

Purton Community Fridge

Well what can I say apart from I'm so, so pleased with how Purton's Community Fridge has been received by everyone in the village.

It's been a huge learning curve for me as Fridge coordinator as I knew nothing about how a Community Fridge was to be set up and run. I'm a regular volunteer in Pips Cafe and I'd overheard a customer's conversation with Mary wondering if Purton would benefit having a community fridge. Dave had made some enquiries and had downloaded a brief information booklet from Hubbub, the company who supports and promotes community fridges within the UK.

This was the starting point and I made the brave decision of volunteering to be the Community Fridge coordinator and take on the task of setting up the community fridge for Purton, after all how hard could it be? Surely it's just a case of getting a fridge, putting food in it and away we go right??

A community fridge's main purpose is to save still eatable surplus foods and gluts from going to waste and eventually ending up in our landfills. It's a public space that enables food to be shared within a community. They work on a basic premise of 'take what you will use and leave what you won't'. Community fridges are free and open to everyone and aim to fight food waste by connecting communities. You don't need a referral or any means testing. Basically if there's food in the fridge then take it and use it or it'll go in the bin!

A list of 'to do's' had to be made and put in order of what needed to be done first.

A meeting was arranged with Lindsey to see if we could situate the fridge within the Silver Threads entrance lobby. Once that was agreed, a grant was needed to be able to purchase the said fridge! I approached John Simpson from Hospitality Services who have helped Pips Cafe with several catering items in the past and once a quote was agreed for a suitable fridge a grant form was submitted to Purton Parish Council asking for the necessary funds. I nervously waited for a reply, but didn't have to wait long however when the grant applied for was agreed by the Parish Council and the fridge purchase was made, the project was finally off the ground! I was thrilled!

Hubbub provide guidelines of what is needed to be done before the fridge can even receive any food which included; recruiting volunteers, food donations, MONEY, public liability insurance for the fridge, volunteer training, a hygiene rating for the fridge, a HACCP, a risk assessment, printing and signage, cleaning equipment, weighing equipment...this list was very long and it was fairly overwhelming at this point! I came to a bit of a standstill and wondered if I'd bitten off more than I can chew.

This is the point at which Lynn (treasurer) and my husband Karl (health & safety) came on board. Lynn gave me the support I needed to get my head around tackling the endless list of official stuff and grey areas that we had to wade through, and Karl had lots of experience in the health and safety area and gave us great advice.

We gradually acquired a list of willing fridge volunteers which was amazing!

And through social media Lynn and I made contact and met up with several volunteers from two other community fridges in Malmesbury and Devizes to swap tips, support and valuable, helpful information. Our list of 'to do's' was gradually getting smaller and smaller until we were at a stage of making enquiries as to who was going to supply the fridge with our surplus foods.

It was at this point that a Just Giving page was created for the Community Fridge as we needed funds to buy public liability insurance, cleaning equipment and volunteer training etc. We set our goal for £300 and managed to raise a staggering £550 in the end! Plus an offer of free graphic design from a kind small local business in the village. We were overwhelmed by everyone's generosity, we were speechless.

A community bank account was created by Lynn and I and the necessary purchases were made.

I had a meeting with Coop's food member pioneers Sherry and Lexi who help and give advice and support to people like us who are setting up projects like the Community Fridge, and also Leanne who manages Purton's Coop. Leanne was totally supportive of the fridge project and agreed to let us have four collections of their surplus best before foods per week.

Rowie from Purton House Organics also kindly agreed to support the fridge too with a lovely large fresh produce donation from their organic farm once a week.

So, we had a space with a fridge, volunteers, all red tape stuff done, bank account, cleaning stuff, posters, health and safety stuff done, food hygiene rating (of 5 stars by the way!!) promise of surplus food..all we needed now was an open day!

We decided on a 'soft launch' to begin with, this gives us all time to iron out any snags and also enables the volunteers to create a routine with collections and fridge cleans before our official launch.

We have been 'open' a full fortnight now and I can totally say that it has been a massive success!! We've had some incredible surplus food donations from the Coop and Purton House Organics and last week we had zero food waste too, a brilliant first week! We also now have a tall bookcase beside the fridge we use as our larder area and any surplus store cupboard foods can be placed on here. This includes foods that someone may have in their cupboards at home that may have been bought a while ago with all good intentions but they have never been used. We can even accept tinned, packet, boxed or jar foods that are past their best before dates so long as they're sealed. We can not however accept any foods that are past their use by dates but if they're in date and sealed we can.

We have had lots of lovely fruit and vegetable donations from local gardens and allotments, cartons of sealed and in date milk left over from an event from St Mary's school in Purton, a wheelbarrow full of butternut squashes from someone's allotment, unopened cartons of baby milk well within best before date, 15 loaves of in date surplus bread left over from a Brownie camp and a large bagful of sealed in date nutritional 'build up' drinks that cannot be returned to a pharmacy to name a few of our valuable surplus food donations which would've otherwise have been wasted.

Purton has several Ukrainian families staying within the community and the fridge and larder shelves have been a valuable source of extra foods to bolster their food bank days. There's been plenty of fresh seasonal beetroot too which I know has been put to good use when making borscht!

We've had a steady supply of various store cupboard foods that if you put your mind to it would create a three course meal for two! We have had visitors using the fridge from other areas too, customers who are visiting Pips Cafe or visiting friends and family in the village and general passers by. We have set up a Community Fridge Facebook page which interacts with our followers on a daily basis with updates of what's available in the fridge and larder. We post recipes on the Facebook

page for people to try so the gluts of certain items can be taken and used...like bananas...courgettes or butternut squashes! ☐

We have a makeshift notice board available to display notices like school uniform swaps, location of the nearest food bank and local goings on. We have a supply of donated bags for life to re use incase someone would like to take and use a few items.

We still need to convert a few people to use the fridge and larder who are still struggling with the fact we are not a food bank or that they can't take these foods for free for fear of denying anyone else. I'm sure the word will eventually get around but we welcome anyone and everyone to use the fridge who have previously had doubts.

Looking to the future we'd love some help from the Area Board to hopefully obtain a grant to purchase a community freezer. We think this would also be a fantastic benefit to the community! Bread seems to be a big surplus food item and if we had a freezer this could be used this to prolong the life of these bakery items. We could also accept freezable meat products and chilled items that are on their last use by dates. A few adjustments to the fridge/lobby area would be required for a freezer to be positioned; a radiator and fuse box reposition and a long coat hook removal would be needed. Plus the area would need to be made good.

We'd also like to produce a simple soft backed community fridge recipe booklet filled with easy to make recipes using gluts or ingredients we often get from the fridge. Recipes that come from the community that have certain memories attached to them; Nan's fruit crumble recipe, Mum's soup recipes, Aunty Ethel's chocolate banana cakes, Dad's fruit smoothies and such. Funding towards the printing of this booklet would be needed.

A new extra large community notice board would be fabulous! Even if it's a second hand one, the makeshift one we are currently using in the lobby are is ok, but could be better. Again, one to be added to the Area Grant grant wish list! 😊

Lastly, none of this would be possible if it wasn't for the group of our wonderful Community it's Fridge volunteers (aka Food Waste Heroes!).

Big, massive thank you to all of them!

