

Community Pantry and Hardship Fund

of the Benefice of Stoke-by-Nayland with Leavenheath and Polstead,
and Nayland with Wissington

Report on calendar year 2022

1. Summary

1.1. Timeline

Until midsummer 2022, there was the one Community Pantry, at Nayland church, costing around £35 per week. The Hardship Fund operated for Stoke by Nayland Primary school.

The Community Pantries at Stoke and Polstead churches started after midsummer, and the one at Leavenheath church in November.

The demand on the Community Pantries increased dramatically in October/November, to around £100 per week per Pantry.

The Hardship Fund started operating for Nayland Primary school in November.

1.2. Numbers

The CP & HF started 2022 with around £900 and ended with £9,600, reflecting income of around £17,500 and expenditure of around £8,800.

Income was roughly equally divided between standing order donations from individuals, one-off donations from individuals, and donations from organisations. These came mainly from parish churches but also £1,000 from Suffolk Community Foundation and £2,500 from the Stoke Jubilee Summer Fete. There were just over 40 individual donors, of whom one-third were churchgoers.

Around £5,800 was spent on the CPs. In addition, there was a steady flow of donations in kind to the pantries. £3,000 was spent from the HF, of which half consisted of grants to families on free school meals at the two Primary Schools and half on grants to meet specific individual needs. Small grants were made to assist Warm Space initiatives.

In the two final months of the year, income and expenditure were equal, but only with the benefit of substantial Christmas-only donations. Currently, our reliable income from Standing Orders is £500 per month, half our outgoings.

1.3. Agenda

Aims for 2023 are: to ensure income sufficient to meet the hugely increased demand; to develop the Hardship Fund role of meeting specific needs not met by national and local government; and, while we have had heart-warming support of many sorts from many people, we need more help with the CPs.

We hope to work with others to reduce the need for our services, especially for the CPs.

2. Community Pantries

2.1. What, why and where

CPs make packaged food and other household necessities available for anyone to take freely. They are the rural version of Food Banks: in villages it is not feasible to deploy

the administrative effort involved in Food Banks, and in villages the anonymity inherent in the CP is important in a way it is not in towns.

The four CPs are in the four churches of their villages. This is for pragmatic reasons: initially we looked for alternatives to Polstead and Leavenheath churches, given their remoteness, but alternatives were not forthcoming. In the event those CPs have been as well used as the others. Remoteness appears to have important advantages: it is clear that beneficiaries value anonymity highly (often choosing to visit at night).

2.2. Stocking

Most of what was on offer was purchased by the CP organisers from low-cost supermarkets and similar retailers. Donations in kind by individuals, generally direct to the CP, were a useful supplement, amounting to maybe 5% of the total. Substantial donations in kind, from organisations outside the benefice, developed after the year-end. Home-cooked food and food donated past its “best before” date were passed on to helpers.

Different CPs show distinct patterns of demand, and it has been useful to deploy a surplus at one CP to others.

We have registered with Babergh District Council Food Safety and Suffolk County Council Trading Standards. A Food & Safety Officer has visited and expressed themselves satisfied with our arrangements. We offer some short-life food – eg bread, eggs, fresh fruit – which is rapidly taken, an effective guard against potential problems.

2.3. Who

There are questionnaires at each CP for beneficiaries to tell us about their circumstances as a guide to purchasing, but we know less than we would wish about our clientele. Many have school-age children. Many have dogs or cats. Many appear not to cook at all.

Perhaps the biggest driver for people to use a CP is ill health of a member of the family requiring others to give up full time work to care for them. In one case a couple who used the pantry Sept-Dec last year (caring for elderly mother who died in December) has become regular donors of goods now the husband has returned to work.

Concern is expressed from time to time about abuse of the CPs. The potential is inherent in the nature of CPs. We believe the level is low. What we offer is basics, not luxuries. The choice is between accepting some leakage, or ceasing to provide for those in need.

3. Hardship Fund

3.1. Role and referrals

Initially HF grants were made on the basis of the personal knowledge of, or personal approaches to, our two ordained priests, Revd. Stéphane Javelle and Revd. Val Armstrong. Then grants were offered, via the Primary Schools, to families on free school meals. Latterly we have encouraged the schools, with their pastoral knowledge, to identify specific individual needs not met by the statutory services.

We have come to feel that this approach is important. The CP & HF has miniscule financial resources compared with government, and none of government's resources of professional staff and compulsory powers. It makes no sense for us to do the same as government. But we do have advantages over government. We do not suffer the constraints of closely specified procedures. We have local knowledge. So we can operate on the basis of trust, hence very swiftly and confidentially, and of addressing rare or novel or inconspicuous forms of need. The Walsh Trust, an ancient Nayland charity, has confided their income to us to distribute in line with their Governing Document.

Where we suspect beneficiaries have intractable problems we intend to refer them to the professional advisors of Christians Against Poverty.