

**Ambleside Parish Centre is a thriving hub in the heart of the Lake District which has taken on a new initiative to involve the community in reducing food waste locally. Working with national charity Fareshare, the Parish Centre is offering a free midday meal every Thursday to 'everyone who eats lunch', by using food which can no longer be sold by local shops.**

**With a terrific network of willing volunteers and a very well equipped kitchen, the Parish Centre is in a great position to take this on.**

## Background

For several years Fareshare has been working hard to engage supermarkets in conversations about what they do with their edible food waste, and to see how it can be used to meet community needs, both social and financial.

Fareshare identify local branches of the biggest grocery retailers and aims to match them with a local community partner who can turn the waste food into tasty meals.

Last year, the Fareshare network provided millions of meals, for lunch clubs, homeless shelters, community centres and children's breakfast clubs and a huge range of charities who prepare food as part of their offer.

The charity is looking for delivery partners in Cumbria, and in August 2017 approached Ambleside Parish Centre Manager, Helen Minton. The centre leapt at the chance and began serving meals to the public in October.

## The Project

By using waste food to offer free meals Ambleside is contributing to a movement of organisations recognising the need to address the paradoxical issues of unsustainable food waste, and increasing levels of food poverty - often in the same community.

Active community members in Ambleside felt so strongly about this that within a week of beginning the conversation they had



*Fareshare lunch on offer at Ambleside Parish Centre*

commitment from four teams of volunteers to prepare food once a week, on a monthly rota.

The team decided to run a month's trial so that each volunteer group could try out their creative cooking skills on volunteer 'lunchers'. As there is no guarantee what sort of food will be available each week, the cook team have to assess, plan and prepare the food quite quickly.

This trial period was invaluable, highlighting that the resources available from the first identified retail partner (Tesco Express) was unable, on its own, to provide the variety of produce needed to create a varied meal.

In the first few weeks the team had mountains of bread and pastries and very little to cook with, so they had to ask around and see what else was available in the community. They approached the local Spar shop and independent grocers, Granny Smith, who were really keen to help with a better mix of produce, including more fruit, vegetables and salad.



*Volunteers serve lunch*

## What has been achieved?

It's still early days but the organisation and commitment of the group suggests a long and happy future for the project - for as long as there is food waste locally to be used.

In their first few weeks the teams have provided between fifteen and twenty-five lunches for people who come for a variety of reasons:

- to support the campaign to reduce food waste;
- to enjoy the social aspect of eating together;
- or because they wouldn't get around to preparing food for themselves, for a host of reasons.

The sharing of a very warm welcome and well prepared food 'until it runs out', is a pleasure to be a part of.

Lunch is free to everyone who joins in. If diners want to make a contribution to support the project, and others like it run by the Parish Centre, they are welcome but under no pressure to do so.

Jacket potatoes, vegetable chilli, chunky soup, warm chocolate croissant and fresh fruit have been on the menu so far.

## The Learning

The philosophy of the Parish Centre in Ambleside is to be 'flexible and forgiving' which gives them the strength to deal with any hiccups along the way.

Centre Manager, Helen Minton, reflects on the success of the project:

- The strength of the volunteer base in Ambleside is really important. The joy of small communities is that you can say to people "This is what we're doing. Do you want to join us? How can you help?".
- In order for this not to be too onerous on any one person, or group, it works well to have a different team of people each week on an monthly rota.
- Additional people are needed to collect the food from the shops, a job which requires a car, and sometimes some awkward lifting.
- The idea is warmly received by many supermarket staff too who hate to see all the food going to waste each week.
- Small supermarkets are unlikely to be able to support this activity on their own so be prepared to find additional ways to make it work. The group has been delighted to involve local independent shops as well as the supermarket.

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For more information about FareShare visit:

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