

BOUNDS GREEN FOOD BANK VOICE

WELCOME SPRING 2022



IN THIS ISSUE

- WELCOME SPRING
- VOLUNTEER VOICE
- FROM A BGFB TEAM
- NEWS & UPDATES
- CONTACT US

We are grateful for the incredible support of the Bounds Green community and more than 100 volunteers who give their time each month to support over 350 local families and individuals. Guests of the Food Bank regularly join us as volunteers to serve food, but also do much more.

Our volunteers interpret and distribute vouchers, coats, shoes and school uniforms. Our Support and Advice service has been accessed by 200 people, helping them get the right benefits, sort out debt, and refer them to support including Citizen's Advice, Disability Action Haringey and the Law Centre.

It shouldn't be like this, in one of the wealthiest countries on earth, but when there is a significant squeeze on the cost of living, we do what we can so that our neighbours, including children, disabled and older people, don't have to make cruel choices between food or fuel.

We thank you for what you give us, from volunteering, to donating, driving, and collecting food, storing, clearing and cleaning up. This spring, we have so much pride and gratitude for being in Bounds Green and belonging to a community that cares.



VOLUNTEER VOICE

From Our Door To Yours

by Lucy Abbots

Every Tuesday morning, amongst the sorting and cheerful carnage of setting up the day's service, Jackie Myles and I pore over the list of vulnerable guests unable to attend the Food Bank independently, to whom the fantastic volunteer drivers have been delivering every week for, in some cases, over a year now. Our challenge – and we always rise to it – is to pack food parcels according to the feedback we hold regarding dietary need and personal taste.

The first point of contact for guests requesting home deliveries is the Food Bank Helpline. Providing they live within the local delivery area (agreed postcodes within N22, N11 and N13), the Helpline volunteer makes initial enquiries: why the support is needed (typically financial insecurity, coupled with physical or mental health issues), could they attend in person, and if not, is there no-one else who could attend on their behalf. Assuming the criteria are met, the enquiry is passed on to the food parcel team who contact the guest again in order to build up a picture of their food preferences and any dietary restrictions.

Guests receive staple foods as standard – bread, rice, pasta, cereal, milk – plus a more customised mix of fresh and ambient items, according to taste. The volunteer drivers often stay to chat with guests, who may be quite socially isolated, passing back to us any concerns. With the guest's consent, these can be followed up by volunteers, involving outside partners such as Haringey's *Connected Communities* as appropriate.



The tragedy is that demand for food banks continues to rise and everyone faces the prospect of doing more without extra people and money to match the demand. We have great ideas for developing our services but, without those resources, we will have to talk to and link up with other organisations in the area: to find new sources of unwanted food, for example.

I'm humbled by the efforts of the volunteers at Bounds Green Food Bank. It restores one's faith in humanity. People giving their time and expertise and doing so week in, week out is inspiring. It is a privilege to work with them.

FROM A BGFB TEAM: FOOD SOURCING

In Conversation

Ishraq and Gill from the Food Sourcing team talked about 2021 and our current challenges.

Gill: You've got a good overview of food sourcing around London, Ishraq. What are the big issues at the moment?

Ishraq: Over the past 3 months in north and east London most food banks have had an increase in service users. This has put an extra squeeze on the amount of surplus food available for redistribution. The greater the demand, the greater the pressure. And this also puts a strain on the donated money we have at our disposal.

Gill: How has this affected BGFB?

Ishraq: Well, we've seen a similar increase in number of guests. But I'll be honest and say that compared to many, we are doing well. We continue to look for new sources. And have just recently been prioritising surplus in order to reduce waste in the retail sector.

A lot of this is down to our amazing volunteers. That's everyone who helps get the goods to the hall – those getting bulk and smaller supplies, people decanting cleaning products at home into jars, the volunteers that collect food donations in their streets and local stores, and the drivers. It's a collective effort.

Gill: I agree. I love sourcing food myself but tell us about some new developments.

Ishraq: Just recently, the Haringey Food Network (a collaboration of food distribution charities) has been doing a lot to offer new support with food. Especially as prices for ordinary basics are on the rise. BGFB were given a good portion of a central budget and we've used it to stock up on some staples, pasta, tins etc. So we have a small safety net.

Gill: Sadly we are seeing a real food crisis emerging in the Ukraine. What can we do to help?



Ishraq: Like all global catastrophes, it's heartbreaking. Firstly just as a little insight, these types of events do actually have a direct impact on our Food Bank. For example two days ago a donation of 28 pallets of vegan milk, which would normally all have been available to food banks, was diverted with 27 pallets going to Ukraine instead. This is phenomenal. We managed to hold back some for our local food banks. We will see other impacts on donations etc. but we will work to overcome that. And for the meantime there are links that we can offer people to donate to Ukraine. Let's hope for stability and peace.

Gill: What's the secret of our amazing food sourcing team?

Ishraq: Jackie, Andy, Oli, Rachel, you Gill – we work well together. We read the situation. And cover for one another. Humour helps – the team even laughs at my jokes!

Gill: Yeah ... we sometimes laugh at your jokes! Talking of funny, what's the most intriguing donation we've received.

Ishraq: Leave that one to you Gill!

Gill: It was pretty amazing when you managed to get crates of face masks in lockdown for everyone. And me? I got a call from a Co-op branch at 11pm for an emergency pick-up. Two black bin bags of 'Nicorette' anti-smoking sprays. But then again, there were always the chocolate spoons!



NEWS & UPDATES

Food Service Volunteers' Meeting, 8 March

21 volunteers, including two who joined over Zoom, attended a meeting of Food Service volunteers on 8 March.

We learned about the Support and Advice sessions that are run by volunteers supported by Citizens Advice, on Thursdays from 10.30am to 12.30pm. Guests receive advice and support on issues including debt, benefits and housing and are signposted to the expert organisations that can help them if we are unable to do so. Over the coming weeks, the Support and Advice team will be running specific campaigns to encourage guests to claim the benefits they are entitled to, targeting one type of benefit each time.

Small groups then carried out a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) to suggest improvements that could be made to the way the food bank operates. The suggestions ranged from enhancing our buddying system for new volunteers to reducing our environmental impact. The issues and suggestions from this exercise will form the basis of future Food Service volunteers' meetings.

Food Service volunteers' meetings will be held every 2 months and each meeting will address one or two key suggestions/issues from the SWOT analysis. The next meeting will focus on our guests, their food allowances and those who transition from being guests to being volunteers. It will also receive feedback and suggestions from our Food Bank's environmental impact sub-group - see next piece.



Launching the BGFB Eco Team

We are developing more sustainable practices to minimise our impact on the environment. Following the Food Service Volunteers' Meeting, we got together a small group to suggest ways that our environmental impact can be reduced.

The BGFB Eco Team will be working on improving our green credentials:

REDUCING our use of plastics,
REUSING bags and containers, and
RECYCLING more.

We will liaise with organisations such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace who can best advise us on the most effective ways for us to move forward on this issue.

The BGFB is already having a positive impact on the environment. Much of the fresh food that we distribute is shop donated food near its sell-by-date that would otherwise go to landfill. By reducing the food going to landfill we are also substantially reducing the amount of greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.



NEWS & UPDATES

Events and Projects Group

Thanks to all the donations from the local community and our sponsors, Christmas truly was festive at the Food Bank. On December 21 we provided festive food bags for all guests and had a separate (and huge!) stall outside to distribute presents. Gifts included winter warmers for teenagers and colouring books, crayons, and pencils etc for younger children. Special thanks to “Mother Christmas Tudy” who gave out an additional present to each child. There were 715 presents and 90 Christmas cakes, which she wrapped like a professional. Massive thanks to Tudy and Shirley!

The generosity of our local community and sponsors continued after Christmas, enabling us to have an additional give-away in January, of toys as well as great quality clothing for all occasions and for all age ranges, baby equipment, and books, games and DVDs for children and adults. On Mother's Day we distributed 254 presents of cosmetics and luxury toiletries to very happy guests. During Easter we distributed nearly 500 chocolate eggs, Easter bunnies and treats, putting smiles on little faces!

Our next project will be Back to School clothes for under 12s, available to order in advance.

Huge thanks for everyone's support, donations and to all the volunteers who helped make these projects a success.

Blue Bags of Goodness

In March the Food Bank was decked with blue carrier bags, all packed to the brim with great food for our guests. The generous donation was from a truly inspirational group of students who form the King's College London Arab Society (KCLAS).

It was a joy to form a partnership with KLCAS. In truth the students did most of the work raising a hefty £5000 – enough to pack out three lovely bags of food for every guest.

But the joy also came in their willingness to work with us. This included being in the hall from opening to closing time, lifting and shifting just like our regular volunteers do. They helped with several driving jobs on the day, accompanied some of our parcel deliveries, and most joyfully for us, played a great part on the day serving guests with the same kindness and respect that our volunteers show on a weekly basis. At the end of the day, they generously bought and shared pizzas with our volunteers.

The day of collaboration was a fitting part of the Ramadan commemoration. A little research shows that celebrating community is indeed one important element of Ramadan.

Job well done KCLAS!

We look forward to next time.



NEWS & UPDATES

Fundraising and Finance

A huge thanks to all our volunteers and the community for the overwhelming support we have received since the beginning of December. Our team delivered 5,000 addressed letters to our neighbours to engage those who wouldn't otherwise have known about our efforts at the BGFB. We also sold our lovely tea towels, tote bags and prints at the Myddleton Road Christmas Festival and ran a successful bottle tombola.

Various groups did their own fundraising – including the marvellous Ally Pally Park Run and the newly formed Bounds Green Food Bank carol singers; donation buckets, a SumUp machine to accept card payments, and some heavy lifting for the food donations paid off.

With all of these activities, we managed to raise enough funds and donated food to maintain supplies to our guests – including a substantial array of fresh produce – for the next five months.

We were also part of a Fundraising Drive organised by Food Aid London, a charity which tackles the daily problem of food poverty. We raised £9,250 for Bounds Green Food Bank.

We are very grateful for every donation we receive, as unfortunately the demand for the Food Bank continues.

We will have a stall at the Myddleton Road Market on May 1st and can set up a donation page for anyone who is interested in conducting their own fundraising activity. We also need help searching for and applying for grants available. If you are interested, please get in touch.



Meeting with Guests, 19 April

We had a very productive preliminary meeting to explore how guests can have an active voice in improving the way the Food Bank works. 6 guests and 5 volunteers were able to come. We discussed what people like about the way the Food Bank runs - many things, including that: everyone is very friendly and willing to support guests; two days a week is good so that one has food for most of the week). We also discussed where improvements could be made - a few areas, including: how the queue works; supplying more items such as dairy products and oil, and how we can work together in the future.

We learned a lot from this discussion and so agreed that regular meetings between guests and volunteers would be beneficial. Solving problems together is the most efficient way to achieve a Food Bank service that works well for both guests and volunteers.

DATES TO NOTE

Myddleton Road Market

1 May 2022

Food Bank Closed for Local Elections

5 May 2022

CONTACT US

To donate, volunteer or get general information, visit: www.boundsgreenfoodbank.org.

To respond to any of the call-outs above please contact us at: boundsgreenmutualaid@gmail.com or call the Helpline 07933 680 869

For suggestions & feedback:
volunteersupport@boundsgreenfoodbank.org