

Issue No 1 – April 2025

Much loved manager retires after 13 years of loyal service

Many of you who have previously met our newly-retired Manager and founder, Susan Kinnersley, will no doubt have been impressed by her quiet determination and her willingness to contribute to any aspect of our work.

Born in Barnt Green in 1935, Susan lived there with her parents and brother, before moving to Birmingham where her father worked in brass making. Following her education, she trained to be a SRN at Middlesex Hospital for four years, specialising in midwifery. Her experience of working in Brixton and Dulwich in the 1960s was very much a “Call the Midwife” time, arriving by bicycle to deliver the babies at the homes of both the poor and the better off.

Susan developed her training in London becoming both a Home Visitor to whole families, and also a visiting School Nurse. She also worked in hostels for the homeless and the disabled. A year engaged in Public Health nursing in New Zealand, followed by another as a part time tutor, both at St. Thomas’ Hospital, London, and Southampton University, completed an impressive C.V.

Whilst attending Bolton College training to be a Public Health teacher, she met her future husband, John. So, by 1969, as a farmer’s wife with two children, Susan’s life had changed completely. The next thirty years consisted of farming 160 acres of land and a herd of 90 milking cows. She immersed herself in the local W.I., looking after calves and baking cakes and pies for the “Country Market”, held once a week in Alcester.



So, how did all this lead to Susan founding Arden Food Bank? By 2013, the financial plight of many families was very much in the news.

The cost of living was impacting to such an extent that many children were going to school on empty stomachs. Susan’s experience of family poverty in London during the early 1960s provided the catalyst for her action. After writing a letter to the vicar of Alcester, voicing her concerns, her letter was mistakenly included in the parish magazine. This provoked great interest from like-minded individuals and other churches, and thus, Arden Food Bank was born. After about a year, in which suitable premises were found, Trussell Trust membership was gained and other details were finalised, the food bank began operating. Despite a slow uptake, the onset of the Covid epidemic proved that there was a true need for Susan’s initiative, born of the seeds of her work and experience of needy London families.

Susan will be 90 in September. She has shown us that lives are meant to be lived to the full, and in the service of others. Susan’s kindness, compassion and her friendly smile will be greatly missed by all of us at the Foodbank.

“The purpose of life is a life of purpose”

People helped in January – March

In the first three months of this year, we gave emergency food to 365 people, including 145 children. Each nutritionally balanced food parcel contains food for at least 3 meals for 3 days, so that makes a total of over 1,305 meals provided, plus toiletries, household cleaning materials and pet food.



Hardship continues to be greatest in Alcester. Volunteers at the Eric Payne Centre there gave out 270 emergency food parcels, whilst 95 were given out by volunteers at the Methodist church in Studley.

We are incredibly grateful to all our amazing volunteers who make this possible, week in and week out, for all 52 weeks in the year.

Huge thanks to all our supporters

None of our work would be possible without the generosity of our amazing supporters. Food donations in the first three months of 2025 totalled an astounding 2.9 tonnes, with 2.3 tonnes of that total coming from our 20+ donation baskets.



Collection Points

Studley

Aldi
Co-op
Village Hall
Spotty Pots
Four Acres Care Home
Studley Rose Care Home
Bank Solicitors
St.Mary's Academy
Parish Church
Mappleborough Gn Church
Baptist Church
Methodist Church
Sambourne Church

Alcester

Waitrose
Simply Fresh
Old Station Nursery
Haselor Primary School
Haselor Church
St.Nicholas Church
Our Lady & St.Joseph Church
Baptist Church
Methodist Church
The Library
Bright Kids Nursery, Coughton



This illustrates the difference every single tin or packet of food left in those baskets makes. We are truly grateful for all food and cash so generously donated to us.

One Studley resident knocked on the door of one of our team leaders in March with a box of 50 Easter bunnies she had knitted herself, each with a chocolate egg inside! Such kindness.



Between January and March local organisations were very generous. Alcester Slimming World and 1st Alcester Scouts donated food, whilst large cash donations were received from SSP, Alcester and District Lions, and Orbit Better Days.



Another highly successful Waitrose food drive

On 21 March, a small team of volunteers spent the day greeting shoppers at Waitrose in Alcester, and asking if they might add an extra item to their shopping for the Foodbank. Wow! What an incredible response. In total, 470 kilos, almost half a tonne, was donated and £95. That will provide over 600 meals for local people. Amazing!



Spotlight on the warehouse

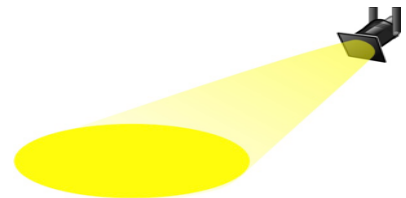
In each newsletter we intend to shine a spotlight on a specific aspect of our work. In this first edition, the spotlight is on our warehouse managers Bryn and Cathy Watkins, who have been our warehouse managers for the last 18 months.



In that period the warehouse has become busier and busier. In the year ending 31 March 2025, total stock into the warehouse weighed 19.2 tonnes (an increase of 13% on the previous year), and the total stock sent out was 18 tonnes (an increase of 11%).

Bryn and Cathy constantly receive donated food and toiletries into the warehouse. They use cash donations to buy any items which are running low, mostly milk, coffee and instant potato. They also purchase soap, shampoo, toilet paper, washing up liquid and toilet cleaner.

All items received into the warehouse are weighed, dated, recorded and then stored in date order.



Each week after every food distribution session closes, volunteers count the stock left on the shelves and the team leaders place a restock order with Cathy and Bryn. Team leaders are responsible for deciding the quantity of stock to be kept at the two distribution centres.

Cathy and Bryn pack up the items ordered, and a small team of drivers then transport the items to the distribution centres. Below is just one week's restock order for our Alcester distribution centre.



Most weeks Cathy and Bryn will include additional items with the order. This might be excess stock, or items that have been donated but are not included on our standard packing list for an emergency food parcel. At Easter time, for example, this will always include Easter eggs and chocolate. It can often include shower gel, hand wash and deodorant too. Currently there is a surplus of porridge oats and dog food in the warehouse. When surpluses occur, Cathy and Bryn request team leaders to ask volunteers to be generous and add extra surplus items to food parcels.

At the beginning of each September Cathy and Bryn are required to do a stocktake which involves weighing everything at the two distribution centres and at the warehouse. As a charity we are custodian of the goods, and therefore it is vitally important that all items of food and toiletries are always accurately weighed both in and out.

If you have any questions please email Cathy and Bryn at warehouse.ardenfoodbank@gmail.com



Welcome to our new volunteers

All of us at the Foodbank are unpaid volunteers. We are delighted to say that in the first three months of this year, Team Arden Foodbank has welcomed 4 new members.

Clare Goodall and Clare Wildin have joined the volunteers at the Alcester distribution centre; Dave Saunders has joined the small team that transports food from the warehouse to the distribution centres each week; and Susan Needham has joined our new small outreach team at community events. We hope you all enjoy working with us.

The hunt for a new Marketing and Communications Manager is on

Our current Marketing and Communications Manager has agreed to step up to fill the vacant post of Foodbank Manager following Susan's retirement. So we now urgently need to fill that post. If you, or anyone you know, might be interested in this role, please get in touch.



MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Our current Marketing and Communications Manager is stepping up to be the Foodbank Manager, and we urgently need to replace her.

Previous experience of foodbank work is not necessary. What matters most is energy, enthusiasm, ideas and good communication skills.

If you are interested in this volunteer role, and would like to learn more about it, please email Helen Watson at comms.ardenfb@gmail.com to arrange an informal chat.

We are recruiting

Donate while you shop online

Easy fundraising is an easy way to donate to Arden Foodbank while you shop online at no cost to you. If you register and choose us as your Cause, then each time you shop brands will donate to us.



Please give us your comments

Thank you for reading this first edition of our new quarterly newsletter. We would love to receive your feedback on what you might like to see more of in future editions. All feedback is welcome, whether positive or not.

If you have time, we would really appreciate your feedback about the Foodbank too. Specifically,

- What works well
- What doesn't work so well
- What we might do differently

Please email any comments to The Editor at comms.ardenfb@gmail.com.

Thanks, and look out for our second edition in July.

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