



### Bea Hughes on taking part in shifts at the kitchen

Being part of the Solidarity Kitchen is a joy and a privilege. I have been working with the project as both a kitchen participant and delivering meals to doorsteps approximately once or twice a week since the beginning of lockdown. It is essential work being done in the face of Governmental negligence and absence of support. For me, it is a method of necessary engagement with the wider community during the uncertainty of this pandemic. In the kitchen, I am often delegated tasks such as counting skyscrapers of takeaway boxes, or cleaning a majestically large cooking pot the size of a cruise ship (in which I often imagined myself rowing down the canals of Birmingham using the paddle). I've made vats of dressing with balsamic vinegar and low sugar date syrup. Not to mention tossing ginormous cauldrons of salad.

The app used to deliver the meals is efficient and user-friendly and the routes are planned so your last stop is the one closest to your house. I have been humbled and moved by the gratitude and the humour of those people I have met from afar at their doors. The strict PPE and hygiene practices within the project made my anxiety around contagion easier. I have relished meeting new like-minded people from around the city and becoming familiar with new and uncharted areas. The Solidarity Kitchen team have without fail been supportive, friendly and kind. This extends to everyone I have encountered working with the project. Their stamina and determination is an outstanding example of the kind of mutual solidarity we must aim for.

**Over 6,480 meals delivered**



## SOLIDARITY IN SEPARATION

### The crisis didn't start with Covid

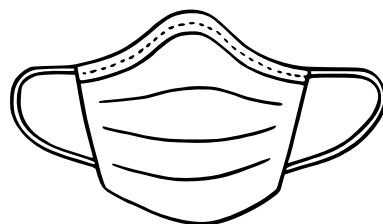
Cooperation Kentish Town was set up in 2019 as a self organised, members-led food co-op on a council estate in north London. Our members have access to extremely affordable groceries (sourced, packed and distributed collectively) and organise free food larders around the school holidays. We believe that by working together to meet our needs, we can make our community stronger, better connected and more resilient.

In early 2020, we set up Cooperation Town as a new umbrella organisation to enable us to share our model with others and build a sustainable network of food co-ops across the country. We hosted a series of training sessions for new organisers wanting to set up similar co-ops in their own communities and started supporting them in doing so. Our vision is for a community-led food co-op on every street, in every town!

By the time Covid-19 hit, we were well placed to quickly respond - we had the space, organisers, links in our community and reliable sources of free and cheap food. On the day after lockdown started, we distributed our first delivery to 40 of the most vulnerable Camden household. We are currently (Mid May) making weekly deliveries to around 150 households on low or no income, including families and individuals referred to us by local agencies, charities, schools and concerned neighbours. Our free parcels contain fresh fruit & veg, bread, tinned and dry food, healthy snacks, baby food and cooked meals.

But we know that for many of us, including Cooperation Kentish Town organisers, the crisis didn't start on 23 March 2020 and will not end when the lockdown is lifted. Like millions of people around the country, many of us lived in poverty and precarity before the pandemic and will continue to endure these conditions after the crisis is officially over. Our situation is not informed by a virus, but by precarious jobs that pay poverty wages, unaffordable bad housing and a cruel benefits system that literally kills thousands of our class. We are now working with groups across the UK - including our friends at Cooperation Birmingham - to develop our own Covid exit plan. Together we can resist going back to the harmful 'normality' that impacted all our lives and plot our way towards a better future.

**Wash regularly with hot soapy water**



**Fully cover both your mouth and nose**

We want to help keep people safe by encouraging face mask use. If you need a mask or want to help make them please get in touch with [masks@cooperationbirmingham.org](mailto:masks@cooperationbirmingham.org)

### Participants NOT volunteers

For some time Cooperation Birmingham solidarity kitchen has slipped into the common usage of the term 'volunteer' to describe people who are working towards the project. This is often used by charities and NGOs, the 'voluntary sector', if you will, to describe all the people who put in work for their cause. This is a distinction made between the people at the top, the people who get paid and even profit from the cause and the people who put in hours of labour to make things happen because they see the value in it. Volunteers often do not have a real say or stake in what happens in the organisation they work for and tend to be instrumentalised.

In Cooperation Birmingham this is not something we hope to replicate. We are not a charity or an NGO and we do not work for anyone but the people involved, whether that be people working in the kitchen, people receiving meals, people driving, people working hard on this very newsletter! Anyone can contribute ideas to the project and has the power to enact them with the work and agreement of other participants. We are all participants and we can all participate!



### Eating well - Shamima Akhtar

The meals have been really helpful whilst i've been isolating alone. I started to receive the government parcel a few weeks ago, but it contains lots of food that I can't eat and there's no way of amending what's in the deliveries. With the Solidarity Kitchen meals I know i'll have a nutritious meal in the evening that I can actually eat, which removes the stress of having to decide on what to eat and gives me something to look forward to in the evenings.

I first heard about the meals on my social media from friends that worked at the Warehouse Cafe. It's been really nice to feel supported during this pandemic, especially because the meals do not require you to share lots of personal information to access them, which I had to do in order to receive help from the government. This is the type of unquestioned support 'vulnerable' people like me need, rather than charity-based support that puts pity at its centre.

A news bulletin for extraordinary times. Submissions to [info@cooperationbirmingham.org](mailto:info@cooperationbirmingham.org) uk 22/05/20

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