



Places of Hope

How Local Pantries help build thriving communities



Gav Aitchison, Rachel Brown & Jane Perry

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www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk

PLACES OF HOPE 2024 :

Your Local Pantry - at a glance

121

Your Local Pantry communities
across the UK

2000+ volunteers who dedicate
7000+ hours each week

120,000

people in 44,000 households that have benefitted
from Your Local Pantry membership since the first
Panttries opened in 2013

13,000

current members
across the UK

270,000

Pantry visits in the last 12 months

£ 21.33

- the typical saving a Pantry member
makes, every time they shop, equating to

£ 1,024

- potential saving over the last year, if a
member visited every week

£ 5.76 million

- approximate total savings to members
across the Your Local Pantry network over
the last year (July 23 to June 24)

From our 'So Much More' report in 2023, we already know the difference Pantries make to individuals and households:

- 97% say being a member has improved their household finances
- 83% say being a member has been good for their mental health
- 74% feel more connected to their local community
- 63% say they now eat more fresh fruit and vegetables

'Places of Hope' explores the cumulative and collective impact of the Pantry Network as a whole, and for whole communities - based on detailed stories from six Pantries: EVI, Kingston, Kirkley, Leith, Oasis FaB Foundry and Portadown, supported by a wider survey of Pantry managers and coordinators (May-June 2024).

Read on and as Susan, Pantry Manager in Kingston, says "feel the hope".



Contents

Welcome!	1
THRIVING - Creating Places of Hope	3
Pantry Focus: Leith, Scotland	6
EVOLVING - What are some of the keys to success?	8
Pantry Focus: Kingston, London	11
SUPPORTING - Your Local Pantry Network	13
IMPACTING - Members tell us the difference Pantries make to them	16
Pantry Focus: Portadown, Northern Ireland	18
CONNECTING - Growing communities	20
Pantry Focus: EVI, Blaenau Gwent, Wales	21
ENGAGING - Run with members, for members	23
Pantry Focus: Kirkley, Suffolk	25
Challenging times: Food and finances	27
Pantry Focus: FaB Foundry, Birmingham	28
Looking to the future	30
Appendix - economic analysis	34
Your Local Pantry: over to you	35
Acknowledgements	36

Welcome!

Welcome to 'Places of Hope', the 2024 Your Local Pantry social impact report. In this report, you'll find lots of evidence showing how Pantries are making a difference across the UK.

You'll see the impact Pantries are having on household finances, on loneliness and isolation, on physical and mental health, and more.

There are statistics and data, including that members save £21 a week on average - but in front of all the facts and figures, there are people.

People like Margie in Kent, who says: *"For me on a social level, it's brilliant getting out of the house more."*

People like Anne-Lise, in Leith: *"I save a lot of money now on food, and it helps. It means I have more money for better things. I would not be able to put a figure on how much I save, but because money is tight, it's good to know I can come here every Thursday and that I will have food on the table."*

People like Graham, in Suffolk: *"When society is so stratified and disconnected, it's nice to meet people and be connected."*

And people like Susan, in Kingston: *"Pantries are lovely communities where people support one another."*

That word - "communities" - appears again and again in this report.

We asked Pantry coordinators what a thriving Pantry meant to them, and it's striking how many of them independently talked about community. One described the Pantry as *"the heart of the community"*.

We hear of communities forming within Pantries: new friendships, support, care and compassion at the weekly visits. One coordinator said: *"We have created a community who cares. We are more than just a place to buy food."* Another said: *"Whilst people value the affordable food, it is the community that keeps people coming back."*

We hear also of the role Pantries play in their wider communities - linking up with other groups, introducing members to new opportunities and support, responding quickly to requests from elsewhere, becoming hubs that connect and strengthen community relationships.

Our 2023 'So Much More' report presented a comprehensive picture of the difference Pantries make to individuals and households. This year's report looks more at the cumulative and collective impact of the Pantry Network as a whole, and for whole communities. It includes detailed stories of six Pantries: EVI, Kingston, Kirkley, Leith, Oasis FaB Foundry and Portadown, supported by a wider survey of Pantry managers and coordinators (May-June 2024).



Pantries: People, power and potential

The number of Pantries has risen by a fifth over the past year, to 121. Since the first Pantries opened in 2013, more than 120,000 people in 44,000 households have benefited from Pantry membership, from Edinburgh to Ebbw Vale, from Portadown to Portsmouth. The latest analysis shows that Pantries have saved members £5.76m in the past year, and more than £10.5 million in the past two years.

More Pantries are opening this year, including with a primary school in Salford, with the Salvation Army in Welling, and with Barnardos in Ayrshire.

It's always exciting to welcome new partners and neighbourhoods, but equally pleasing this year has been the deepening role that older Pantries have attained in their communities. Leith Pantry is adding a map to its wall, showing other local opportunities and services for members. In Kingston (p11), Susan tells of the huge amount of work done to provide additional services, or connect with others. [“The word on the street for people is that they can get a lot of help here as an organisation,”](#) she says. [“We cannot fix everything, but there is a lot of help.”](#)

A lot of help - and also a lot of hope. Hope has always been one of the three core Your Local Pantry values, along with dignity and choice. There is hope for individuals, hope for the 121 neighbourhoods where Pantries operate, and hope for the country as a whole.

Susan in Kingston says members should [“feel the hope”](#) in the Pantry. We love that idea: Pantries as places of hope.

We know food is a great foundation for hope and progress. Pantries are gathering places that bring people together around food, and when that happens it unlocks everyone's collective potential. Pantries tell of new and evolving friendships. New opportunities open up. Our horizons widen. Community-led change becomes more tangible. Many people are dealing with difficult social issues, but there is an inherent evergreen goodness in people coming together and doing life together, sharing food, skills, ideas and company.

In that context, we've been thrilled this year by Pantry members forming steering groups and forums to have a greater say in how Pantries are run, by members speaking up on national TV, and by members joining in the national 'Speaking Truth To Power' programme and taking part in creative art collaborations, as part of the 'Let's End Poverty' campaign.

That is especially heartening, because there is unmistakably a great need and desire for national action to tackle poverty. Pantry members and communities have been at the sharp end of the cost of living scandal in recent years, and Pantries rely in large part on supply systems that are fragile. Charity can never be a long-term answer to food insecurity. We need a national Government-driven commitment to ensure that all incomes are enough to live on, so people are not swept into deep poverty, and so everyone can have long-term hopes. Everyone deserves access to good food without having to turn to others for help. But everyone also values community, and the hope that such community provides.

Whether you help run a Pantry, attend a Pantry, support Pantries, or are looking to start a Pantry, our hope is that in reading this report, you will see the power and potential that Pantries provide, not solely as food venues, but as real places of hope.

The Your Local Pantry Team

THRIVING - Creating Places of Hope

- 121 Pantry communities
- 44,000 members since the Your Local Pantry Network started in 2013
- 13,000 current members across the UK
- 270,000 visits in the last 12 months

Pantries enable tens of thousands of people around the UK to strengthen their community and loosen the grip of high prices. In our [2023 Social Impact Report 'So Much More'](#) members told us first-hand how pantries reduce isolation, foster community and friendships, improve health and pre-empt poverty.

What makes Pantries special?

Your Local Pantries soften the blow of high living costs and create the conditions for communities to grow and thrive, by bringing people together around food. The values of dignity, choice and hope are central to the work of all 121 Pantries in the Network, which stretches across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

As the Network has grown, Your Local Pantry has stayed faithful to our distinctive core values:

- **Member-run:** Pantries are co-operative, run with and for their members.
- **Open to all:** Membership is open to anyone local, with no requirement to be referred by a professional or third party. Members pay between £3.50 and £7 a week, which entitles them to choose ten grocery items.
- **Choice:** Members can choose the food they want, using a symbol or colour-coded system which ensures that a balance of fresh, packaged and higher-value foods are included. Choice also enhances dignity and agency, as members are able to choose their own products, rather than being given a selection of food.
- **Quality:** Your Local Pantry insists on good quality food, including fresh fruit and vegetables, frozen and chilled food, meat, dairy, vegetarian and vegan products, alongside a supply of tins and packets. Each Your Local Pantry is unique to its community, but all aspire to have the look and feel of a small local shop, with uniformed staff who manage the Pantry with hand-held technology. This enhances the experience of shopping at a Pantry by reducing stigma and calming anxiety.
- **No time limits:** membership is not time-limited; members can choose to come every week, or less often, for as long as they need to.

Some Pantries are independent, but most are part of a wider organisation such as a church or other community project. Some, like our original Pantry in Stockport, partner with Housing Associations. In some areas (e.g. Salisbury and London Borough of Havering), Pantries are run in conjunction with the Local Authority. There is one Pantry partnership with a school (see p28), with at least one more school set to follow later this year.

Nearly all Pantries are part of registered charities (or a registered charity in their own right), but there are examples of Pantries with alternative structures and charitable registrations (CIC or CIO).

What does a thriving Pantry look like?

"I am proud of our Pantry because it effectively supports our community by providing nutritious food and making a positive impact on food security. Additionally, our commitment to continuous improvement and community engagement allows us to adapt and grow, making a lasting difference in the lives of those we serve"

As the Network has grown, many Pantries have gone from strength to strength, despite challenging socio-economic conditions. Through conversations within the staff team, and with Pantry managers, we've identified some characteristics of a thriving Pantry. The quotes here are from survey responses.

Financial benefits - saving money on grocery bills

"A thriving Pantry is a place where people are released from the pressures of debt and financial concern, and find community, stability and hope for the future."

Pantries typically charge members between £3.50 and £7.00 per visit. Costs vary between Pantries and across the country, reflecting regional differences in prices. Pantries which have opened in 2024 are advised to open at £4.50 or higher.

Members typically save between £11 and £35 a week, compared to supermarket prices (average saving of £21 a week). If a member visits every week, that would amount to saving over £1,024 a year.

With 270,000 Pantry visits UK-wide over the last year (July 2023 to June 2024), this represents an approximate total saving to members of around £5.76 million. This means that Your Local Pantry has saved individuals and households a staggering estimated £10.5 million over the last 2 years.

Financial savings are often a way into a range of wider benefits. You can read more about the difference our Pantries make to members on p16.

Food - enhancing nutrition and variety

Thriving Pantries serve as wide a range of tastes and diets as possible, and ensure shelves are always well stocked.

"To me, a thriving Pantry is... One that provides a great range of fresh, chilled and ambient foods and where pantry members find so much more than food with good conversations, help and support."

Pantry managers tell us they are proud of their Pantries not just for the way cost savings they for members assist with household finances, but also for the range and quality of healthy food they are able to provide:

"We get an amazing amount of support from donors which means we can provide an excellent variety of foods including fresh, chilled and frozen for our members."

"We're proud of our Pantry because...we offer a friendly and supportive welcome to our members. We also work hard to try and offer an amazing range of products, ambient, fresh and frozen. We can see the difference our Pantry can make to their lives, financial and pastoral. Members have made friends and they say although they have to wait to shop, they enjoy the social aspect of chatting together"

"We work hard to stock good quality products that members want."



More than Food - community and support

“We help people make connections with other services and with each other”

What our Pantries offer members overwhelmingly adds up to more than financial savings and food. Pantries bring people together. Providing a safe and welcoming environment, with familiar, friendly faces, helps to build strong relationships and overcome social isolation.

Pantry managers tell us that Pantries provide “a service in our community, which is bringing the community together” - helping to form real, meaningful communities where members look out for each other, check in with and support each other - building social capital and community links which go beyond the ‘service’ provided by staff and volunteers.

One coordinator said a thriving Pantry was “the heart of our local community”. Another said a thriving Pantry meant “Seeing the same members attending week in week out, and the friendships it has created.”

All Pantries now provide additional services and opportunities, or connect well with others locally. A thriving pantry is “a community hub offering a choice of affordable, good food, in a dignified environment where members can access information, advice, and support.”

People stay with Pantries for very different lengths of time. Some opt to leave after a while, to free up space for someone else, and coordinators cherish seeing people make progress. “To me, a thriving Pantry is... a pantry that supports its members to move on in life.”

You can read more about the difference our Pantries make by creating spaces for community on p20.

Busy and Growing - somewhere members want to come back to

Thriving Pantries are reaching more people and strengthening local relationships. Several coordinators talked positively about being busy. “To me, a thriving Pantry is... plenty of activity and community building partnerships.” For a Pantry to thrive, members must enjoy using it. “A place where members are happy to return for an excellent selection of food along with a chat. A space to share”

Appealing and Welcoming

Many Pantries work hard to create an environment which feels more like a conventional shop:

“It is a vibrant positive place to be.”

“Our space is beautiful and friendly, so members don't feel that they are getting a hand out but rather that they shop in a little farm shop.”

Alongside their warm welcome and friendliness, several Pantry managers specifically mentioned the importance of bringing people of all cultures together:

“Everyone is welcome regardless of social background or ethnicity.”

“We work with local organisations to support people from diverse backgrounds and situations, building strong relationships.”

Many Pantry coordinators mentioned the importance of being welcoming for all. A thriving Pantry is: “A place of acceptance , a multi-cultural space where everyone is made to feel welcome and part of a community.”

Pantry Focus: Leith, Scotland

“People say it’s a highlight of their week”



At Leith Pantry, in north Edinburgh, the volunteers go out of their way to make members welcome. There’s usually background music on in the Pantry, welcome sheets have been translated into Arabic, French, Spanish and Mandarin, one member’s artwork adorns the walls, there’s a focus group that all members can join, and a lot of thought has been put into the design.

Pantry coordinator Ann Monaghan says: “I did not want it to just look like a pop-up shop, and an extension of the church. So we took the carpet up and put new flooring in, and got support from local companies and contractors for the sink and worktops and electrics. I wanted it to look like a farm shop, rather than just plastic tables. The members say it’s lovely and nicer than they anticipated.”

The impact has been significant, says Ann. “We have got members who are volunteers, and people say it’s a highlight of their week. They like coming shopping and have met people. We had an Indian woman in last week, it was her second week. We chatted and as she left she said it has been like chatting to family, as she’s over here with no family support.

“There’s a lot more diversity now and there’s a massive divide in Leith. There’s definitely money, and we also have the biggest arts community in Scotland and there’s lots of independent coffee shops, but there are people really struggling in abject poverty.

“The food bank has been here for ten years, through the Church of Scotland, and it has five outlets in Leith. The Management Committee wanted to keep the food bank for emergency food only, but because of the economic circumstances then Covid, the food banks were seeing the same people getting referred, week in week out. So the management committee looked into what they could do, and found the Pantry model, and I was brought in to set it up.

“I think the difference is being able to buy and choose what you want, rather than being told that’s what you’re having. It means for members, they’re not a charity case.”

The membership is diverse, with a wide range of ages, languages and situations:

“We have a range of students, families, single people, all with diverse circumstances. I like chatting to them, and finding out about people. We have one woman, who was very nervous the first time. She’s living with her 18-year-old daughter, and had fled domestic abuse, so her confidence and self esteem were very low, and she was financially struggling. We chatted about her cooking from scratch, and now she brings in food she has cooked. We have one man who didn’t really eat any fruit and veg at first, and now with a bit of cajoling he is eating more. His friends now cannot believe what he’s eating. That’s changed him.”



Pantry Focus: Leith, Scotland



The food supplied through Fareshare varies, but the Pantry also gets donations from three local supermarkets, and volunteers use bulk discount vouchers at Farmfoods.

Ann says: “We sometimes have to limit a few things if we have limited stock - so at the moment, people can choose milk, eggs, cheese or butter, and sometimes choose just one meat item.

I am a Christian, and some weeks we go to Fareshare and hardly have any food. But we always have enough, and in the weeks when we have little food, it always happens to be that not many members come. It’s uncanny. If we have any left over, it goes to other uses. We have never run out of food. I always tell members it’s a partnership. We use their weekly payment to invest in the Pantry and stock.”

The Pantry currently operates from a small room in the church building, but finding larger premises would be very costly.

“In five years, I don’t think we will get to not needing the food bank and Pantry, but maybe we will have grown the Pantry so it’s open to more members. I might be retired - but still volunteering.”

What do you think are the key essentials to make the Pantry a success?

- Atmosphere: make it friendly, welcoming, non-judgmental and low-key.
- Don’t get too big: your membership has to fit with your space and volunteers. If you become too big, it’s a lot of pressure on volunteers.
- Being able to listen and signpost if need be. We are going to have a map of what’s in Leith, so we can signpost people to support and fun opportunities.

EVOLVING - What are some of the keys to success?

We're constantly working with our Pantries across the UK, listening to their experiences and learning from their challenges and successes. Some recent learning about the factors which help a Pantry to thrive include:

Living the values

Pantries are based on the values of dignity, choice and hope. Coordinators also talked of values such as being approachable, non-judgmental and dependable. "To me, a thriving Pantry is... Full of life, a place of friendship and hope."

Many Pantries are exploring ways to more consistently involve members in decisions, such as through steering groups or forums. "To me, a thriving Pantry is... one that is led by the community and has member involvement throughout". For more information, see p23.

Council support

Local authorities are increasingly finding that the Pantry model is a win-win, helping the council and communities.

Many Pantries, including in this report, talk positively about the extra impact they have been able to have through council partnerships.

Sometimes this has been through particular grant funds, as reported by Oasis FaB Foundry Pantry (p28). Sometimes it might involve providing rent-free use of council buildings, such as in Kingston (p11).

Sometimes it involves councils helping multiple projects to collectively access regional food surpluses, as reported by Portadown Pantry (p18) and Kirkley Pantry in Suffolk (p25). And increasingly, councils are becoming integral Pantry partners themselves, opening Pantries, either alone or with local partners. Salisbury City Council was the first to do so, and as this report went to print, Wrexham County Borough Council was also preparing to open one.

It is in councils' interests to support residents to soften the impact of high living costs, and to ease pressure on crisis services, and Pantries are proving an effective solution.



Dedicated volunteer teams

Most, but not all, Pantries have some paid staff. However, no Pantry could run without their volunteers.

Volunteers are key to Pantry relationships, and having a dedicated, caring team can make a huge difference. A thriving Pantry “gets good feedback and has a great staff team who are passionate about what we do.”

Many Pantry managers credited the success of their Pantry directly to their “amazing” teams of volunteers:

“We’re proud of our Pantry because...we work as a team and welcome anyone. We are family now. We know we are having a positive impact in our community.”

“We have a great team of volunteers who believe in our Pantry and work hard to make a difference to the lives of hundreds of people in their local community.”

“We’re proud of our Pantry because...it has the most amazing group of volunteers, who work together and use their different skills to come together, and without them we wouldn’t have a pantry.”

Some Pantries are run by very small teams of dedicated volunteers, others have 30 or more. Average reported volunteer numbers are around 18 volunteers per Pantry, which means we have well over 2000 volunteers across the country.

“It requires a dedicated team of volunteers to make it happen each week, but even a small team can really make a difference for families.”

Total volunteer hours reported by our Pantries ranged between 2 and 260 hours per week, with the average figure being 58 hours per week. Multiplied across the Network that comes to a massive 7000+ volunteer hours each week dedicated to providing food, dignity, hope and choice for their communities.

Community partners

Several Pantry Managers mentioned the significance of building strong, sustainable links across the local community:

“We are proactive, always looking for opportunities to support the community and to have immediate impact”

“I am proud of our Pantry because it effectively supports our community by providing nutritious food and making a positive impact on food security. Additionally, our commitment to continuous improvement and community engagement allows us to adapt and grow, making a lasting difference in the lives of those we serve”.

“We have a partnership approach with community organisations to provide an holistic service to the community”
“we work with local organisations to support people from diverse backgrounds and situations, building strong relationships”

Over half of the Pantries who responded to our survey said they were part of wider partnerships or other local networks. These included local forums and food aid/justice networks, Feeding Liverpool and or wider Feeding Britain. Many Pantries work with local agencies, councils, housing associations, health services and local churches.



To me a thriving Pantry is...

“buzzing with the sound of members talking and sitting back down after getting their shopping and continuing the conversation.”

“full of life, a place of friendship and hope.”

“one where we are able to get to know the members and support them in a holistic way which includes the provision of food.”

“part of the heartbeat of the community, enable support without having to be referred”

“the heart of our local community where people come for more than food.”

“one that provides a great range of fresh, chilled and ambient foods and where pantry members find so much more than food with good conversations, help and support.”

“a community where members get wrap-around support to improve their financial situation but also build resilience.”

Pantry Focus: Kingston, London

“We have added so many extra things”

At Kingston, the team see the Pantry as a stepping stone and a connection point that enables people to make progress all across their lives.

The Pantry is run by City Changers Projects, part of the charity Doxa Deo Community Church. They run other projects and works closely with other services and activities. Members can access Grace advocacy; employment help, especially for mums returning to work; health checks; nutritionist advice and more. The charity also runs Kingston Foodbank; Kingston Growbaby, a project helping new parents access baby clothes and support; art workshops; a Christmas savers scheme, as well as Christmas Lunch on Jesus; and it has just opened a wellness centre, Discover Well.

Pantry manager Susan Bence says: “Over the last two years we have added so many extra things. We are lucky to be a big charity, so we can move clients between different services and offer people wrap-around support.

“I usually say the Pantry is a place where someone can still get support but with the added benefit of dignity. It’s a stepping stone for someone coming out of crisis before they are fully shopping. Pantries are lovely communities where people support one another. It’s about way more than food, and we want to offer support because our hearts will always be to get people in a better financial position, so we need extra intervention.

“The word on the street for people is that they can get a lot of help here as an organisation. We cannot fix everything, but there is a lot of help.”

People can just ask to join the Pantry, but members have also been introduced via Citizens Advice, children’s centres, schools, Growbaby, health visitors and Refugee Action, among others. Staff from Nuffield Health also came in to offer BMI and blood pressure checks, and the Pantry works with local cooking groups and stop-smoking groups.

Susan and her team also have a good relationship with the local council, which provides the space they use rent-free, funds other work, and attends the annual City Changer Projects Impact evening.

Susan can tell of the Pantry’s impact through stats and stories. They have 92 members; 13 have been able to stop using the food bank since joining the Pantry; 18 have received advocacy support; and 47 accessed healthy eating support, for instance. Susan has numerous member comments, calling the Pantry a “light in a dark place”, and a blessing, and “a reminder that there are lovely people”. One member arrived in deep hardship, but is now the Pantry’s driver, collecting stock each week. Another member had a chance to move to live nearer her sister, but felt so connected thanks to the Pantry that she didn’t want to leave.

Susan and the volunteers have made the Pantry a welcoming space. The word “Hope” is emblazoned across the wall, there’s a coffee shop for members while they wait, and lots of creative touches, to build dignity and hope into every moment.



Pantry Focus: Kingston, London

“You need to focus on dignity,” says Susan. “At City Changers Project we work on a step in, stand with and strengthen principle. Where food bank is a step-in service to help someone in crisis, the Pantry is a place where we stand with our clients on their journey and offer Grace Advocacy and Employment Worx as a strengthening service. When clients come to the Pantry, they should experience a feeling of dignity and feel the hope in the space. It needs to be a beautiful space. That adds a lot to the experience.... You could hand out the same food from plastic bags on trestle tables, or you can make it a lovely space that people do not want to leave.”

There are various food projects locally, but Susan says the focus on dignity makes the Pantry stand out.

“The difference here, when I listen to members and the feedback, is the dignity. People always say they feel like they are walking into a farm shop - it doesn't feel like a hand out. We believe in building resilience. We don't offer free shops or debt. If people can't pay, we offer some free fruit and veg, but will not allow debt, so we help people to budget. I feel the Pantry should be a step away from crisis, and if we allow debt it's allowing people back to crisis.

“I would like fewer food banks and more Pantries, and more people able to move on. We have families with young children who will be with us for a while, we have elderly people who are not going to work again who will be here a long time, but I really hope we can help the middle group out of debt, and improve and be financially independent.”

Kingston is very diverse and has a wide inequality gap, but Susan says the community is very generous, and she makes sure it hears about the Pantry.

“Every year we have an impact evening, so in February we invited everyone we partner with and other agencies to an evening celebration. This year, we used actors to tell stories with voiceovers on videos, to hear people telling about being in difficulty then coming here.

“A local school's art department also did paintings of Pantry members, and we're doing a new art project for Let's End Poverty. We always want to talk about hope. Bad things happen, but we want to talk about hope. And we want to show people they can do something with their art to make some income.

“As an organisation we have changed our language a lot to bring a message of hope, and helping members when things go wrong.”



What we've learnt:

- Having time slots helps, and means we have quite high attendance. Nobody ever gets to the 90-day lapse point, because we always follow up with people. I would encourage people to do slots or bookings from the beginning. If you have a lot of people queuing, it defeats the purpose of dignity.
- We struggled at the beginning with how to fairly share the free fruit and veg. It took us forever to get a plan, but we now have small baskets for a single person or couple, and a larger basket for a family.
- As soon as you can, offer wrap-around support. Food is not enough.
- We are very fortunate to have a coffee shop, run by our charity, outside the Pantry. It is a commercial café with a heart for the community. Members get a free drink when they come. People sometimes have less confidence and being able to sit here and chat with volunteers helps.

SUPPORTING - Your Local Pantry Network

From Stockport, across the UK

Your Local Pantry (YLP) was created by Stockport Homes Group in 2013, just as austerity measures were beginning to severely impact individuals and communities. Since then, our YLP Network has gone from strength to strength. In 2023, we celebrated our 10th birthday and milestone of 100 Pantries. Since July 2023, our YLP national team have supported the opening of a further 19 pantries with 12 in the pipeline.

As part of their mission to ensure communities have better access to food, The Co-op Members are providing three years of funding, investing in substantial expansion of the Your Local Pantry Network. To date, 57 Pantries have been opened during our partnership with The Co-op.

Now we have more than 120 Pantries spread across the UK, including 4 in Northern Ireland, 7 in Scotland and a further 5 in Wales. Pantry success leads to growth with more Pantries opening in nearby locations, aided by dedicated support of our national team. As a result, we've seen clusters of Pantries flourish in Liverpool and Merseyside, Birmingham and West Midlands, as well as Portsmouth and Newcastle.

An exciting development this year has been alternative models of Pantry, including 'multi-site' Pantries serving more rural communities in Dorset and Pantries opening in schools (see p28).

To find out more about opening a Pantry see p35.

Network offer and benefits

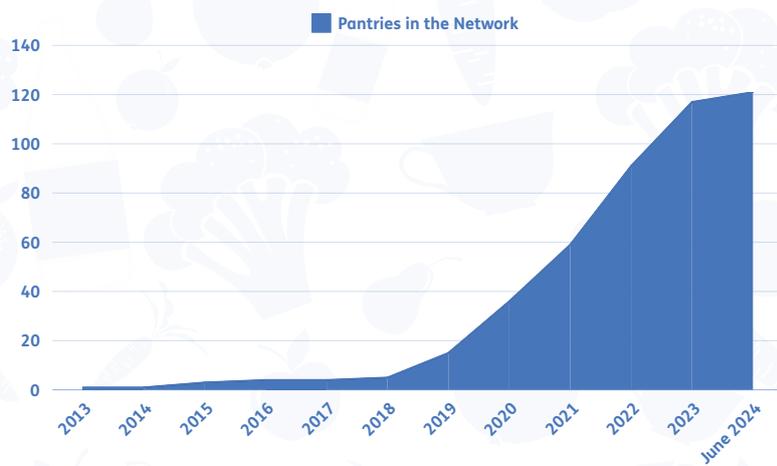
The Your Local Pantry national team

The YLP national team works hard to respond to queries from organisations interested in opening Pantries and support new Pantries through the opening and beyond. With 10 years of experience of opening Pantries across the UK, the team have shaped a development process through which new Pantries can learn from those that have gone before. This allows new Pantries to avoid 'reinventing the wheel', translating successful models from elsewhere into their own context whilst, hopefully, avoiding common pitfalls. The team facilitates the bespoke Pantry Portal membership (IT) system, ensuring operating data is collected effectively and held securely. They also support the Network to problem solve, bring together best practice and find ways to develop the Network in a person centred and value led way.

Expanding the YLP Network

During 2023-4, we reviewed and developed our approach to recruiting Pantries, including more targeted outreach and communications strategy. During 2024, the YLP team reached out to new organisations to introduce them to YLP. Whilst food networks, local CVS (Council for Voluntary Service), church denominations or wider organisations might not necessarily be looking to open a Pantry themselves, this broader network are starting to refer people to us who are interested. The success of this approach is being monitored.

In line with the new communications strategy, and to better resource the team, we have conducted surveys and interviews with Pantry managers who run Pantries in specific contexts - starting with foodbanks and schools - to create case studies for public use and guidance notes for those who proceed to open a Pantry in different contexts.



YLP Network Map

Today there are YLPs as far north as Edinburgh and as far south as Portsmouth.

There are 7 Pantries in Scotland, 4 in Northern Ireland and 4 in south Wales. In London there are 10 Pantries, and 8 Pantry sites in Kent.

In the Midlands, there are 13 Pantries in Birmingham, 7 in Sandwell and 5 in Reading with a further.

In Merseyside there are 19 Pantries in Liverpool, and 11 Pantry sites in St Helens.



Still to come: we have more Pantries opening in Scotland and Northern Ireland in the Autumn

Multi-site Pantries in Newcastle and in Kent have taken a new approach to the YLP Model - running their Pantries in multiple community spaces.

Still to come: our first North Wales Pantry will be open by the end of 2024

Thanks to generous support from the Co-Operative, the dedication of the national team and our local partners, the Pantry Network has grown significantly, spreading across all major regions of the UK.

See an up-to-date map at www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk/pantry-listings/

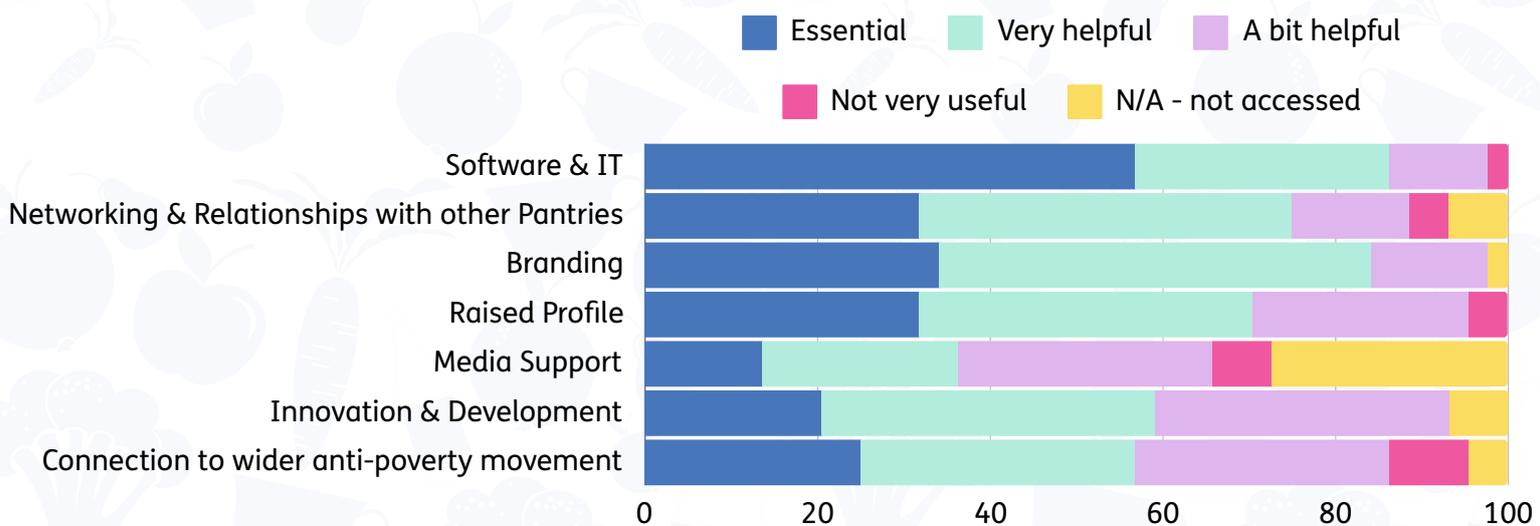
Supporting Existing Pantries

Alongside providing intensive support with the opening of new Pantries, our national team also work extensively to support the existing Network, providing support, guidance and training; connecting Pantries across the Network through conferences and webinars; and, looking to the future, anticipating and helping Pantries to develop responses to future challenges.

In April we had the first coordinators' panel - where all Pantry managers were invited to join a session to give feedback on key projects that the YLP team is working on which will direct our work in the coming months. The panel gave specific feedback on the implications of some of our changes, identifying which proposed projects would and would not be of use to them and so directly shaping our priorities. We plan to do these every 6 weeks.

43 Pantry managers who responded to our survey said they had engaged in some or all of the activities provided by the Network, most popular being the WhatsApp group, co-ordinator catch-up meetings, webinars, conference, trainings and regional meetings. 28 Pantry Managers also mentioned Pantry Post and/or Newsletters. Respondents indicated that they were largely intending to continue this level of engagement with a range of Network activities over the next year.

Pantry managers overwhelmingly said that they would recommend the Network to others (98% of respondents). The main reasons given were the support and guidance available from the YLP National team, the benefits of being part of a wider Network - connecting with others, sharing experience, the advantages of buying into established model, particularly the IT and systems. Several Pantries specifically mentioned the support with starting up a new Pantry as being particularly valuable.



Three-quarters of Pantry Managers described being part of YLP Network as good value for money (12 “very good”, 21 “good”). The only sense of hesitation was regarding the increasing cost of membership to Pantries:

"The costs are creeping close to being prohibitive and may put off smaller organisations in the coming year though."

IMPACTING - Members tell us the difference Pantries make to them

As the Network has grown, more and more members have been telling of the impact Pantries have had in their lives. We know from previous research that Pantries improve people's household finances; lead to improved physical and mental health; enable members to eat a more varied diet, including more fresh fruit and veg; spark new friendships and strengthen community - as well as introducing people to many more opportunities and support services locally. These comments give a few snapshots of the very personal human impact that Pantries have all over the UK. Some were collected this year, and others were collected previously through the Pantry Post members' newsletter.

"We've got a young daughter, and with all the costs of living and clothing costs going up, this really helps. We come every week on Thursdays and it makes a big difference. The Pantry is never short of choice!"

"It helps us money wise. We are saving maybe £20 a week, and that means we have a bit more money for other costs, and also to spend with my daughter, like days out together and buying clothes, and making her life better."

Darren, Halesowen

"The social side has been fantastic. Everybody that comes in is really lovely and everyone I volunteer with as well. There's nobody that isn't lovely! For me on a social level, it's brilliant getting out of the house more."

Margie, Aylesham

"The impact for me has been really good. I am a social recluse and do not like going out, but they're super-friendly here. They help, not just with food but with wider advice or help. I generally do not like going out but I do like going to the Pantry. I'm actually getting meals and nutrition now that I would have gone without, because I couldn't afford it.... I cannot really express fully the help they give, and the quality of the food is unbelievable. They always go the extra mile, and nobody feels embarrassed.

"It's a lot more than just unbelievable food. It's a lot more to people than that, and they also have different groups come in, like Citizens Advice, so people do not have to go to other places."

Andrea, Macclesfield

"The cost of living crisis doesn't seem to be going anywhere right now and as a family of five, that's a lot of shopping. The Pantry offers me the option to stock up a bit on cupboard essentials, toiletries and sometimes a cheeky little treat too. I have found that the pork chops from the Pantry are the best in town! It allows me to stock up at a lower cost, and taking the veg that the Pantry offers means I now make more home-made food such as soups and stews."

Kate, North End, Portsmouth



“We love it! We come here religiously. It’s like a third place - there are not so many coffee and chat places to go to meet people, and this is a useful place to chat. We sometimes bring food, and take some as well.

“When society is so stratified and disconnected, it’s nice to meet people and be connected. When it was cold, it was nice to come for a warm up, and for some people it’s the only people they will see each week.

“Often there’s a vertex of mental health issues and poverty. This is good for mental health and you’re warming up and getting some food.”

Graham, Kirkley

“It’s great for me. My partner works full time, and we have kids at home. We are not well off, but we’re not on benefits, and there’s not much help. Nobody here presumes anything. Poverty doesn’t really come into it, which is nice. You don’t feel like you are taken in because you can’t afford to feed your family. You feel you’re doing something positive, and for the environment.

“You can choose what you want. If you go to a food bank, you get what you are given and are thankful because you had nothing. Coming here, you can choose what you need or like. Here, it’s non-judgmental. At food banks, it’s a case of ‘just be grateful you have got something’. Here, it gives people who do not have choice, a choice. That’s important when you have no money. The ladies here are really lovely and I love people shouting and swapping recipe ideas round the room, googling ideas for what to do with different things. That’s a nice side of things, and I’m making things I would never have done before. When you’re a mum always trying to think what’s for dinner every night, it helps.”

Carol, Leith

“The Pantry staff are amazing and never make me feel like I am begging or a failure. They always treat me with such respect and dignity. With their help we have been able to finally get out of fuel debt which was £980 when we started using the local pantry nearly a year ago. We are now £8.20 in credit with our fuel supplier.

“We have also been able to have our grandchildren over for meals, which helps their parents who although are working long hours in Tesco struggle to get by. The help with dog food has enabled us to keep the dog. We can’t tell you how much appreciation we have. The Pantry is a brilliant place.”

David, Cardiff

Pantry Focus: Portadown, Northern Ireland

“The humanity that comes from forming a social bond with someone else is amazing.”

The Your Local Pantry model is deliberately flexible. Local partners inevitably know what will work best in their neighbourhood, and might have particular funding requirements. Dignity, choice and hope run through all sites - but thereafter, Pantries come in all different shapes and sizes - as shown in Lurgan and Portadown, in Northern Ireland.

Emmanuel Church opened both Pantries in 2022, after exploring alternatives to food banks. Both have become cherished community spaces, with just over 80 members each, and with unique features.

A food bank also operates from the church, as do a few others locally.

Sharon McCollum, Pantry coordinator, says: “The difference with a Pantry is that there’s a community that forms around a Pantry. That’s makes a huge difference. People go to the food bank, the team try to chat to people and signpost them on. But when they join a Pantry they build relationships, and they realise that there’s more to it than just food. There’s a community that forms around the Pantry. People get to know each other and know each other’s names, and children’s and grandchildren’s names. We offer tea, coffee, biscuits and cakes so people can sit down before or after they shop and have a bit of a chat with each other, and out of that sometimes friendships have evolved.

“My overriding focus is community around friendship and relationship... a lot of people are starved of that and lack true meaningful relationships in their lives. It’s something I believe is really important: the humanity that comes from forming a social bond with someone else is amazing. It’s a community, more than a food shop”

Portadown and Lurgan operate differently to many Pantries, through the use of a membership card and an initial limit on visits.

“We set eight visits. If people come once a week, once a fortnight, or once a month, that’s fine. They can shop eight times. We wanted to put responsibility of managing shops to the shopper so that if they might not need to come one week, they could save a shop, rather than coming for the sake of it. If people are struggling, they might have one or two weeks when they run out of money, so we always tell our people to use the Pantry when they need it.”

Eight visits is not always enough, so if someone needs additional shops and a new card they meet with Sharon to discuss next steps. Sharon encourages people to try to foresee a few months down the line, to see if there is more financial stability on the horizon, and discusses their goals, such as reducing debt.

“I’m using my own discretion with people and sometimes I will suggest to shoppers, can you go to once a fortnight, then once a month, if I think it’s more a budgeting issue in particular.”



Pantry Focus: Portadown, Northern Ireland

Sharon says the church provides a budget towards stock, and says the local Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Council has also helped:

“Our council have a food hub and that’s where we get a lot of food from. They buy certain products in huge bulk, and it’s well run. I also use InKind, and we do spend a lot of money each week buying fresh fruit and veg. We’ve just introduced a new initiative something that our church that Lurgan introduced . Each month we ask our church family to donate two or three particular items, and that frees up more money for me to spend on other things, like fruit and veg or add new stock to the freezer.

We usually ask for a heart item, for example cleaning spray or cereal, and a diamond item, for example washing up liquid or biscuits. It has proven to be an excellent way of stocking up on popular items that keep.”

People are introduced to the Pantry through social services, other churches, food banks and local word of mouth. Sharon is in the process of setting up a Pantry member and volunteer group, and she also strives to use and share members’ recipes in the Pantry. The Pantry values and kindness are also key.

“When I initially chat to members, I hope that they understand the kind of base line for who we are and what we are. Sometimes if people are unsure, they can think it’s going to be like going to the Benefits Office. That initial connection is really important. The fact they know they can email me any time and I will get back to them and everything is confidential is important. I make sure that’s very clear...

When they come to the first session, you can see people are a bit nervous and anxious. They get their card and meet the volunteers. The volunteers change everything, because they have such beautiful hearts. I’m still amazed how quickly relationships build at that initial introduction. We know by experience the first visit is difficult, and people are working out the hearts and diamonds and who we are and sometimes why we do this.

We always offer a personal shopper to every client but that is particularly invaluable to our asylum seekers and clients where English is not always their first language.

When people get the rhythm of it, they sense the level of compassion and the heart of what we do and why we do it.

Bringing hope is a big thing for me. Some people’s lives are filled with such despair and worry and anxiety, so it’s lovely for our people to know with certainty that they’re welcome when coming to in Pantry. The hope is that we are all on first-name terms, there’s no judgement, just a cup of tea a chat and a shop . The environment we set is really important to us and it works well. There is lots of laughter in our Pantry. I encourage our people to email me in order to make contact with me. They can ask about anything and I’ll try to help or signpost on. I’ve just been asked to find a kitten for a Pantry member. The hope comes from being part of our Pantry family, dignity from the friendships / relationships and choice of good wholesome food.

We have a Hope Cafe once a month on a Friday night, and many members are joining us on the Sunday service or at our Connect cafe on Friday mornings. I believe there’s value in our Pantry community, and out of that even more community through other social spaces in our building. I hope we’re demonstrating the values of the Pantry. It’s love in action really. It’s a practical kind of ministry that serves that need in our local community. And we just love that it works.”

CONNECTING - Growing community

Your Local Pantry is much more than a food club.

“We provide community cohesion - citizens socialise together; eat together in our Place of Welcome; members are now taking on volunteer roles too”

Most Pantries serve as community hubs offering welcome, hospitality, social activities and opportunities for friendship. Many host additional practical support on-site, personally connecting members with and/or signposting to other services in the neighbourhood. Together, this holistic approach tackles isolation through creating opportunities for social connection, friendship and mutual support

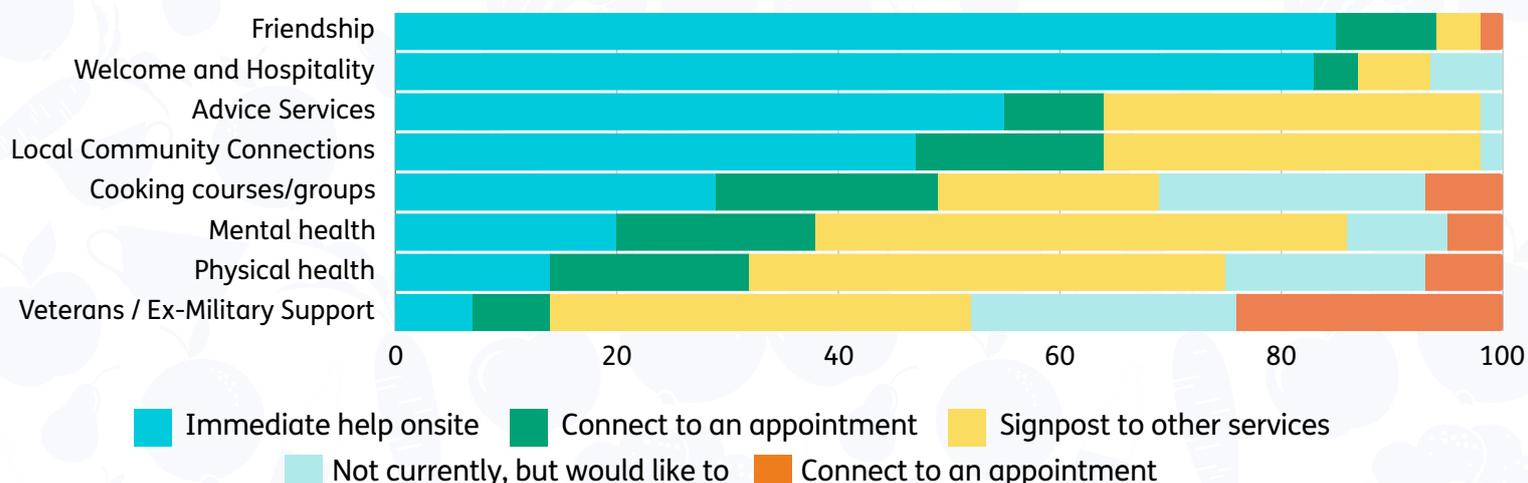
Some Pantries offer a wider range of activities, often building on member’s own interests, gifts and skills. Kingston Pantry, for example, offered a nutrition and healthy eating programme, as one of its members has a nutritional qualification. That person worked with almost 50 other members, who completed questionnaires, kept a diary and were then supported to make small changes to their diets.

Nearly half of Pantries who responded to our survey offered cooking courses or groups, directly or through connections with partners, with others signposting members to cooking opportunities elsewhere. Other Pantries with outside space are able to offer gardening clubs, providing opportunities for members to socialise, develop their green skills and learn about growing food.

Many Pantries and their partner organisations provide (or connect members to) much needed advice services, with over half located ‘immediately on-site’, with others either connecting members directly to an appointment at another time or signposting to other services. Support offered most commonly covers benefits and local welfare support schemes and housing, with some Pantries also offering support with debt and budgeting and/or utility bills.



What wider support are you able to offer at this time?



Pantry Focus: EVI, Blaenau Gwent, Wales

“Everyone supports each other. It’s a lovely atmosphere. People chat to friends and make new friends.”

Few Pantries are blessed with as much space and community connection as EVI Pantry.

It is part of the Ebbw Vale Institute, which was a large cultural and entertainment venue for Blaenau Gwent for decades, until Covid struck. Now, thanks to much work and Government pandemic funding, it’s home to thriving community projects, including the Pantry.



Sian Tucker, EVI Centre manager, says: “To ensure the future of this Grade II listed building after Covid shut everything down, the Centre welcomed new tenants, Women’s Aid, Barod Gwent Ngage, drug and alcohol support, Llamau and other community support groups.

I was appointed post-Covid and my vision for EVI was a community hub, developing more services and activities to support the community. We received UK Community Renewal Funding to help the Centre post-Covid and when, at the end of the project, there was some funding left, we asked if it could be used to buy equipment and shelving to open a community pantry in the bar area of the main hall. The funders agreed and EVI Community Pantry was born. We opened the Pantry in February 2023 with the support of the amazing team at Your Local Pantry. An initial coffee morning to encourage the community to sign-up led to 40 members, and there are now 270.”

Sian says: “Here, it’s all about hope, dignity and choice. People can choose what they want. They are welcomed. We have a big hall, and it’s all laid out with café tables, and the urn is there so people can help themselves to tea, coffee and biscuits. The volunteers are there to help them. We are a collection point for Smart Money Community Bank, a credit union, that can support the community with budgeting and low-cost loans. We also have an Advice & Guidance Officer who helps with benefit reviews, blue badge applications and with the completion of benefit forms and appeals. We are fortunate that we have the space that allows us to do this. We have built up a community where everyone supports each other. It’s a lovely atmosphere. People chat to friends and make new friends. People come every week and say that without the Pantry they would not be able to cope.

“We always knew that if we started a Pantry in EVI, that would be a springboard for other things. From that springboard, we have a repair cafe every month, repairing electrical goods, or bicycles, or sewing repairs. The community cafe has developed leaps and bounds because of the Pantry. We have welcomed Communities for Work Plus to the building, and they support people who are looking for work – it’s a community hub, everyone in the building is working to make a difference to the lives of people living in Blaenau Gwent.”

From Pantry visits alone, staff estimate that members saved £45,000 in its first 15 months, and feedback from members and volunteers is very positive. Some even spoke on BBC Wales’s TV news, ahead of the Chancellor’s 2023 autumn statement, sharing the Pantry’s impact.



Pantry Focus: EVI, Blaenau Gwent, Wales

“At Christmas we are part of the “Everyone Deserves a Christmas Campaign” organized by Carolyn Harris MP, Swansea. We work with Blaenau Gwent MP, Nick Smith, and pack hampers and deliver them to pantry members. The hampers made a huge difference to 60 pantry members last Christmas. The joy on people’s faces when they saw the hampers was just unbelievable.

“One of our stalwart volunteers, Sue, joined us when saw a sign outside the Centre asking for volunteers. She had recently lost her husband and had become quite isolated. She thought ‘will I, won’t I?’ but came in and has not looked back. She’s there every week, she delivers a craft class every Wednesday and that has raised over £1,000 for the Pantry, and she says this has absolutely changed her life.”

The Institute also plans to open a wellbeing Centre including counselling and mindfulness to further support members and volunteers. EVI Pantry doesn’t have a member steering group or forum, but Sian says there are dozens of one-to-one conversations every week.

“We always talk to members and ask for regular written feedback through questionnaires about stock, logistics, anything we can do to help to make the visit more dignified... We have about 50 or 60 completed questionnaires each time, so that’s pretty good feedback.

“It’s an absolute joy to work here. I have worked in communities for a long, long time. The Pantry in EVI is one of my proudest achievements. The EVI Pantry is now a constituted community group applying for charitable status and are working hard to apply for funding to ensure the future of the pantry.”



What’s something you’ve learnt along the way?

“We wondered where to keep people waiting, and whether to give people their numbers out there. That took a little time to work out, and people sometimes arrive before 10am. But now, people arrive, get their number, have a coffee in the cafe area and it’s like clockwork. At first, we were calling out people’s numbers but we didn’t like that, so we changed to get a big board for numbers to go on, and that works well.”

ENGAGING - Run with members, for members

Your Local Pantries are run with and for members, trying to give everyone the opportunity to contribute. Membership fees are pooled together to fund the operation of the Pantry. People know that their membership helps others, as well as themselves.

Pantries also try hard to give members other routes for participation:

Member Volunteers

Enabling members to also volunteer in the Pantry is an important part of the model. Such reciprocity, the opportunity to give as well as receive, fosters a sense of personal ‘ownership of’ the Pantry, as well as supporting self-confidence, social connection. It also provides opportunities for members to contribute their existing skills and develop new ones.

Nearly, but not all, Pantries have member volunteers. In several Pantries, the volunteer team now consists entirely, or almost entirely, of people who are also members. Figures across the Network vary widely, but survey responses suggest that in most Pantries, members account for at least a quarter of the volunteer teams.

Member Engagement

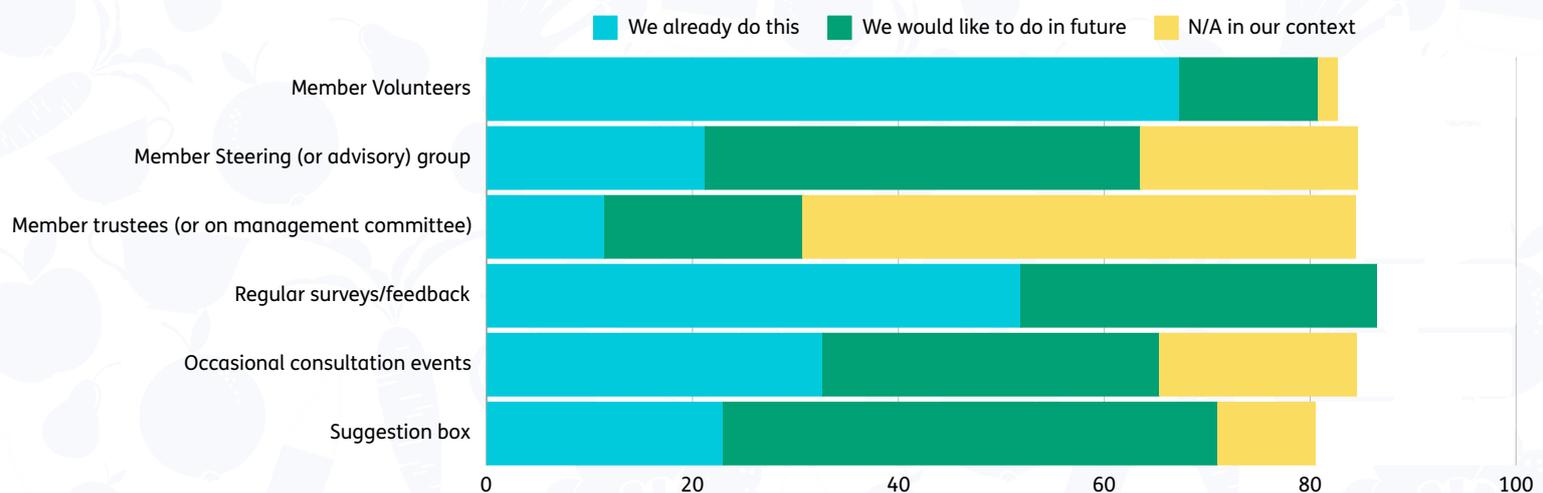
“The best ideas come from the members! The biggest thing we’ve learnt about running a Pantry is the importance of making sure members are involved in all areas of what we do.”

When organisations are run on a cooperative model, all members can have a say in decision-making about the Pantry and how things are organised. In 2023, 74% of members said having a say in how the Pantry was run was an important aspect of their membership.¹

Several Pantries across our Network, including Trowbridge Pantry (Cardiff), North End Pantry (Portsmouth), Epsom Pantry (Surrey) and Peckham Pantry (London) have member engagement or steering groups that enable members to get more involved with decision-making.

Amal, a member at Peckham’s group, said it represents “the steering wheel of a vehicle that takes us to beneficial places and improves our relationship with the community.”

Exactly what member engagement looks like varies from Pantry to Pantry:



¹ So Much More! p32

‘Speaking Truth to Power’

People experiencing poverty are often excluded from decision-making, civil, social and cultural life and can be left feeling powerless and they are not listened to. In this context, being part of a member-run organisation, being asked for their opinions and invited to take part in decision-making about the Pantry, helps people to develop a sense of agency, which in turn diminishes feelings of powerlessness.

“Our Pantry has given a voice in the community to highlight the many issues that individuals and families are facing on a daily basis during the cost of living crisis.”

In addition, one of the opportunities available through the Your Local Pantry Network is for Pantries to participate in Church Action on Poverty’s ‘Speaking Truth to Power’ (‘STTP’) programme. ‘Speaking Truth to Power’ supports lived experience activism, running national groups and supporting facilitators from partner organisations to establish and run local groups.

In January we hosted a two-day ‘STTP’ training for a range of partner organisations, attended by representatives from three local Pantries. A peer support group will be available to Pantries who wish to establish their own local ‘STTP’ groups. One example is ‘Voices for Southwark’ run by Pecan Pantry in South London. ‘Voices for Southwark’ are currently campaigning for an easily accessible online platform with clear information about local services.

‘Let’s End Poverty’

Twelve Pantries have actively participated in the ‘Let’s End Poverty’ campaign this year. Epsom Pantry and YMCA North Staffordshire Pantry both hosted ‘Neighbourhood Voices’ conversations ahead of the General Election, and YMCANS also hosted the ‘Dreams and Realities’ art exhibition, which told true stories of poverty in the UK.

A further ten Pantries are taking part in creative projects alongside the ‘Let’s End Poverty’ campaign, creating art that centres members’ experiences. This includes a new mural in Edinburgh, a collaborative crochet project in Reading, painting workshops in Kingston, and more.

Pantry Focus: Kirkley, Suffolk

“Every member gets a personal contact and gets to talk to someone.”

A short walk from the beach in England’s most easterly town, Kirkley Pantry is a hub of hope.

There’s much inequality here in Lowestoft, but also a lot of love. St Peter and St John Church opened the Pantry in its hall in late 2020, to address two great issues: food poverty and food waste, and the Pantry now supports 60 households a week.

Paulette Holland is Pantry manager, and Helen Chandler is church rector.

“To me, this is a kind of hope story,” says Helen. “We are here to get people out of poverty, and that is the key difference between a food bank and Pantry. The food bank can get you food in the moment, but you can’t go for long.”

Helen sees the Pantry as an expression of church itself, connecting with the community, and says: “Unless our faith lands on the ground with people in our community, it is useless.”

There is also a community garden on-site, producing crops for the Pantry and a peaceful space for all. The hall also hosts a lunch club on Wednesdays, so fresh leftovers from Pantry on a Tuesday are used there. A local knitting group donates home-made clothes that people can take, and a wellbeing group and benefits advisers also use the space.

Paulette says Lowestoft is a great place to raise a family, with wonderful natural areas within easy reach, and lovely beaches and parks, and she says much money is being spent on regeneration now.

But she says: “We have pockets of real deprivation and Kirkley is an area of particular deprivation, so there are quite a few social issues in the area. People come and are amazed at our golden beaches. In Victorian times, it got on the map because the railways came here, and there were terraces of villas for the wealthy, and beautiful houses behind them for the second-class citizens. We were a really genteel seaside resort, but over the years unfortunately it declined.”

Kirkley Pantry opened during Covid restrictions, so initially offered a personal shopper service, to minimise the number of people handling the stock. Paulette says: “It was so successful that we have carried it on. It means every member gets a personal contact and gets to talk to someone, and we can find out who’s in their household, what they cook, what they might like and give suggestions.”



Pantry Focus: Kirkley, Suffolk

When less everyday items are in stock, Pantry volunteers sometimes create demonstration dishes, or give free samples.

“When you are on a budget, you cannot take the risk of buying something you or your family might or might not like or eat. We have the luxury of being able to say to people to take and try one. One woman had never had a mango, so we showed her how to prepare one and she thought it was delicious. We had some unusual cream cheese and an unusual herby, garlicky bread, so we cut it up and put the cream cheese on and let people try it, and we were able to give people packs of cream cheese and rolls to take that week.”

The impact for members has been considerable.

“We know from what people tell us that it has made a huge difference to their lives,” says Paulette. “It’s made their lives easier. Sometimes people sit and meet a friend and have a coffee and a natter. People have made friends here. It’s a corner shop vibe, with saving money and making contacts. The Pantry often leads to people coming to our lunch, where they always get a home cooked meal, or getting connected with the garden, or helping out here. We have a disabled gentleman in a wheelchair and he says this is the only place that he can come to shop without his wife with him, and that makes him feel really proud that he can do the shopping. The pride that gives is lovely.”

Helen adds: “It’s not only about financial impact. It’s social as well.” She says the garden was initially run by another organisation, but Pantry members had been keen to get involved, and it was now primarily for the Pantry. “We have people struggling with mental health and they find that coming here gives them meaning and purpose and then they get involved and are giving back.”

Paulette and Helen say they value the generosity of local shops and shoppers, and the support of local food networks and charity partnerships. They also have a supportive local council, which has provided grants, and also access to a shared regional warehouse.

Paulette says: “I’d say up to 25% of our food comes from that. We get tea, coffee, milk, sugar, rice, biscuits, tinned fruit, tinned veg tinned meat. The county council have also once a year given us £1,000 of hygiene products. We have a lovely selection in the Pantry of things that people like.”

The church is also keen to press for systems change.

Helen says: “We need awareness much higher up the chains - why are we getting so much excess; why are they cooking so much excess? And we need better understanding of use-by and best before dates. There are so many cracks in the social fabric and we can’t work in silos. We approach a symptom of poverty but we need to approach the problems that underlie the symptoms.”



Challenging times: Food and finances

From listening to our Pantries across the country, we know that many are facing challenging times. Austerity, particularly public service spending cuts, have hit many communities hard, with the effects often most felt in areas commonly known as ‘more deprived’. Similarly the cost-of-living crisis has been particularly keenly felt among those with the lowest incomes, leading to increased food and financial insecurity, stress, fear and anxiety. Pantries, like many community groups, often feel ‘caught in the middle’ between diminishing public sector provision and increasing numbers of people seeking support.

Many local Pantries tell us that their primary concerns are sourcing sufficient stock, ensuring financial stability and recruiting, then retaining, sufficient volunteers. Everything we have learnt about what it means to be a thriving pantry (see p3) depends on adequate stock, sufficient finance and good people. All the other aspects which make our Pantries such an asset to their communities - dignity, choice, appealing ambience, welcome, social support - builds on that firm foundation.

“It takes a lot of money and a dedicated team to run a pantry, you need complete buy-in from the whole team and organisation. It really needs a dedicated member of staff to take the lead on it.”

Stock

“In terms of practical things, we have learned that food donations are harder to come by than we expected, so researching the best value for money for our shopping is essential.”

If there was such a thing as a ‘typical’ Pantry (based on 38 responses to our Pantry Survey), then they would purchase just under half of their stock (44%), with 30% coming from FareShare or other community food distributors, 14% donated and 12% coming from surplus food.

However, in reality there is considerable variability between different Pantries in the proportion of stock they receive from FareShare (or other community distributors) and proportion of stock which is bought. Most pantries were much less dependent on donated by the public and/or surplus food direct from supermarkets or shops, although a minority were very dependent on those sources

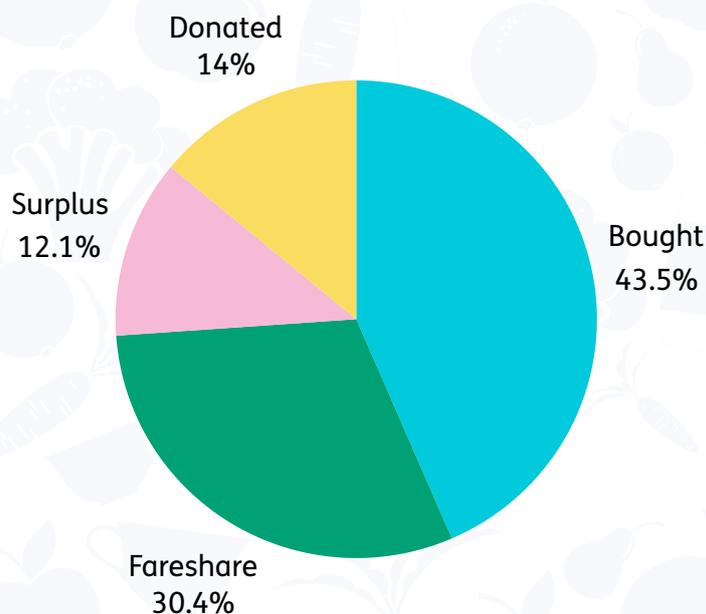
Nearly all Pantries who responded to our survey indicated that they regularly bought stock from supermarkets to top-up their supplies.

Financial Sustainability

Of Pantries who responded to the question regarding their finances, three-quarters reported that they currently were running at surplus or “breaking even”.

“You have to constantly write funding bids to purchase the food and essential supplies needed - it's jolly hard work.”

Sources of stock for a ‘typical’ Pantry



Source: Pantry Manager Survey 2024

Pantry Focus: FaB Foundry, Birmingham

“It’s really that relationship-building. It’s anti-loneliness. A community to belong to.”

Pantries are ideal for many organisations: churches, councils, libraries, community centres, charities - and schools.

FaB Foundry Pantry opened in 2020, as part of the community hub at the Oasis Academy Foundry, in Winson Green, Birmingham. It now supports 50 to 60 households a week, across the school and a diverse local community.

Running a Pantry from a school presents unique logistical matters, such as around access arrangements, but schools are also fantastically well-placed to provide support, often having trusting relationships with hundreds of families. Recently, Oasis has been supported by Birmingham City Council through winter food aid and warm space funding, and it also provides advocacy support or signposting, particularly around housing and health.

Mark and Carolyn Gilmore are community hub leaders, and Darren Groves is pantry coordinator.

Mark says: “If a Pantry is in a school, you have to navigate whether it’s just for parents in the school, or the wider community. The whole community hub (not just the Pantry) provides school families with extra support really, and extra options. It also means school staff can refer much more personally - they’re not sending families down the road or to something far away, but to something right here.”

Mark says: “The main language is cooperative - you give something, everybody gives something, and everyone can take something out.”

“My main reflection on the difference with the Pantry is the sociability of it. It’s a Pantry community, so people have a chance to interact with others, the chance to not just shop but have a conversation, a chance to stay around and maybe ask for support or help... It’s really that relationship-building. It’s anti-loneliness. A community to belong to.”

Oasis runs a second Pantry nearby in Handsworth, but Carolyn says there is limited other community food provision locally. Some people travel from across Birmingham to reach the Pantry, although other members are very local.

Mark says: “We have a single mum, Antonia, who comes. She has two children, and the youngest has unconfirmed autism and extreme special needs. She’s a parent at the school, and always comes, every week. In winter, we started a warm space attached to the Pantry and she started coming, and we had a chance to talk to her and build a relationship. This year, Carolyn worked through her disability allowance for her son with her, and we worked through the carer’s allowance with her. Having that relationship means we have got to the point where we can support her to get those allowances.



Pantry Focus: FaB Foundry, Birmingham

“One of our regular volunteers is in her mid-50s, and was diagnosed with breast cancer. She has explicitly said that what is helping her get through it is the support of the Pantry community, and coming along on a weekly basis and contributing and being able to serve other people.”

Darren adds: “I have been here four years, and we have a member, Simon, who has been coming as long as me. He used to be quite distant to everybody, but over the years he has become much more open, and he has now become a massive part of the team. He volunteers and goes to an art course and did a cooking course as well.”

Daren says close discussion with members has ensured the Pantry is as useful as possible.

“A lot of our membership is from the Asian community, so I sat down with them and asked what they would like to see in the Pantry, and a lot said they wanted Halal stuff, so now when I buy chicken I make sure it’s from a Halal butcher. We’ve learnt that, and we always ask now what people would like to see on the shelves, and try to get what people like.

“The feedback we get is mainly individual, based on our conversations. In the context of Oasis, our volunteers are all local people, so their voices is what’s heard. Oasis every year has a regular event so volunteers and Pantry people can go along to that. That’s a chance to raise voice.... All our volunteers are also members, so we hear member voices there.”

Looking ahead, Carolyn says: “If I were higher up the chain, and had the ability to make sure that it changed so working people and people on benefits had enough to survive, without Pantries, that would be the ideal. But if we continue to be needed, if Government is not going to support people, then they need to support Pantries.”

What do Pantry values look like here?

Carolyn says:

“Dignity is really key for us - it’s about how we treat people when they walk in the door, trying to treat people with respect, which is partly why we have the Pantry model rather than a food bank. It also goes beyond that, to our attitude to people. No matter what issues they come in with, treating people with respect and speaking about where they’re at is key.

“Choice - Within our possibilities, we give as much choice as we can and make sure we point out options to people.

“Hope - I think that’s the relationships, in really getting to know people and seeing where they need hope, and offering support where they get stuck. It’s our own attitudes as well, making sure we don’t talk about the challenges in the Pantry but trying to be a cheerful place. There’s something in just giving people space for a chat and a conversation.”

Looking to the future

The Your Local Pantry Network has been growing rapidly in recent years, as more and more organisations have seen it as a sustainable, dignified way to bring people together around food. Inevitably, growth brings new challenges and opportunities, and we briefly outline a few of these here.

Learning all the time

Many coordinators are keen to learn from each other, and our Network team continues to look at ways to collate and share lessons and tips, so new Pantries can avoid pitfalls and so all Pantries can support one another. Some of this has been through webinars, such as around effective use of social media and story-gathering.

We asked Pantry managers and coordinators what they had learnt since opening. Here is some of the learning to date, in coordinators' own words:

- “How far a little can go.”
- “How challenging it can be to provide the service we want with rising costs and limited funding.”
- “Reviewing membership is really good practice.”
- “Relationships are key.”
- “That firm clear boundaries help everyone, even those who fight against them.”
- “People who can really want to give - we just need to make it easy to do so. We have had most donations from church, but generous top ups from a local running club and tennis club.”
- “As soon as you can, offer wrap-around support. Food is not enough.”
- “It’s so much more than food! That members take time to trust you, and when they do... they share all of their life, good, bad and ugly.”
- “That the best ideas come from the members! The importance of making sure members are involved in all areas of what we do.”
- “It is not just about food. It is about building relationships and supporting each other.”
- “Working together with the community is what leads to success.”

A shifting playing field

Many Pantry partners are small grassroots organisations, delivering many other services and responding to ever-shifting complicated situations. One coordinator said: “It’s challenging, the playing field is always changing, juggling, people face so many diverse challenges, when it’s done right it makes such a difference to some families and their children”

As we saw in ‘Challenging times’ (p27), Pantry managers and coordinators can sometimes be stretched by multiple demands, and often lack the resources they need. Food is integral to any Pantry’s success, and yet some Pantries are working with very fragile supply chains.

We will continue to recognise and support grassroots partner organisations in navigating the challenges and demands they face.

Sensitivity to local context

The Your Local Pantry model is designed to be flexible, to suit partners' local situations. For instance some partners are looking at multi-site Pantries, to reach more people where they are. This flexibility does mean not every Pantry can or should engage with everything, and comparisons between Pantries are not always helpful.

We will continue to support local Pantries to explore which options are right for their local context, including potential new initiatives which might be developed locally before sharing across the Network.

Supporting future development

Our national Your Local Pantry and wider Church Action on Poverty teams are working hard to secure the development and continued success of the Network into the future. This work involves digging into and sharing our learning more widely - such as the Alliance for Dignified Food Support - as well continuing to develop our own practice.

Re-affirming the value of dignity

One encouraging piece of work this year has been the emergence of the Alliance For Dignified Food Support. Your Local Pantry is a partner in this work, which is a coalition of community food organisers, local food partnerships, academics, and activists committed to integrating dignity into food support provision.

The aim of the Alliance is to support organisations to make their practice as dignified as possible, whilst also championing other anti-poverty strategies including support for a living income through social security payments, increased wages and a cash first approach. Developed from the lived experience of community food providers, including learning from our Pantry Network, the Alliance proposes four core Dignity Principles:



**ALLIANCE FOR
DIGNIFIED
FOOD SUPPORT**

- Welcoming - providing an inclusive and welcoming space; minimising barriers to access; providing spaces to share food
- Transparent - offering clarity about what those providing and receiving support can expect; providing information about the community food project, how it works and why
- Person-centred - ensuring that interactions are respectful and compassionate; including appropriate safeguarding culture and practices; where possible, offering a choice of food (or the provision of vouchers and hardship grants)
- Empowering - offering opportunities for staff, volunteers and members to share their views, so that people with direct and relevant experience contribute and are involved in decision-making; creating opportunities for members to contribute in a range of ways (money, time, skills, etc.)

Each Dignity Principle is illustrated by a range of evidence-based suggestions for how these might be implemented in practice. The recognition of the importance of dignity is vital, and should be central to any community food work. We will continue to work with Pantries and other organisations to share this learning. Find out more at <https://www.alliancefordignifiedfoodsupport.org.uk/>

Member voice and engagement

One area of notable growth this year has been in member voice and engagement (see p23). Several Pantries have set up steering groups. We hope more groups will emerge in the coming year. At the same time, dozens of Pantry members have taken part in creative events linked to the national Let's End Poverty campaign. Pantries have always been proactive at providing additional practical support for household difficulties, and it is exciting now to see many expanding this to provide opportunities for fun, activism and greater voice.

Just over half of Pantry coordinators who took part in the survey (54%) expressed interest in doing some sort of media work in future, so we will be offering specific support around this in 2024/25.

Member progression

Some Pantries are exploring the question of what a member journey should look like. Should members 'move on' at some point, and if so - to what? Or should membership last as long as a member wishes. We are not prescriptive on this question. The flexibility of the Pantry model means partners can adapt to funder requirements, local demands and organisational needs, but we have seen great value in the trust and community that open-ended membership enables. We know some funders might measure impact mostly by numbers. We would love to see more funders willing to support long-term relationship-building, which Pantries are well placed to support or nourish.

Tackling poverty: A political priority

Charity is no substitute for justice, and can never be a long-term answer to the social challenges that Pantries see and help to address. In last year's report, we stressed the need for national action to tackle poverty and the cost-of-living scandal. Under the new Government, this simply has to be a priority. We need a national commitment to ensure that all incomes are enough to live on.

At regional level, many local authorities face huge financial challenges, but we know councils are eager to continue to support low-income households in their areas. We have seen in various areas that council support can enable Pantries to have a huge impact. We are keen to work with more councils in the year ahead.

The Network will keep growing. Several new Pantries are opening this autumn, and we continue to work closely with a wide range of potential partners, who share our belief that everyone should have access to good food; that dignity, choice and hope are essential; and that bringing people together around food can be the starting point for meaningful community-led change.

Last words, recommendations, and an invitation to chat...

- **Government:** Let's End Poverty. We need a national commitment to ensure that all incomes are enough to live on, and to work with people who understand poverty first-hand.
- **Local authorities:** See the impact that council-run or supported Pantries have had in Birmingham, Kingston, Kirkley, Salisbury and most-recently Wrexham, and get in touch with us to discuss how we could work together in your area.
- **Funders:** It is tempting, and relatively easy, to assess the 'success' by the volume of people moving through services. Often in this report, we see the deep impact that comes from sustaining communities. Should there really be limits on people's access to such a community? It takes time to build trust and friendships, but doing so opens up exciting possibilities. We hope funders might see the value in investing in Pantries long-term, as hope-filled hives of community.
- **Churches, schools and academy trusts:** Change happens when people come together. We know that your central and trusted role in your neighbourhoods makes you especially well-placed to host Pantries. If reading this report makes you think a Pantry could work for you, then please get in touch.
- **Other food providers:** Even if you don't run a Pantry, we hope you will find this report useful and uplifting. We would love you to take a look at the work of the Alliance for Dignified Food Support, and contact the organisers to share your ideas.
- **Pantries:** Thank you to all members, coordinators, and volunteers, for contributing to this report and for making Pantries amazing places of hope.



Appendix: Economic Analysis

Estimates of the value of a 'typical' basket of Pantry goods and the potential financial savings this represents to members is a powerful way of demonstrating the economic value of the impact of Your Local Pantry for households and communities.

For the So Much More - Your Local Pantry Social Impact 2023 report, we worked with consumer prices experts at The Co-op to redesign a methodology for 'cost-of-basket' calculations which is fit for purpose for 2023 and beyond, with a specific view to creating time-series data into the future. The figures were based on typical baskets of food supplied by 12 Pantries from across the Network in May 2023. Experts at The Co-op then matched the contents of these baskets to products on the Azure national price database and used these figures to calculate the value of a typical basket of goods from a Pantry, compared to supermarket prices.

The 2024 figures reuse the same 'typical baskets' but re-cost these for 2024 food and membership prices:

Cost-of- basket	Co-op price comparison		Tesco price comparison		Saving to members (Co-op value minus membership fee)	
	2023	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024
Average (mean) value	£25.52	£25.71	£23.40	£23.36	£21.27	£21.33
Highest basket value	£33.05	£41.00	£29.21	£37.71	£29.55	£35.00
Lowest basket value	£16.28	£15.75	£13.99	£13.99	£12.55	£11.20

This shows that in 2024 the value of a 'typical' basket of goods at a Pantry varies between around £15.75 and £41.00 at Co-op prices, with the average (mean) cost being £25.71. Taking into account the Pantry membership fee, this means that the typical saving for members is around £21.33 for each Pantry visit (ranging between £11.20 and as high as £35.00 each week, depending on basket contents).

It follows that households that visit the Pantry each week (that is 48 or more visits each year), could save over £1,024 per year on their shopping bill. With 270,000 Pantry visits UK-wide over the last year (July 2023 to June 2024), this represents an approximate total saving to members of around £5.8 million.

Savings over time

Use of a consistent methodology means we can start to compare cost-of-basket figures over time. Fluctuations up and down in price across the product range mean that there is greater variation between highest and lowest basket values, but only marginal increase in average (mean) savings. This also reflects the drop in food price inflation: Food prices have been relatively high but stable since early summer 2023, compared with sharp rises over the previous 12 months*.

'Cost-of-basket' estimates for the 2021 YLP Social Impact Report were calculated using a different methodology. The headline 2021 estimates – cost of a typical food basket in 2021 was over £20, saving to members at least £15 each visit, saving members who visit each week at least £780 per year – are not directly comparable with the 2023-4 figures.

*SOURCE: ONS, Consumer price inflation, UK: June 2024 (Food and Nonalcoholic beverages): <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/bulletins/consumerpriceinflation/latest>

Your Local Pantry: over to you

Want to start a Pantry in your area? Here we provide some information about how to get started. Your Local Pantry is a network of community Pantries with an underlying philosophy to help low-income households to avoid food poverty, financial crises, and save hundreds of pounds on their grocery bill each year.

Your Local Pantry helps its members to have a healthy diet by ensuring that Pantries stock fresh fruit and vegetables, seasonal food, and chilled and frozen food. Your Local Pantry helps volunteers to improve their employability and skills, e.g. by using modern technology in the Pantry.

Your Local Pantry works with members on a long-term basis (if they need it). Pantry staff can get to know their members and help them with other aspects of their lives (e.g. training opportunities and signposting to other services).

A Pantry could have the same transformative impact in your local area. Our team has experience in helping to set up and support over 120 Pantries around the UK. We have a tried and tested plan and a positive approach centred on dignity, choice and hope.

All Pantries are hosted by existing local organisations, such as charities, community groups, churches or councils. To open a Pantry, you need to have an organisation that wants to host it, and which has the physical space to do so.

We provide new Pantries with a dedicated Development Worker, who will take you through each step from your initial enquiry, to setting up and successfully running a flourishing Pantry. This support will continue when you open, when you will also get peer support from other Pantry Managers / Coordinators in the YLP Network.

We also offer:

- A tried and tested package of advice and support, that helps you avoid common pitfalls and builds on our experience of working with a large number of Pantries
- Access to custom built Pantry Portal membership software system
- Dedicated support and training from a YLP Development Worker
- Support from wider YLP Team via phone/email, including support with media interactions.
- Access to the Pantry Operations Manual – a comprehensive manual giving step-by-step instructions and guidance in setting up and running a Pantry.
- Access to Shared Learning Library of Resources created for and with the Network and opportunities to visit existing Pantries in the YLP Network.
- A custom digital marketing package
- An initial uniform pack
- Media support, at the point of launch and if needed thereafter
- Pantry Management Training, Volunteer Training and Software Training.
- Access to YLP conference
- Regular updates and tips from the central team and from the Network, by the WhatsApp group, the E-News, Pantry Portal Updates and the 2-minute updates
- Regular innovations to the Pantry Portal, led by the Network including
- Updates to Digital Marketing Package
- Website Maintenance and updates

Find out more and make an enquiry now at www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk

Acknowledgements

About the authors

Gav Aitchison: Gav lives in York and is media and storytelling coordinator for Church Action on Poverty and Your Local Pantry. He was previously a newspaper journalist and loves visiting grassroots projects around the UK to hear (and help share) new perspectives, and to see community-led change in action.

Rachel Brown: Based on the west coast of Scotland, Rachel is responsible for supporting the development of the Your Local Pantry Network and model. Rachel's commitment to seeing our Pantries grow and succeed is equalled only by the enjoyment she gets from visiting thriving Pantry communities across the UK.

Jane Perry: Jane is an experienced social researcher based in Sussex who is passionate about making sure the voices of those who know best can be heard by those who make decisions. Jane leads on monitoring and evaluation for Church Action on Poverty and Your Local Pantry.

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About this report

This report captures the extent and impact of the Your Local Pantry Network and shares the experiences of our members, volunteers and staff. It does not evaluate the Your Local Pantry model or the practices of individual Pantries.

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Your Local Pantry partners

The Your Local Pantry Network now has 121 Pantries supported by Church Action on Poverty, The Co-op, Thrive Together Birmingham, St Andrew's Community Network, SKylight, Pecan and Feeding Liverpool.

Church Action on Poverty is a national ecumenical Christian social justice charity, committed to tackling poverty in the UK. We work in partnership with churches and with people in poverty themselves to find solutions to poverty, locally, nationally and globally.

Further information can be found at www.church-poverty.org.uk

Registered charity number 1079986. Company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales, number 3780243.

The Co-op partners with Your Local Pantry to bring communities together around food, as part of its mission to ensure communities have better access to food. The partnership, which is funded by Co-op Members, aims to see the Your Local Pantry Network triple within three years.

Stockport Homes Group is passionate about not only providing housing and building new homes in Stockport, but helping to transform customers' lives through its charitable arm, SKylight. It delivers a wide range of social inclusion projects, including Your Local Pantry.

Further information can be found at www.Sk-y-light.org