

The Vale Pantry: An Inspiring Approach to Food Poverty [C1]

Abbiamo visitato un'associazione benefica nella contea di Dorset che fornisce generi alimentari di prima necessità e consulenza legale.

Pantry is an old-fashioned English word that refers to a small room or cupboard for storing food in. In recent years, however, many British families have found their pantries to be practically empty. Soaring food prices have meant increasing numbers of Britons are now experiencing food poverty. To tackle this problem, social supermarkets known as 'local pantries' are being set up. They are providing not only food, but also much needed hope and humanity to those forced to turn to charity.

BASIC SUPPLIES

The Trussell Trust is a charity that supplies basic food parcels to people referred to them by doctors or social services. Between April 2019 and March 2020 they provided a record 1.9 million parcels of food supplies through their food banks. This was an 18 per cent increase on the previous year and the figures have continued to rise. While the Trust's work provides relief for many families, food parcels aren't the best solution for those experiencing food poverty. Each parcel contains only basic dried and tinned products; there is no choice, so if you are vegetarian or dairy intolerant, for example, their content might not suit you. The parcels do not include fresh fruit or vegetables, essential for health, especially that of children.

SOCIAL SUPERMARKET

When Carole Jones set up the Vale Pantry in Dorset in southwest England in 2020, she was hoping to provide a more nutritious solution, but soon realised that it was also a question of dignity. Social supermarkets are run entirely by volunteers and offer membership for families who struggle financially and may have to make impossible decisions, like whether to feed

their families or to heat their homes. The number of people facing these choices was alarming, says Jones.

DIVERSE NEEDS

Dorset is a rural area, so many people were doing low-paid agricultural work for a minimum [wage](#) and could no longer [make ends meet](#), as rents are high. With the recent increase in the cost of gas and electricity bills, the number of elderly pensioners coming to the Vale [Pantry](#) has also risen [sharply](#). Sometimes the problem will be temporary, while people are between jobs or waiting for benefit money to come through. Other cases can be more complex, such as those who suffer long-term health issues and who struggle [to keep on top of things](#). To find out more, Speak Up met with Carole Jones. We began by asking her what sort of families come to Vale [Pantry](#): **Carole Jones (English accent)**: There are a few families that have very limited experience with cooking, and they will find it much easier to get something that's really processed, throw it in the [oven](#) and that's it. So what we do is we'll [produce](#) a [recipe](#) bag that will contain every single ingredient to make a nutritious family meal, together with a step by step card. And we [encourage](#) them to take pictures, post them in to us, [rate](#) it, get the kids involved. During the school holidays, we'll do children's [cookery](#) classes. So we start to really get a feel for the love of food. And what we've seen through that process is that people start to make better food choices. We see children actually eating more fruit and vegetables.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Unlike with food banks, the members of the Vale [Pantry](#) do not have to be referred by doctors or social workers. They can simply apply themselves by [filling in](#) a [form](#) on the website and answering some simple financial questions, such as: "Do you [run](#) out of money before the end of the week or month?", "Have you had [to cut back](#) on food shopping in the last three months?", "Do you struggle to pay any of your bills and if so, which bills?" Once the application has been received, the volunteers at the Vale [Pantry](#) telephone the applicant [to gather](#) a few more details. Then, as soon as the

application has been approved, the new member can come into the pantry for their first shop. All they have to do is make a contribution of £6, and once they've paid that, they can fill their shopping bag with [produce](#) up to a value of around £60. The best part is that they can choose what they want to take home, just like in a normal supermarket, as Jones explains. **Carole Jones:** The way that we work in our pantry is that everything in the pantry is either red, or it's green, or it's free. So the red items tend to be the more expensive items. So they could be large blocks of cheese, they could be large [jars](#) of coffee, they could be packets of [mince](#), chicken, pork... All sorts of things like that. So we say you can have any two reds and then any twelve greens. And the greens are going to be things like the packets, the tins, the cereal, the sugar [and so on and so forth](#). But the free items — free items is good — so free is all the fruit and vegetables, unlimited, [sanitary wear](#), a couple of toilet rolls, bread and if we get a bit of a [glut](#) on something, like at the moment we are swimming in fabulous chocolate [florentines](#), then they can have as many of those as they like!

EXPERT ADVICE

The Vale [Pantry](#) is much more than a local shop, as members can also get expert [advice](#) on a variety of issues. This combination of practical help and the restoration of dignity and a sense of community is a solution beneficial to both mental and physical health, says Jones, and there are now local pantries in more than sixty-five communities around the UK. **Carole Jones:** So we have a direct line into the Citizen's Advice Bureau, so if somebody needs some help in restructuring debt, if they need help in [sorting out](#) their [benefits](#)... Anything like that, we will sort [it] out with them. And then we also look at what else we can do. So, for example, we found that when we first started we were really surprised at the number of families [that] we had with autistic children, or children with very high additional needs. We just couldn't believe how many we were [coming across](#). And what we were finding was that mums were really quite stressed. Invariably, they're single mums as well. So the marriage has broken down, and they were not able to work, or if they were it was [haphazard](#) and half the time they couldn't work.

Invariably they're on medication, anti-depressants. So we set up a support group for mums that meet every week. www.valepantry.co.uk

Glossary

- **form** = formulario
- **to gather** = raccogliere
- **produce** = prodotti agricoli
- **mince** = carne macinata
- **advice** = consiglio
- **dairy** = latticini
- **run** = gestire
- **run out** = rimanere senza
- **to cut back** = ridurre
- **cupboard** = credenza
- **oven** = forno
- **filling in** = compilare
- **sanitary wear** = articoli per l'igiene
- **coming across** = imbattersi
- **wage** = salario
- **To tackle** = affrontare
- **parcels** = pacchetti
- **encourage** = incoraggiare
- **jars** = barattoli
- **and so on and so forth** = eccetera, e via dicendo
- **florentines** = biscotti fiorentini
- **benefits** = prestazioni, sussidi
- **relief** = sollievo
- **to keep on top of things** = mantenere il controllo
- **glut** = eccesso
- **sorting out** = risolvere
- **Soaring** = in rapido aumento
- **tinned** = in scatola
- **sharply** = bruscamente, improvvisamente
- **rate** = valutare
- **cookery** = cucina
- **haphazard** = disordinato
- **Pantry** = dispensa

- **suit** = adattare
- **make ends meet** = far quadrare i conti
- **recipe** = ricetta