

BRENT MUTUAL AID NEWSLETTER



SEPTEMBER 2020

Caring for the Wellbeing of
Our Community



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IN THIS SEPTEMBER ISSUE, WE CONSIDER THE
IMPORTANCE AND IMPACT OF MENTAL HEALTH

Good mental health is important and is linked to good physical health – both of which support positive social and economic outcomes for individuals and society. However, the pandemic and lockdown have affected the mental health of many, with some impacted more than others. Knowing that mental health disorders account for almost a quarter of the total burden of ill health in the UK is worrying. According to this [BBC article](#) published on 18th August 2020, one in five people appear to have depressive symptoms compared with one in ten before the pandemic. Those most likely to show symptoms of depression are:

- People under 40
- Women
- People with a disability
- Those who said they would struggle financially

That is why this month we have decided to focus on mental health. Volunteering has helped many residents remain positive and resilient during lockdown. You can read the stories of Katie from Kensal Green, James from Willesden Green, and Jason from Tokington. Nicole from Dollis Hill gets personal and shares some of the things she has done during this challenging time to help her own mental health. Some wonderful charities and local initiatives established in Brent have done an amazing job of supporting people facing mental health issues.

As always, you will also be able to read about some of our wards’ recent news, as well as updates about various Mutual Aid projects. Our featured charity this month is Home-Start which helps families with young children through challenging times. Finally, we love supporting local businesses, especially when they help Mutual Aid, and this month we highlight Cuore Italian Deli & Coffee Shop who actively participated in Mutual Aid’s initiative “Gift Your Neighbour”.

Kieumy Pham Thai

FROM ONE NEIGHBOUR TO ANOTHER



A warm hello!

You may or may not know me... Either way, I want to invite you all on this journey with me. My aim is to use this new platform which I have put together 'From One Neighbour To Another' every month to help normalise the conversations around mental health. As a collective we need to speak and celebrate the highs and the lows, and overall break the stigma. Whether you are living in Brent, another part of London or somewhere across the pond, hello. I hope this article finds you well and will in some ways help either you or someone close to you.

When it comes to our body, it is always good to be in touch with ourselves, and that comes with knowing when something feels unbalanced in our body. A lot of the pain we feel can stem from our mental health. In order to be more aligned, one of the main steps we need to take is healing our minds to therefore feel physically good all round.

The first step I always take is acknowledging whether this feeling is an internal experience, which means is it personal? This may be from childhood memories or something current. The other is this from an external experience which means you have felt and connected so deeply with something exterior that you are now living and carrying those motions with you daily (I will be touching on external feelings further down).

There is no wrong or right and whichever one has triggered your mental health you have to take the steps of acknowledging, accepting and surrendering.

Although my mental health is mainly from personal experiences, I have understood from a young age that I am an empath, meaning I feel things very deeply around me, I can get easily overwhelmed and I feel and experience exactly what others are experiencing. With this my mental health has been triggered at times, as I mentioned above from external material.

Which brings me onto my first topic around my mental health episode, COVID-19. I believe that we have all in some way felt some form of heavy emotion during this pandemic which has all been triggered from the external. I will be giving you all of my personal tips which have helped me throughout the years and some that I have added during lockdown in order to better my mental health.



This has allowed me to take the next steps as lockdown has started to ease:

- *Go at your own pace, always!* Try not to cram everything in at once. Slow down and ease in gradually.
- *Read books that uplift you.* A personal favourite of mine during lockdown was 'Conversations With Friends'- Sally Rooney.
- *Socialise!* (Socially distance) with people you feel the most comfortable with.
- *Connect with your community.* Lockdown has given me a whole new meaning to the word 'community'. The new friendships I have made have built me up in so many ways. You'd be surprised how many like minded people live at your doorstep!
- *Meditation!* There's various apps for this and YouTube is also brilliant for this too.
- *Move your body.* This doesn't need to be anything high intensity. A walk around your local park is just perfect.
- *Start enjoying your own company.* Take yourself for a morning run, a solo coffee trip, play your favourite songs out loud or even better have a pamper day of doing all the things you love at your own pace.
- *Normalise saying "no".* This also comes with if you feel uncomfortable that a friend has not stuck with the Government rules.
- *Talk to someone you trust.* Whether it's physically or virtually.
- *Weekly plan.* Every Sunday set your weekly plan and your daily intentions. Whether that's to do with work, your own personal growth or play.
- *Spend time in the kitchen.* Bake and cook wholesome food that is good for your soul.
- *Learn new skills.* Try to switch off the negative brain and have faith in yourself that you can and will accomplish what you have brushed to one side for so long.
- *Morning affirmations!* Look yourself in the mirror and say "Whatever struggles I face today I will handle them with a positive mindset. I will learn and grow".



All in all, never stop being kind to yourself. You are number one. Everything starts with you. You are worthy and are bigger than anything your mind is telling you not. Sending love and peace to every single person as we all go through this transition stage. Be kind and patient not only to yourself, but also to the ones around you. Express your gratitude daily, and remind yourself that what may be small to you is big to another.

All my love,

Nicole Jebeli

N.B. I want to make you all aware that the information in this article is purely based on my own personal experiences and research. I am not a qualified health professional, and none of the above is medical advice. The words, resources and advice I give are gathered from my own personal journey and this shouldn't be used as a substitute for advice from your usual health care professional. If you or anyone around you is feeling low or anxious, please use this [link](#) to get further support. Or alternatively the Samaritans helpline is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. You can call 116 123 for free.

OUR COMMUNITY:
INITIATIVES

ELEVATED EXCHANGES

Elevated Exchanges is a meetup that provides a space for local neighbours to connect as a community in the context of themes such as: how to work towards unity in the face of inequality; how to uphold justice both in our own lives and at a community level; and the connection between the transformation of ourselves and our society. Having these discussions helps bring a community closer, which is the aim of the group, guided by the principal of unity and inspired by the values of the Bahá'í. The group activities are open to everyone living locally in the Dollis Hill, Dudenhill, Willesden Green, West Hampstead, and Kilburn wards.

Marta Albright Autran Dourado spoke to Elika Roohi and Soraya Sanatian.



were so many amazing efforts with food distribution or delivery of medication. But then we were also thinking about our emotional, mental, spiritual well-being. How can that also be maintained during this time when people are at home, more cut off from family or friends, and how can we enhance that sense of community and cohesiveness, even though we are not really able to be together in person.

You've organised quite a few talks on mental health, how did they turn out?

Soraya: During mental health awareness week, we looked at concepts like kindness and explored questions like 'how does being kind to another person contribute to another person's mental wellbeing and mental health?' One of the quotations we looked at was 'Let your heart burn with loving kindness for all who may cross your path'. What does that look like in action? Practically, what does it mean to show kindness to every person who's path you cross? And another quotation was 'Be sincerely kind not in appearance only'. What does that mean, to be sincerely kind? How would it change our community if we were kind not in appearance, but sincerely? I think these ideas, about

our connection to each other, all contribute to mental health.

I think that the fact that you provided an open space to talk and share your feelings about certain ideas already helps so much when it comes to mental health.

Elika: No matter what we are talking about – whether it's race unity or mental health during lockdown or even the influence of the creative arts on our lives – people who participate in the conversations always come back to the fact that being connected to one another and having a sense of community is so vital.

What do you currently offer residents?

Elika: Outside of our Zoom conversations – which have done a lot to bring people together and form friendships, as well as provide a bit of support during such a challenging period – we also have programmes for the empowerment of junior youth (11-15 years old), the moral and spiritual education of children, and building capacity in youth and adults to contribute individually and collectively to the progress of the neighbourhood. Our hope is that every child, youth and adult feels empowered to make a contribution to the community.

What experience did you gain with the project?

Soraya: I think one thing would be how to have these conversations with people that you've never met before. How to take a topic, and how to invite a group of initial strangers who just



OUR COMMUNITY:
INITIATIVES

live in the same area and how to actually be in that space and have a conversation. Find points of commonality and find that unity of vision as well, so that it is not voices that are countering one another or kind of debating. That is not really the environment I think we are planning to promote, but one of seeking truth together, collectively. That doesn't mean that everyone agrees but it's an open exploration and if people ask questions and sometimes have different views and opposing views, that is fine and that is what is actually beautiful about it and what ultimately makes it enriching.

Anything that people don't know about you two?

Elika: A lot of our interactions with people from the Mutual Aid group have been through these Zoom conversations, and I was mentioning before that actually a number of us have been involved with community-building activities even before lockdown, where we were working with youth and different populations to envision the transformation of our communities and movement towards some sort of unity and cohesiveness. I see this group as part of a larger process that is not just a couple of people here, but that is actually connected to a global process of transformation.

Soraya: I don't know if this is something that people know, but, everything that we do is with this ultimate aim and vision of unity, which is described in the Bahá'í faith. I believe in the oneness of all people and in the oneness of humanity ultimately.

To learn more about the group and get up-to-date information about the meet ups, follow them on Instagram at @elevated.exchanges



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CLITTERHOUSE FARM PROJECT

I knew of the Clitterhouse Farm Project, a community garden and café in a corner of the playing fields off Claremont Road, before I moved to the area. But my own life had to take a difficult turn before I felt confident strolling up to an event and asking to volunteer. 2019 was a terrible year for my family, one that saw first my granny and then my young aunt diagnosed with what turned out to be very aggressive terminal cancers. I find that when someone dies, nature can almost feel like a bit of an affront — why is all of this *living* just going on as normal, as if nothing has happened? But it can also be a huge comfort.

Our small flat has no outdoor space, and not even any usable window sills, and so the garden, and the amazingly welcoming team who run it, offered me an opportunity that I wouldn't otherwise have had to be around green things that I have seen develop. I only do very basic tasks: planting seeds, weeding, watering, and I've just learned how to take cuttings. And yet, I found that even these small acts of tending to plants made me feel that I could help something to grow and live, which did something to counteract the feeling of helplessness that attends seeing loved ones go through cancer treatment and palliative

care. The tasks are also meditative in and of themselves, allowing you to enter the state of "flow" that is so rewarding. And if you are ever having a really terrible day, you can go and take it out on the ever-encroaching brambles!

The garden is absolutely beautiful at this time of year, and I encourage you to go up and see it in September. Although the vegetable-growing area is closed to the public because of COVID-19, this year the team built a new wildflower and herb garden that is always open, and is full of flowers. You can bring your own watering can to do some watering from the rain butts, and there will be apple pressing workshops on Saturdays throughout September. You can find out more about the project [here](#), and events tend to be posted on their [Twitter feed](#).

They also recently hosted a day of workshops with Ali Alzein from the group [Bees and Refugees](#). Ali found solace in beekeeping when suffering from PTSD after fleeing Damascus. Ali's project aims to support refugee mental health and black bee populations by bringing the two together.

Jessica Stacey

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LOCAL HARVESTING

Free food falling out of the sky...so why not try launching your own local harvest.

When we talk about mental health, being in harmony with nature brings wonder. Let's talk about this well known initiative about local fruits harvesting.

Have you noticed food lying about in Brent? Several tons of apples and pears are falling in gardens all over Brent. Sadly, most are thrown away. Local community project Kensal to Kilburn Fruit Harvesters saves between 1 and 1.5 tonnes of fruit every year and donates it to community projects.

The Kensal to Kilburn group is offering to show other areas of Brent how to set up harvesting groups. The season lasts until the end of September, so you will need to respond fast!

It takes about an hour to harvest a tree, using a pole with a hook to shake branches and a tarpaulin below held by four volunteers. People enjoy being outside, meeting others, peeking



in at people's homes and gardens, plus getting closer to nature and where food comes from.

You can see for yourself with a four minute film available [online](#), produced by local photographer Jonathan Goldberg who won an Environmental Video of the Year award.

If you are interested in setting up your own a harvest group, you can contact Michael Stuart for more details : michael.stuart6@gmail.com

Apple harvest in Regal Way, Kenton. Photo: Jonathan Goldberg



Volunteering, businesses and how they can work together: An example of a business that supports volunteering, improving mental health for many.



Andy Vassilev spoke to Jason Hale about his experience

I worked in social and welfare care support charities for LGBT and HIV for fifteen years. Austerity led me to pursue a new direction. I volunteered then was employed by a Dyslexia charity, a condition I have as an office manager. This gave me the skills, combined with my previous role to take my current position as Front of House at Informa plc (via Mitie, my employer).

I have volunteered frequently in the past, usually between contracts. Apart from the reward of helping others, volunteering helps with gaining skills, realising and sharing knowledge, and in learning in general, in many ways. In addition to this, and in times like these, it avoided the feeling of isolation and the mental health issues it can bring.

How important is the employer's support in volunteering?

Both my employer Mitie and the contractor I work with at Informa plc, offer volunteer days off as an exchange. Informa offers four days off that can be split into half days. They were aware of the need for volunteers at Mutual Aid and added it to their list of approved organisations to volunteer.

At Informa plc they offer fundraising for charities. They offered £500 and £750 grants for a colleague who regularly volunteers with a charity. I hope to be successful in applying for this grant for Brent Mutual Aid. My organisation has gone over and above its volunteer commitment and in particular, Mutual Aid.

Understandably, many companies are not yet ready and able to bring back furlough the entire staff from each of the departments due to new COVID rules. This involves tough decisions, they must pick who will not return to work. In my case, it was quite easy for them. They were pleased to keep me on furlough and I am pleased to continue contributing and helping the community. At a time when many people are having to cut down or withdraw from commitments, this has been extremely useful.

How to go about volunteering?

Before I applied for volunteering, I looked at matching my skills to what was available and needed. With Mutual Aid, and my ward, I helped with distributing leaflets at local establishments such as shops, libraries and post offices, where the vulnerable are most likely to frequent and be known.

Many of our target vulnerable residents are based in council housing blocks. We were not able to reach out to these individuals as gaining access to locked blocks was difficult. I researched the direct email address for Brent council's CEO, requesting her assistance. Within a few minutes I received a positive response stating that she would help and link me up with the caretakers for the relevant blocks.

The outcome was more referrals to Mutual Aid and some very grateful residents. I am now working with other wards to establish the same in their own area. Some wards had plenty of volunteers whilst others had none. I have asked leads to contact other wards to see if they require assistance. This will enable a better service offered to their residents.

Upon my return to work I will continue to volunteer for Mutual Aid and look forward to being part of the team that remains onboard to establish the future of the excellent services provided by Mutual Aid.



Informa Group
Third Floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark
Street, London SE1 0SU
Telephone: 020 7017 7771
jason.c.hale@informa.com
www.informa.com

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CUORE



A HUGE THANK YOU TO
CUORE ITALIAN DELI & COFFEE
SHOP IN BRONDESBURY!

A number of businesses have teamed-up with Brent Mutual Aid groups to help with food donations and deliveries but a very special mention has to go to Cuore, the Italian deli on Sidmouth Rd in Brondesbury.

Cuore have always helped local residents in need of support and when lockdown began they extended their support to NHS and front-line workers.

Owner, Rudy, took an even bigger step however in July when he approached Brondesbury and Kensal Green Mutual Aid to donate thousands of pounds worth of stock. This was shared between “Gift Your Neighbour” - a Salusbury World-led non-referral food initiative across Brondesbury, Queens Park and Kensal Green, as well as Willesden Mutual Aid Foodbank.

In addition, every Thursday Rudy offers a free coffee of choice to anyone leaving food



donations for “Gift Your Neighbour” and pledges to match any donations bought from Cuore.

Rudy has not wanted to create publicity for the donations, but feels very strongly that “no-one in a community such as ours should be struggling to feed themselves or their families”.

Rudy’s huge generosity has made it possible for the “Gift Your Neighbour” initiative to continue.

Kieumy Pham Thai



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Aditi Singh, 18 year old volunteer for “Gift Your Neighbour” (pictured here with her sister Jyothi at Cuore) said: “We’ve been helping to feed 200 people twice a week and we had been worried about whether we could keep the initiative going. Thanks to Cuore we’ve had an amazing supply of high-quality food to go with meals made the same day by Daksha and her Community Response Kitchen”.

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“Gift Your Neighbour” will continue to work with Granville Community Kitchen, St Laurence’s Larder and other local food initiatives supported by Brent Mutual Aid.

Our Focus charity this month is HOME-START

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Have you enjoyed volunteering with Mutual Aid? Brent Mutual Aid is now building partnerships with established charities to look for synergies and strengths. There is so much we can do by working together.



Home-Start is a charity who recruit and train volunteers to support local families with young children who are struggling to cope. They provide practical and emotional support in family homes. However, during the COVID-19 period this has happened via Zoom or, when appropriate, in open spaces and parks.

For more info [visit](#)

Katie Pascoe



About us



Ways to volunteer

WANT TO VOLUNTEER LOCALLY?

Some of our partner charities are also looking for volunteers to support their work in our community

- **Peaceful Solutions** are looking for volunteers to help in their local charity shops
<https://www.peacefulsolutions.org.uk>
- **Home-Start** are recruiting volunteers to support and mentor young families
www.homestartbarnet.org
- **Little Village** are recruiting for drivers
<https://littlevillage.typeform.com/to/ondLiL>



A BETTER MIND WITH VOLUNTEERING

TESTIMONIALS FROM VOLUNTEERS ACROSS BRENT

Marta Albright Autran Dourado, interviewed James Moxon Browne, a very active volunteer from Willesden Green Ward

How did you get involved with Mutual Aid WG?

Before lockdown, I was working at a tourist attraction in London as well as working as a freelance performer. Because of Covid, the attraction was forced to close in March and my entire industry was essentially shut down. Like many others, the situation made me feel depressed and anxious about the future. It was important for me to have routine and a sense of purpose to my day, as well as trying to find something positive amid all of the horror. The last thing I wanted to do was stay in my flat and watch the (increasingly bleak) news. Initially, I did a lot of running in the local park and later I started thinking about ways of helping out the local community. I started in quite a small way – I slipped my number under the doors of a few neighbours to see if they needed anything. Then I found out about the Mutual Aid groups because I saw a poster about it on our noticeboard. I'd already been doing shopping and pharmacy deliveries for my parents who were both sheltering and it seemed like a logical extension of that. So I got involved in mid-April and I've been doing it since.

Why did you decide to help/dedicate so many hours to Mutual Aid?

Because of losing my job, I found myself with a lot of spare time. Luckily, I had some money saved up and I was able to get a self-employment grant so I haven't had to worry too much about finding short-term work. I think my initial commitment to the Mutual Aid group was predicated on this temporary new freedom. I'd never done any volunteering before and in all honesty, I don't think it would've occurred to me to join the group if I was still working. But the good thing about being in the middle of a crisis (particularly when it affects you directly) is that you see things in a new way. You have a stronger compulsion to do the right thing and help others to the best of your ability. At first, I really just saw volunteering as a way of killing time and taking my mind off things but over the months I've become more emotionally invested in what I'm doing, not least because Brent has been one of the hardest hit regions in the country. The customers are always so grateful when you deliver their shopping and medication which makes it all feel worthwhile. Also – it's called Mutual Aid for a reason. Not only do I get the satisfaction of helping others but I get peace of mind by knowing there are people out there who are willing to help me.

What have you gained from this experience?

Definitely a renewed sense of purpose. I think volunteering has made me a better person – more engaged with my community and less self-absorbed. It's been great getting to know people

in my area. I've lived in different areas of London all of my life, and this is the first time I've really got to know the people in my area. Also I've become more tech-savvy and connected. I'm starting to enter the 21st century in terms of communication. I've always been a bit of a Luddite when it comes to phone apps. I never use Twitter or Instagram, but I've started using WhatsApp in order to communicate with the group. It took an international pandemic to get me on WhatsApp! I'm hoping to return to work in the autumn, but I'd like to keep volunteering even if I have less free time.



How does it feel to have completed 100 cases?

It feels good! It's certainly something I'll look back on with pride. When I was doing the medication deliveries, I used to make a lot of silly jokes about turning up at a flat and being ambushed by Esther Rantzen disguised as an old lady with a hidden camera and getting some kind of "Hearts of Gold" award! I knew I'd done a lot of deliveries but I never really kept track of them. Anyway - when I made my 100th delivery, the admin team threw a little surprise party for me which was really lovely. I turned up at the chemist thinking I was doing a delivery and they appeared out of nowhere with a celebratory box of little cakes. I was very moved by the gesture (even though Esther Rantzen didn't show up!) On a serious note though, I have nothing but praise for the admin team and all the other volunteers. Everyone works hard and has such a positive attitude – it really is a well-oiled machine. A lot of people are balancing their volunteering work with full time jobs and utilising every bit of spare time they have to help people and I have huge respect for them.

Any pros and cons since lockdown

The lockdown has saved a lot of lives and certainly taken pressure off the NHS. The air we're breathing is a lot clearer. But I don't like the idea of lockdown and social distancing having a prolonged cultural legacy because of the devastating effect on the economy, particularly for tourism, hospitality and the arts.

I understand that some people are able to work from home and would be happy to stay in lockdown for a long time but not everyone has this option. It's a highly divisive issue because lockdown hasn't affected everyone equally. Some people haven't been affected at all, some people have lost loved ones, some people have lost their livelihoods. Some people want to stay in lockdown for longer, some people want to get the economy going before it's too late. I think the answer is somewhere in between. There needs to be compromise. We can't stay like this forever but we can't fully open too quickly either or we may risk a second wave. I personally feel that we're reopening at a sensible rate, although I'm concerned about the future of theatre and tourism.

What message would you give someone who is considering the role of volunteer helping Mutual Aid?

You have to be patient. You may spend a lot of time queuing in supermarkets or chemists. Also, if you are delivering to elderly or vulnerable people, they may be

Katie Pascoe from Kensal Green Ward shares her experience of how volunteering helped

I'd always heard about how volunteering builds self-resilience; the limited amount of volunteering I'd done in the past had always filled me with a good feeling and had felt purposeful. I hadn't anticipated just how much volunteering with Mutual Aid in 2020 would reframe not only my definition of community, but would also reframe my own purpose, and reaffirm my confidence in my skills and ability to find solutions. Most important however, has been meeting many many incredible, dedicated and talented people on this journey.

Some personal issues over the past few years, culminated in me experiencing periods of anxiousness in 2019. At first I didn't know what it was, but I knew it wasn't right, and thankfully sought some experienced help later last year. Therapy provided some new coping strategies to build my resilience. When COVID-19 hit in 2020, I was worried that these feelings would resurface and that they may be even harder to deal with, given the challenges and isolation we were all facing. Trusting my instinct, I asked if the Kensal Green Mutual Aid team could do with some organisational help. I knew it would be a good fit with my skill set, but had no idea whether I could translate this into a volunteering role. We have an amazing network of volunteers, and I initially busied myself recruiting volunteers into roles that I thought would be a good fit for them based on a 15 minute phone chat! This alone was so rewarding, seeing that there were so many people wanting to help, even when faced with very challenging

reluctant to answer the door even if they are expecting you. Again, this requires patience and reassurance. Where possible, you should leave the medication at the door and keep your distance when they receive it (although if they are elderly, they may require you to physically pass it to them). It's best to wear a mask in this situation. You need to make sure your phone is always fully charged. For your first 10 deliveries, you will always be paired with another volunteer so communication about meeting times is very important and if you can be flexible with your time, this is a big advantage. When making grocery deliveries, you are expected to pay for the groceries yourself and photograph all receipts. Upfront payments from the clients are not accepted. Once you have made the deliveries, you will be reimbursed online within 24 hours (although some of the customers will insist on paying by cheque which can slow things down). As long as you're not deterred by this, I highly recommend volunteer work as it is very rewarding. Good luck!



circumstances themselves was incredibly inspiring. I gained strength through their efforts, and over the early weeks we all supported each other through our ups and downs.

Not only has Mutual Aid allowed me to build a strong, kind, supportive network around me (a key to resilience), but it's taught me to be grateful, humble, and more mindful of others. I won't deny that when those little fingers of anxiety crept up on me over the past few months, that I wasn't scared and worried that they would take hold. I truly believe that volunteering has given me a new form of resilience, and some amazing new friends. We've all been changed by this crisis; but volunteering with Mutual Aid has helped keep my head above water, reset my purpose to build and be part of strong, successful teams, and above all has given me a new found love of this amazing little community.

NEWS FROM THE WARDS

Each month we will feature news from different wards across Brent, giving each ward an opportunity to present their latest projects and successes.

WILLESDEN GREEN

In our last issue we featured James, one of our volunteers, who helped with 100 cases - and counting! (See our interview with James in this edition and find out how Mutual Aid and mental health can go hand in hand). This month we have another amazing volunteer who also completed 100 cases, Matilde. Matilde has been an invaluable volunteer helping with a number of things, such as handling requests. The group prepared an "ambush-surprise" to celebrate her 100th case (see picture below).



Mia, Matilde, Marta



Matilde's celebratory encounter; William, Matilde, Marta, Mia

The number of cases fulfilled by Willesden Green Mutual Aid ward has reached 780 cases. That means that many households had their requests fulfilled, bettering the mental health and well-being of residents. An additional benefit has been gained by the volunteers themselves, many of whom also thrive when helping others. Being involved with Mutual Aid means feeling motivated, and having a purpose or aim, even in times of anxiety and uncertainty. It also means getting out and exercising - great for mental health! If there is one positive and beautiful thing that could possibly come from the pandemic, it is, no doubt, Mutual Aid. The name says it all: mutual aid bringing mutual winners!

Marta Albright Autran Dourado

MUTUAL AID FOOD WILLESDEN & SUFRA

After operating since the end of March (and delivering to more than 8,500 people) as an emergency food aid centre at the Pakistan Community Centre, Mutual Aid Food Willesden (MAFW) ended its current project on Friday 28th August. But, from 8th September, they will restart as a partnership with SUFRA, the well established Brent food bank and community support organisation.

In conjunction with SUFRA, MAFW will provide emergency food aid to local residents from the same venue one day a week. The MAFW team of volunteers believe that working with SUFRA will build more structure and sustainability into what was created during lockdown and enable them to support people in the community long-term.

For more information, click [here](#)



MAFW Communications Team

KENSAL GREEN

This month in Kensal Green we've been focused on growing the community spirit; primarily by holding a socially distanced festival which involved street performers, singers, poetry, bagpipes, violins, and an amazing performance by some original members of the the first Notting Hill carnival on the steel drums. Three hours of sheer delight as the streets of Kensal Green were once again filled

with many beaming faces.

The team have also been focusing on building partnerships with local and Brent wide charities, to ensure we signpost our neighbours to help that is already there. This month we had a collection of baby clothes and equipment for [Little Village](#), our community were so generous it was inspiring.

Katie Pascoe



If you would like to speak to us, or would like help, please get in touch:
tel: 02086388291
email: kensalgreenaid@gmail.com

Kensal Green Mutual Aid Group



MAPESBURY

From the start of the coronavirus outbreak we (at Mapesbury Mutual Aid) have received calls from residents struggling with self-isolation and in need of a friendly ear. Some residents just wanted to chat and expressed reassurance knowing that we were here should they need help with shopping and accessing essentials, amongst other things.



We also received calls from residents with more challenging needs, with some phoning up in mental distress. Knowing how to appropriately escalate these calls has been challenging and, as a result, a smaller mental health working group was

formed, which included local mental health professionals of different backgrounds (including psychiatry, nursing, counselling and research). This meant that call handlers could direct mental health questions and concerns to this group as and when they arose, and seek the advice of mental health specialists in the area who know about the local services available. This working group collaborated to develop a mental health call handler telephone prompt to help phone coordinators signpost existing services to callers.

For many, the isolation of lockdown has brought on great loneliness and exacerbated underlying mental health issues. In recognition of this, volunteers have started to think about ways of supporting and connecting people. For example, a Mapesbury Mutual Aid plant gifting scheme was set up by a local volunteer, Roxy (pictured opposite) who wanted to gift houseplants to residents who might be struggling with loneliness

whilst self-isolating, in order to bring some joy and nature into people's homes. Through the Mutual Aid Food Willesden (MAFW) and Mapesbury Mutual Aid volunteers, over 100 plants have been gifted to local residents. Feedback from beneficiaries has been really positive so far, with many saying how grateful they are for their new houseplant. One lady said how it makes her happy every time she wakes up and looks at her plant. There is growing evidence that plants can have numerous health benefits – they have been shown to lower levels of physiological and psychological stress¹; increase attentiveness and memory; increase productivity; boost mood and creativity. This plant gifting scheme has proven to be a great success and we hope it will be an ongoing project in the area.

Aneeka Verma & Tatiana Los

**Mapesbury Mutual Aid
Plant Gifting!**

Are you self-isolating, shielding or just need some cheering up?

Would you like a houseplant or know someone that does?

Or, do you have a houseplant or cutting to donate?



Please email us:
localplantgifting@gmail.com





In Mapesbury, we conducted a survey among our volunteers which showed that most have found volunteering rewarding and enjoyable. 62% have said they will continue volunteering indefinitely. There is growing evidence that community volunteering is linked to improved mental health and wellbeing. Some of the benefits of volunteering include improved social connections mental health and wellbeing. Even helping with seemingly small tasks like shopping or picking up a prescription can make a significant difference to the lives of local residents. Volunteering can be mutually beneficial as local residents receive the support they need and local volunteers meet their neighbours, make new friends, boost their social skills and feel the reward of giving back to their local community. Committing to a shared activity together can be one of the best ways to make new friends and strengthen existing relationships. Volunteering can be a great way to meet new people and strengthen community networks, build support systems and social capital, through sharing information, resources, and mutual aid.

Mapesbury Mutual Aid Coordinator, Linda, gives her thoughts on volunteering:

What were your reasons to start volunteering?

I started volunteering just before lockdown, as it really seemed that there would be a lot of urgent problems and I wanted to help out. Especially things such as food were a big problem and I wanted to help out people in need.

How have you found volunteering has helped you as a person?

Volunteering has been great. The people you meet are so inspiring! The first weeks of lockdown, there was so much negativity on the news, etc., and to be part of such a large group of people who just want to help each other was a major positive boost. Lockdown was personally also very stressful and the volunteering has kept me focused on positive things instead of worrying about things I couldn't change.

Many say volunteering is good for mental health, would you agree?

Definitely! I think so many aspects of volunteering are. Positive interaction, the feeling of having an impact, being part of a group, it's all there and is great for mental health.

A huge part of our role on the community phone at Mapesbury has been working with those who just need a chat. This ranges from those who are lonely and would like to build a relationship with someone on the phone to those really struggling with their mental health and needing guidance in getting additional support. Some residents have ended up in long term friendships with our volunteers who continue to check in on them and are a friendly voice.

The team has also been focused on acquainting themselves and sometimes even partnering with charities to ensure people get the right expertise and nuanced referrals are made to connect people to organisations.

We have also seen a desire to focus on community spirit for those feeling lonely or simply needing some joy in their day.



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BRENT COVID-19 TESTING
For further information [click here](#)

THE 5+1 WAYS TO WELLBEING

Mental health and wellbeing can sometimes be an afterthought but taking care of your mind is just as important as looking after your physical health.

- **Connect** : Keeping in touch with friends and family has never been easier. Make use of the many free apps, social media or just have a good old phone call to connect with people you love.
- **Take notice** : As many people get back to the hustle and bustle of life, it's good to take time out, self-reflect and pay more attention to being in the moment.
- **Give** : Giving or volunteering can help improve mental wellbeing by creating positive feelings and a sense of reward.
- **Be active** : Physical fitness doesn't have to mean running miles or lifting heavy weights. A 20-minute walk or some stretching indoors can really boost your mood. Why not use one of the free outdoor gyms in Brent parks or search "Brent Walks" on the council website to find a walking route.
- **Keep learning** : Libraries are so much more than a place to read books. Brent Libraries offer free classes to brush up on your IT skills as well as courses, such as ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), online job-related training and much more.
- **Create** : Taking time to make or create something, whether on your own or with family and friends, can leave you with a huge sense of achievement. When was the last time you completed a puzzle, cooked something new or got the colouring pencils out? Why not try it this weekend?



IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO GET
BETTER HEALTH

Public Health England have launched a new campaign to seize the moment for a national reset moment of health!

Nearly two thirds (63%) of adults in the UK are overweight or living with obesity. Extra weight can cause pressure to build up around vital organs, making it harder for the body to fight against diseases like cancer, heart disease and COVID-19.

The Better Health campaign provides a variety of tools and apps to help you make healthier food choices, become more active and prevent future weight gain. For help and support, just [visit](#).

YOU DON'T NEED TO JOIN A GYM TO KEEP FIT!

There are 19 outdoor gyms in parks across Brent and they are open for you to use, free of charge!

[Outdoor gyms](#) are designed to help you lead a healthier, more active life.

The wide variety of equipment can help you manage your weight, improve muscle tone, increase your fitness and feel better. No experience or knowledge is needed as the equipment is simple and straightforward to use. To help you get started, you can join monthly short introductory sessions for free. There's no need to book these sessions, places will be allocated on a first come first

served basis. There are also a number of other classes available to book online delivered by fully qualified and registered coaches. Instructors will be adhering to social distancing guidelines and contact details will be taken for NHS Test and Trace purposes.

Classes are for all ability levels and ages, and there are a range of different options for you to choose from.

Whether you're interested in yoga, circuits or a full body workout, there will be something there for you to enjoy so visit the [Our Parks](#) website to take a look, find a class that suits you, and book your place today!

GOOD THINKING

[Good Thinking](#) provides digital mental wellbeing support for those living or working in London, this includes free NHS-approved apps that residents can use to deal with stress, anxiety, low mood and poor sleep.

IF YOU NEED TO SPEAK TO
SOMEONE...

Call the Samaritans free on 116 123 or go to www.samaritans.org
Call the Parents helpline on 0808 802 5544 or go to www.youngminds.org.uk
Text the charity SHOUT. This is a crisis text service. Text SHOUT to 85258

NEW!!
Follow us on Instagram
@brentmutualaid

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- Editor – Kieumy Pham Thai
- Assistant Editor – Yasmin Aluf
- Graphic Designer – Sukey Parnell Johnson
- Copy Editor – Jacqueline Perez
- From One Neighbour to Another - Nicole Jebeli
- Elevated Exchanges - Marta Albright Autran Dourado
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- Charities – Katie Pascoe
- Volunteer Testimonies - James Moxon & Katie Pascoe
- Willesden Green Ward – Marta Albright Autran Dourado
- Mutual Aid Willesden Food – (check)
- Kensal Green Ward – Katie Pascoe
- Mapesbury Ward – Aneeka Verma & Tatiana

Thank you ...

- Brent Mutual Aid Communications Team
- Brent Mutual Aid Website & Graphic Design Team
- Brent Mutual Aid Social Media Team
- Brent Mutual Aid Ward Reps
- Volunteers Communications Team
- Local Brent Councillors
- Brent Residents

BRENT MUTUAL AID GROUPS

Barnhill	barnhillcovid19@gmail.com	07498 219 883
Brondesbury Park	covidaid.brondesburypark@gmail.com	020 8050 3929
Dollis Hill	st.catherines@gmx.com	020 8914 7891
Dudden Hill	duddenhillmutualaid@gmail.com	07588 541 399
Fryent & Queensbury	kingsburycommunity20@gmail.com	07721 233 050
Harlesden	aka_212@hotmail.co.uk	07446 557 715
Kensal Green	kensalgreenaid@gmail.com	020 8638 8291
Kenton	kenton.mutualaid@gmail.com	07725 881 428
Kilburn	kilburnaid@gmail.com	020 3488 4916
Mapesbury	MapesburyMutualAid@gmail.com	020 8914 7950
Northwick Park	NorthwickPark.MutualAid@gmail.com	020 8050 1768
Preston	preston.mutualaid@gmail.com	07725 881 428
Queens Park	qpmutualaid@gmail.com	020 8050 3875
Stonebridge	mrasifzamir@gmail.com	07950 994 411
Sudbury	sudburymutualaid@gmail.com	07770 678 714
Tokyington	tokyingtonmutualaid@gmail.com	020 3448 4810
Welsh Harp	welshharpcovid19@gmail.com	0330 043 1787
Wembley Central	wembleycentralmutualaid@gmail.com	020 8050 1617
Willesden Green	willygmutualaid@gmail.com	07593 426 959



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