

MUTUAL AID FOOD WILLESDEN



60 SECOND INTERVIEW WITH ELAYNE COAKES OF MAPESBURY

For Mutual Aid Food Willesden (MAFW)
A food hub offering emergency essential boxes locally during Covid-19



PHOTO: Elayne with plants for community centre

Q Can you tell us about yourself?

I am a retired university lecturer in Knowledge Management, with a keen artistic streak. I love eclectic reading and write online reviews for several publishers; and eclectic gardening! We open our garden every year for the Yellow Book and it hums all summer with bees and wild flowers pop up everywhere. I claim that it was designed as a painting with colour schemes, views, and unusual planting groups. We also have various pieces of art and sculpture scattered amongst the plants.

Q How did you hear about Mutual Aid Food Willesden?

I was approached as I have obtained grants for the Willesden Green Town Team and was asked if I could help find grants for Mutual Aid Food Willesden.

Q Have you noticed any changes as a result of Covid-19 lockdown?

The outpouring of volunteering has been really amazing – the energy and effort of neighbours, the level of caring for

our community has really astonished me. I now know so many more of the people who live in Willesden than I did before and hope that they have become my friends.

Q Can you tell us how you're involved helping provide essential aid?

My main role is on the finance side. I manage the bank account for the Town Team and the money from donations goes through us and so I can pay the bills. I also search for grants as well as the initial set up of the Local Giving page through the Town Team.

Q Are there any stories that you could share?

I found out recently – in the middle of the COVID crisis - that I have a quite serious illness, which masqueraded as the virus on first glance. I have to say how wonderful the NHS has been to me. Within 30 mins of phoning 111 I was in an ambulance with 2 lovely paramedics who were very kind, being whisked off to the Royal Free hospital and have had daily phone calls from my GP to check on me, and a video conference with a consultant – no 3 month waiting list! And 2 negative COVID19 tests!

Q How would you sum up what Mutual Aid Food Willesden does?

It has astonished me how many people, in what seems on the surface to be an affluent area – Mapesbury has always been known as the ‘posh’ part of Willesden – are in need of help and food parcels. I was not aware of these neighbours and I suspect many people I knew before weren’t either.

What Mutual Aid Food Willesden has done is shone a light on how fragile our economy is, and how many people live very much on the edge of true poverty. MAFW has provided a much needed assistance to so many in different ways, and I sincerely hope that this community spirit of help and neighbourliness continues when the situation stabilises. I wonder how soon our service can wrap up when more and more job losses are being announced as the economic situation deteriorates....