

In a Shropshire town, a young church member's idea to help people with shopping has seen more than 1,000 answered calls for practical support for the vulnerable and isolated.

Shifnal Help launched the week before lockdown as St Andrew's Church, brought together a community partnership to launch an emergency phone line for local people who were self-isolating. Two months later, today it now operates a helpline six days a week offering support, medication collection and delivery, shopping and other key tasks – with the local pub becoming a food donations hub.

Shifnal Vicar, The Revd Preb Chris Thorpe reveals: "It all started with one young mum from church called Elizabeth, who posted an offer to help people with shopping!"

To recruit volunteers, the Outreach Enabler, Catherine Rogers, had "helped to set up a GDPR compliant database, so that people could register for help securely. She trained a team of people to receive calls and another team to allocate jobs" he explained, and "80 people came forward and offered to help".

"When people have been unable to pay for food, we have supplied food parcels and purchased particular things needed. A local pub, The White Hart, has become our base for food donations. It has been an amazing privilege to work with such a dedicated and highly motivated team and to see that we could make a real difference."

The helpline is based at St Andrew's Church Office, with the venture supported by other local churches and organisations including the local school's PTFA, The Coop, Shifnal Matters and Royal British Legion.

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