



Best Start and Smile Pantry

Food Poverty Action Aberdeen
July 2020

The Best Start and Smile Pantry offers a unique shopping opportunity for families with young children who are eligible for Best Start Foods

CFINE, working with the alliance and other partners, has opened a Best Start and Smile Community Food Pantry where members can access good quality, nutritious fresh, frozen and ambient food for £2.50 a week with a typical shopping being worth £20 plus.

Food Power funding provided us with card readers for the anticipated need when, in Scotland, Healthy Start vouchers moved to Best Start Cards. This transition was not without problems, but our NHS partners offered advice and help with registration and problem solving. Pantry members are using their Best Start Debit Cards to purchase fruit, vegetables and pulses from the CFINE enterprise.

Although we cannot comment on local figures (Scotland does not publish this data like other nations), there has been a steady increase in the uptake of Best Start Foods since the Pantry opened and we began the campaign to increase knowledge and uptake of the Best Start Foods, increasing income and opportunities for our members.

“The Best Start and Smile Pantry “has enabled us to work directly with the public, something that we don’t always get the opportunity to do, and to work in closer partnership with a third sector organisation.”

Carole-Anne Duff, NHS Health Professional



Shirley-Anne Somerville, MSP Cabinet Secretary for Social Security Scotland, visiting the pantry and speaking to Rowanne, one of our young ladies who comes to play while her mum shops and enjoys a cuppa.

This activity was assisted by financial support and other advice from Food Power.
www.foodpower.org.uk



Our challenges and learning

We realised early on that the pantry would be harder to set up than we had anticipated. The physical changes to the building were timely and expensive, and while volunteer recruitment was initially easy, we then realised that the volunteer hours required far exceeded the Pantry opening times and we needed to re-recruit. The Pantry became such a benefit to members and partners in getting their message across that NHSG, Childsmile and Aberdeen City Council Communities team permitted staff to be in residence fortnightly, not only to provide information, advice and assistance but to also volunteer as required, including stacking shelves and helping shoppers.

Member recruitment was a challenge with the Best Start and Smile Pantry target group focussed on families with young children eligible for Best Start Foods living in the AB11, Torry area of Aberdeen. Initially we recruited from the Food Bank, members moving on to a better way to provide for their families with more choice, 'a step up'! There was a huge Torry-wide promotional campaign with the schools, nurseries, GPs, etc. and we held two information sessions at venues in or beside schools, but these were poorly attended. However, as word got around, members began to appear and membership increased to 60 in March. NHSG have met with Health Visitor and midwife managers to include the Pantry in their information pack in the future.

Cooking classes and a training programme were developed in consultation with members, however, an on-site creche was required for members to attend. This took time to organise but with the help of Aberlour Child Care Services we were able to provide a free creche run by a registered childcare provider and 3-4 volunteers. The classes were greatly received, offering members a break from their children while learning new skills and cooking healthy, affordable, tasty recipes. Volunteers, staff and members attended Oral Health Training.

Our next steps

The Best Start and Smile Community Food Pantry, with funding from the Scottish Government Oral Health Challenge Fund, will continue to develop over the next two years. Working closely with health and dental professionals, our aim is to reduce dental decay in Primary 1 children by offering help to access a dentist and providing oral health training and products. NHSG will continue to support us with their expertise and time around Best Start Foods. The SAFE team will provide information, advice and assistance, maximising income and hopefully alleviating stress. The Student Law Association will offer information and referrals for members. Volunteers will continue to grow in expertise as they are trained and work with the members. As we grow, so will the range of skills, experience and services that can add value to the Best Start and Smile Community Food Project.

Covid-19 update: In March CFINE and the Pantry closed due to lockdown but we immediately started contacting people to ensure they had access to food. Charities, enterprises and the Council came together, with CFINE taking the lead to feed those in food poverty, shielding and isolating, who received emergency food deliveries, including toiletries, baby food and dental products. Support and advice continue to be provided by email, phone or Zoom. We are looking at ways to reopen the Pantry and offer support with minimal contact. Members will now have an allocated time slot, negotiated in advance, with a one-way system inside and queue outside. Temperatures will be taken, and masks will be worn at all times. Fruit and veg orders can be prepared while members shop, and then collected at the pay station and paid for with their BSF card or ordered on-line with home delivery. Training, information sessions and cooking classes may be carried out online, or a Facebook group may be started to share hints, tips and advice to make money and food go further. Zoom or video cooking classes are also in the pipeline.

Key achievements and impact

- Aberdeen as a whole has seen an increase in the uptake of Best Start Vouchers, in the Pantry membership alone there has been an increase of 37%
- Local people in or at risk of food poverty have another option to food banks and the opportunity to buy healthy, affordable shopping whilst sharing with others the benefits of an inviting and supportive space
- Our hopes are that the pantries will expand across the city and Shire, that our members will help to create these and that the alliances we have made along the way continues to be beneficial and help each other to help those in need