

Rural Action Derbyshire: Feeding Derbyshire Community Food Projects

Monitoring and Evaluation Report 2026

Feeding Derbyshire Community Pantries Members Feedback Survey

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Monitoring and Evaluation Report 2026:

Feeding Derbyshire Community Pantries Members Feedback Survey

Background, Context and Purpose

In 2023/24, the pilot phase of Feeding Derbyshire Community Pantries project was evaluated (Rural Action Derbyshire, 2024)); it included feedback from service users gathered from a postcard survey which provided a rich data source on the beneficial outcomes of community pantries, additional to accessing affordable food, which are not always captured by routine data collection.

In February 2026, as part of monitoring the Feeding Derbyshire (FD) Service Level Agreement, the Feeding Derbyshire team adapted and repeated the postcard survey to provide a snapshot of members views and experiences.

Context: Summary of information needed for FD Service Level Agreement

- How are community food projects helping people/what support do they provide?
- What benefits/impact do people identify?
- What do community pantry members say about their experience?
- How often do people use community food projects, specifically pantries?

Purpose: Aims of the User Feedback Survey

- Find out about the experience of people using community food projects in the Feeding Derbyshire network, specifically, community pantries.
- Collect information from people using community pantries which can be used to evaluate outcomes, impact, and effectiveness of the service/provision.
- Track data trends, where possible, from previous evaluations and surveys.
- Provide information to support the monitoring of the Feeding Derbyshire Service Level Agreement.
- Collate information to continue the development and improvement of community food provision across the Feeding Derbyshire network.

What We Did? Survey Approach

Overview

Based on the previous approach the survey involved a postcard survey to collect Community Pantries user views.

Questions were designed to generate numerical data and also qualitative feedback; these were tailored to a community pantry context and adapted from the 2023 survey. The fixed responses were reduced to 10 questions with space for free comments. (Appendix 1: Survey Questions)

The period for data collection was 2 weeks in February 2026; this was considered sufficient to provide a snapshot of usage and experiences amongst .community pantry members.

Sampling Strategy: Purposive non-randomised sampling

Five locations were selected from the current cohort of community pantries and included three pantries that were surveyed previously. This approach was agreed as a way of gathering information from longer established and also newer pantries, and to enable the FD team to carry out basic comparisons by looking at trends since the 2023 survey.

Sample Response Rate

Each pantry sampled received 100 postcards to distribute to members during the survey period. Response rate target was 35% based on the previous survey carried out as part of the evaluation of the Community Pantries pilot in 2023/24.

The 2026 survey achieved 37.4% (187 responses from 500 postcards distributed). In statistical research terms, this is a good return, but it should be noted that over 40% of the responses came from just one pantry established in 2025.

Analysis and Interpretation

The quantitative and qualitative data gathered were analysed using different methods before combining them for this report:

- Quantitative data from the postcards' fixed responses were collated into a spreadsheet and anonymised to produce visual representations of the findings.
- Qualitative data from the free comments were analysed using a manual colour coding system, allowing them to be grouped into themes and reported as a narrative.

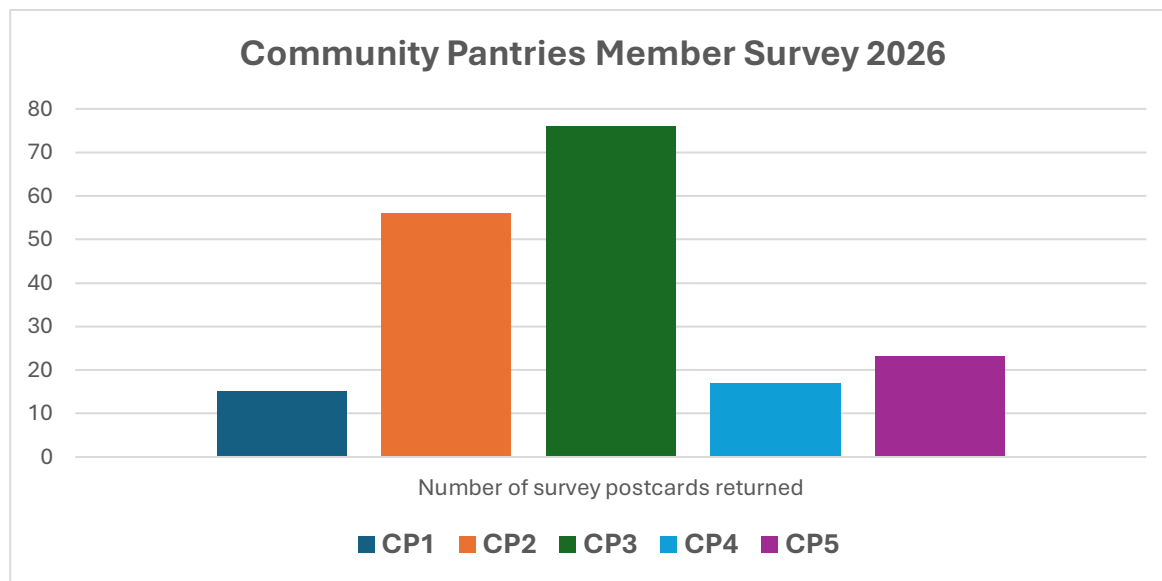
The combination of these data provides a rich and comprehensive picture of the experiences of the community pantry members and the impact the facilities have on their daily lives and personal wellbeing.

What People Said? Survey Findings: Fixed Responses

Overview

In total 187 postcards were returned; the distribution across the five pantries in the sample is shown in Figure.1. Over 40% of the responses were generated from CP3; CP2 and CP3 combined accounted for over 70%, with the remaining 30% spread across the other 3 locations in the sample.

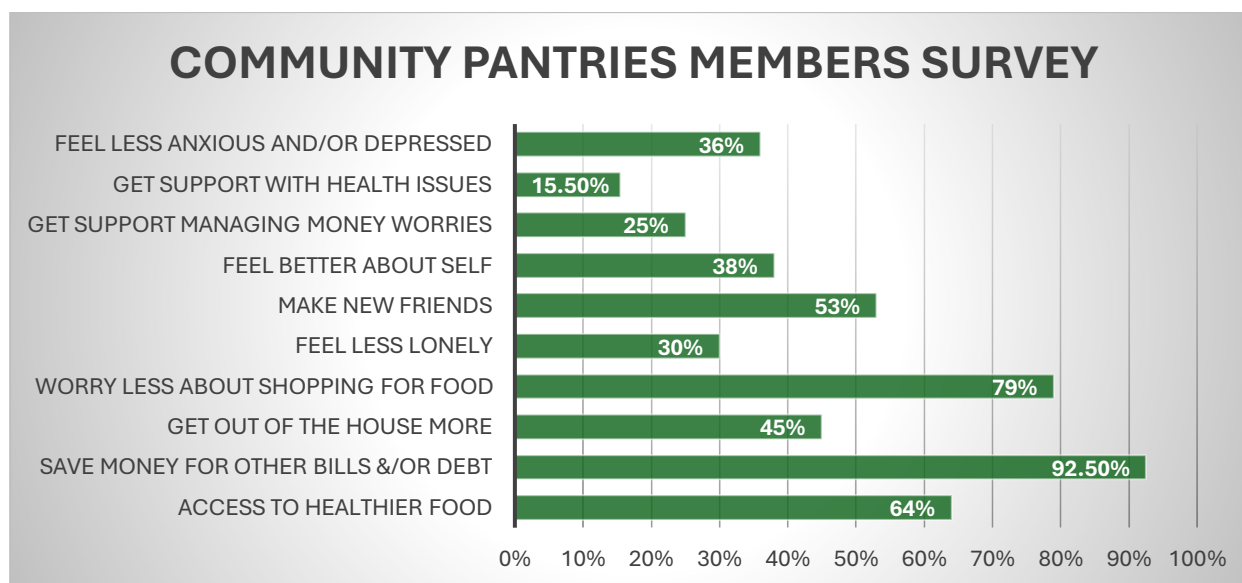
Figure. 1.



Headlines

Responses from the whole sample were combined to provide an overview of the pantry members views and experiences across the five locations.

Figure 2.



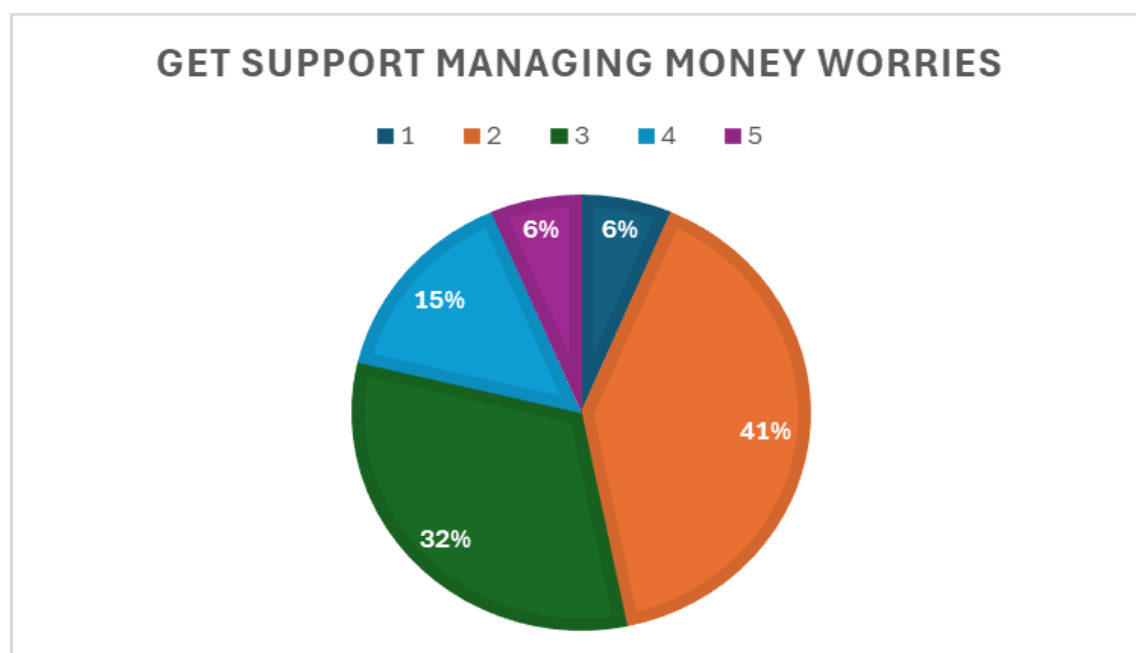
As a starting point, Figure. 2. shows that over 90% of pantry members (n=173) are saving money for bills and paying off debts; this is considerably higher than the finding of the 2023/24 Pilot Evaluation, where 66% stated this as a positive benefit. It is probable that this increase is linked to the continued cost-of-living crisis.

A high proportion of pantry members (79%) confirmed that, since joining the pantry, they worry less about shopping for food; with 36% reporting that they are feeling less anxious and depressed in general. The responses also illustrate that pantry members experience wider mental and emotional health benefits related social interaction, for example, making friends (53% n=99) and getting out of the house more (45% n=84), resulting in them feeling less lonely (30% n=56). These findings are similar to those in the 2023/24 FDCP evaluation (RAD 2024)

Almost two thirds of the pantry members surveyed identified that the community pantries gave them access to food that helps them to eat more healthily (64% n=119). This is significantly higher than the finding in 2023/24 (46%), suggest that there may be a greater availability of healthier items, particularly fruit and vegetable, which is having a positive impact on the food choices and usage by pantry members. Some of these issues were further explored in the free responses completed by just over 80% of the members surveyed; these findings are reported in the next section.

One area worthy of further examination is the additional support provided by the community pantry to the members . For example. when asked about support managing money worries, the collective responses across all five pantries, indicated that just a quarter (25%) of pantry members surveyed felt they get this support. However, members report that they experience practical financial benefits from using the pantry, as well as emotional impacts on wellbeing.

Figure 3.



It is notable that when the overall response rate is broken down by pantry there are significant differences in the distribution of the results. The results are presented anonymously to maintain

confidentiality in the context of small sampling and numbers. However, this issue warrants further, discrete, exploration to better understand the support available across all pantries, the uptake by pantry members, and their perceptions of how these services contribute to the benefits they mention in other parts of the survey.

What People Said? Survey Findings: Free Responses

Free Response Common Themes

The free response section of the postcard survey elicited significant feedback from the members; of the 187 survey respondents, 150 people took the time and trouble to add their own comments, which suggests the high value they place on the community pantry they use. The free responses provide a qualitative insight into the user experience and personal impact of the community pantries; the material was analysed and grouped into four main themes:

- Financial Wellbeing, including food poverty and insecurity
- Food Choice and Healthy Eating
- Community Pantry Ethos, Staff and Volunteers
- Mental and Emotional Well-being, including isolation and loneliness

These are explored in detail below.

Impact on Financial Wellbeing, Food Poverty and Insecurity

Perhaps unsurprisingly, community pantry members frequently report the positive impact of having access to affordable and nutritious food. The direct quotations below, reveal the extent to which some pantry members are experiencing the brutal end of food poverty and insecurity.

“Able to eat decent meals after struggling so my brothers could eat”

“I would literally (literally) struggle (struggle) for meals without it – thank you”

“Helped in desperate times when I have been hungry and not had money to have eaten otherwise”

It should be noted that, with the legacy of the cost-of-living crisis being further impacted by current global events, circumstances of community pantry members may worsen in the coming months.

In contrast, there is uplifting feedback about how the community pantries help members to save on food shopping and redirect their income into other household bills, paying off debt, and alleviating adverse personal circumstances.

“helps my finances go further” “helped with food shop after hardship”

“I always have something in my pantry now”

“great help ... so I can pay more on bills”

“my dad is disabled so money is tight, so coming here really helps”

The wealth of feedback about the support given to alleviate financial worries, indicates that the community pantries continue to impact on wider financial wellbeing of individuals and families across Derbyshire; the free responses concur with the quantitative data.

Food Choice and Healthy Eating - ***“I can cook food that is good for me”***

Overall, Members provide positive feedback on the range and choice of food produce, particularly the availability of free fruit and vegetables, and healthy options. Many respondents linked this to eating more healthily and several expressed the view that this helped them encourage their children to eat fruit and vegetables,

“gets the kids eating fruit”

People reported that they feel that their diet and health has improved because of shopping at the pantries, and that they,

“tried things (I’m) not used to”

and also, “I try new food so my diet is better, and my health has improved”

There were a couple of comments about limited choice at the end of opening hours or on certain days (n=2). Also, references to pantries opening before the advertised opening hours which sometimes impacted on choice and availability of items (n=2). And finally, that some opening days had more choice than others.

There was positive feedback about provision for people with special dietary needs, including gluten-free and dairy-free, with specific gratitude for gluten-free items referred to as costly in mainstream supermarkets.

Ethos of Community Pantry; Staff and Volunteers – ***“Simply Lovely!”***

Overwhelmingly, the members commented that staff and volunteers were welcoming, warm and friendly, remarking that,

“there’s always a smile” “I always look forward to coming ..”

and “always have a chat”

Members felt that volunteers and staff were helpful, specifically commenting that there was no judgement and that they were kind and caring,

“make us feel that we are real and valued people”

Others remarked positively on the cleanliness and organisation of the pantry environment, which suggests that standards are good and not seen as second-rate. There was a strong sense that the community pantries create a ‘community feeling’ by being local, and places which are warm and welcoming to all, with members liking the familiarity and the opportunity to build friendships.

“I love the pantry because of its hospitality, it brings people together”

“Real gem of a place”

“I love the warmth of the place”

The comments build a vivid picture of the very personal experiences of some of the members, and one in particular stood out because the member mentioned their inability to use supermarkets

Mental and Emotional Well-being – ***“There is No Shame!”***

The feedback written on the postcards conveys the powerful impact of the community pantries on the mental wellbeing of members that use them regularly. Some of these benefits were identified in relation to financial worries mentioned above; with people reporting feeling less worried about money and household bills, as well as feeling better able to manage their finances. All of which help to strengthen mental and emotional wellbeing.

Other mental health benefits were stated in terms of the social and emotional support that members get by becoming part of a community pantry, contributing significantly to reducing their isolation and sense of loneliness.

Some pantry members identified that the facility offered an opportunity for getting out of the house, stating that it helped with,

“meeting new people instead of being in the bungalow more”,

And ... “I live on my own, I like to get out of the house.”

Linked to this the is the impact on reducing loneliness and isolation, with several comments that:

“You’re never alone”

“It has helped me feel less lonely”

And, “enjoy the company”.

Members stated that going to the pantry helped them meet new people, and that these are, “nice people” with a specific reference to, ***“people with same problems”***, suggesting that knowing others have similar issues is important to some members.

There is a correlation with earlier comments, explored under the Ethos theme, about the compassionate and caring approach taken by staff and volunteers. The feedback indicates that staff and volunteers provide a supportive environment, which is essential for everyone visiting the pantries, but vital for people with emotional fragility.

This demonstrates where themes interrelate; as mentioned above, some people noted that they felt comfortable going to their pantry because,

“ there is no shame”

This suggests that pantries have been successful in reducing the stigma often associated with food insecurity , possibly because of the approach of the staff and volunteers, based on comments that they treat members, ***‘like real... people’*** , *which makes them feel valued.*

This is significant in terms of promoting mental well-being and resilience, and because shame and embarrassment can be a factor preventing people accessing support when they are vulnerable and need it the most. This highlight that members view their community pantries as a safe and non-judgemental support system, which is a testimony to the character and approach of the staff and volunteers.

In all, there is clear evidence that, not only do the community pantries continue to address the SLA measures, but there are wider public health outcomes in relation to mental wellbeing, social isolation, and loneliness, which are not only key indicators of poor-quality health (Sherman, et al, 2024) but also life expectancy (World Health Organization, 2025).

Their Overall Impressions

In addition to the main themes, there were some common words used by members from across all the community pantries, which capture the essence of these well-regarded facilities in the Feeding Derbyshire network.



Conclusions

- ❖ The material collected by the members survey is both credible and emotive, offering insight into how a community pantry can have significant wider impact on the health and wellbeing of people affected by financial hardship, food poverty and food insecurity week-on-week
- ❖ The findings are from a purposive sample of community pantry members, however, it is reasonable to assume that the experiences of service users in the sample are reflective of those in other geographical location in the wider Feeding Derbyshire Network of community pantries.
- ❖ The findings build a compelling picture of the user experience across community pantries in the Feeding Derbyshire Network; the qualitative feedback provides a detailed narrative on the important role of community pantries at a very human and sometimes emotive level
- ❖ The findings reflect the challenging economic conditions that have prevailed for over 5 years, this is evident in both the statistical analysis of the fixed responses and the individual comments.
- ❖ The feedback on the kind and caring ethos of the community pantries is powerful, and members comments show a heartfelt appreciation for the support they receive, and also the compassionate manner in which this is given.
- ❖ Alongside this, the findings show that community pantry member place considerable value on the social and emotional support provided by community pantries, with particular emphasis on reducing/alleviating loneliness and isolation. This resonates with contemporary research into social isolation as a cause of ill-health and reduced life expectancy (WHO, 2025; Sherman, et al, 2024).
- ❖ The findings suggest that the community pantries have maintained and built on their capacity to encourage healthier eating through the availability and promotion of healthier options.
- ❖ The findings highlight a disconnect between the positive impact that community pantries are having on financial wellbeing and the link with additional services offering specific support on money worries. This requires further examination to understand the reason for this and to look at the variations across different pantries.

What Now? What Next?

Recommendations/Considerations for Future Action.

Key Themes for Future Investigation

- ❖ Further investigation of the benefits to mental and emotional health, with specific focus on social isolation and loneliness, which is a recurring theme in the free responses.
- ❖ Further examination of the 'additional support' offered by community pantries to better understand the comparatively low uptake and perception of the benefits of the support available, along with a deeper look at the variations reported across different pantry locations.

Measuring Social Value

- ❖ Apply Social Value calculations to the outcomes that are evidenced in both quantitative and qualitative data from this survey, to attribute a financial value to the holistic benefits that members report. This would help to demonstrate the financial efficacy of the community pantries in the medium to longer term.

Targeted Case Studies

- ❖ Consider conducting a small number of in-depth interviews to produce case studies, rather than a universal approach to surveying members views.
- ❖ Whilst there are risks to this approach, for example, handpicking resulting in respondent bias, members' unwillingness to engage or disclose information; however, if the intention is to drill down into the user experience then risks can be managed to ensure a credible research/evaluation process.

Specific Project delivery/development issues:

- ❖ Consider how to support community pantries with the specific delivery issues highlighted by the survey.
- ❖ A few pantry members identified issues with opening times and availability of consistent supply; some suggested staggering opening times and holding back supplies to ensure all members have similar products available to them whatever time they visit the community pantry.

Sources of Information

Maynard, N, and Tweedie, F. (2021) ***Your Local Pantry: Dignity, Choice, Hope Social impact report 2021*** <https://www.yourlocalpantry.co.uk/media/lfvhl0o/pantries-impact-report-2021.pdf>

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Sherman DW, Alfano AR, Alfonso F, Duque CR, Eiroa D, Marrero Y, Muñecas T, Radcliffe-Henry E, Rodriguez A, Sommer CL. ***A Systematic Review of the Relationship between Social Isolation and Physical Health in Adults***. Healthcare (Basel). 2024 Jun 1;12(11):1135. [A Systematic Review of the Relationship between Social Isolation and Physical Health in Adults - PMC](#)

World Health Organization (WHO) (2025) ***Social Isolation and loneliness have serious impacts: Infographic*** [Social isolation and loneliness have serious impacts](#) <https://www.who.int/multi-media/details/social-isolation-and-loneliness-have-serious-impacts>

Appendix 1: FDCP Members Survey Questions

Question No.	Question Topic
1	Access to healthier food
2	Save money for other bills &/or debt
3	Get out of the house more
4	Worry less about shopping for food
5	Feel less lonely
6	Make new friends
7	Feel better about self
8	Get support managing money worries
9	Get support with health issues
10	Feel less anxious and/or depressed