

Malmesbury and District Food Bank.

Why in Malmesbury .

Despite the prosperous surroundings that we are fortunate to live in there is a significant level of hardship that many people do not recognise as it tends to occur in small numbers. Organisations that deal with children, older people and those on various benefits report a number of disturbing cases and this number is rising. Examples include school welfare workers reporting children coming to school in need of food, young people “sofa surfing” and not being in a position to feed themselves, people making the decision whether to pay the rent, heat the house or feed the family. Churches Together in Malmesbury have run a Christmas voucher project for many years, this has usually benefited about 30 families (as identified by school welfare workers) this number jumped to 65 for Christmas 2013.

Who is it for.

There appears to be a wide range of people that use food banks. Many are on benefits of one sort or another and many are on zero hours contracts or in irregular work. It seems that any changes to either their work patterns or benefit situation causes an inordinate amount of disruption and results in food (and other) crisis. Illness is involved in a significant amount of food bank usage nationally. Although many vouchers have been issued to people in our community figures that identify specific causes for specific cases are not available.

What Area Will it Cover.

The intention is that whilst the food bank will be open to any person with a valid voucher, there will be a concentration on an area roughly defined as Hullavington to Kemble and Minety to Luckington. Initially the food bank will cover the area from its’ base but once established the intention is that volunteers in the outlying areas will be able to hold emergency packs in the larger villages and that there will be people willing to deliver packs in exceptional cases.

Who is Running the Food Bank Project

The project is a joint venture between Churches Together in Malmesbury and eRotary. The steering group represents this. The key partnership that has been signed up is between the Trussell Trust and the food bank. The TT are involved in well over 400 food banks nationwide and provide a support service that is valued by food banks – particularly in the early days. There is an initial charge and annual fees are payable to work with the trust.

How Will it Operate

Partner organisations are being signed up to operate with the food bank. These professional organisations are vital as it is these organisations that will be in a position to identify people in need of help. Having identified a person or family in food crisis a voucher will be issued and this voucher will be redeemed for a food parcel. In this way it is not those manning the food bank that make the judgement about need, but a professional person usually with knowledge of the case. Those organisations currently interested in being part of the partnership include :- the police, green square housing, the children’s centre, social services, citizens advice bureau, local clergy, the doctors surgery etc.

A secondary but vital part of the food bank activity is that of signposting clients to agencies that are able to help them out of the crisis in which they find themselves. This will include organisations such as the Jobcentre network, Social Services, Housing Agencies, Doctors surgeries etc etc.

What Is Money Needed For, Who is Helping.

The food bank is being set up in an old store attached to the URC church and this has required upgrading – new roof, new electrics, plastering decorating and shelving. Some of this has been achieved using voluntary labour but never the less there are costs associated with the work. Joining the Trussell Trust will cost £1500 and there will be expenses associated with set up such as insurance etc. The food bank requires kitting out with suitable furniture and computer set up. There is a probability that an initial sum will need to be spent on a stock of food supplies until donations reach an adequate level.

Grants have been received from Malmesbury Carnival Committee and CTiM. Applications for grants have been made to numerous local charities including League of Friends, Old Corporation, Jack Lane Trust etc. Results of these applications are eagerly awaited and the feedback has initially been positive.

Timescale Involved and Progress So Far.

A public meeting was held in the middle of January. Approximately 50 people attended and the outcome was

- a) agreement that a food bank is required in Malmesbury,
- b) a database of volunteers interested in helping with the food bank. These people came from a wide range of backgrounds and with different skill sets.
- c) a steering group to progress the project – Chair Ray Sanderson, Sec Richard Payler, Treasurer Mike Langtree plus 4 co-opted members.

The URC has agreed that the old stores can be used for the food bank (rent free) and this has been undergoing refurbishment – hopefully complete by the time of this meeting.

Agreement has been reached with the Trussell Trust and volunteers are being matched to the roles that require filling. Training is being designed and delivered for the volunteers.

Registration to become a charity is being processed.

The opening is planned for early June.