



Stock cubes, socks and warm jumpers

By Neil Starkie

Last week, just as I was leaving The Spiers Centre for the evening, I saw a lady arrive in the car park. The centre was already locked up, the lights were off and everyone had gone home. I approached her as she looked in our after-hours pantry, asked if she needed support and offered to open the doors again for her.

She said she only needed one thing, stock cubes. We keep a small after-hours pantry outside for situations exactly like this. I was surprised that she found some, but she did, exactly what she was looking for.

She thanked me as if I had somehow known that's what she needed. I, in turn, silently gave thanks for deliverance of a random item just as it was needed. I tried to encourage her to take a few other things, some bread, a few tins, but she politely declined.

Her son was sick, she explained, and she wanted to make him some broth. That was all she wanted. ometimes, when we talk about Emergency Relief, people imagine dramatic moments or large-scale interventions.

We often talk in terms of the thousands of kg's of food distributed and the tens of thousands of meals that equates to.

But this was just a stock cube. Hardship and how we address it comes in many shapes and sizes. This time it looked like a mother standing in a car park asking only for stock cubes so she can make soup for her sick child.

I saw her again a couple of days later. This time she came into the centre seeking support.

One of our amazing staff members was speaking to her, and I could hear the lady struggling under the weight she had been carrying in recent times.

Not only is her son seriously unwell and hospitalised, but her husband is seriously unwell too. She is working two jobs whilst trying to care for both of them and somehow hold life together financially and emotionally at the same time.

She spoke about exhaustion, and about trying to keep going when life keeps pushing harder. About feeling like no matter how hard she works, the gap keeps widening. She cried as she spoke.

Our staff member listened and gave her a hug. We supported her in every practical way we could. And, like so many times in the work we do, there was also a feeling that what we could offer felt too small compared to the size of what she was carrying. But perhaps that is where the importance of simple things really sits. Sometimes hope and the resolve to carry on, arrives in very ordinary forms.

Recently, we launched our new sea container clothing space at The Spiers Centre. On the surface, it is a very simple project. It is, quite literally, a storage container for clothing. But the reality is about something much deeper. It is about dignity and self-respect.

It is about creating a space where someone experiencing hardship can choose clothing for themselves or their children in a way that feels respectful, welcoming and human. Most of us know the feeling of finding a jumper, a shirt or a dress that we instantly love. The colour suits us, it fits properly and, it makes us feel a little more like ourselves. Perhaps a bit more confident and a little more comfortable. Even something as simple as warm socks can bring a sense of comfort, warmth and normality.

That feeling does not disappear simply because someone is experiencing hardship. In many ways, it matters even more. Sometimes a warm jumper, a fresh pair of socks or

Sometimes a warm jumper, a fresh pair of socks or clothing that feels dignified can restore something much deeper than comfort. It can restore a small piece of self-worth.

Because when the challenges that people are experiencing claw away at the foundations of life and strip away certainty, security, energy, and confidence, preserving dignity matters enormously.

It isn't about grand gestures. It may just be a simple stock cube or a warm jumper. Someone to listen without judgement, or to know that they are not facing hardship alone.

The challenges many people in our community are carrying right now are becoming heavier. We are seeing people arrive at crisis faster and from further back than ever before. People who never imagined they would need support are trying to hold life together whilst caring for loved ones, paying rent, buying groceries and simply trying to keep going, one day at a time.

We acknowledge that we cannot solve every problem, but we will keep doing what we can.

We will keep opening the doors, keep listening, keep standing beside people with no judgement. And we will keep believing that dignity, compassion and human connection still matter, especially in the small things.

Sometimes a stock cube, a pair of socks or a warm jumper can say to someone: you matter.