

OsNosh: a community kitchen project in Oswestry



Contents

1. What is OsNosh?
2. The main strands of OsNosh's work
3. Getting set up
4. Costing and funding the project
5. The day-to-day running
6. Who uses the service?
7. What impact has the project had on the local community?
8. Top tips for running a successful community kitchen

1. What is OsNosh?

OsNosh is a surplus food redistribution and community kitchen project in Oswestry. It is run by co-founder Ben Wilson with a team of volunteers. It collects surplus food from supermarkets and uses it to create hot meals and grocery boxes for the local community.

2. The main strands of OsNosh's work

This case study focuses mainly on the hot meals and grocery boxes that OsNosh has been providing during the Covid outbreak, but it is useful to outline the different strands of the work it does to get a clear idea of how it operates, what it stands for and how it has adapted and developed.

Before Covid outbreak – OsNosh was creating a weekly community meal at a local church hall where people could come and eat together. It also distributed boxes of surplus food on a pay-as-you-feel basis.

After Covid outbreak – OsNosh has adapted its service to cook and deliver hot meals to people in the local community, along with grocery boxes made up of surplus goods from local supermarkets.

Core Services

- The hot meals and surplus food boxes are delivered by volunteers on Tuesdays and Fridays.
- Most people are referred to the service by other organisations (e.g. Designs in Mind, Shropshire Towns and Rural (STAR) Housing, Qube) as they have the skills and contacts to target the people who would benefit most from the service. OsNosh does however accept self-referrals, for example if people have a physical disability or a learning disability, are experiencing acute financial stress, are struggling with food bills, or who are feeling anxious and finding it difficult to leave the house, or are struggling with any other mental health issues.

Breakfast Club – for 16-20 year olds and their families

- This is targeted at people who are finding that their food budget isn't stretching as far as it needs to during the school holidays.
- On Wednesdays throughout August, service users can collect a free cooked breakfast and a grocery box between 10am and noon on a first come, first served basis.

Income Generating Projects

OsNosh is a social enterprise so it also runs ethical, commercial projects to raise funds for its community operations. For example, PoshNosh a field-to-fork concept in which OsNosh has teamed up with Treflach Farm to produce high-quality meals, which can be collected or delivered locally. The project aims to drastically reduce food mileage

and spread the word about Shropshire produce, the use of seasonal ingredients and ethical food production.

3. Getting set up

This next section runs through the key resources that OsNosh needed to set up and gives advice for people looking to start a similar project.

Premises

OsNosh was very lucky, it was the first group given permission by Shropshire Council to use The Centre on Oak Street in Oswestry after the Covid outbreak. This is a modern purpose-built youth centre, with lots of space and a fully equipped kitchen, which was unoccupied prior to the outbreak. Previously, OsNosh was operating out of the Holy Trinity Church in Oswestry, but these premises lacked the necessary storage space and weren't large enough to enable social distancing.

When trying to find a suitable space from which to run operations a good starting point is to ask the local council. It is likely to recognise the value of non-council operations offering immediate relief services and may be willing to help find suitable premises. In your communications with the council it is key to find the right people to talk to and build a relationship with them. If the council has premises of its own to offer it may work out an affordable rent arrangement for your organisation or allow use based on paying an incremental rent or just paying for utilities used. Getting long-term tenure is a challenge.

Key factors to consider when searching for premises:

- **Size** – is the space big enough for social distancing? This is probably going to be in place for some time. You will also need storage space for your collected surplus food, boxes, equipment and other ingredients.
- **Easy access** – this is crucial, especially if you plan to work with people who have limited mobility.
- **A good, well designed and ventilated kitchen** – having a workable space will make your day-to-day operations much more streamlined and efficient.

Equipment

This will be limited by your initial budget but there are some essential basics.

- **Personal protective equipment** – the cost of this will depend very much on the size of your organisation but it is essential to set money aside for it.
- **Kitchen equipment** – a good set of knives is essential plus large cooking vessels, spacious refrigerator, food storage containers, foil, cling film, etc.

Supplementary ingredients – a good stock of spices, oils, salts and stocks give you versatility; always try and have dried pulses, pasta and rice. You should set aside at least £30 for this.

Team members

OsNosh currently runs with Ben as a full-time member of staff. He acts as lead chef and also oversees the overall running of the project.

In addition to this, there are two other part-time staff, one of whom provides administrative support and another who helps run the kitchen and commercial projects. The core services currently run on two days a week and are supported by a team of volunteers. Some of these collect surplus food from the supermarkets, some help in the kitchen, some put together the grocery boxes and others do the deliveries.

OsNosh has found that the wage bill is the most expensive outgoing for projects like this, and one of the biggest challenges can be how to staff the project in an affordable way but still give it stability and endurance.

Volunteers are crucial to enable the project to run. There is always a degree of flux in the availability of volunteers and it is a good idea to think about how you will reach out to, recruit, train and retain sufficient volunteers for your planned service.

Reaching out to volunteers

OsNosh has primarily used Facebook to attract volunteers although word of mouth and building close relationships with local businesses has also attracted valuable helpers. You may find that your area has a volunteer portal (see [Freegle](#) for an example) with job boards where you can advertise volunteer roles, these are a great way to reach people who are specifically looking for voluntary work.

Skills

For this kind of project a competent lead chef is an asset. Good kitchen management, ideally overseen by a member of staff, is essential. Ideally you would have:

- At least two people who are very competent in the kitchen and are able to manage food preparation, the menu and the volunteer team. It takes a 'Ready, Steady Cook' type of approach to deal with the varied donated food – you don't know what you'll get until the day and you have to be really creative.
- One or more person who has the capacity to train others in food safety. The Level 2 Food Hygiene course can be done online, but people need support to apply it in practice.

Ben is a self-taught chef who has worked in some very good quality restaurants. However, he has flagged up that it is important for someone coming from a professional cooking background to understand the differences between a professional kitchen and a community kitchen. For example, you need to be very patient and personable. Think Rick Stein, not Gordon Ramsey! People volunteering in the kitchen are there on their own free time so it needs to be a fun environment where people can

learn. The chef also needs to be able to ad-lib and adapt recipes at short notice, as working with surplus food is highly unpredictable.

Food sources

For its community meals and Breakfast Club OsNosh primarily uses surplus and donated food, supplemented with some bought ingredients. Meat is used rarely and only when it has been bought or donated, and is high quality and ethically produced. Surplus meat and some other chilled foods from supermarkets, such as dairy, are not currently used as OsNosh is not confident that it has the capacity to safely collect, store and redistribute these foods at present.

The key point here is to be aware of your capacity to collect and safely store food. Consider how much refrigeration and freezer space you have available. You want to avoid being overloaded with food that you can't process and use. Note that food safety requirements are much more stringent if you are collecting chilled surplus food, so we recommend starting with food that is safe at room temperature. If you are collecting surplus food you need to register with the local Environmental Health team.

Collecting surplus food

Organising the collection of food can be onerous! Currently OsNosh collect from 3–5 supermarkets every day of the week before 9am. The amount and quality of food can vary enormously so ideally your drivers need to have a spacious vehicle and a critical eye for what food is acceptable for use, besides an affinity for early mornings! OsNosh also does evening collections and also one-off pick-ups for example from organisations that find themselves with a surplus of one commodity or another.

Food waste

Even with the best intentions OsNosh finds that it often has food that needs to be disposed of and this can sometimes be in significant quantities (especially bread). This is an important issue for new organisations to consider. Sending food waste for animal feed is a very good option, but this needs registration with your local council.

Relationships with other organisations

Ben had a good knowledge of other local organisations prior to setting up and had many key contacts. Links with other organisations are really useful for many reasons, such as:

- Securing a premises;
- Getting referrals;
- Spreading the word about the work that you do;
- Complementing rather than competing with or undermining the work of other organisations;

- Mutual support, resource and knowledge sharing.
- Gaining a thorough understanding and awareness of the community you are working in. It's useful to think about the size of the area you are serving. Oswestry is relatively small but if you were in a bigger town or city you might want to consider serving a specific area or neighbourhood.

Legal requirements

The main legal requirements specific to this type of operation are:

- **Environmental health registration** – most organisations register to operate at a specific location. As OsNosh started life as a pop-up, it has Environmental Health Officer approval that covers any premises it operates in. This may not always be the most appropriate option but it gives OsNosh the flexibility to run out of different locations.
- **Employee liability insurance and public liability insurance** – this needs to cover all staff and volunteers working for the operation and anyone else who may be affected by the organisation's operations. OsNosh ensures that its volunteer drivers are aware that they are not covered by the above insurance and that they carry out the deliveries at their own risk.
- **A Health and safety policy**, and a specific Covid policy which is up to date with current government guidelines.
- **Food Safety**- you need to follow the Food Standards Agency guidelines. You must have a Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points monitoring system (HACCP) or equivalent. The Safer Food, Better Business from the Food Standards Agency is one alternative (<https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/safer-food-better-business#sfbb-packs>). If your service includes a delivery service there are additional food safety guidelines you need to comply with.
- You must be up to date with, and follow, all guidelines on food safety, especially allergens and dietary requirements.

There are many other requirements of operating legally as an organisation, such as accounts, safeguarding, data protection. See NCVO (National Council for Voluntary Organisations) for details.

Costing and funding the project

Having a realistic costing for your project is vital to give a clear idea of how much money you need to generate to keep the project functioning. OsNosh operates as a social enterprise so generates its own income as well as receiving donations from trusts and foundations. Donations in kind of access to premises and volunteer time are vital and make the organisation more resilient. Bear in mind that fundraising can be very time consuming and try to build forward funding so that you can keep going if you have a gap in funding.

The main elements you need to cost

This is the best representation we can provide of costs and overheads, these will vary significantly from project to project, depending on the model used and the existing resources they have. We hope it serves a useful starting point to gain an idea of the types of costs involved in projects like these.

Resource	Details	Working out the financial cost
Chef time	OsNosh works on a minimum of five hours of chef time per session to organise the surplus food collections, cooking, food boxes and deliveries. This is for roughly 50 covers.	How much food are you producing and how often? Will all the chef time be paid for or will there be some voluntary work?
Operational management	Organising food supplies, volunteers and service users' requirements. This coordination takes up to 2 hours a day, but is spread across the week.	Will this be a paid or voluntary role?
Kitchen equipment and consumables	For example cleaning products, foil, cling film, stationery, labels.	What equipment do you already have? What items can you get donated? In what quantities and with what frequency will you need the items?
Extra ingredients	Surplus food and food donations are highly unpredictable, so you need to budget for supplementary ingredients to make sure you can always produce a decent meal.	You should set aside up to £20 per batch of 50 meals for additional food expenses.
Overhead costs	You need to cover the costs of insurance, rent, utilities, bank charges, web hosting and (very	This will depend entirely on the premises you are running out of and the size of your operation.

	important!) any staff time needed, including administration tasks.	
Fuel bills and vehicle maintenance	For any vehicles you may have and to pay driver mileage. It's possible to operate the service with cars but obviously vans are better. Insulated boxes are ideal if you need to transport hot or cold food.	<p>What mileage rate will you be paying your volunteer drivers?</p> <p>What distances will you be covering in the vehicles?</p> <p>What condition are the vehicles in? Are they likely to present you with a big service bill in the near future?</p>
Personal protective equipment	This will be essential for the foreseeable future and the cost of it can mount quickly.	<p>Will you provide all the PPE, or will you ask volunteers to provide their own?</p> <p>Completing a detailed Covid risk assessment will help you in estimating the cost of PPE for your project.</p>
Training volunteers	For example, buying access to the Food Hygiene Level 2 online training	This costs roughly £12 per person.

The structure you decide to set your organisation up under will influence how you can generate income and what funding sources are accessible. It is worthwhile researching this and making sure you choose a legal structure that best suits what you plan to do. [The Cooperative Assistance Network](#) can offer advice – but they do charge a fee for their services. OsNosh is a community interest company, which allows it to undertake commercial operations but prevents access to some funding streams. Alternative social enterprise models include charitable incorporated organisations, which are registered charities.

4. The day-to-day running

Meals produced – OsNosh currently produces an average of about 40 meals on a Tuesday and 50 on a Friday. The maximum capacity is around 50–60 meals a day.

Number of people – Ben is a full time, paid member of staff and is supported by two other part time staff members and a team of volunteers. Volunteer numbers vary but he usually needs at least two volunteers for sorting food and putting it in boxes, two helping in the kitchen and three delivery drivers. OsNosh tries not to give any one driver more than ten stops and currently pays volunteers 45p per mile. Almost all deliveries are within five miles of Oswestry.

Surplus food collection-. As these are frequent and often at anti-social hours, it is preferable to spread these collections out between a few people; it's a big workload! OsNosh carry out the following food runs:

- Morning runs: 8am–9am, 5 days a week, 30mins to 1 hour.
- Evening runs: 6.30pm–7pm, 5 nights a week, 30 mins.
- Late-night runs: 8:30pm–9pm, 2 times a week, 1.5 hours.

Number of hours – Ben spends roughly three days a week on core operations, the admin staff member spends around 12 hours a week and the other staff member (kitchen and commercial) between 6 and 12 hours a week. On the two operational days the kitchen team works from at 9am until about noon to prepare the meals and then another hour or two tidying the kitchen. The box volunteers work from 9am until 10am or 11am (check with Ben) and the delivery drivers work from noon to 1pm or 2pm. Ben spends his remaining two days working on commercial projects, organising volunteers, doing shopping, collecting surplus food, dropping off waste food, managing the business (marketing, recruitment, accounts, website), liaising with other organisations, and many, many other tasks!

Commercial projects – If your organisation is going to be undertaking commercial operations be realistic about how much time these activities will take. They could take a significant chunk of time.

Equipment – fully equipped working kitchen and, ideally, a van. Delivery equipment such as insulated heat bags and a dependable source of t/a boxes.

5. Who uses OsNosh's services?

Before the start of the Covid outbreak OsNosh's community meals were mainly benefiting people who were lonely and isolated, but the people now receiving hot meals and grocery boxes are often more acutely in need and have a broader spectrum

of needs. To make sure it reaches the most vulnerable people OsNosh accepts referrals from local organisations that support various sectors of the community such as Designs in Mind, STAR Housing and Qube. OsNosh also accepts self-referrals but these are much fewer in number. The people that benefit from OsNosh's core operations include children, the elderly, people with mental and/or physical health issues, homeless people and people in Covid quarantine. The service is intentionally and emphatically inclusive.

6. What impact has the project had on the local community?

From the beginning of June to the mid-August 2020, OsNosh delivered 638 meals and grocery boxes to people in and around Oswestry!

Between mid-May and the end of July 2020 OsNosh made 127 collections of unwanted supermarket food, totalling some 2.6 tonnes of food, the vast majority of which was redistributed rather than wasted.

Service users

For the most part people's feedback on the meals and boxes has been very positive. It's different for everyone. For some people the main value of the service is the food they receive, for others it's the contact with other people. Some people want to come out and chat, some won't open the door. OsNosh sees the service as a trust building exercise. The boxes and meals are personalised according to personal taste (some don't like mushrooms, one hates bagels!), the level of cooking facilities available to the service users and, of course, their food allergies. OsNosh's volunteers take the time to listen to people and said that when they deliver the food they often see people's mood change; many people who receive the meals have chronic health conditions and are very isolated. Your volunteers should be prepared to schedule some time into their delivery round for those people who may want to have a chat (from a safe distance!). It's important to note that this is a balancing act, they do also have to be very careful about data protection issues and keep people's privacy in mind

'I remain sincerely grateful for my Friday food and meal delivery from OsNosh. I have a few underlying health issues going on and am wary of shops, so it really helps. Thanks again.' Mr Tucker, Oswestry

'We are delighted with the services provided by OsNosh. My father is living alone and the delivery of generous and tasty hot meals twice a week has been a great benefit especially during the lockdown, plus I have the

reassurance that somebody has called with him and that he is ok' Mr Davies, Cardigan

'I would like to say a massive thank you to everyone involved. Not only has it helped me and my family out, but I also look forward to seeing what I have received. You are all AMAZING. Once again, a big thank you' Name withheld, Oswestry

Volunteers

OsNosh's volunteers describe the project as an energetic, welcoming and respectful place. They are made to feel at ease and are grateful for the opportunity to help that volunteering at OsNosh has provided over the past months. (It is worth noting that when the pandemic hit OsNosh lost all of its regular core volunteers and welcomed in a new group that were of a very different demographic: students and young people who had been furloughed.) According to the volunteers it's always good fun, a good vibe and there's no pressure.

What is the attraction for someone to work in this kind of community initiative according to OsNosh's volunteers? Well, Ben is a big part of the appeal; he's created a very inclusive and welcoming environment where people can come together and learn. The sense of community in the project is strong and volunteers value the opportunity to spend time with people who are like-minded and enjoy meeting new people when they go out to deliver the parcels.

7. Top tips for running a successful community kitchen

- 1. Listen to and engage with the people you are delivering to** – it can be a difficult balance to strike whilst also bearing in mind people's privacy, but building-in the capacity for feedback from service users from the beginning means your service can adapt and change appropriately to make sure it is fulfilling the needs of the community being served.
- 2. Try to get all your processes in order before you launch** – issues will inevitably arise and you'll have to adapt, but it's good to have a solid base to start from.
- 3. Be aware of your delivery driver's safety and comfort** – make sure they are given a clear delivery route and know who they will be delivering to by responsibly collecting information and passing it to your drivers. Some volunteers may feel more (or less!) comfortable delivering to certain areas than others. A particularly difficult aspect of this for OsNosh has been telling volunteers that at the moment they can't go in and have a cup of tea when they are invited – as much as they might feel like they want to, it isn't safe for either party at the moment. The delivery

drivers sometimes have to call the people they are delivering to and should be aware of how to keep their number hidden to avoid unwanted calls from service users when they aren't volunteering. If you have the budget it's a good idea to get a dedicated work phone.

- 4. Putting great care into the food** – the food that OsNosh creates is mostly vegetarian and this can be unknown territory for some of the people who receive it. If the food you put out is beautiful, even if it isn't the sort of thing someone would normally eat, people are more likely to try it and enjoy it. Providing a high-quality meal also helps break down the stigma of receiving 'charity'. There is more dignity and enjoyment in receiving food relief if it is obvious that a lot of care has been put into it.
- 5. Make the 'combating food waste' message central to your work** – this, along with the pay-as-you-feel element is very important, it makes the project feel less like charity as the service users are contributing to a greater cause.
- 6. Manage expectations** – if you're using surplus food, it is important to let people know how variable it is likely to be and that this will be reflected in the meals and the contents of the boxes delivered each week.
- 7. Include an occasional crowd pleaser** – every now and then Ben will cook something he knows will be really popular, like a pork bap (with bought, ethically produced pork). This keeps the service exciting and appealing.
- 8. Monitor your impact** – this is crucial for funding. OsNosh advises anyone starting out to get a good monitoring system in place before they start. For example, record the hours you spend, the number of volunteers and their hours, the mileage used, the number of meals and boxes delivered, the amount of food collected and redistributed, the number of people your service has supported. OsNosh is getting better at doing this but it has taken a bit of time. They use an average crate weight and an average amount of crates per day for surplus food collected. The system isn't perfect and is something they are developing.