



s of food clubs, or low cost food shops, run by Church of England

Food pantries or clubs run from eight Church of England churches in Wigan as well as a school playground and a library in the town now have nearly 3,000 members.

The clubs operate by charging a small annual membership and a £3 fee per shop for 15 items, including fresh food as well as tinned items, sourced from surplus supermarket food, food that is bought in and donated items.

The clubs, with varying opening hours from several days a week to once a week for a couple of hours, have hosted more than 20,000 shopping visits over the past year and now have 2,700 members. The clubs are estimated to have made an overall saving for shoppers of £446,000 over the past year.

When open, the clubs offer a 'warm space' too aimed at helping people struggling with energy bills, offering light refreshments and board games and activities.



Rev Catherine Cosslett, who oversees the work of the Wigan churches in providing food, said: "There has been another big increase in the use of the food pantries compared to the year before and we have noticed different people coming in to use the pantries.

"We looked at the figures and found that £446,000 overall has been saved by shoppers over the past year. That is a massive amount.

"We asked people what their perceptions were of the food pantries (or food clubs) and they said overwhelmingly that they felt part of a community. So many people who have come into the shops have gone on to become volunteers.

"There is dignity in the shops and people can walk round and choose what they want from the shelves. The warm spaces are also helping promote a sense of community and friendship amongst people who might never have met otherwise.

"In doing this work, the churches are motivated by a love of Jesus and a wish to reach out to share that love of Jesus with others."

The churches taking part in the food clubs and warm spaces include:

- St Aidan's, Holy Trinity Downhall Green, St Thomas, St Nathaniel, St James, Christchurch, St Stephen's, St Anne's churches. There is also an occasional food club in a school playground and a weekly food club in a library in the town
- The Wigan food clubs were developed as part of a larger food security project supported by Church Urban Fund's Together Network and Feeding Britain, with the first clubs opening in 2019 with support from Wigan Council. Some membership fees are paid by Wigan Council.
- The warm spaces are also supported by Wigan Council.

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