

Your Local **PANTRY**

So Much More!

Social impact report 2023



 www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk

   @yourlocalpantry



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and Jane Perry
July 2023**

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Your Local Pantry partners



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

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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, will 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

Welcome!

100 Pantries. More than 90,000 lives engaged. Around 2,000 volunteers. Countless moments of hope, connection and community.

10 years after the first site opened its doors, Your Local Pantry is achieving so much more than any of us could have possibly imagined, and so much more even than at the time of our previous social impact report, two years ago.

Individually and collectively, Pantries are doing so much more than we expected, and so much more than many people perhaps realise. Members often join for the immediate tangible savings, which are now worth £21 a week on average. But throughout this report you'll see that Pantries offer – and members cherish – so much more than that.

Members tell us of Pantries enhancing mental and physical health, and reducing feelings of isolation. You'll hear members telling of new friendships formed, new opportunities, a renewed connection with the local community. Ellie at Paradox Pantry in London tells us: **“Friendships are one of the biggest benefits that people get from the Pantry.”**

Reading on, you'll also hear of new ideas and recipes, of food bringing us together and forming the basis of lasting memories. You'll hear of Pantry membership enabling people to do and enjoy so much more than they otherwise could – such as the member who was able to buy her son the bike he needed to pursue a course at college.

The stories are varied, numerous and compelling, and we are grateful to all Your Local Pantry members who generously shared with us.

As you read through the testimonies, you'll see some recurring themes:

- **Pantries are bringing communities together.** The weekly shop, and familiar, friendly faces, help to reduce isolation. Pantries also signpost to other local support.
- **Pantries are loosening the grip of soaring living costs,** by enabling people to save on groceries. A typical weekly food basket at a Pantry saves members around £21, meaning a member who attends each week could save over £1,000 a year.
- **Pantries are enhancing nutrition, health and food variety,** through a commitment to offering fresh, frozen, chilled and seasonal products. Many members report improved physical and mental health.
- **Pantries are preventing food waste,** by working with the environmental charity FareShare, and His Church, to ensure a sensible and useful redistribution of supply chain surpluses.
- **Pantries are serving as a stepping stone to employment.** There are a range of volunteering opportunities, training and skills opportunities, and members often tell us the Pantry has helped improve their confidence and stability, so they can return to work.

In summary, Pantries have enabled tens of thousands of people around the UK to strengthen their community and loosen the grip of high prices. Pantries reduce isolation, foster community and friendships, improve health and pre-empt poverty.

It's been 10 years since Stockport Homes Group opened the first Pantry, amid acute concerns about the impact of austerity and, at that time, the bedroom tax. Rising numbers of Stockport residents needed support, and Stockport Homes wanted a sustainable solution that would improve people's situations without compromising on dignity, and which, beyond



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This July, we welcomed the 100th Pantry, and we expect a further 125 to open by the end of 2025

food, would foster community. From that first Pantry, a wide, fast-growing movement has emerged, reaching four Pantries by 2018, 35 by 2021, and now 100 in 2023.

Today, Pantry membership is held by almost 13,000 households, containing over 35,000 people. Since 2020, just over 90,000 people across 33,000 households have benefited from membership, and there have been almost 440,000 Pantry visits.

The Your Local Pantry network is able to keep doing so much more, because of the wonderful compassion and devotion of host organisations and around 2000 volunteers, almost half of whom are members themselves. We are supported also by the backing and belief of national partners, such as The Co-op, whose involvement over the next two years means we can continue to do so much more. This July, we welcomed the 100th Pantry, and we expect a further 125 to open by the end of 2025.

At the same time, our report title *So Much More!* is not just a recognition of achievement, but also a challenge to all of us. Communities have shown us that there is so much more they can do when they come together and are entrusted with the resources and support needed to sustain vibrant, thriving neighbourhoods. Pantries, and the host organisations, can serve as engines that energise whole communities.

There is also so much more that the country can and must do. In this report, many members, volunteers and Pantry staff tell of the acute damage being wrought by soaring living costs. At the same time, many Pantries are now having to spend significant sums on food, topping up their stocks, as the FareShare distribution network struggles to keep pace with soaring national need. This should be a wake-up call to the whole country. Community organisations have long warned that charity is not the long-term answer to food insecurity. It will take so much more than that. Government must now step up. Everyone should have access to good food, and that means all incomes need to keep pace with rising living costs, so people are not swept deeper into poverty.

Pantries are built on a belief in dignity, choice and hope. Those are sacrosanct values. Everybody should have access to good food. Everybody values community. We hope, in reading this report, you see that the 100 Your Local Pantries provide both – and so much more.

The Your Local Pantry team



The team (left to right): Chris Shelley, Shabir Jivraj, Jen Sissons, Rachel Brown, Ellie Malhotra, James Henderson

If Your Local Pantry had 100 members...

97

would say being a member has improved their household finances

98

would say tackling food waste is important to them

74

would feel more connected to their local community through the Pantry

68

would say being a member has been good for their physical health

83

would say being a member has been good for their mental health

66

would have made new friends at the Pantry

59

would say they are eating less processed food

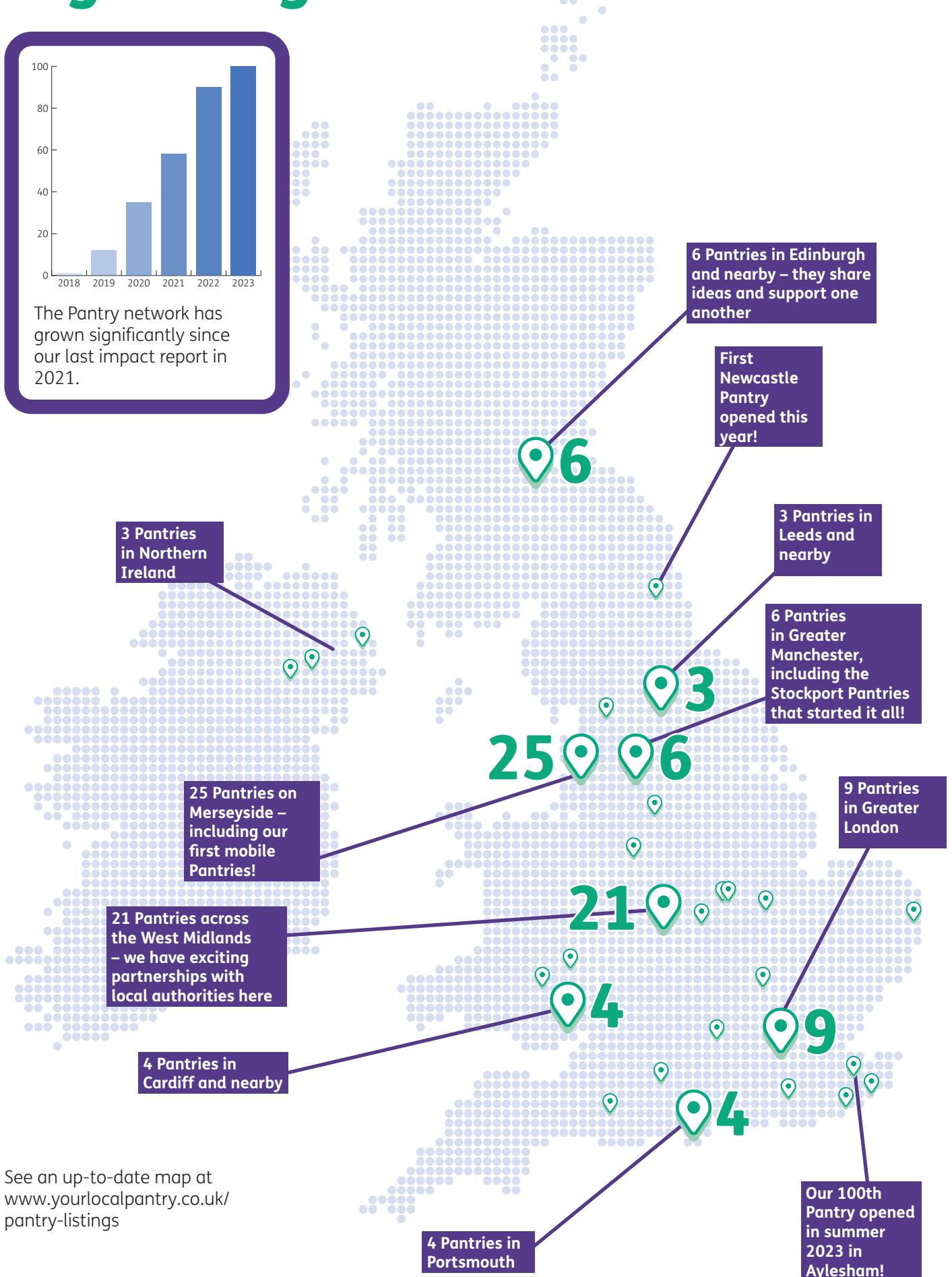
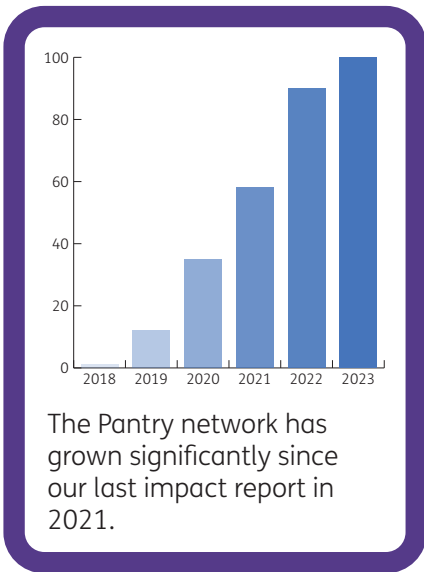
63

would say they now eat more fresh fruit and vegetables

14

would be volunteering at the Pantry

A growing network



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

How a Pantry works

Pantries have enabled tens of thousands of people around the UK to strengthen their community and loosen the grip of high prices. Pantries reduce isolation, foster community and friendships, improve health and pre-empt poverty.

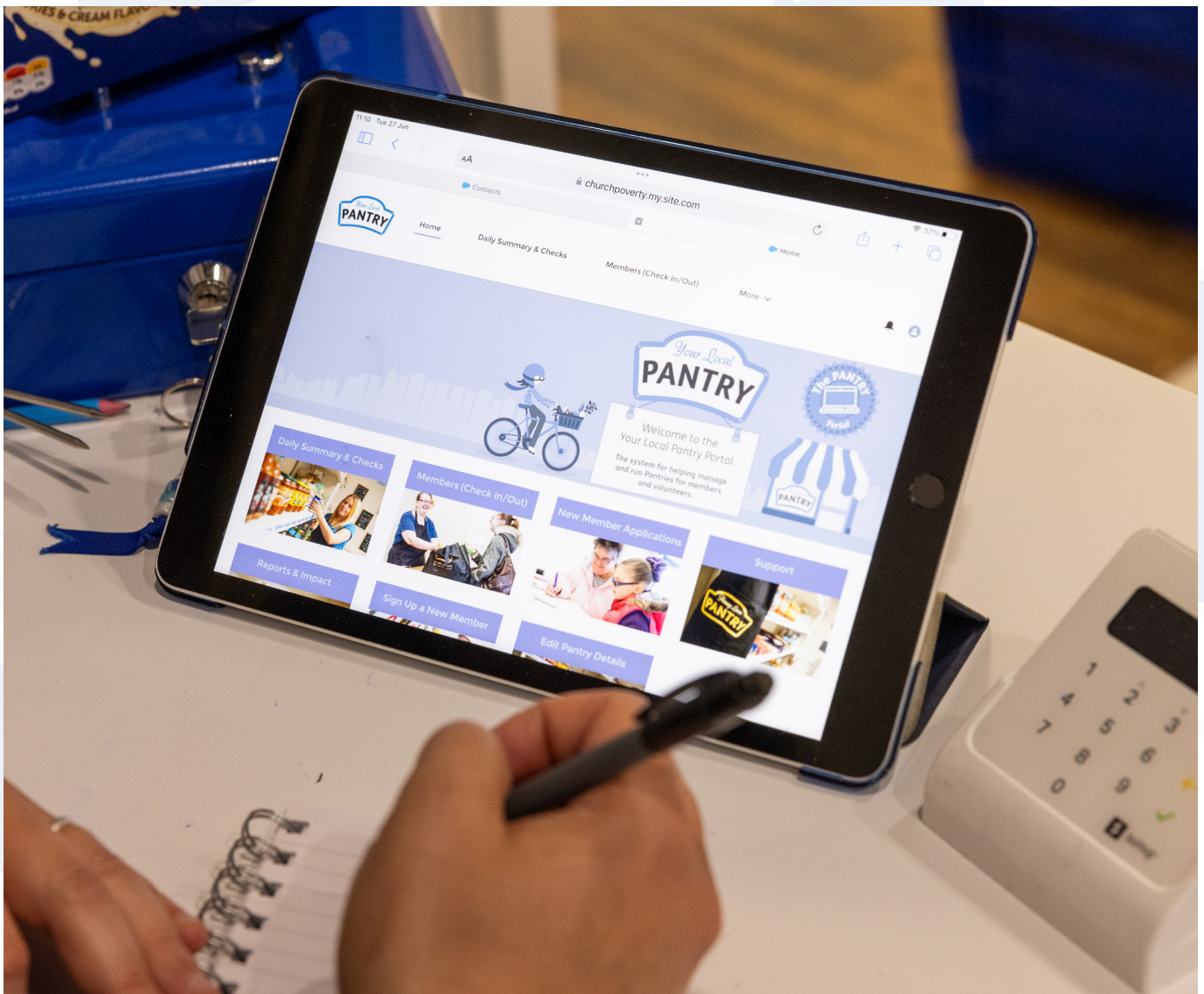
Your Local Pantry (YLP) was created by Stockport Homes Group in 2013, just as austerity measures were beginning to severely affect people. Stockport Homes observed that a number of their tenants were struggling to make ends meet. They needed extra help and support, but Stockport Homes did not think that more food banks were the answer; food banks are designed to offer short-term emergency support for people experiencing food poverty or crises. Instead, Stockport Homes formed Your Local Pantry.

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 100 Pantries in our network, which stretches across England, Wales, Scotland and now Northern Ireland.

Member-run: Pantries are co-operative, run by and for their members. Around half of Pantry volunteers are also Pantry members.

“I’ve been shopping at the Vale Pantry for a few weeks and today was my last shop. It’s really helped me when I was off work ill, as I’m self-employed. I’ve now gone back to work, so we’ll be okay now and it’s time for me to make way for someone else.”

Member from Vale Pantry, Dorset



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.

The Your Local Pantry network now has 100 Pantries, supported by Church Action on Poverty, The Co-op, Thrive Together Birmingham, St Andrew's Community Network, Skylight, Pecan and Feeding Liverpool.

Most Pantries are based in churches or other community projects. In some areas (e.g. Salisbury and London Borough of Havering), Pantries are run in conjunction with the local authority. Others, like our original Pantry in Stockport, partner with Housing Associations.

Around 70% of Pantries (who responded to our survey) are part of a wider organisation, around 30% are independent.

The national network is 100 strong, and continuing to grow, with the benefits of the model clearly evident:

- **Bringing communities together:** through the weekly shop, with familiar, friendly faces, overcoming isolation, building strong relationships and signposting to other services.
- **Improving employability:** Pantries have a wide range of volunteering opportunities, which leads to the development of confidence and new skills including allergy and food hygiene training, retail experience, stock rotation, stock control, use of our bespoke membership-management software, handling payments, effective communication, providing good service and environmental health.
- **Enhancing nutrition and food variety:** through a commitment to offering fresh and frozen, chilled and seasonal produce.

- **Saving money on grocery bills:** Members typically save between £13 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 £1,000 a year.

- **Preventing food waste:** through environmental charity FareShare, and His Church (an emergency goods redistribution charity), Your Local Pantry draws on the oversupply in supermarket supply chains.

Thanks to the generosity of Your Local Pantry members in sharing their experiences we have found strong examples of the above, which are highlighted throughout the report. We have listened to how members describe the benefits of Pantry membership, and we have overwhelmingly found that this adds up to more than financial savings.

“I am on the go 24/7, and having to count every penny ... so to come and know I just need to think about hearts and diamonds [the Pantry coding system], and not worry about anything else, to get healthy food, and also the occasional treat for my children, that I wouldn't be able to afford otherwise – it is wonderful and it means so much and just gives me a moment to breathe and relax. I am so grateful.”

Pantry member, survey response

In these days of increased pressure from the cost-of-living crisis, YLP's mission remains the same: to offer dignity, choice and hope in neighbourhood settings.

Understanding the social impact of Pantries

“It gives me choice and dignity.”

Survey response

In this report we have sought to explore, listen and understand how being a Pantry member makes a difference to households across the UK.

We did this through:

- A **member survey** completed online, over the telephone or in person at 60 Pantries in the network. Between February and April 2023, 1,149 members completed the survey.
- A **Pantry survey**, completed by Pantry managers and coordinators (February-April 2023), to provide information about the structure of Pantries, how they are organised, partner organisations, staff and volunteer hours, etc. This survey was completed by 46 Pantries.
- **Gathering stories** from Pantry members. We are very grateful to staff and volunteers at Freedom Foods Pantry, Northern Ireland; Dover Pantry, Kent; The Vale Pantry, Dorset; Epsom Pantry, Surrey; Hope Pantry, Merthyr Tydfil; Pennywell Pantry, Edinburgh; Kingsgate Food Pantry, Peterborough; Paradox Pantry, Chingford and Burgess Hill Pantry, Sussex, for supporting this.
- **Economic analysis** to understand the value of a Pantry visit. In one week in May 2023, 12 Pantries from across the Network supplied details of typical baskets of food for that week. This was then analysed by experts at The Co-op to calculate the value of a typical basket of goods from a Pantry, compared to supermarket prices.
- The **Your Local Pantry database**. Pantry data, including the total number of Pantries, visits, members and people connected through the Your Local Pantry network, captured on 30 June 2023.

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.

Our member survey respondents

1,149 members from 60 Pantries responded to our survey.

They represent their households containing 3,294 people (1,165 children, 1,861 people aged 16–64, and 268 older people aged 65+).

These members came from many different types of households, including multi-generational families, single and older people.

49% of households were families.

8% of household members were over 65.

22% were single person households.

16% were lone parents.

88% were White, **6%** mixed race, **5%** Black, **4%** Asian, **3%** other ethnicities / Global Majority Heritage.



“I am getting access to food I would not normally buy/or afford. Trying new recipes and also get access to fruit and veg that I normally cannot buy.”

Survey response

What's important to our members?

Your Local Pantry's first social impact report in 2018 identified a number of reasons why people value being a member of their Pantry. For this 2023 impact report, we asked members how important these aspects are to them and their households. We found that...



99% said that saving money on the weekly shop is important, 88% said it's very important



98% said tackling food waste is important, 73% said this is very important



98% said knowing that their Pantry belongs to the local community is important



98% said that increasing the amount of fresh and healthy food eaten in their household is important



95% said increasing the variety of food eaten in their household is important



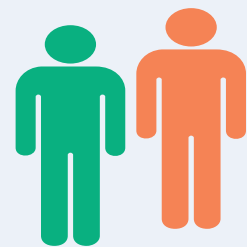
98% said being able to choose their own food is important



74% said having a say in the decisions about running a Pantry is important



91% said increasing the overall amount of food eaten in their household is important



89% said making friends with others in their local community is important



73% said having the opportunity to volunteer at the Pantry is important

Pantry development story: The Vale Pantry, Dorset

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

“People come to us or we go out to them.”

Carole, founder and trustee, The Vale Pantry, Dorset

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Vale Pantry member



Improving financial wellbeing

£4.75 million

saved from Pantry members' household food bills last year

97%

of members said being a Pantry member had improved their financial situation, with 50% saying it made things a lot better

"It has enabled a choice ... We've been able to choose brands as well as ... it's not just how should I explain ...? Not just, say Happy Shopper [value range] goods. It's named brands that you have access to. The price for what you get is just amazing."

Lucy, Hope Pantry, Merthyr Tydfil

"Being a carer limits my finances, this allows me to stretch further with two grown-up children at home."

Survey response

For every member, the potential savings made through Pantry membership are incredibly important.

Analysis by Co-operative consumer prices experts found that the value of a 'typical' basket of goods at a Pantry varies between around £16 and £33 at Co-Op prices, with the average (mean) cost being £26. Taking into account the Pantry membership fee, this means that the typical saving for members is around £21 for each Pantry visit (ranging between £13 and as high as £30 each week, depending on basket contents). It follows that households that visit the Pantry each week could save over £1,000 per year on their shopping bill. With over 226,000 Pantry visits UK-wide in the last year, this represents an approximate total saving to members of around £4.75m.

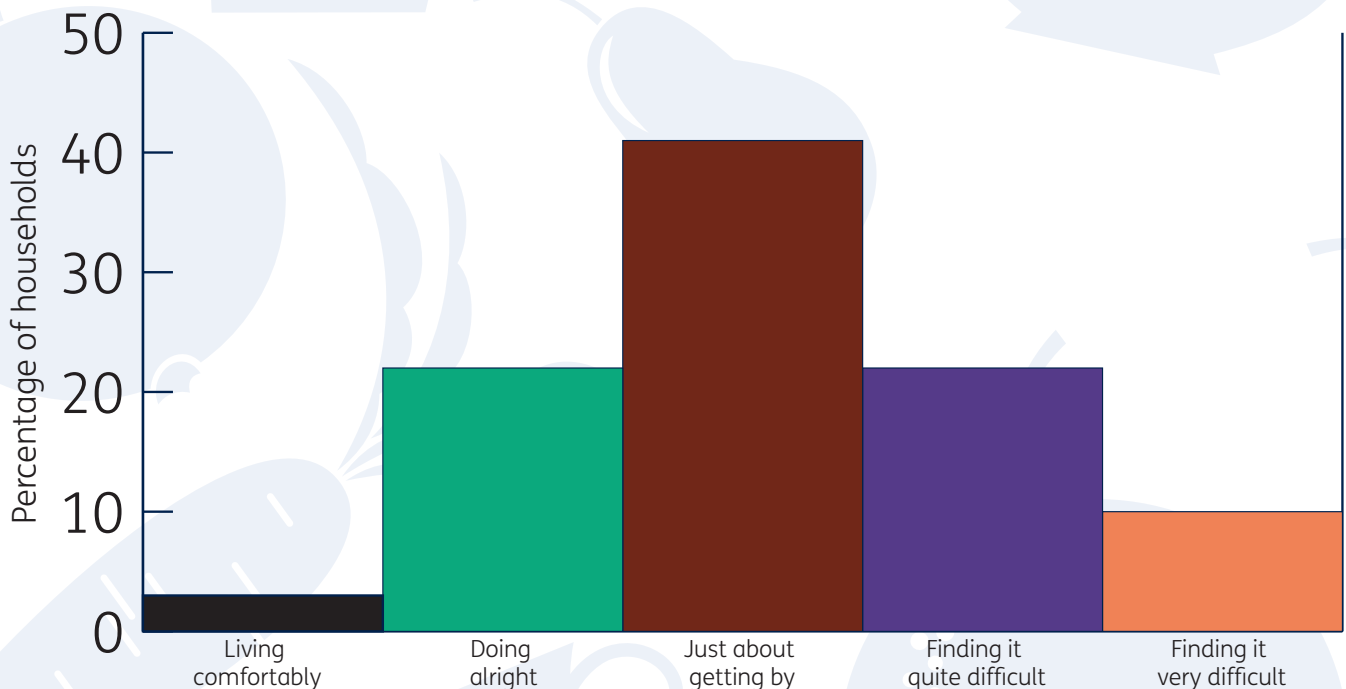
"I use the savings to put towards household bills and treats for the children."

Survey response

"We use the money to pay off our debts and it also helps when it comes to things like birthdays, Christmas and Easter ... I have three children in total and one granddaughter so the little bits I can get really help us."

Survey response

How well are households managing financially?



We asked members how they their household is managing financially. Around a third of survey respondents (32%) said they were finding their financial situation “very difficult” or “quite difficult”, 41% said they were “just getting by”.

Almost all (97%) said that being a Pantry member had improved their financial situation, and half said it had made things a lot better.

“Hello, wonderful Pantry staff. I’m happy to step back and let someone else have my membership. I’m just about coping better than I was. I’m working more hours, so please help out another family in need. I’m so grateful for everything you’ve done for my family and me over the last few months. More grateful than you will ever know. My husband has now had the last of his three surgeries and is 90% recovered. He has found part-time work and slowly getting back to normality. We would like to thank you so much for helping us through this very difficult time. I don’t know that we would have survived without your help. Please pass our membership on to someone else.”

From a letter written to Vale Pantry

“... the Pantry was the lifeline ... it was getting to the point I was gonna have to go and steal food from shops because I couldn’t afford to feed my kids.”

Survey response

“While my partner was out of work not so long ago, and me being a carer we really struggled. A friend told me about the Pantry and once I was accepted and went for the first time, I was so taken aback as I have had no help before with anything, I just wept. This is a lifeline to so many, thank you for providing such a necessary service.”

Survey response

“I don’t know that we would have survived without your help”



Responding to the cost-of-living crisis

The cost-of-living crisis has had a detrimental impact on millions of families across the UK; inflation, wage stagnation, real-terms cuts to welfare, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the long-term impact of austerity and welfare reform, have pushed more people into poverty and food insecurity.

The inflation rate of food reached 19.1% in April 2023, which amounts to an extra £1,000 on the average annual food bill (The Resolution Foundation, 2023). Food prices have continued to rise at record rates; food and non-alcoholic drinks rose at the second highest rate in 45 years in the year to April 2023 (ONS, 2023). The UK now has one of the highest poverty rates in Europe, with 9.77 million adults and 4 million children

experiencing food insecurity (LGA, 2023).

In the UK as a whole, one in four shoppers say they are reducing their outgoings and four in ten people say they are spending less on food and essentials. 50% of adults said they were buying less when shopping for food. 97% of people report an increase in the price of their food shop (ONS, 2023).

“It’s the only shop where I don’t feel depressed at the exorbitant price of everything. And sometimes it’s my only direct contact with people all week.”

Survey response

Some of the worst hit by the cost-of-living crisis are people who were already struggling to make ends meet, and for whom the Pantry was already a lifeline. This year

people have told us about their struggles to get by, with numerous Pantry members telling us that they would not be able to put food on the table if it were not for the Pantry.

“I’m struggling to pay my bills. It’s like robbing Peter to pay Paul.”

Survey response

Until the safety net is strengthened and household incomes are more adequate, Pantries will continue to play an important economic role in supporting households experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity.

“I don’t have savings, as I have not enough coming in now to cover everything, with electric and food all doubled in price. It’s truly been a lifeline for me, and I am working also.”

Survey response



Are households able to save in the current economic climate?

“[S]ome people say that the Pantry just keeps them going and I think without it, they would be really struggling ... We also have some people who say it’s helped, they’ve been able to save and pay off some debts and things like that. But I think some people say the money they save here just tends to go on to bills and energy.”

Bex, manager, Epsom Pantry

We asked Pantry members whether they are able to save money through shopping at the Pantry. Most people said that any extra money they had was being spent on other bills and essentials.

When we carried out our social impact research in 2021, we found that some members were able to save the money they would have spent on a normal supermarket shop, and put the savings towards things such as the cost of birthday presents or Christmas. However, this year we found that most Pantry members had found it incredibly difficult, if not impossible, to save due to the cost-of-living crisis. In particular, the cost of gas and electricity has meant that people had no spare money for anything else.

“... because the cost of the fuel prices have increased ... we just haven’t been able to save. We’re just lucky that we’ve got this. It provides me with a sense of security, knowing that we have the food to eat and we don’t have to worry about finding a large amount of money to do family shops.”

Lucy, Hope Pantry, Merthyr Tydfil

“I don’t cover my bills and food on a monthly basis. I skip meals so that I can make sure my son has something to eat.”

Robin, Kingston Pantry

“There’s a lot less treats going on and a lot more everyday bills that are being paid.”

Pantry Coordinator

“We’re just getting by. But with everything gone up with the gas, electric ... it’s a nightmare. I’ve been running out of gas and electric all the time. It’s been quite stressful.”

Sam, Dover Pantry

“It was tight anyway, but it [the Pantry] made it liveable.”

Joanne, member, Kingston Pantry

“My grandchildren stay with me regularly knowing I can give them good food and be able to heat the home.”

Survey response

A Pantry shop is designed to supplement, rather than completely replace, a household’s regular food shop. We found that some members were able to use the savings made at the Pantry to purchase more, or better quality food at the supermarket.

‘It helps to reduce the cost of weekly / monthly shopping, helped to save money, and ease worry for shopping prices.’

Survey response

“We were guardians for our three grandchildren ... as I was working we had no other help so the Pantry was a godsend, being able to feed three hungry teens on one wage was not easy, but the Pantry helped me to afford the food they liked and buy clothes for them.”

Survey response

“Since we joined we can afford more for our children, e.g. better school shoes, ice-cream for a treat, occasionally.”

Anna, member at Kingston Pantry

However, other members said that they relied on the Pantry for almost all of their shopping.

“This is my only means of acquiring a weekly shop of food that I can afford.”

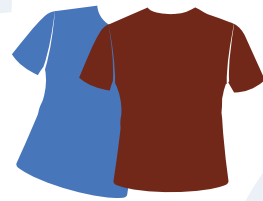
Survey response

“There is a good range of fruit and vegetables available, some of which we could never afford normally. The same goes for meat and fish.”

Survey response

Most people said that any extra money they had was being spent on other bills and essentials





“For us it is not always about saving the money, but trying new things and helping the community”

Heidi, the Pantry coordinator at Hope Pantry, Merthyr Tydfil, told us about one of their members who, when she joined the Pantry, was struggling to bridge the gap between coming off benefits and starting work. She was a hard-working single parent, but still on a low income.

“Over the last six or nine months, she’s been able to save a little bit every week from her wages. She forward pays money to the Pantry once a month, so she knows the money is here. That really works for her and helps her to budget. At Christmas time, her daughter wanted Dr Martens for Christmas and she said, I’ve been able to save my money and buy my daughter the Dr Martens she wanted. She said she wouldn’t have been able to do that otherwise.”

Heidi, Pantry Coordinator, Hope Pantry, Merthyr Tydfil

Cara, a Pantry coordinator in Dover, says that the Pantry enables most members to improve their financial situation, although currently this means that they are able to put food on the table, rather than save any money. For many families the Pantry is a lifeline, particularly at the end of the month, when there is little money left. Cara says that some families just use the Pantry on weeks when they are struggling; others rely on it every week.

Cara says that most of the members currently use any savings they do make through using the Pantry, on things like utility bills and rent. Some members are able to use the savings for ‘treats’ such as trips to the cinema with their children; however, more and more, people are not able to save, due to the cost-of-living increases.

“Food prices are going up and they still keep soaring.”

Sam, member at Dover Pantry

“I am now able to use the money I am saving to buy sensory items for my son who is autistic. They can be quite expensive so I wasn’t able to buy things to help him before.”

Molly, Kingsgate Pantry, Peterborough

Our survey found that some members were able to use the money they saved (by shopping at the Pantry) for other expenses (e.g. rent, gas, electricity), which enables members to maintain a safe living environment, especially during the winter (e.g. by keeping their home warm). Savings were also used to reduce debts, or for essential items like clothes, nappies, school uniform, etc.

A few survey respondents said that they used any savings made by using the Pantry, for holidays, transport, petrol, donations, and to buy more food.

“I am able to take the children to local playgroups and clubs.”

“Get some lessons for the kids.”

“Can afford to have some treats and still able to pay bills.”

“Just makes getting by each month without being overdrawn almost possible. If on occasion, we have a little left we put it towards the credit card used for car repairs.”

“I am no longer having to borrow money to buy food, which has made a huge difference! At Christmas I was able to save up to buy a bike for my son so he can get to college. I am saving towards us having a short family holiday this year, which we’ve never had before.”

“We use the money to pay off our debts and it also helps when it comes to things like birthdays, Christmas and Easter ... as I have three children in total and one granddaughter so the little bits I can get really help us.”

“Pay off debt, have a treat, buy Christmas presents for family, go out for a meal or buy some new clothes, etc.”

“We try to give and receive to the Pantry to help prevent food waste and be part of the community. For us it is not always about saving the money, but trying new things and helping the community.”

“We are able to enjoy one or two ‘expensive’ meat meals a month. Last week we had lamb steaks! Apart from that we just leave the extra money in our account.”

Across the survey responses and interviews, many members reported their inability to save, despite shopping at the Pantry.

“[N]o savings.”

“We don’t have any money left over after bills, etc. have been paid, so we don’t really get treats, it just means we don’t go without.”

“We don’t do anything as the savings just mean we eat the same, or we will be eating less, as my budget isn’t going up the same way costs are.”

“I don’t have money available or spare ... as I used to just ration my meals, to ensure my daughter had enough.”

Pantry development story: Paradox Centre Pantry, Chingford

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

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

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

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

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

“... the popularity of those, and the waiting list we had, I think was reflective of how tough it is really for people at the minute.”

Ellie

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

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

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

Ellie

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

Barbara, 84, Paradox Centre Pantry

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

Matora, Paradox Centre Pantry



Supporting a healthy and nutritious diet

63% of all members said their household is eating more fresh fruit and vegetables and 59% are eating less processed food since joining the Pantry. 36% of members said their households were now eating more protein, such as fish, meat and eggs.

39% of members say they have seen significant changes to their diet, eating more fruit and vegetables and less processed food.

"I eat food and products I wouldn't be able to afford. I also love the freshly cooked meals that are frozen from the Felix Project."

Tom, Kingston Pantry

"I had a week off from the Pantry ... and my food bills were horrendous that week. And you can really see the difference it makes. Like fruit and veg, it's

63%
are eating MORE fresh fruit and vegetables

extortionate. So, yeah, it does make a huge difference."

Pantry member, Hope Pantry, Merthyr Tydfil

Eating a healthy, balanced diet (including fresh fruit and vegetables) is very difficult when budgets are tight. Healthy food can often take second place to food that is cheaper, or higher in calories, allowing people to feel full for longer. A third of Pantry members described their financial circumstances as difficult or very difficult; many members said that the Pantry was essential to ensure their household could eat healthy and nutritious food. A number of members commented how Pantry membership and the food on offer, had enabled them to choose healthier food.

"... Another person said they had been living on chip butties, and now they were able to have fresh fruit and vegetables."

Pantry Coordinator

"With a disabled daughter it's good to know I can

come here to help with the cost of shopping."

Survey response

"I'm getting more confident cooking with the [Pantry] recipe bags and adapting them slightly to the family preferences. And my father is enjoying cooking meat meals from scratch. The variety of delicious veggies is something we also appreciate. I am now a fan of cabbage and spring greens."

Pantry member, Vale Pantry, Dorset

"I've got three members who are going through chemotherapy at the minute ... So I think it's made a big difference to them in terms of the quality of the food that they're able to eat, the fact they're eating a healthier diet, that they know that's good for their overall health due to the treatment that they're on."

Heidi, Pantry Manager, Hope, Merthyr Tydfil

47%
are eating MORE food in general

"We try to make sure there is fresh fruit and veg available for members, we get it donated by supermarkets each week."

Cara, Pantry Coordinator, Dover Pantry

"We could not afford fresh meats, dairy, eggs, or vegetables, so it's extremely vital to our health. Also it's a 15 mins walk for us, so when it's not raining it gets us out for a walk into town :)"

Survey response.



Has being a member made a difference to the food you eat?

“Definitely due to my illness, I had to retire from work and being on benefits, sickness benefits / PIP, we are very limited on our income.”

Lucy, member, Hope Pantry, Merthyr Tydfil

59%
are eating **LESS**
processed food

Almost half (47%) said that their household ate more food as a result of being a member of a Pantry, with a number of people saying that they now had enough food for their household each week, whereas before they were skipping meals.

“As I was struggling every weekend with food to feed my daughter and myself now I don’t have to, all for £5.”

Survey response.

“It is keeping me afloat money wise. I can provide better food for my family and I’m not having to skip meals.”

Survey response

36%
are eating
MORE protein

“... we have fresh fruit and veg, which is so beneficial for us because it helps my health, and my daughter is a member and she has a four-year old child, and they are both asthmatic and he has dairy allergies as well and ADHD, so he eats a lot of fresh fruit and vegetables... Rather than processed food ... it benefits them so much because everything is cooked from scratch then.”

Lucy, Hope Pantry, Merthyr Tydfil.

“I am struggling financially at present as it’s just myself and my daughter. Hope Pantry has been a massive help and I don’t know what I would do without it. I am so grateful and feel blessed that I have been able to be a part of something that helps take the weight off buying food for myself and daughter each week. It is truly a godsend.”

Pantry member, Hope Pantry, Merthyr

“It takes the stress off me having to find more money for meals for my boys.”

Survey response

67%
are trying **NEW**
foods

“It’s helping me to survive.”

Survey response

“For myself personally the Pantry really helps me in various ways. As money is tight on a weekly basis the Pantry helps me to get through the week managing eating and just basic bills ... Because of [my health problem] my mum, cousin, daughter etc., more often than not, cook for me. But with the help from the Pantry I can get cereal and milk, plus other ready to eat items.”

Survey response

“With a limited income it helps with the cost of food, I’ve also been able to try different foods that I would not consider.”

Survey response

The variety of food on offer at the Pantries enables members to try new food (things that they have not had before). Many Pantries provide information about new ingredients and recipe cards for members to try out. Pantry membership can help people to find enjoyment in cooking, and

Building health

A Pantry coordinator told us about a couple who were Pantry members. One of them used to have only £20 to spend on food each week, so they would buy things that were discounted to stock up. However, this meant that their shopping lacked variety. Since joining the Pantry they have access to fresh fruit and veg and are feeling healthier and better overall.

help them to create positive food memories, which means that food is about more than survival, it can also be enjoyed.

“I feel less anxious about money for food than I used to ... Being able to get fresh fruit, vegetables and bread really helps so we can have fresh food more often, and with me having to change my diet due to my health, it really helps even more now as there are types of food I can’t eat.”

Survey response

“Due to health reasons and massive allergies, shopping in the Pantry allows me to be safe in the knowledge that the staff are fully trained and can help me shop safely.”

Survey response



Pantry development story: Family membership scheme in Edinburgh



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

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

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



Tanya's story

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

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

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

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

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

Sharon's story

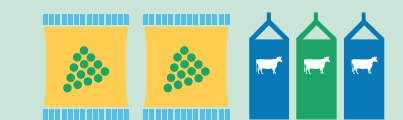
Sharon is a volunteer and has family membership at Pennywell Pantry. Sharon says she has been struggling financially, particularly due to the increases in energy prices. Sharon says that joining the Pantry has improved her financial situation. Family membership helps Sharon to get enough food for her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

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

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

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

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



Enhancing mental and physical wellbeing

Pantry members told us about their experiences of food poverty and how this had a knock-on effect on their mental and physical health. Many Pantry members reported that being able to buy fresh fruit and vegetables, and other affordable food, made a big difference to their overall health.

“Yes, I have increased my fitness levels carrying back home, on foot, heavy bags of shopping ... and feeling less anxious about the amount of money I spend each week on groceries and toiletries.”

Survey response

83%
said being a member of the Pantry had been good for their mental health

One Pantry coordinator told us that a number of members and volunteers have said since getting involved with the Pantry, they no longer need to take anti-depressants.

One Pantry has a trustee who is a local GP who has had a number of patients who joined the Pantry and noticed them change dramatically. One of them previously had a lot of problems (including poor self-care and alcoholism), now she has become a volunteer. The GP said, “What happened, what was it?” The volunteer said to the GP, “I don’t need you any more. I’ve got the Pantry”.

“I really enjoy volunteering here when I’m not in work ... this Pantry has opened so many doors for me and helped massively with my depression.”

Survey response

“I now have peace about my finances, and especially about providing meals for my family. If I start to feel concerned again I just think – Wednesday is coming – don’t panic! I no longer feel shame about my financial situation, I feel proud of how it has changed – I have my dignity back.”

Survey response

68% said being a member of the Pantry had been good for their physical health

“I have found it a way to help with my loneliness, after the loss of my husband.”

Survey response

People in poverty are more likely to experience poor mental and physical health. People experiencing food poverty often feel judged by others, for the situation they are in, which can have a negative impact on mental health and lead to social isolation. The stress related to food insecurity, and having to juggle priorities (e.g. food, heating, health concerns, social inclusion), can cause depression and anxiety.

Our research found that Pantry members experience a welcoming, non-judgemental environment which helps to improve people’s mental health and restore their dignity and confidence.

“I have to say that since coming to Pantry in last month. ... not only has it been a huge help. The ladies are amazing. So friendly and non-judgemental. I truly appreciate all you do and thank you immensely.”

Survey response

“Being a member of the Pantry has helped me stay mentally stable and gives me the opportunity to meet new people and to help them.”

Survey response

Alex’s story

Before joining Dover Pantry, and becoming a volunteer, Alex was struggling with mental health issues.

“I wasn’t getting out of bed, and now this has given me a reason to get out of bed. I’ve never not turned up to work. I’ve always turned up I’m always here, come rain, or sunshine, or snow.”

Alex says that life would be a struggle if it were not for the Pantry:

“I think I’d be depressed. I think I’d be really upset ... I’d be at home. Yeah. I think I’d be depressed ... I’ve been here about seven months now ... It’s given me such a positive outlook ...”

Quotes from older people regarding improvement to their health:

“The Pantry helps us afford better quality food. This means we’re better off nutritionally, but also that we have to stress less about how much food is costing. As a result, our mental health is improved as well.”

Survey response

“Getting fresh groceries from the store has really been helpful in maintaining a good diet intake.”

Survey response

“It has been great to see my autistic son’s mental health improve in coming here. He doesn’t usually want contact with anyone, but he has taken to some of the volunteers really well – even walking round holding their hands.”

Ash, Kingsgate Pantry, Peterborough

Members told us that the savings made through Pantry had helped to relieve their financial worries, enabling them to pay household bills or repay debts. Several identified how this had positively affected their mental wellbeing.

Story of hope

[Note: contains discussion of suicide]

One Pantry coordinator told us that they have had members who said the Pantry saved their lives. These members told the Pantry coordinator that they had been contemplating ending their lives because of their financial situation.

“So even though we’re at capacity, if somebody rings and you can tell that they are at the end of their tether, I’d always make room for them.”

The coordinator spoke about at least three members who were close to saying “... there is no point, we didn’t think anybody cared, there was no hope, no nothing ... and then I found Pantry.”

The coordinator talked about how shocking this was and how it feels like a big responsibility. At the same time, it demonstrated the tremendous work that the Pantry does. She said it really does make a difference to people’s lives: **“People can come in and see a friendly face, talk and have a cup of tea.”**

Another Pantry member said in their survey response, **“In words it really has saved me from suicide as I was so down I did not know where to go or what to do.”**

“... (M)y mental health was really bad before I came, and my confidence was really bad after my stroke and social anxiety. But due to coming as a member initially built all that up and then I felt confident enough to offer to volunteer.”

Jamie, Pantry member



“I think that we help people out of a really dark place. There’s no two ways about it. I mean, our manager is just extraordinary. She’s been in someone’s house at midnight sorting out crises. We’ll advocate for people ... we’ll make phone calls, we’ll deal with their housing providers. If something’s not right, there’s just so many things that we do...”

Carole, founder and trustee, The Vale Pantry, Dorset

“As my wife passed away it is nice to speak to people, as myself I am a very quiet person and I find talking to people that I don’t know very difficult, people there don’t judge.”

Survey response

“I would be very stressed [without the Pantry]. Very unhealthy at home, lack of food variety. Very isolated [thinking] no one is having a hard time like me.”

Anna, Burgess Hill Pantry member

“Definitely less anxious about money! My mental health has improved massively knowing that I can feed my children good, nutritious food.”

Survey response

Many Pantry members talked about how being a member or volunteer has helped to improve their mental health by giving them a sense of purpose and reducing social isolation.

“A place I can go to talk to really lovely staff, so if I feel low I know they will always talk to me.”

Survey response

“Mental health ... Belonging to a group makes you feel like you’re not alone in your experience.”

Survey response

“I know some people have said to us that it helps with their mental health ... A lot of people come here for the community and to meet other people, other Pantry members, because everyone’s so friendly and nice.”

Bex, Manager at Epsom Pantry

Many Pantry members told us that being a member had reduced stress and worry about the cost of food. In particular, Pantry members who were in a difficult financial situation, or just about managing, said that access to the Pantry took away a lot of stress and anxiety.

“This has definitely made me feel less worried and anxious about money, I’m less worried and stressed which in turn is making me a better mum to our disabled daughter. We are all also eating much more fresh fruit and vegetables as these items are becoming very expensive in shops.”

Survey response

Members told us that being a member of a Pantry gave them a sense of security, as they know they will be able to have a number of healthy meals each week.

“Without the Pantry I would be in a very dark place, it is such a relief knowing my boys can have some good food and that I can feed them.”

Survey response

“... being part of the Pantry has taken a huge weight off me. It is a haven of peace - the staff are so welcoming and so lovely, so caring and so kind.”

Survey response

Many Pantry members talked about how being a member has benefited their physical health in a number of ways, including walking to and from the Pantry (and carrying their bags of shopping), eating a wider selection of healthy food, access to fresh fruit and vegetables and learning new healthy recipes (often tailored to Pantry stock/ingredients).

“It has given me routine and a focus once a week. Increased my exercise ... marching up and down the street once a week and socialising with others.”

Survey response

“The increased fresh fruit and veg has improved our physical health, I have even lost weight. My mental health is much better now as I am less anxious and I can sleep at night.”

Survey response

“Walking to the Pantry is good for my physical health, and mentally ... meeting new people.”

Survey response



Strengthening local communities

Pantries play an important role in developing and strengthening local communities.

“So we know people, [for whom] we’re the only people they speak to. Some people, it’s a really big deal coming out and coming to the shop ... It’s helpful for them to speak to people.”

Bex, Manager, Epsom Pantry

79%
say the Pantry has enabled them to meet people and socialise

Rooted in their local communities, many Pantries make a geographical decision on their membership area. This encourages Pantries to become, and remain, spaces which serve and strengthen local community networks.

“It’s a joy to come. there’s always a friendly hello ... and I meet others in the same situation as myself.”

Amelia, member at Burgess Hill Pantry

“It helps me to feel more connected to other people. It makes me leave the house. I share time with locals and I feel very supported by Pantry staff.”

Ruth, member at Kingston Pantry

“I am very shy, so would never start a conversation in a normal shop. The girls always put a smile on my face and I feel relaxed.”

Survey response

Our survey found that Pantries are perceived as valuable assets for each community:



66%
of members had made new friends at their Pantry

“A great asset to my neighbourhood, offering good value for a range of items.”

“It’s an important community resource.”

“It is a community action group; to which being a member is important for myself, others and the community.”

“It feels like part of a community when I go there.”

“It helps get communities together, as well as helping so many people who are struggling financially at the moment.”

72%
say it’s important that their Pantry belongs to their local community

“We have quite a social group in the morning we have a lot of people that come really early, about three hours before we even open the shop, but they will sit and have a coffee ... or sit and chat. So I think some of them come that early in order to have the social aspect before the shop opens ... they sit and chat for hours.”

Cara, Dover Pantry Manager

Being able to make new friends was an important aspect of the Pantry model, with 89% of members saying this was “important” or “very important” to them.

Lucy's story

Lucy became a volunteer at the Pantry a year ago. She had experienced illness and had to take early retirement. Being a member of the Pantry has helped her to access healthy food and have a choice in the food that she eats. Being a member of the Pantry has also helped Lucy with her mental health. After she became ill she struggled to get out of the house (due to physical difficulties after having a stroke), and experienced social anxiety.

Both Lucy and her partner receive Personal Independence Payment (PIP) due to ill health, and therefore live on a low-income. Being a Pantry member and volunteer has not only helped Lucy and her partner with the cost of food, it has helped Lucy to get out of the house and become more involved with her local community. Coming to the Pantry is a social occasion and Lucy has made many friends and acquaintances at the Pantry, she says this gives her motivation and confidence to leave the house.

"It's enabled me to come out of the house, whereas before I wouldn't go, I wouldn't leave the house. ... But now I'm able to come out on my own at least once a week, so I come here myself. Whereas before, my husband had to take me everywhere. I wouldn't go anywhere on my own."

Lucy found that coming to the Pantry helped her to maintain a connection with the community, and as she started to feel better, she offered to volunteer at the Pantry. She now volunteers once a week and it has made a big difference to her confidence.

"I love meeting the people here. They're really friendly."

Lucy used to work for the local authority so has a good knowledge of services and support that are available for people, so she is able to help people out with various problems, and signpost them to the right service and explain how to get help, etc.

Lucy enjoys volunteering at the Pantry and comes in even if it's her 'day off'; she says she would miss coming to the Pantry and talking to everyone, so she still comes along on these days.

74%
feel more
connected to their
local community
through being
a member of a
Pantry

"I get to interact with a new social group and meet people in similar financial situations in the queue, whom I hadn't realised were as hard up as me."

Anna, member at Burgess Hill Pantry

"It's very important as it's part of our local community and it's a nice way to make friends."

Survey response

84%
feel like valued
members of the
Pantry

"I've met lovely people here and they all quite like me, and I love it here. And I speak to these lovely people when I see them in the town."

Sam, Dover Pantry

"Love going to Pantry, it helps me to get out and meet other people."

Survey response

"I much appreciated being here and it's given me a positive outlook to life. ... I've not worked for so long because I've got mental health. ... It's been fantastic. And lovely people here, they all know me by name and I love it. Absolutely love it. I've definitely got more of a social outlook ... it's given me more confidence."

Alex, member and volunteer, Dover Pantry.

Connecting with other community services

Your Local Pantry is much more than a food club. Many serve as community hubs which host additional services on-site, personally connect members with wider support and/or signpost to other services in the neighbourhood. These additional ‘wrap-around’ services directly tackle social isolation through facilitating local connections, friendship and hospitality. Beyond this, many Pantries and their partner organisations provide (or connect members to) much needed support with a range of issues, including benefits and local welfare support schemes, debt, housing, mental health, and utility bills. Around a third of Pantries who responded to our survey also offered cooking skills or courses, directly or through connections with partners, with others signposting members to cooking opportunities elsewhere.

Around a third of members who responded to our survey had been connected to an additional service through the Pantry. Alongside those outlined above, other services mentioned by members included volunteering opportunities, emotional

support, training and education (information and advice), preparation for employment/ job-searching, health groups and other help, e.g. a new cooker, fuel vouchers, clothes, children’s programmes.

“It’s the extra support and help that they offer when you feel you are really stuck.”

Survey response

Some Pantries offer additional services alongside Pantry opening times, while others share their building with other, independent services.

“Thanks to the Pantry I have an advocate to help me manage my debts.”

Ruth, member at Kingston Pantry

“My wife was told about an organisation that could help with a particular problem. Her confidence was boosted so that she has now attended training courses and is applying for jobs.”

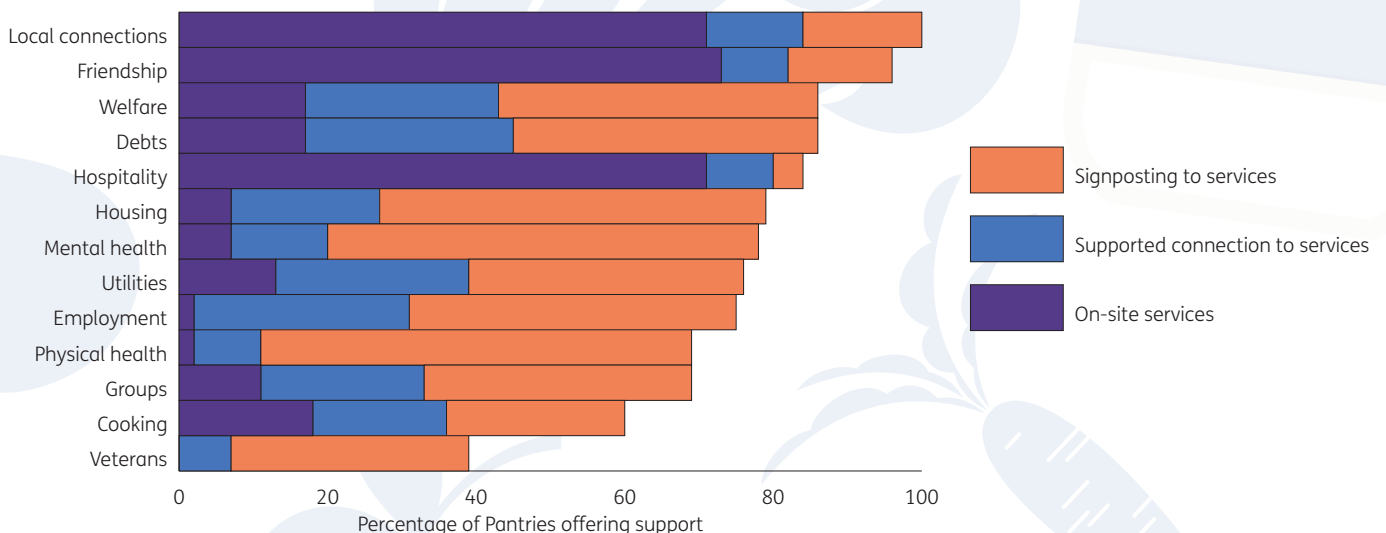
Jake, member at Kingsgate Pantry, Peterborough

“Food Pantry was able to arrange for some floor covering to be donated to us, and laid, when we had nothing on our floors.”

Jake, Kingsgate Pantry, Peterborough

“It’s great to know you’re not alone in your struggles. That there’s help and support if you need it, not just the food side of things. There’s always a very warm welcome with refreshments offered upon arrival.”

Survey response



Wraparound support at Hope Pantry, Merthyr Tydfil

100% of
Panttries offer local
connections...

87% of Panttries
offer signposting or
support with welfare
benefits...

87% of Panttries
offer signposting or
support with debt
advice...

Hope Pantry works closely with local services, such as the credit union, the water company, 'Communities for Work', the jobcentre and housing association. This helps members to connect with services that can provide help and support when it is needed. For example, if someone's fridge or freezer breaks, the credit union can provide an affordable loan to help the member buy a new item. Welsh Water often attend Pantry sessions to provide information to members about potential discounts and payment plans. Working with these additional services can help members to save money in different ways.

More than half of Hope Pantry members are tenants of Merthyr Valley Homes (MVH), which is the biggest social landlord in the area. The housing officer often attends the Pantry sessions to meet members/tenants. This helps the housing association to keep in touch with their tenants and tenants can report any issues they have with their housing.

One of the big employers locally is EE (the mobile phone network), they sometimes volunteer at the Pantry and spend time talking to members about their work, apprenticeships, training and job opportunities. Health workers and dietitians also attend Pantry sessions to offer information and advice, they provide recipes and meal plans for members.



Additional services at Pennywell Pantry, Edinburgh

Pennywell Pantry is part of a wider community organisation, Community Renewal Trust, which works in low-income neighbourhoods and campaigns to end persistent poverty. Community Renewal, Pennywell, hosts the Pantry and provides information and one-to-one support for local residents across a number of areas including: employment support, family support, housing, benefits, health/wellbeing and empowering residents to improve their neighbourhood together.

Next Step Edinburgh (a council funded project) delivered at Community Renewal, Pennywell, offers employment support, vocations training and benefits advice. Next Step, Edinburgh, can help people to develop their skills for employment, help with CVs, or interview preparation. An advantage of the close working relationship is that Pennywell Pantry can directly refer people to Next Step, to join education, training and employment

preparation courses. Many of the volunteers at Pennywell Pantry have taken part in these programmes, with a view to improving their skills for future employment. The Pantry recently had a lot of volunteers who were referred from Next Step; the Pantry are able to provide valuable “work experience” (e.g. helping people to improve their English language skills, gain customer service experience and learn about the running of community projects and food services). This helped Pantry volunteers to gain new skills and confidence and move on to employment.

“We’re Community Renewal, Pennywell, so we run an employment service and some community development projects as well. But we also share an office with Citizens Advice Bureau and two youth groups in the building as well. It’s a good little hub where people can come in and get lots of different support. And we signed up to the Fuel

Bank Foundation this winter ... so we were able to give people fuel vouchers to help stretch their budget further.”

Cara, Neighbourhood Manager at Community Renewal Pennywell and Pennywell Pantry, Edinburgh

As well as having Citizen’s Advice (Edinburgh) in the same building, Pennywell Pantry also have a connection to an adviser (one day a week), who they can refer people to for welfare information, health advice, etc. Community Renewal, Pennywell, also have a community development project which supports local people to start their own projects. At the moment they are working on the creation of a community garden and linking people from the Pantry into this, with possible advantages of improving access to affordable, healthy food and learning about nutrition and growing. They are also hoping to run a community kitchen and playgroup as part of this project.

Story: “That’s so much more than food...”

[Note: contains discussion of domestic violence]

From a Pantry coordinator (anonymous):

“We had one lovely lady who had worked all of her life, but was made redundant. She was a homeowner so didn’t think she was entitled to any benefits. She had no money for food for the family or her pets. She called the Pantry and said ‘... this has never happened to me before and I don’t know what to do’. She came to the Pantry and we helped her with food for a few weeks and told her about a local company that was recruiting. Around six weeks later she had found a new job.”

“She also confided that she was experiencing domestic abuse, so we had conversations about that ... nobody has the right to hit you. You need to be safe ... And we had conversations about what she could do to protect herself. And that’s so much more than food.”

After this the woman was able to access specialist support and counselling to help with her situation.

“So I think it’s recognising that people come for apples, pears and dog food ... but we’ve always got the kettle on, we’ve always got a box of tissues.”

“We’ve always got the kettle on, we’ve always got a box of tissues”

Pantry development stories: Epsom Pantry

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

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

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

Bex, Epsom Pantry Manager

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

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

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

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

because they didn't have enough money for food.

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

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

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

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



Harris' story

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fostering dignity and agency

Financial hardship is closely related to feelings of shame and stigma which can lead to poor mental health and a negative self-image. People experiencing poverty often suffer from stress and anxiety, and fear judgement from others, particularly due to the negative images portrayed in the media of people in poverty.

These experiences can lead to social isolation as people become cut off from their community (and sometimes their friends and family), as they fear judgement, and can't afford to take part in many social activities. When people become isolated, their mental health can also deteriorate.

Our research has found that this is counteracted for many Pantry members, who experience feeling welcome, dignified and valued.

"I feel more grateful and have more hope in humanity."

Ruth, member at Kingston Pantry

Cooperatively run

Your Local Pantries are cooperatively run, so everyone can experience the benefits of membership. Membership fees are pooled together to fund the operation of the Pantry. People know that their membership helps others, as well as themselves.

For 74% of members, having a say in how the Pantry was run was an important aspect of their membership.

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. Peckham, Epsom and Portsmouth North End Pantries have member engagement groups that enable members to get more involved with decision-making.

People who have experienced poverty often feel powerless and feel that they do not have a voice because they are not listened

"It's a great place to let off steam to volunteers who always have a listening ear with no judgement and great helpful advice, which is always needed."

Survey response

Being able to choose items from the Pantry is also very important for members, it can be hard to feel dignified when receiving a pre-packed parcel (put together by someone else). Food parcels may contain items that people don't like and we are all used to choosing our own shopping. The Pantry model recognises the importance of this.

Anyone in the local community can join a Pantry, they do not have to be referred by a professional or someone else in authority; potential members do not have to provide evidence that they are in need. This is important to members because there is no stigma or shame in joining the Pantry.

to. People in poverty are often excluded from decision-making, civil, social and cultural life.

Therefore being part of a member-run organisation, and 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.

As part of their mission to ensure communities have better access to food, Co-op Members are providing three years of funding which will aim to triple the size of the Your Local Pantry network.

"... not being judged, but greeted with smiles and a feeling of being important"

Survey response

"Relationship with the volunteers. There is no judgement at all."

Survey response

Many people said they were proud of being Pantry members. For people on very low-incomes being able to pay for their shop, or volunteer at the Pantry, rather than receiving charity, made a big difference.

"It feels less like just taking charity ... by helping others in the same position, and feeling less ashamed of being dependent on a charity just to survive."

Survey response

"What we hear all the time is people saying how important it is to them to pay the five pounds and also have the choice [of food]."

Bex, Manager, Epsom Pantry

Celebrity chef Big Zuu helped to launch the partnership between Your Local Pantry and The Cooperative in November 2022



Tackling food waste

“I hate food waste. This along with affordability were my two main reasons for joining. What I got in return, that was unexpected, was community and friendships.”

Survey response

Your Local Pantry works with the environmental charity FareShare who tackle food waste by redistributing surplus food to charities. Each week most Pantries get a delivery from FareShare, of grocery and household items that would otherwise go to waste. This means that Pantries get different types of food each week, depending upon what surplus food has come through that week, sometimes they get lots of cereal, other weeks they might get lots of flour, butternut squash, or apple juice, for example.

Reducing food waste was one of the most important reasons for people to be Pantry members.

Addressing food waste remains a significant aspect of the Your Local Pantry model. As well as the benefits of access to affordable food, Pantry members can play an active role in helping their communities to be more environmentally sustainable.

Some members who were dependent on charity or food banks in the past, are now able to be part of a wider movement that tackles food waste. Joining the Pantry has enabled many members to learn about the negative impact of food waste on the environment.

Since our 2021 social impact report, many of the Pantries within the network are diversifying their food supply a lot more. Partnering with His Church, an emergency goods redistribution charity, focused on providing food and supplies to those who need it most, has helped many Pantries to continue to have as wide a range of stock as possible to give members real choice.

98% of members said tackling food waste was ‘very important’ or ‘important’ to them



Volunteering: a member-run community

“I volunteer every Tuesday and have made friends and love to help others in our community and the staff are very friendly and helped my mental health.”

Survey response

Many Pantries have paid staff to oversee the organisation of the Pantry, but they are also member-run organisations. Being part of a community-owned movement was important to 98% of people who took part in our survey. 74% said it was important to have a say in decision-making.

Many Pantries have a core team of volunteers who are essential to the smooth running of the Pantry and who readily contribute their considerable gifts and talents and previous life experience.

73% said
**it was important
to have the
opportunity to
volunteer at the
Pantry**

Across the Your Local Pantry Network there are around 2000 volunteers, around half of whom (47%) are Pantry members themselves. Between them, Pantry volunteers contribute approximately 5,700 hours each week, well over a massive 287,000 hours of time each year.

Volunteers are essential to ensure that the Pantry runs effectively. They take on a variety of roles including helping members in the Pantry, stocking shelves, welcoming members as they arrive, organising the rotas, managing the database, serving tea and coffee, taking in deliveries and monitoring stock availability. A vital part of their role is building relationships with the members, which helps members feel comfortable asking for additional support if they need it.

“One of the best things is the number of members who go on to be volunteers. This can absolutely transform people’s lives and give them a sense of purpose. Volunteers feel needed and people feel they are giving back to the Pantry for the support they had received themselves.”

Carole, Vale Pantry, Dorset



Anne's story

Anne is one of the longest-standing volunteers at Pennywell Pantry, Edinburgh. She has been a member since it opened in 2020. Anne finds the Pantry is particularly useful for items that are expensive at the supermarket, getting these items from the Pantry helps her to have a balanced diet. Anne says that before she was a member of the Pantry she used to eat a lot of junk food, but since becoming a member she has been eating healthier food and has lost weight.

Anne is struggling financially: **"... if it wasn't for the Pantry, I don't think I could afford to buy food because by the time I paid my bills, top my electricity up, top my gas up ... no ..."**

Anne says that before the cost-of-living crisis she would sometimes have a little bit of money left after paying the bills (e.g. £10), but now she is struggling to get by each month.

"So if it wasn't for the Pantry, then the second week I wouldn't be fed."

Anne lives with mental health issues and was struggling to get out of the house before she became a volunteer. Now she volunteers for a few days each week and talks to customers and gets to know them.

"You get to know their names and have a chat with them, and see how they're coping with everything."

New volunteers receive tailored training, which includes Pantry management, customer service, Pantry online portal training, manual handling, food hygiene and allergy awareness. Volunteers come from a variety of backgrounds, with multiple reasons for deciding to become volunteers. Some volunteers want to 'give back' to their community and help people. Others want the chance to learn new skills, with a view to finding employment after gaining valuable experience as a volunteer.

"It gives me a reason to get out of bed."

Jo, Pantry member and volunteer

"... And I just loved doing it. So I started one morning a week and now I'm doing a full day. It's something I love doing, I love meeting all the people that come. I just love sharing knowledge as well, because sometimes people ask about certain vegetables that they don't even know the names of and how to cook certain things, or they ask for menu ideas ... It's just lovely to share many ideas that you have yourself to help them."

Lucy, volunteer, Hope Pantry, Merthyr Tydfil

"I feel confident in myself, I used to think that nobody really want to know me ... But I feel so confident in myself, through going into the Pantry, meeting people, packing their bags and other things..."

Harris, member and volunteer, Epsom Pantry

"I became a volunteer and I love it. The Pantry has had a massive impact on my life."

Chrissy, volunteer, Burgess Hill Pantry

"It has given me a purpose and helps boost my confidence, and give back to the community."

Survey response

Our research found that volunteering helped people in a number of ways, including: increased confidence, increased social interaction and learning new skills. A number of responses made a direct connection between decreased anxiety, increased confidence and a positive effect on mental health.

"[The Pantry has] given me a purpose and helps boost my confidence, and give back to the community."

Survey response

"I am able to put my 30 years of previously working with customers to good use volunteering at the Pantry. Volunteering gives me a sense of purpose since leaving work and makes me happy."

Survey response

"It's helped regain confidence, get adequate training, make new friends and learn about reliability."

Survey response

287,000
approximate
number of hours
contributed by
Pantry volunteers
each year

"Made friends built up confidence and helped other people."

Survey response

A number of volunteers talked about the importance of helping others:

"The ability to help others, if I pay extra to help pay it forward for others"

"Volunteering at the Pantry gives me the opportunity to help others."

Pantry development story: Freedom Foods, Northern Ireland

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

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

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

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

"So, I like to think that it's a little glimmer of hope. It's a wee bit of God's love in action for the church. It's showing people that really everyone's treated the same."

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

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

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

"... it's really important that the volunteers really buy into it ... I call it the ministry of Pantry ... this is a ministry; this is actually a really important thing to do. Volunteers are really enthusiastic about it because you can't do it without a good set of volunteers who really embrace the ethos of what we're trying to do."

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

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

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

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).

Your Local Pantry tackles the environmental problem of food waste by working with FareShare.

A Pantry could have the same transformative impact in your local area.

Setting up a Pantry is relatively low-cost if you have a venue, volunteers and a good supply of food. Pantries can cover most of their operating costs from weekly membership fees.

Our team have experience in helping to set up and support 100 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 bespoke cash-in/cash-out membership software system, which also helps you measure your wider social impact
- Branded aprons and polo shirts
- Cool-bags
- 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
- Support with business planning
- Media support, at the point of launch and if needed thereafter
- Ongoing advice and support throughout

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



The benefits of being part of the YLP network

Your Local Pantry is much more than a food club. The additional services run by Pantries and their partner organisations provide much needed support to members who may be struggling with a range of issues, including housing, mental health, poverty, debt, social isolation and barriers to education and employment.

Being part of a national network also provides many benefits to Pantries, particularly in terms of organisational support, including Pantry management software, partnership with FareShare, training, set-up and development support, marketing materials, website, annual conference, peer learning and networking opportunities, communications and updates.

100% of the Pantries who responded to the survey would recommend being part of the YLP Network.



Pantries from across the UK came together at our first network conference in October 2022

“I would say I’m just really grateful for YLP because there’s loads of pantries out there that do their own models, ... but being a YLP makes my life so much easier with the way it works, the systems, the background stuff, the membership database, and the support I get off YLP is amazing ... We couldn’t do this without you guys because you guys help us so much that I don’t have to think about all the background stuff. It just happens. And I just think that’s amazing.”

Heidi, Pantry coordinator, Merthyr Tydfil

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Appendix - economic analysis of ‘cost-of-basket’

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 this 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.

In May 2023, 12 Pantries from across the network supplied details of typical baskets of food for that week. 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.

This provided the following figures:

Cost-of-basket	Co-op price comparison	Tesco price comparison	Saving to members (Co-op value minus membership fee)
Average (mean) value	£25.52	£23.40	£21.27
Highest basket value	£33.05	£29.21	£29.55
Lowest basket value	£16.28	£13.99	£12.55

This shows that in 2023 the value of a ‘typical’ basket of goods at a Pantry varies between around £16 and £33 at Co-op prices, with the average (mean) cost being £26. Taking into account the Pantry membership fee, this means that the typical saving for members is around £21 for each Pantry visit (ranging between £13 and as high as £30 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 £1,000 per year on their shopping bill. With 226,000 Pantry visits UK-wide over the last year (July 2022 to June 2023), this represents an approximate total saving to members of around £4.75 million.

Comparison with 2021

‘Cost-of-basket’ estimates for the 2021 YLP Social Impact Report were calculated using a slightly different methodology. During September/October 2020 a bespoke auditing system was used to assess Pantry stock at four Pantries (Middleton, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Birmingham) comparing stock distributed over a typical session against a Tesco price base. 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 – were calculated by dividing the value of stock distributed by the number of members using the Pantry on that day.

Concerns regarding the basis of these figures, together with the considerable impact on Pantries of participating in the stocktake, led to the decision to redesign the methodology for 2023. Benefiting from Co-op expertise, we were able to design methodology which more closely reflects a ‘typical’ basket of goods from Pantries across the UK. This does mean figures are not directly comparable with 2021.

Your Local **PANTRY**

So Much More!

Social impact report 2023

“The Pantry is the only help we get, as they don’t discriminate, they never judge and actually it shows us there are more people like us. My store cupboards are always full now because of the Pantry, and often I find real treats that at a normal shop would cost more than the £4 for the Pantry. The children love knowing that some treats come from there and they love going and choosing their own things when they get a chance. We love the Pantry and all the lovely volunteers.”

Survey response



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