



# CHESTER PAY AS YOU FEEL CAFE

A FEEDING BRITAIN CASE STUDY

## Combating hunger and social isolation through food

When Elitsa Yakimov first heard about the Real Junk Food Project, a global initiative intercepting surplus food to be redistributed on a pay as you feel model, she knew her hometown of Chester had to have one. After running her own Pay as you feel (PAYF) cafe for the first year Elitsa found that there was a lot more on offer than reduced waste and affordable food. Many of the customers and volunteers suffered from social isolation, and getting involved in the cafe gave them a feeling of belonging and community.



## THE NEED

When Elitsa first set out to establish the Chester PAYF cafe her mission was to reduce food waste. According to the Food Standards Agency, the UK throws away 7 million tonnes of food and drink every year. Much of this is good quality food that is binned due to packaging errors or over ordering by retailers. By intercepting this food, PAYF cafes can offer healthy food at an affordable price to customers, while doing their part to reduce waste.

In a recent report by the APPG on Hunger it was estimated that over 1 million older people are malnourished or at risk of malnutrition. The most common cause for this was reported to be social isolation. At the same time Trussel Trust foodbanks are reporting an increase in the numbers of people having to access emergency food aid. Hunger is an issue in the UK, and while national reform is required to root out the problem, community run pay as you feel shops have an important role to play to ensure the gap is filled.

Bringing together communities through food is not a new idea, but it is one that needs to be revisited in light of these social challenges.



## THE CHESTER PAYF CAFE AT A GLANCE

After 7 months of “testing the waters” via pop-ups, Chester PAYF Café was registered as a Community Interest Company in October 2016. Food surplus and donations were secured through Costco, Neighbourly, Fareshare, and food retailers in North Wales. Students from Chester University came on as volunteers to help prepare and serve the food.

The cafe first began offering goods to the public by renting a café and kitchen space at Wesley Church in Chester once a month on a Sunday. Three-course meals were offered on a pay as you feel basis to anyone who walked in, and promotion was largely done through word of mouth, social media, and simple flyers.

Over the subsequent months the cafe moved locations a number of times and continued to run pop events at community events. After presenting the idea and mission to Buckley Town Council, rental of a premise in Buckley Town Hall was offered. The Chester PAYF cafe now operates as a shop, where you take as much as you wish, and pay as much as you wish. If customers aren't able to pay cash for food, they can volunteer their time and skills instead. For example, one artistic customer created a pavement sign, while another takes the garbage out regularly. Volunteers have also been recruited to run the shop, with 99% aged over 55. The shop is open six days a week, with most customers quickly becoming regulars and setting up social groups and weekly meet ups.

## CHALLENGES TO SUCCESS

The biggest obstacle to setting up a not-for-profit shop or café is that you need to keep your expenses to a minimum. You need to find reliable and dedicated volunteers, and a premises with affordable rent. This can be a difficult barrier to overcome, as rent in central areas are typically high, and without the right location, you can get lost in the crowd.

Thankfully, there are a lot of sources of support, including government and non-government agencies, and funds to which you can apply. Additionally, this cause is so relevant and timely, that it usually strikes people right away as something that requires action. It is therefore relatively easy to convert people and find followers anywhere in the world, as The Real Junk Food Project Charity proves.

### In 2 Years...

- 66 pop ups
- 769 people fed
- 1758 meals served
- 9198 KG of food surplus redistributed

**Cost: £3000**

# IF IT WEREN'T FOR YOU, I WOULD NOT HAVE HAD A NICE HOT MEAL THIS MONTH

**A note from Elitsa Yakimov, founder and director of the Chester PAYF Cafe.**

During our early pop-ups at Wesley Church, this older lady came in. She had a roast dinner and a pudding with a cup of tea. She was stunned by the amount of food we offered her. She asked us a lot of questions about the project, gave a small monetary donation, and went on her way. This same lady started coming to every single pop-up we did in Chester, She was there at the



church, she came to the Grosvenor park; anytime we were in the centre, there she was. It remains a mystery how she knew where we would be next, as this lady didn't use social media and was always by herself. She was always very thankful for the food she received. She always gave us a big hug before she left, and one time said: "If it weren't for you, I would not have had a nice hot meal this month. I live alone and so I don't cook. Why would I cook as there is no one to feed?"

This touching admission provided a glimpse into the reality of life for a lot of single people over 55 years of age. A lot of them may be lonely, socially isolated, malnourished and as a consequence, depressed. We are extremely humbled and grateful by what our food waste reduction project does for people, both in helping them find a source of affordable nutrition and social interaction.

**"If it weren't for you, I would not have had a nice hot meal this month. I live alone and so I don't cook. Why would I cook as there is no one to feed?"**

**- Chester PAYF Cafe Customer**

**For more information please contact:  
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