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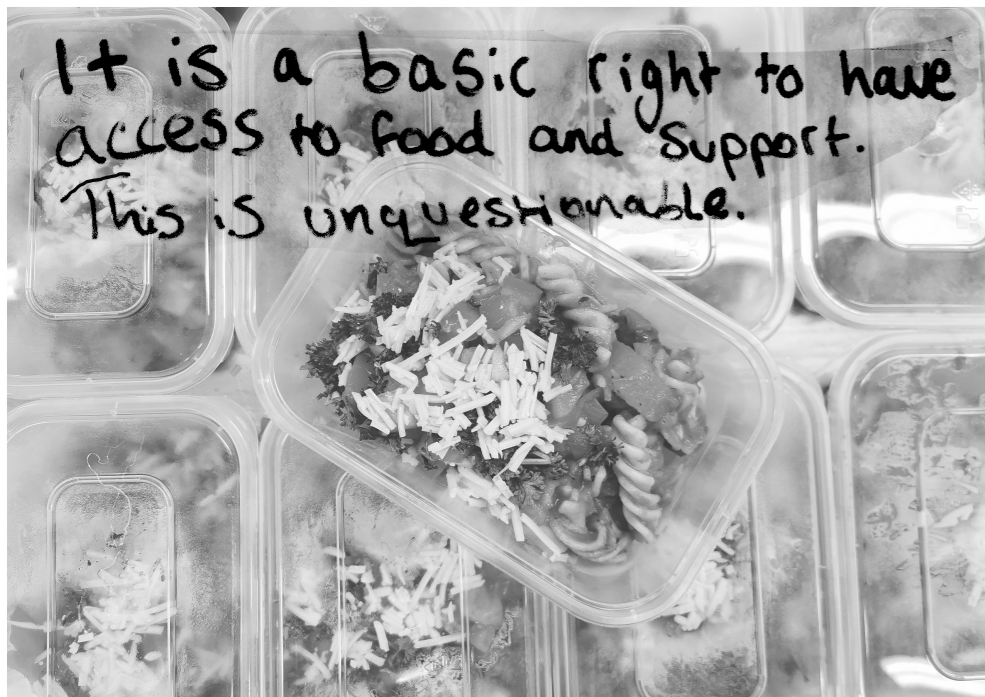
WE HAVE

IS EACH

OTHER



cooperationbirmingham.org.uk



It is a basic right to have access to food and support. This is unquestionable.

What is Cooperation Birmingham?

We are a cooperative of working class people living in and around Birmingham. We want to build an organisation that provides mutual aid to us and our surrounding communities. We want to build a solidarity economy that works for us and not for the rich. We currently run a solidarity kitchen and a mask making project, but we aim to expand by including a second kitchen, a composting site and many other things!

Access to food in the U.K is grossly unequal: through Trussell Trust food banks, the largest provider, people can only access food with a voucher. Vouchers are given out only via 'care professionals' such as health visitors, school counsellors, social workers etc. The vouchers ensure that only those deemed deserving by the state are able to access food. This can often exclude homeless people, asylum seekers, and many others who might not check the tick box but will need food.

Our aim is not to give charity to the 'needy', but instead to be a platform where people can contribute according to their abilities and receive what they deserve. This means that we need help with things such as cooking, delivering, sewing masks, social media, or admin and we want to support people in doing so - even though this is a crisis we can still learn and grow together. If you would like to contribute, you can reach through email, social media or just tell one of us.

This is the first edition of our newsletter, in which we want to provide some context to what we are doing and hear the voices of fellow Brummies. If you are either actively participating in Cooperation Birmingham or receiving food from us, we would like to share your story and hear your thoughts, reach us at info@cooperationbirmingham.org.uk

Over 5,500 meals delivered



SOLIDARITY IN SEPARATION

It takes soap & a lot of ❤️ to run a kitchen

The Digbeth solidarity kitchen is our main project. We deliver around 150 free meals every day to people around the city. We ask no questions and we take no money, it's solidarity without conditions.

On a normal day, there are usually 17 people working for the meals to be cooked, and distributed. Five people work at the kitchen of the Warehouse Cafe from 11,30am to 6pm cooking and packing the meals. Usually eight drivers deliver the food all around the city, following a strict health and safety protocol at every single stop (you can find our guidance in podcast form online). And four people are doing backroom work, which includes confirming and taking orders, creating routes, coordinating with the kitchen and offering remote support to drivers.

As for last week, the total hours of work by all people involved in the daily operation of the solidarity kitchen amounted to 2,400. At minimum wage rate, that would mean almost £25,000. Obviously none of us are paid for this work, so these astonishing numbers show that this would be possible without the solidarity of the people from Birmingham, and also the enormous shortfall in financial support for people and communities from the government. However, those numbers do not capture the whole magnitude of the solidarity kitchen.

In order to make the daily operations happen, there is much work that needs to be done in advance. Someone needs to contact all the people involved and make sure that they know what to do. Someone else needs to work on social media and outreach so potential food recipients know about us. Someone else needs to work on raising funds and managing finance so we have enough to keep cooking. And the same again next week!



Tech for good

We have set up Cooperation Birmingham with an open tech infrastructure, we have a forum on our website which people can use to get involved in the project and a map of all mutual aid support in the city, public finances and we make sure we keep all the important personal data safe. We are also working on a rota app to make it easier to sign up to a shift and an exciting new technology called Co-op Cycle - something like Deliveroo but run on solidarity instead.

All we have is each other

Since the Covid-19 pandemic started you have probably heard about mutual aid groups blooming all around the country. It is really inspiring to see this boost of solidarity in times of crisis! But... what exactly is mutual aid? Mutual aid is the very simple idea that only in cooperation (and not in competition, like we have been told) we thrive. It is the idea that we help each other and we don't leave anyone behind. But above all that, it is the idea that together we are powerful.

Caring for and sharing with your family and your neighbours is a very simple and beautiful way of practising mutual aid. But in Cooperation Birmingham we want to bring the concept to a new level. We want to create a large community of solidarity able to make collective decisions and work for the common good.

Resistance is fertile

We get most of our food from other groups in the city, lots of the veg is intercepted from supermarkets landfill still perfectly ripe. Although there are some good things in the food industry there's a whole lot that's rotten too.

Food should be valued more in society from seedlings to meals and beyond. Our kitchen produces a mountain of vegetable peelings weekly. To close that loop we want to set up a composting service working in local communities across the city - if we've got this much imagine how much a city of 2 million produces, yet the council doesn't collect it, all that energy and nutrients gone up in smoke at Tyseley. If soil, worms and getting your hands dirty is something you find fun send us an email and pitch in!

Rent Strike?

The pandemic is having a huge economic impact, millions are struggling to afford to live and renters are coming together to say housing IS healthcare. Evictions in the middle of a pandemic are a health hazard all round and good housing was too expensive and hard to come by before this started anyhow.

One heartening story is of a landlord in Los Angeles, California, who sent an email demanding full rent payment to all his tenants but copied them all in by accident. Now able to contact each other, the tenants organised a rent strike across the city, withholding rent so they can pay for food! Closer to home in Lancaster students who have had to leave accommodation to be home with parents are on strike for refunds for housing they will never use.

If you have any problems with your landlord or paying your rent give ACORN Birmingham a shout birmingham@acorncommunities.org.uk

