provide additional support to those who needed it, and by paying a small amount, help people feel more empowered. The Pantry aims to improve members' financial resilience, strengthen local support networks and improve members' health and wellbeing.

“This is sort of a stepping stone and people can get referred through to us here, they can get information about the Pantry at food bank...”

Bex, Epsom Pantry Manager

Initially, clients were invited from the food bank to join, then membership was opened more generally. Quickly the Pantry began to get new members who they had not previously had contact with. Bex explains a lot of their Pantry members were really struggling financially but had not been accessing the food bank.

“... [T]alking to people at the food bank ... people were saying - I

don't want to be using the food bank regularly. I don't want to be always taking it for free. I want to be able to pay, and I want to be able to choose ... So then the Pantry just felt perfect for that. We still hear that so much, people say it just means so much to pay five pounds.”

“I think people really like the fact that they're not just paying us. They're paying to stock the shelves. They're paying for the Pantry and the community. They're paying it back.”

Although membership is open to anyone in the community, the Pantry has been effective in reaching households who are struggling financially and experiencing high levels of food insecurity, including many low-income working families who may be reluctant to use the food bank. Through their own survey, Epsom Pantry found that there was a high level of food insecurity among its members, with three quarters reporting that they worried about running out of food, and the same number were eating less healthy food because they could not afford a balanced diet. In their survey, Epsom Pantry found that 57% of members 'sometimes or often' skipped meals, and 17% had gone for a whole day without eating (within the last three months), because they didn't have enough money for food.

Bex says that the community feel of the Pantry is very important to

the members, **“... it's the thing that members always highlight as being one of the most important aspects of Pantry membership. They feel like it's their place, they feel safe here. Everyone always says they really look forward to coming and to shopping...”**

Epsom Pantry offers community activities on different days of the week, including coffee mornings, craft sessions, cooking courses and information sessions (e.g. fuel/energy advice), as well as activities for children during the school holidays. Some of the activities focus on things like CV writing and job applications, they also have sessions with Citizen's Advice, their local water companies, and other services.

The Pantry is now exploring ways to help people to move on from the Pantry in the future. However, many members say they would miss the community as much as the affordable groceries, so the Pantry is thinking about how to replicate the community atmosphere in other ways, so that people can continue to access community support when they are no longer members of the Pantry.

Information drawn from Epsom Pantry Social Impact Report (2023).



Harris' story

Harris (pictured, left) is a member and volunteer at Epsom Pantry. He had previously used the food bank (also run by Good Company) and was invited to join the Pantry when it opened.

“... when I get my first voucher to go to the food bank, I feel really bad, a bit of shame and pride. I was never used to these things ... turning up at the food bank where they're giving away free food. And I remember I went with my son in the car and I leave him in the car outside. I said 'wait here, I'm going to collect some food inside'... and he don't know that this is what is happening to me ... and you feel really bad to be ending up at the food bank, but at the end, it's really helpful, and I tell other people about the food bank and Pantry also.”



Harris has found the Pantry very useful in terms of being able to have a range of healthy food which means he can cook for his sons when they come to visit. Harris suffered a stroke a few years ago and was unable to work for some time while he recovered. Surviving on Universal Credit alone was difficult, and his budget was stretched to the limit. He is now a Pantry volunteer and really enjoys his role and the social side of the Pantry.

Harris says that being a member of the Pantry helps with his finances each week; before joining the Pantry he would sometimes have to borrow money from friends and family, now he is occasionally able to save a little bit. He says if he were not a member of the Pantry he would still be struggling.

“I would be struggling just like before ... I used to be working. I lost my job, my rent was going up. I didn't know that help was there until the housing association gave me a voucher to go to the food bank. Then I met some people and started to talk to Alison [a support worker at Good Company]. Then I realised that there is a relief, because you were worrying so much about the stress of life ... and you may think, oh, I'm going to be living on the street, things is not working rightfully.”

When Harris met Alison [at the food bank] he realised that help was available:

“Then I think to myself, oh my God, there is help out there. But you just didn't know that there is a bit of help out there, that you could get to sort out your problems ... And then the pantry come in now, which is great. It just makes me feel like every week I could go there and meet people and talk and discuss my problems because I live alone.”

Harris says that his confidence has increased since he became a Pantry volunteer. **“[M]y confidence was low before ... and I had been through a string of different sickness but it's so much better, my confidence, than before ... because I'm someone who used to go to the food bank. ... and ever since the food bank organised the Pantry, and I was asked to join, it's so good, it's so great.”**

Bex says: **“Harris is brilliant! He has been a volunteer right from the beginning, and has always been a great help receiving deliveries and restocking the Pantry every Wednesday.”**



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**BRENDAN
RESEARCH**