



# Cupboard

Bridport's food bank has b...  
 people in the town during...  
 visited on a busy Wednesday...  
 helping those who often h...

**F**or a perfect example of how Bridport responded to the Covid-19 crisis, you need look no further than Cupboard Love, the town's food bank.

Before the start of lockdown, the food bank was operating from three cupboards in St Mary's Church, as it had done for years. People in need would come every Wednesday morning not only to pick up food and toiletries, but also to enjoy coffee and cake and chat to the volunteers. There was a café-style arrangement with a relaxed, friendly atmosphere, and even visiting experts from Citizens Advice, Housing and the mental health field on hand to answer questions. Then, at one o'clock, everything would be tidied away until the following week.

But in mid-March everything changed. Life as we know it suddenly stopped – and the combination of a vast increase in demand and the closure of the church to the public saw Cupboard Love

grow... and grow... and grow.

As the effects of lockdown kicked in, many people who couldn't work from home and weren't furloughed inevitably found themselves struggling to put food on the table. The food bank responded to this demand – and the logistical difficulties posed by the restrictions – by switching to a delivery arrangement. People could phone up and ask for an emergency three-day food parcel, which would be delivered to their home.

“Demand doubled in the first weeks of lockdown,” says Carrie Gamble (pictured top left), who has been the food bank's manager since 2017. “We also lost many of our volunteers, mainly the older team members who were advised to shield so just weren't leaving the house. Luckily the level of donations shot up, too, and new volunteers came forward from the Bridport Coronavirus Community Support group – I just don't know how we'd have managed without them.”

To comply with the new regulations,

St Mary's was totally closed to the public from the start of lockdown (and it's still only open for two hours a week). It was clear that it was going to look very different inside for a while, as donations started to pour in and the food bank spread out over much of the church, volunteers using the pews and floor space to pack parcels and store food with no need to clear up at the end of the day.

“The community proved how incredibly generous it is,” says Carrie. “This was true before Covid, but early in lockdown donations moved up a gear. Local businesses of all sizes have been giving food, and there's been quite a lot from the public, too. People have been going to the shops less, so we've had fewer items coming via the donation boxes in supermarkets, but we've definitely received more gifts of money from individuals.”

National chains Morrisons, Waitrose and Lidl have been making local donations of food, and Carrie lists



All photos by Eddy Pearce

## It all adds up...

In 2019 Cupboard Love provided 1,485 food parcels, which helped to feed 2,130 adults and 778 children in Bridport and the surrounding villages (these figures are for the whole year).

During the Covid-19 lockdown the number of people requesting and needing help increased dramatically. The numbers from the beginning of lockdown in mid-March to the end of July 2020 (four and a half months) are: 661 food parcels, feeding 876 adults and 454 children.

# Food Love: feeding the people

been a lifeline for many  
lockdown. Olivia Daly  
day to meet the team  
have nowhere else to turn

Washingpool Farm, Leakers Bakery and Burton Bradstock Post Office among the smaller businesses that have been sending supplies regularly. The Pilsdon Community, too, has been growing extra vegetables and delivering them to the food bank on Wednesday mornings. Meanwhile, Carrie and her team have used the cash gifts – nearly £100 a week at the height of lockdown – to buy additional fruit and vegetables. They work from a guide to make up the food parcels, with bags for single people, bags for couples and bags for families – plus

their pets, of course – and catering for various dietary needs.

“I haven’t turned any donations away,” says Carrie. “Although demand for the food bank went down slightly after the first peak as some people’s additional benefits started to come through and others went back to work, I know the level of donations will drop at some point, and we have to prepare for an increase in demand later in the year when seasonal work dries up – this happens every year, even without Covid.”

As the restrictions were eased in early July, more volunteers started to come back, albeit in limited numbers to ensure social distancing. People using the food bank were able to come to the church again, too – but only as far as the door, to collect their three-day package of essentials – while the team continued to deliver to people who were shielding. →



# Cupboard Love: feeding the people

continued

Carrie's team of regular volunteers includes Debra Bates (pictured right), who has been working at Cupboard Love for two and a half years. Debra explains that when she retired early from her job in social work, the food bank was the main thing that she wanted to get involved with. "I particularly like it here because there's always a warm, genuine welcome for everybody," she says. "It's a very special place and everyone enjoys being here."

"This pandemic is the most significant thing that's happened in most of our lifetimes, and there's been lots of uncertainty, lots of anxiety. But people trust us – particularly Carrie – and it's been wonderful knowing we have helped to make things better for them."

So what of the future? The economic effects of Covid-19 are likely to be long-lasting, so Cupboard Love is going to be a vital part of many people's support network. Perhaps the most significant challenge it faces is lack of space: once the church is open to the public, and the food bank can no longer take up the whole building, the three cupboards that used to house all the supplies just won't be enough. Organisers are having to look for an alternative base.

But Carrie's not worried about Bridport's generosity drying up. "As the need has grown over the years, so has awareness of food poverty," she says. "We've worked to achieve this locally – such as through the fundraising events we held last November during the 'We Shall Overcome' anti-austerity weekend – and it's happened nationally, too, with more exposure in the media. I believe there's both the demand and supply to ensure Cupboard Love's existence for a while yet: I wish the demand wasn't there, but at least we can fulfil it."



## Capturing Bridport life in lockdown

The beautiful photos in our feature on the food bank were taken by Eddy Pearce and are part of the Bridport Lockdown Project. Created in April to document the experiences of Bridport people during the pandemic, the project asks people to submit photos and explain the stories behind them. "We wanted to give people a positive story-telling outlet at a time when we were particularly focused on how we engage and interact with our community," says Eddy. Ultimately, all the photos and their stories will be added to the Covid-19 archive at the Dorset History Centre. Discover more at [www.bridportlockdown.org](http://www.bridportlockdown.org) plus Facebook and Instagram (search 'Bridport Lockdown').



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