

Peacehaven & Newhaven Community Supermarkets

Evaluation Report 2023

By Hilda Mulrooney, Ronald Ranta, Nevena Nancheva, Dee Bhakta,
Sarah Sumpter & Stef Lake



WELCOME TO OUR COMMUNITY SUPERMARKETS!

SCDA operates two community supermarkets (CS) in Newhaven and Peacehaven, East Sussex. They support upwards of 250 households each week to access free and affordable food. The model was developed as an alternative to a food bank.

The aims of SCDA's community supermarkets are to:

- **Ensure that everyone in our community can access high quality, affordable food**
- **Eliminate food waste and reduce our impact on the planet**
- **Empower people to make healthy choices**
- **Bring people together to cook & share food**

Local residents in Newhaven, Peacehaven and Seaford are able to join a CS, and can attend for as long as they would like to. Additionally, three teams of cookery volunteers produce up to 300 portions of food each week, which are offered in the CS and café areas.

CS members have the option to contribute on a pay-as-you-feel basis, meaning that as people's financial position becomes more stable, they are able to pay it forward for those in greater need. Members also benefit from having a choice of food and other essential items, being able to stay for a cup of tea and a chat with others, and the advice and support of specialist signposting volunteers and community navigators.

An independent evaluation of the community supermarkets at Newhaven and Peacehaven was again carried out in 2023, using questionnaires and optional interviews to explore CS users' perspectives and experiences. Feedback supports the SCDA community food team to further develop the service.

Overall, members were very positive about their experience of using and accessing the CS. In particular, being able to choose their own food mattered to customers and this was the most highly rated statement in both venues. This was followed by the pay-as-you-feel model and social aspects of the community supermarket in Peacehaven. Equally as important as being able to choose food was the pay-as-you-feel model in Newhaven, followed by the community supermarket helping with healthy meals preparation.

For former food bank users, the most important features of the CS in both locations were being able to choose foods, followed by the wide range of foods available. In addition, those at Peacehaven rated being able to sit and have a chat, while those in Newhaven rated the friendly atmosphere highly.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This report was prepared by researchers at Kingston and London Metropolitan Universities. It is a follow-up to a previous evaluation carried out one year previously and aims to explore perspectives and experiences of CS members at two locations, Peacehaven and Newhaven. The research was conducted between April and May 2023. The research included two site visits (Peacehaven [PH] and Newhaven [NH]), 77 completed CS members' questionnaires, and 10 detailed interviews with CS members.

The questionnaires and the main questions asked during the interviews were agreed beforehand with Emily Clarke, the Community Food Project Manager at the SCDA.

Dr Hilda Mulrooney is a dietitian and Associate Professor in Nutrition at Kingston University London. Her interests include community food provision, food insecurity and obesity.

Dr Ronald Ranta is Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations at Kingston University London. His interests include food in relation to sociology, politics and international relations.

Dr Nevena Nancheva is Senior Lecturer in Politics, International Relations and Human Rights at Kingston University London. Her interests include community inclusion and integration, and minorities.

Dr Dee Bhakta is a dietitian and Reader in Health Sciences (Human Nutrition) at London Metropolitan University. Her interests include community and workforce nutrition interventions.

Sarah Sumpter is Research Associate with the team and an undergraduate student studying Nutrition.

Stef Lake is the community development & health programme manager at SCDA. They chair Lewes District Food Partnership steering group, and Lewes District Emergency Food Network. Stef specialises in community responses to food insecurity which centre dignity.

PEACEHAVEN COMMUNITY SUPERMARKET

Peacehaven Community Supermarket opened in March 2021. It is open between 11 and 1.30 on Thursdays and recently moved to a new venue at Community House, with support from Peacehaven Town Council.

Between April and December 2023:

Total Number of Supermarket sessions	39
Total Number of Registered Members	546
Combined Number of Visits to supermarket of registered members	3508
• Total # Adults represented	5,436
• Total # of children represented	1,921
Average number of visits per member	13
Number of clients who have attended 6 + times since 04/23	190
Percentage of clients who have attended 6 + times since 04/23	35%
New members signed up	207

NEWHAVEN COMMUNITY SUPERMARKET

Newhaven Community Supermarket opened in August 2021. It operates at Denton Island Community Centre between 11 and 1.30 on Mondays.

Between April and December 2023:

Total Number of Supermarket sessions	35
Total Number of Registered Members	544
Combined Number of Visits to supermarket of registered members	2776
• Total # Adults represented	4,582
• Total # Children represented	2,515
Average number of visits per member	5
Number of clients who have attended 6 + times since 04/23	145
Percentage of clients who have attended 6 + times since 04/23	27%
New members signed up	117

Sussex Community Development Association (SCDA) is a community development charity aiming to build stronger, healthier, more inclusive communities. We make a difference in our communities by reducing loneliness and social isolation, improving health and wellbeing, and increasing economic stability. SCDA is a multi-purpose locally rooted organisation based in Newhaven. We started our work as Newhaven Community Development Association back in 1997 and have been supporting community regeneration in Newhaven ever since. We have been based at Denton Island Community Centre in Newhaven since 2004, with a dedicated Youth Centre added to the site in 2021. In 2013 we changed our name to Sussex Community Development Association, reflecting our growth and extended reach supporting socially and economically deprived communities across East Sussex. As a community anchor organisation, we work to combine community-led action with social enterprise to bring about long-term social, economic and environmental benefits.

Community Supermarket Demographics

The majority of CS members surveyed at both venues were male and white. Over half considered themselves to have a disability, which may reflect either high levels of need for aid among those with disability or the age groups represented in the sample¹. All age ranges were represented, but over half (51%) of the entire sample was aged 55y and above. There were no significant differences in gender, ethnicity or disability between locations. However, significantly more customers at Peacehaven compared with Newhaven were aged over 65 years (39% vs. 8%).²

Over half the sample were either single, separated or widowed. A range of housing types were used by participants; 29% overall living in private rented accommodation, 21% living in homes owned by themselves or their families; and 28% living in accommodation rented from the local authority. Significantly more Peacehaven customers owned their own homes (33% vs. 8%) or were in temporary LA accommodation compared with Newhaven (18% vs. 0%).³ By contrast, significantly more Newhaven customers were renting privately compared with Peacehaven customers (39% vs. 21%).

Walking was the usual mode of travel to the community supermarket at both locations (56% overall), followed by driving themselves (13% overall). Qualitatively, members surveyed and interviewed did not raise any issues with the location of, the difficulty of travel and or access to the venues. It might well be that members who have difficulties accessing or traveling to the venues, particularly since the change in location at Peacehaven, have simply stopped coming.

¹ According to the Office of National Statistics, and based on the Family Resource Survey 2021-22, 23% of working age adults and 45% of pension age adults have a disability.

² This might be related to the previous venue at Peacehaven, which also served as a community centre, and or to the more extensive community café facilities available.

³ The larger numbers of members in temporary LA accommodation is partly explained by the proximity to Castle Accommodation, which has provided support for its residents using the community supermarket. On the day of our visit, a key support worker from Castle Accommodation was there accompanying several residents.

Previous and Current Access to Food Aid Provision

Most CS members had visited before (96% overall), and most visit on a weekly basis (79% overall). Over a third of the overall sample had used other food support e.g. food banks; this proportion was higher for Newhaven compared with Peacehaven customers.

Significantly more of those living in hostel/refuge had used other food support services compared with those in rented local authority or owned (100% vs. 62%). Significantly more of those who were single had previously used other food support such as food banks, compared with those who were married (69% vs. 16%).

Age also affected this. Significantly more younger respondents aged 35-44y had used other food support such as foodbanks compared with older respondents, aged 65y and above, (56% vs. 6%). No other differences by demographic characteristics were found.

The number of members who have previously accessed food support was largely in line with what we encountered last year: Peacehaven (33%), Newhaven (55%), and overall (41%). However, this year, and for the first time, we encountered members who accessed an additional food support service, while using the community supermarket. Those who did so explained that using an additional food support service was necessary in order to access sufficient amounts of food. This could be related to decreased levels of food support that some members highlighted, and or to increase level of need.

[John NH]: [when asked about whether the limited food he purchased at a supermarket and accessed at the CS was sufficient] *'not for the week. I mean I go to another place at the Baptist Church on a Wednesday, yeah, and by doing that you know, going to both it's about right.'*

[Wendy NH]: [so do you use another food support service?] *'I'm not quite sure what it is because I've never been there but she [her friend] picks me up stuff from there ... it's the same sort of thing [okay], erm, and she picks me up the vegetables ... I'll go out of my back door and there will be a bag of stuff there that's she's picked up from there, erm, and again I never know what's in that, but it's usually vegetables that's in there, fresh fruit and vegetables.'*

1. REASONS FOR USING COMMUNITY SUPERMARKETS

The Covid pandemic and cost-of-living crisis clearly impacted upon the use of the CS; over half of respondents in both locations citing these as their reasons for visiting. However, a third from Peacehaven and almost a third from Newhaven stated that they would use the CS even without those. In terms of other support offered by the CS, the most frequently used service was advice. Nonetheless, a substantial proportion of CS members at both locations did not use any of the other services offered by the CS. There were no significant differences by venue, and demographic characteristics did not affect responses.

The qualitative data (questionnaires and interviews) points to a wide range of often overlapping reasons for using the community supermarkets. These are very much in line with our findings last year. The main reasons continue to be financial difficulties, particularly brought about or exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis; benefits that are not in line with the cost of living; rising food and fuel/electricity/heating costs; and adverse changes to physical and mental health. One thing that was made clear to us this year was that members were struggling and that these were exceptionally difficult times for many of them. This mood was summed up by Carry at Peacehaven:

'It's almost going back to Dickensian times ... it's a horrible situation we're in now.'

Several members told us that their first response to the cost-of-living crisis, before joining the community supermarket, was to cut down on food purchases, in particular fresh meat and fish, prioritise their children, and focus more on supermarkets' economy ranges.

[Alex PH] (how did you manage before coming to the community supermarket?): *'I've had to cut out a lot of the prime proteins and erm, if I want fish, I go fishing. If – erm, I only eat erm, chicken. I don't eat red meat very often because I can't afford things that I'd like to eat. So it's a case of paring it down. I've learnt to cook with lentils and pulses and erm, it's getting to the point I hardly miss meat now. I have to make a point of eating it a couple of times a month to make sure I get the right protein.'*

[Mary NH] (what changes have you made to your shopping?): *'Like certain bits of meat I won't buy anymore. Because I always put my son before myself. So I make sure he gets the good stuff and I'll back on myself.'*

[Alice PH] (what changes have you made to your shopping?): *'Well I've had to cut out a lot of things that I used to buy, erm, and go for cheaper options, erm, and it's just trial and error, and it's some of the things that are cheaper are not very nice but definitely erm, cut back on what I buy, erm, you know, gone for cheaper brands.'*

While the reasons for using the CS vary considerably, and are often context-dependent, we continued to encounter the same broad three categories of members we found last year.

The **first** category includes those who have been on benefits and have used various support services prior to using the CS. Many in this group were either struggling with long-term mental or physical ill health or were taking care of a family member with mental or physical health

problems. For members in this group, the reasons behind their long-term struggle with food insecurity are complex and affected many aspects of their lives. Members of this group were most likely to come every week and use the CS for longer periods of time. They also stressed the insufficiency of the benefits they were left to live on.

[Wendy NH] (in previous years, would your benefits cover your food needs and expenses?): *'it would just about have covered, I wouldn't have needed to use the supermarket.'*

Several of the single men we surveyed and interviewed also stated that they regularly ran out of money towards the end of the month.

[John NH]: *'By about 10 days before I get my next lot of money I haven't got nothing.'*

The **second** category of members are those who have started to use the CS as a result of a sudden change in their circumstances, brought about through the death of a family member (most often the main breadwinner), a serious physical injury, and the loss of employment. This group could be further broken down into those who required short-term support, often while they waited for their first Universal Credit payment, and those who now needed longer term support.

The **third** category of members does not fit the prevailing notions of those in need of food aid. These are members who are mostly not entitled to receive benefits and who had never previously used support services or needed food aid. This group could be categorised as the just-about-managing, who often comprise of either a single or two working adults with children, and who are facing financial difficulties as a result of the cost-of-living crisis. Members of this group were more likely to come in occasionally, and often only towards the end of the month when budgets were tight. One mum we encountered at Newhaven told us that she doesn't 'come regularly. I mostly have enough money. Just the end of the month when things get very tight.'

These members were also more likely to express feelings of guilt for using the community supermarket.

[Alex PH]: *'I actually feel a bit guilty taking those [food at the CS] from people that can't cook and their food is more expensive.'*

[Dinah NH] (did you feel like you shouldn't be going [because you are more financially stable]?): *'Yes, yeah.'*

It was clear that one way of alleviating the sense of guilt was by focusing on the issue of food waste and food redistribution.

[Dinah NH]: *'Through the weeks, months of going I notice that I know people that go there that have got money and they still go. So it's not erm I guess money-related, income-related. You know, is it more for redistributing food that's you know, excess to the supermarkets.'*

The differences between the three groups were also clear in how often they attended the CS and how they managed during periods of closure due to bank holidays. Members of the first two groups would only miss coming in due to medical appointments and illness, while members of the third group at times had enough money and or food. 17 of the members we surveyed (22%) told us they did not need to come in every week. Additionally, several members,

particularly at Peacehaven, who attended regularly, mainly for social reasons, were also less concerned with bank holiday closures.

For those who came weekly, bank holiday closures meant asking family and friends for help, dipping into their meagre savings, and or using another food support service. 6 members told us that bank holiday closures meant reducing their food intake (8%); one member told us: 'I prioritise the kids and eat less.' It is clear that, while the CS has several mechanisms for supporting members during bank holiday closures (one member told us that the CS managers were 'quite accommodating'), some members appeared unaware.

The lack of awareness was also noted with regard to the additional support provided by the CS. In terms of accessing additional support at the CS, most members we surveyed and interviewed were not aware of what was provided. Several expressed their potential interest in using recipe cards and accessing cookery classes but were unsure of how to access these. It was also suggested to us by several members that they would particularly welcome the recipes for the frozen meals.⁴



Three generations of the same family, volunteering at Peacehaven Community Supermarket

⁴ It is very likely that given the existence of additional support services at both locations, some members were not able to distinguish what was specifically provided by the CS as opposed to other support services.

2. FEELINGS ON BEING A MEMBER

Most respondents were not concerned about being seen visiting the CS; 76% from Peacehaven and 72% of those from Newhaven disagreed or strongly disagreed that they would prefer not to be seen visiting. However, 16% of respondents from Peacehaven agreed with this statement, while 9% from Newhaven agreed or strongly agreed. There were no significant differences in views by venue, and no impact of demographic characteristics.

Mary's (NH) comments were largely reflective of members views (who do you feel about been seen attending the CS?): *'It doesn't bother me at all. At the end of the day I'm being helped. I'm grateful. Like I know some people would just be like, "Oh God, I'm going to the foodbank".' It's just like actually you know, don't see it as a bad thing. You know, one day you'd like to think that you wouldn't use it anymore and you'd be able to donate to people, be able to help. Because as a community we should be helping one another regardless.'*

There have been changes to both venues since our visits last year. There has been a change of venue in Peacehaven and a move to a different part of the venue in Newhaven, which meant the queue to enter the CS was no longer visible to the public. These changes have clearly made a difference. At Newhaven 25% of members previously told us they would prefer not being seen compared to 5.7% this time. Most of the regular members we interviewed and surveyed at Newhaven supported the move, stating that it was now 'more accessible' and 'better'. Though other members pointed to the difficulty of queueing outside without any protection from the elements.

[Wendy NH]: *'It could be doing with a bit bigger because it's quite a small place, but it does. You know, it does the job, so yeah. I liked it where it was before because there was more room. Because I've got a stick and I have to take my shopping trolley with me, I can't carry stuff ... in the morning you've got to queue outside and I have trouble standing so there's not many places to sit. In the other building there were places that I could sit down and I mean here there are benches outside but people just sit on them and all the kids with the, you know, you can't get to them, erm, that's the only thing, and when they're there they won't move for you so. You just stand there in the wet now, there's nowhere to shelter. when they had it in the main building there was a covered like walkway erm, outside that you could stand under.'*

The views of all members interviewed and surveyed were very positive regarding the new venue at Peacehaven. We were told it was 'more accessible', 'closer to other places', 'less congested', 'there was more space', 'weather protection', 'better laid out', and 'easier to use'. The only negative comment we heard concerned the need to queue to access the CS. The volunteers we spoke to on the day also expressed their support for the new venue and told us it was 'much better', 'easier to manage', and gave the CS a 'better image'.

3. THE VALUE OF THE COMMUNITY SUPERMARKET AS AN INNOVATIVE MODEL OF FOOD PROVISION

The majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the pay-as-you-feel model worked well for them, 85% in Peacehaven and 84% in Newhaven. Being able to choose the foods to eat was also clearly important, with 95% and 89% agreeing or strongly agreeing in Peacehaven and Newhaven respectively. There were no differences in responses by venue or demographic characteristics.

The Pay-as-you-feel Scheme

Overall, 43% of customers stated they donated each time they visited, while 15% were unable to ever make a donation. There were no differences in responses by venue. Accommodation type also affected frequency of donations. Significantly more of those in own homes donated every time compared with those in rented LA accommodation (81% vs. 24% respectively); by contrast, significantly more of those in rented LA accommodation never made a donation (24%) or donated once a month (19%) compared with those in their own homes (0% and 6%). No other effect of demographics were found.

The members surveyed and interviewed were by and large very supportive of the pay-as-you-feel scheme. We were told that it ‘worked well’, that it was important for many members to be able to ‘give back something’ ‘without feeling pressured’, and that they knew it helped ‘support my community’.

[Francis NH]: *‘This is a reasonable system, so I try to donate every time when I attend supermarket, err so I found it is reasonable. and I can cover all the payment as much as I have and it depends on the food that I take because sometimes I find something that I need sometimes I take very little.’*

[Alex PH]: *‘I think that’s good. Erm, it takes away the erm... tendency or feeling of need a little bit. Erm, if I’ve got any change left that week, I’ll happily put it in. I didn’t last week. Having told you I usually do, I completely forgot but I’ve still got the money here waiting and next time I go up, it’ll go in ... It stops you feeling erm, like a freeloader and you don’t have to do it if you can’t ... So if you’ve got the choice to contribute something and you’re not being judged by how much you contribute, then it works for the charity and it also works for the people using it. So I, I think it’s a good idea. I don’t think they push that enough.’*

One issue that came out in several of the interviews and during our site visits was the question of whether everyone contributed. One member told us that they were ‘not sure’ the pay-as-you-feel-scheme was ‘a good idea’ because ‘not everyone contributes’.

[Wendy NH]: *‘I know a lot of people don’t, but I always do because I mean what we’re getting there is marvellous. Oh a lot, a lot of them don’t put stuff in.’*

[Dinah NH]: *‘I think some people like to give and you know. Although quite often I think it’s a case of the people that can’t afford it that give than the ones that can.’*

Several members told us that they were not aware of the scheme (8 members out of 77 surveyed), while others explained that they either didn't have enough money to contribute, or that they contributed only when they could.

[John NH]: *'I haven't actually paid anything into that, I mean I have bought eggs and milk before now, but there's times when I go there I haven't got no money at all.'*

[Carry PH]: *'Well, I don't know that it does work, because you – you see everybody just walking in, and nothing. Like, because they don't want to put pressure on people. They know people – some people haven't got anything. I mean, there's been some weeks when I haven't had anything.'*

[Mary NH]: *'I give every time that I can. I think that's – I do think it's good. I do because like I'm not gonna lie, when it comes to erm the second to last week of my money, that's when I really have to ration my expenses. And they're so good with it, they're just like you don't have to give a donation, but whatever you do really does help. So in the first two weeks after I've been, I've got my Universal Credit, I do donate. I do. Because they do such a brilliant job and if we didn't have them a lot of people would struggle.'*

The Community Supermarket as a Social Space

Given the importance placed by the government on tackling loneliness, and the relationship between loneliness and physical and mental wellbeing, the opportunity to socialise and meet people is an important aspect of the community supermarkets that should not be overlooked when focusing on food insecurity. The importance of the community supermarket as a social space was made clear to us by members in the interviews and during our visits. It was also particularly clear in the qualitative responses we got from members at Peacehaven: one member even told us that they did not 'need to come, but I come every week for social reasons.'⁵

[Alex PH]: *'I will sit down to have a cup of tea and chat to anyone who's around. Erm, I never thought I'd end up at a community foodbank erm, but I'll meet people I wouldn't otherwise meet ... I've come to rely on it and, and can look forward to it as a social thing. Even though I don't know who I'm going to be talking to, it's – erm, it's quite a, a nice little connection for the area even though I'm only in temporary emergency accommodation.'*

[Alice PH]: *'It is nice to be able to just sit down and have a coffee and sometimes somebody will talk to you and it's just nice to get out the house, because sometimes I get shut in here because I can't always erm, part of what I've got [her disability] sometimes it means that I tend to shut myself away and don't want to go out.'*

[Dinah NH]: *'I quite often stay for a coffee and you know, get to talk to other people. You talk to people when you're in the queue waiting to go in, yeah.'*

[John NH]: *'I didn't really like the first day but I look forward to it now because the people are so nice you know, everybody's so lovely but nice to see the same people again.'*

⁵ According to the Department for Culture, Media, and Sports' Community Life Survey 21/22, 6% of the adult population felt lonely often or always with another 19% feeling lonely some of the time. Those with a disability, suffering from long-term physical or mental illness, unemployed, living on their own, and living in a deprived area, were more likely to feel lonely.

Volunteering

Members were asked about whether they had, or would consider, volunteering at the community supermarket. The majority 96% had not previously volunteered, and over half would not be able/willing to volunteer in the future. Almost one in five were unsure. There were no significant differences in responses by venue or demographics.

Healthy Eating

The majority of customers agreed or strongly agreed that the community supermarket helped them prepare healthy meals, 64% in Peacehaven and 76% in Newhaven. Most felt they knew whether the meals they ate were healthy (55% in Peacehaven and 63% in Newhaven). However, about a fifth (24% and 23%) were unsure, suggesting that there is scope for provision of information on healthy eating and/or meal preparation for customers. Almost two thirds (61% in Peacehaven and 63% in Newhaven) agreed or strongly agreed that healthy eating was too expensive for them. Despite this, healthy eating was a priority for 71% of Peacehaven and 69% of Newhaven respondents. Lack of equipment was not a barrier for customers at either venue. There were no differences in responses at the two locations, and no effect of demographics on responses was found.

Time and knowledge as barriers to healthy eating

Asked about knowledge and time as barriers to preparing healthy meals, the majority disagreed or strongly disagreed that knowledge was a barrier for them (79% and 80%). Similarly, time was not perceived as a barrier for the majority of customers (79% and 66%). Although time was a barrier to a greater proportion of Newhaven customers, this difference was not statistically significant. No effect of demographics was found.

Trying new foods

Members identified a number of practices that have helped support healthier diets, including trying new foods, in particular new vegetables, and the frozen and prepared meals offered. These have helped members broaden their diets, improve their cooking skills, and try new foods. For some members, particularly those living on their own, the frozen meals provide an essential addition to their diets, and in some cases their only cooked meals.

[Alice PH]: *'I'm more open to trying different things now yeah, yeah.'*

[Mary NH]: *'Before I went – before there like I hadn't used things like celeriac before. That was a new one ... There was another thing as well. I think turnip. I hadn't actually purchased a turnip before. Yeah, so there's been a few items that I've got from there that I've not used before which have been quite refreshing.'*

[Alex PH]: *'[the frozen meals] were really very good They use fresh ingredients and they cooked well and to a, a specific – if they're doing a curry, they'll use the appropriate vegetables and flavourings, so you don't get any bland stew.'*

[Wendy NH]: *[the frozen meals] 'it is a real treat for me because it's proper home cooked food and I've not had one bad meal, they are really lovely, lovely meals. I had the most gorgeous potato and cauliflower curry, the last time, and it was so lovely. The only thing is I do ask for the recipes'*

but I haven't had one yet, I've had to muddle through and see what I can taste in the food, but they are really lovely meals.'

Views on subsidised fixed-price products

The most frequently chosen items agreed by members at both locations were dairy products (cheese, yogurt, butter), fruit and cleaning products (laundry soap, conditioner). If only two items were available at fixed low price, which would guarantee their availability, the top-rated items were dairy products (e.g. cheese, yogurt and butter), followed by fruit. This emphasises the need for basic staple foods at reasonable cost but also the importance of healthy eating to customers.

Most of the members we interviewed and surveyed were supportive of paying a bit extra for milk and eggs. John's remark is representative of members' views: 'I think, well I think 50p is unbelievable for six eggs. So it's definitely good value as long as I've got some money.' Even those who have used other food support services before understood the rationale for charging extra.

[Alice PH]: *'Well, it's fair enough I suppose yeah. I mean I've never, I've never paid for milk and eggs before other places I've been, erm, but I suppose it's fair enough they've got to, they wouldn't be able to keep going if they didn't do.'*

Nevertheless, several members raised the point that they were no longer able to purchase eggs and milk at the same time.

[Mary NH] (what has change over the past few months?): *'the only thing that I can safely say that has changed is that they alternate now with milk and eggs. So one week it's eggs and the next week it's milk, whereas before they used to sell both of them every week.'*

When members were asked about paying extra for additional items, there was a clear divide between the three groups of members discussed above. Those most struggling financially were less keen on paying for additional items. While those in the third group, who by and large had more disposable income, favoured the idea of charging for additional items or even paying a fixed charge for shopping as Mary informed us: 'I wouldn't mind paying £6 or £4 for a small or big shop, including like nappies, cheese, toiletries.'

[Alex PH] (what do you think about paying for additional items?): *'I think that's quite a good idea because things like cheese and fruit is quite expensive. I always try and make sure I've got some fruit, but I'm limited to what I can have, so yes I think that's probably quite a good idea.'*

[Carry PH]: *'I think people would be willing to pay – like, if you – if you did that – you know, if you can have the eggs – if you can get hold of more eggs, so that people can have eggs and milk at the same time [mm-hm], maybe some butter and cheese.'*

[Francis NH]: *'Cheese, eggs, meat, fish, it will be perfect if it will be available because these are the main foods that we buy in the Lidl'.*

Interestingly, some members also raised the possibility of paying for additional prepared or frozen ready meals, which, as mentioned above, are very popular.

[Francis NH]: *'I'm ready to pay for it but it's better to have more erm boxes with ready to eat meal to take with me because just two boxed for one week it's not enough, very useful, it helps us save time, erm energy so it's the best thing that I found there.'*

People running the community supermarkets

As the data above show, members are positive about many different features of the community supermarkets. One feature that has come out consistently in the interviews and questionnaires is the importance of friendly and supportive volunteers and staff members. We have heard no complains and or criticisms of the staff and volunteers. Members responses were overwhelming positive and supportive of the staff and volunteers.

[Alex PH]: *'The staff are very good. They're always helpful, quite happy erm, which makes a difference if you're not going out too much.'*

[Francis NH]: *'Yeah, so they're friendly, so everything is perfect of course.'*

[Alice PH]: *'Very nice, yes. Yes they're very nice, they're always there if you want to talk to them, they're always pleasant and friendly and they always seem to remember what you said to them.'*

[Mary NH]: *'They're great. They're a lovely bunch of people. When I first like moved here I didn't know a lot of people in general anyway, so like literally I knew like one person. So it was quite nice that when I did go out to these places they were super you know – up for listening and you know, really, really good group of people. Really good group of people.'*

[John NH]: *'Amazing, absolutely amazing.'*

[Wendy NH]: *'They're so lovely there and like it's always a surprise, you never know what you're going to get, so yeah. they are they are so sweet and so helpful yes. as I say they're so lovely and helpful and it's always a nice surprise.'*

Even when members had complaints about the community supermarket, in particular the levels of provision, they were clear in not placing the blames at the staff and volunteers.

[Carry PH]: *'I know it's not their [the community supermarket and their staff] fault [lower levels of stock], because people are not donating' ... 'They can only do what they can do, with what they're given. This is the trouble, isn't it?'*

[Alex PH]: *'I think they're doing the best with, with what they get erm, because I think it's a constant nightmare not knowing what they're going to have and from who. So in light of that, I think they do pretty well.'*

4. CONCERNS & FRUSTRATIONS RAISED BY MEMBERS

Concerns, frustrations, and suggestions raised by members

While members are, overall, very supportive and appreciative of the work done by the community supermarkets and their staff and volunteers, several concerns and frustrations have been raised. These, similarly to last year, are focused on two key issues. The first is there are different levels of provision at different times of the day; the second is that the offering has decreased over time and needed to be shared with a larger pool of members.

[Alice PH]: *'If you go after 12 then you find there's not a lot left, erm, so I've been going earlier and queuing, but over the recent weeks I've found that there's been less and less there and I know they're not getting their donations they used to get and you sometimes you can only have two tins and one of everything and sometimes that's quite hard.'*

Alice's perception of a reduction in offer later in the day was once shared by many members, who opted as a result to arrive earlier, even if this meant queueing for longer. A member at Newhaven expressed the same view: 'In the afternoon there's less available because morning get priority.' It is clear to us, having spent time at the venues, that staff and volunteers make an effort to overcome this perception/misperception. Nevertheless, this view is a prevalent one.

In terms of the offer more generally, many of the members we interviewed and surveyed have noticed an increase in demand and a decrease in what is available.

[Carry PH]: *'At the very beginning [more than a year ago], they had a lot of stuff, at the very beginning, but I mean it's just – it's just – it's just got worse, as time's gone on'.*

[Alice PH]: *'I've noticed sometimes there's nothing there. Like you go for cereal and sometimes there's no cereal and things like that.'*

[Dinah NH]: *'I've noticed over the year what is available has decreased. So sometimes I can't always get bread, sometimes there's no fruit. But that's the way it is, isn't it? ... porridge, erm and sometimes you can go weeks and there's no porridge ... then I look for like baked beans, spaghetti, that sort of thing, some bread. And then yeah, some vegetables, fresh veg and whatever, fresh fruit. You know, if it's available.'*

One member, who also uses a local food bank told us: 'I know they do what they can, but sometimes I can get more food in the other food bank.'

Members' suggestions for improvement

For most of the members we spoke to, the main improvement that hoped for related to the amount and variety of the food on offer. Members told us they hoped the community supermarket 'could have more on offer', 'could bring in more meat and more fresh produce', and 'make the offer more varied, particularly fruit and veg'. Other members suggested a stronger focus on key essentials, for example, rice, pasta, and cheap legumes.

[Alex PH]: ‘Liaise back to them [community supermarket] of getting cheap, cheap lentils, particularly lentils and chickpeas.’

Members, who were more financially able, also emphasised the need for additional donations and expressed willingness to contribute more if the offer was expanded. Some even suggested moving towards a food club/subscription model.

[Mary NH]: [Had previously lived in Brighton and had used Bright Store] ‘If they had better donations like I highly would recommend them go the same way as they’ve done with the food club in Brighton one because that would be – it’s so good.’

In terms of more immediate and practical suggestions, many members at Newhaven suggestion providing some protection from the elements and more places to sit while queueing.



5. SHOPPING ELSEWHERE

How much of their weekly shop members receive from the community supermarket is important both in terms of evaluating the demand for food aid provision but also in terms of tailoring the provision of the CS, given the limited food supply. Almost all CS users at both locations also used other supermarkets, all of those who responded from Peacehaven. Almost a third of CS users in Newhaven and a third in Peacehaven got about half of the household food from the CS, while almost half of those in Newhaven and almost a third at Peacehaven used the CS for the basics.

Marital status also had an impact; significantly more of those who were single compared with married got most (24% vs. 0%), or half of their weekly shop from the CS (38% vs. 21%); by contrast, significantly more married than single respondents used the CS only for the basics (47% vs. 35%). No other significant differences by demographics were found.

Similar to last year's report, the surveys and interviews make clear that for most members the community supermarkets' food provision covers either half of what they consume or only the basics. One clear change from last year has been the reduction in members who use the community supermarket for all or most of their household food. The figures for last year for members' using the community supermarket for all or most of their food were 32% for Peacehaven and 23 for Newhaven: in comparison, the figures for this year were much lower, 15% for Peacehaven and 16% for Newhaven. Only one member indicated that they got all of their weekly food from the community supermarket.

It appears that most members base their weekly food shop around what they are able to get and the community supermarket. The below quotes are fairly indicative of members who come weekly:

[Wendy NH]: *'I literally, when I go to the [community] supermarket on a Monday, because I never know what I'm getting, I arrange my meals for the week around what I get from the supermarket, so that's how my meals have changed.'*

[Mary NH]: *'[the community supermarket] helped me with like my veg shop and stuff like that and my dried goods. So you know, I can get a packet of rice there or a packet of pasta and that would save me money from having to buy it. Or like I'll go there before I do my normal shop so I can have a look at what veg they supply which I can pick up there and then accommodate it for that.'*

Ethics

Ethics approval for the evaluation was granted by Kingston University Faculty Ethics Committee.

Data collection

Data were gathered on two occasions, once at Peacehaven (PH 27th of April 2023) and on once at Newhaven (NH 24th of April 2023) by a team of researchers from Kingston and London Metropolitan Universities.

Data tools

Data were gathered using questionnaires administered in person at the supermarkets. Questionnaires were developed and agreed beforehand with Emily Clarke, the Community Food Project Manager at the SCDA. Questionnaires included several sections, as follows. Demographics data included factors likely to impact on use of the community supermarket such as age, gender, ethnicity, housing, and disability status. Questions related to the community supermarket included how long it was used, whether it is a main source of household food, which items customers would most value available at low fixed cost, usual and preferred travel to the community supermarket. In addition, participants rated their level of agreement with a series of statements about the CS but also related to healthy eating using a five-point Likert rating scale from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. In total, 77 participants completed a questionnaire (39 PH and 38 NH)

Interviews

Participants were offered optional interviews to discuss their responses more fully. An interview guide was used to ensure consistency and all interviews were audio-recorded with permission for accuracy. Additional contemporaneous notes were taken. Audio recordings were transcribed and basic thematic analysis was carried out to identify key themes. Where quotes are used to demonstrate themes, pseudonyms are used to maintain anonymity. Those who were interviewed received a small token of acknowledgement of their time in the form of an Amazon voucher. In total 10 interviews were conducted: 4 at Peacehaven and 6 at Newhaven. Interviews were conducted between the 8th and 12th of May 2023.

'They're so lovely there and like it's always a surprise, you never know what you're going to get, so yeah. they are they are so sweet and so helpful'.

@seahavenfood



www.sussexcommunity.org.uk