

BRIGHTON AND HOVE MUTUAL AID NEWSLETTER

Issue 1

WHAT IS MUTUAL AID?

Mutual aid is not charity, it's not a government handout, it's people coming together to support each other. Sounds like a no-brainer, doesn't it?

While mutual aid is as old as human history, the concept was first coined by anarchist geographer, historian, philosopher and Russian prince Peter Kropotkin* in his book *Mutual Aid: A factor of evolution*. During extensive field work in Siberia and Northeast Asia, he researched the role of mutually-beneficial cooperation and reciprocity between animals and in human societies, both past and present.

Contrary to Charles Darwin, he argued that it was cooperation, rather than competition, that was driving evolution. Rather than individual competition and

survival of the fittest, he argued that mutual aid has been promoted through natural selection and the increased chances of survival of species.

Some examples in the animal kingdom include Humpback whales who protect other species from killer whales, mongooses who babysit each other's young ones, or Bonobo monkeys who support injured or disabled mates. Vampire bats regularly spew up blood to share with unlucky or sick mates that didn't find a meal, and lionesses regularly share food with each other too.

Kropotkin further argued that mutual aid was crucial for the prosperity and well-being of indigenous and early European societies – for instance through guilds in Medieval free cities, and among poor people. It was the state and the imposition of the private property system that broke these historically important institutions.

One of the most famous mutual projects might have been the 'free breakfast program' that was set up by

the Black panthers in 1969 in Oakland. It grew to feed 20,000 children in 19 cities and included not just free food handouts, but also free medical clinics, self-defence and first aid classes and drug and alcohol rehabilitation, among others.

Today, mutual aid tends to be central to a form of organising and participation where people take responsibility for caring for one another and supporting each other in every-day survival or their struggles for social change. It is most often used by community groups, often marginalised groups, and it is central to anarchist organising.

We need mutual aid, not just now, but always.

DID YOU KNOW?

Kropotkin actually lived in Brighton for 5 years!? He and his wife moved to Chesham Street in Kemptown in 1912 and stayed there until 1917. After the overthrow of Tsar Nicholas II, they returned to Russia. Check out the little blue plaque commemorating his work next time you walk past!

Lockdown may be lifting but our support is still here and strong. Brighton Mutual Aid can help with:

FOOD SHOPPING

COLLECTION & DELIVERIES

COOKING MEALS

ACCESSING FOOD

DOG WALKING

HAVING SOMEONE TO TALK TO

HOW TO GET IN TOUCH:

Phone number: 07872 023446

Website: [HTTPS://BRIGHTONMUTUALAID.CO.UK](https://brightonmutualaid.co.uk)

Facebook: [HTTPS://FACEBOOK.COM/GROUPS/
BRIGHTONANDHOVEMUTUALAID](https://facebook.com/groups/brightonandhovemutualaid)

BRIGHTON & HOVE MUTUAL AID GROUPS: WARP AND THE WEFT

In March Brighton & Hove was one of the first Mutual Aid groups to form in response to the Covid-19 crisis. At a grass-roots level people were introducing themselves to neighbours and forming street Whatsapp groups. Within days there was a network of forty areas further divided into sub areas and streets according to the number of volunteers gathered, by further divided into sub areas and streets according to the number of volunteers gathered by contacts and flyers.

For a month or so there was a lot of activity in the local groups, distributing flyers and supporting people who were self isolating. There was also exchange of information about items which were in short supply. This eventually got more quiet in areas of low need which had more people offering than requesting help. There were other areas where there were not enough people to distribute flyers or to respond to the

extreme needs of people who were requesting or being referred for help.

In the spirit of neighbours helping neighbours a citywide group was formed so that mobile people from quieter areas could help out in other areas with shopping and delivery of food parcels. This grew and has stabilised at around seventy volunteers. People also had other things they wanted to offer, so a skills and services spreadsheet led to the creation of a home-based group able to provide telephone support and help with filling in online registration forms to access regular food and other services. The dog walking group was formed so that people did not have to spend all their money on dog walkers but was equally beneficial for dog lovers without dogs. The gardening group created a potential matching of people who have gardens they cannot manage with enthusiastic gardeners. As we go forward into the next stage of this crisis we have a more resilient and a connected mutual aid fabric consisting of the weft of local street groups and the warp of the citywide groups and projects.

MUTUAL AID REDISTRIBUTION HUB

In early May, Southern Cross Mutual Aid group was contacted by a family struggling during the lockdown. They lacked essential household items and furniture, and the means to purchase them. Two hours after their request was sent to various mutual aid groups, hundreds of offers were pouring in. This is how the Brighton Mutual Aid Redistribution Hub started. We take requests from people who need essential household items and match them with people who offer these items. We have an excellent team of volunteer van drivers and we don't charge anything. The current list of items we need is advertised on our website. Apart from our first family, to this day we have managed to help over ten other individuals and families in need with items such as ovens, washing machines, beds and fridges.

LEWES ROAD NO FIXED ABODE SUPPLY POINT

The specifications for the NFA Supply Point on Lewes Road came out of a community group which met through the mutual aid groups and was inspired to do something practical. During the lockdown, several key services had been closed or reduced, and access to things like fresh water affected by cafés closing. We wanted to make sure that we were providing a public access point for essential supplies such as hygiene products, toiletries, dog food and water and this has been organised through the local mutual aid groups and donations from across the city. It was important for us to highlight the precariousness of people living in temporary accommodation, vehicles and other places considered 'not fixed abode' as well as people sleeping on the streets.

As a group we are horizontally organised and, as best we can be, informed directly by the needs of the NFA community. One thing that has driven our organising

is the conviction that the needs we are addressing were there before the crisis and will be there afterwards too, and they can't be tackled by government services alone. Mutual aid is one way of pushing towards the permanent change we want to see in our city.

You can see what our no-fixed-abode group are up to on their Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/nfamutualaid

You can also get involved by joining our Whatsapp group:

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/HBCC5XkAPeXL6HwXzDLuGk>

OPEN CUPBOARDS & OPEN HEARTS MUTUAL AID FOOD ACTION UNDER LOCKDOWN

As the spread of Covid-19 forced many people into isolation and closed down the community food projects that thousands in our city rely on, many people found themselves in desperate circumstances. Alongside the Food Partnership-coordinated emergency food network, local mutual aid groups sprang into action, especially where other services couldn't reach. One MA member started Brighton Cooking Club, a peer-to-peer cooked meal sharing scheme connecting people struggling to access tasty, healthy meals and people keen to help out by cooking for others. Another member nudged a local catering wholesaler to offer food boxes for older and vulnerable residents who couldn't access online delivery slots. And another set up a driver dispatch team to help move food and other essentials to where they're needed most across the city.

There are many more initiatives cooking up in our Mutual Aid Food Sub Hub. Unfortunately, the food insecurity revealed under lockdown is just the tip of the iceberg of the challenges many of us face in accessing good food. Food Foundation research revealed close to 5 million adults and 1.7 million children are currently food insecure, with 10% of all children in the UK facing severe food insecurity, the worst rate anywhere in the EU, according to UNICEF data. It doesn't have to stay like this as we move forward.

As we craft our next steps to look after each other and connect over food, be it cooking, sharing or growing, as well as campaigning for systemic change, we'd love more passionate people to join us.

FOOD SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

MUTUAL AID FOOD SUB-HUB:

Brings together various food initiatives across the city to link people to food banks, provide food etc.

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/DQ3AD1Mla2xIHXkK3hILrN>

BRIGHTON COOKING CLUB:

If you would like to help out with cooking, or you are in need of cooked meals.

<https://www.brightoncookingclub.com>

REAL JUNK FOOD PROJECT:

If you would like to volunteer with their pay-as-you-can afford movement, or would like to find out more about how to access their meals.

<http://www.realjunkfoodbrighton.co.uk/>

GETTING INVOLVED & GETTING HELP

On our website:

[HTTPS://BRIGHTONMUTUALAID.CO.UK](https://brightonmutualaid.co.uk)

Please see map on website homepage for links to all of the local WhatsApp groups. The website also has forms to request support for you or someone else and to volunteer your help.

DO YOU WANT TO HELP THE MUTUAL AID NETWORK GROW IN BRIGHTON AND HAVE TIME TO VOLUNTEER? THERE ARE NUMEROUS GROUPS GROWING THAT YOU CAN JOIN. NO EXPERIENCE NECESSARY!

DON'T USE WHATSAPP? You can still join by filling in the form on our website, or calling us on:
07872 023446

Are you self-isolating but want to help others access services or register online?

MA HOME BASED GROUP

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/B6ZQDlilBW05HwMp9XxLwi>

Would you like to help by walking, cycling, or driving?

MA MOBILE GROUP

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/D9xu21bv6PZLXomlzm3HP8>

Would you like to help with dog walking?

MA DOG WALKERS

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/LXoWd090xISIAKprpV1gq9>

Are you interested in gardening?

BRIGHTON & HOVE GARDENS

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/Fo6FV3y1b459Jl63jW3YxZ>

Do you have a specific skill that you want to volunteer (like being a dentist, or driving a van)?

MA SKILLS DATABASE :

Request access here:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1BxxEbQe5sFjkmuoyMlyNrWbm78TMTE38u1OqTmB4Rfc/edit>

Would you like to help with setting up support points for people who are experiencing homelessness or have no fixed abode?

MA NON-FIXED ABODE SUPPORT GROUP:

www.facebook.com/nfamutualaid

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/HBCC5XkAPeXL6HwXzDLuGk>

Do you want to help create this Mutual Aid newsletter? All voices welcome!

MUTUAL AID NEWSLETTER GROUP:

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/JlVf1gzaLvMFS13eug5ENI>

Would you like to help us get more flyers out? We would like to extend our reach across the city and access more people wishing to provide and request support, especially in more vulnerable areas.

MUTUAL AID REFLYERING GROUP:

<https://chat.whatsapp.com/EKao1n2zl5GHOIUAw81W7>

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