

60 SECOND INTERVIEW

WITH DEBBIE THOMAS

OF ST GABRIEL'S CHURCH IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

CHRISTIANS AGAINST POVERTY (CAP)

For Mutual Aid Food Willesden (MAFW)

A food hub offering emergency essential boxes locally during Covid-19



PHOTO of volunteers from St Gabriel's Church socially distanced by household in the car park before delivering for MAFW
Pictured from left: Debbie Thomas, Ron and Judy Harrison, Abbie and Shelley Murray and Bessie and Alison Muchie

Q *Can you tell us about yourself?*

I work for St Gabriel's Church in Cricklewood / Willesden Green which partners with Christians Against Poverty, a non-profit charity set up to help people with debt. We are proud to be Christians but we will work with anyone that recognises that they have a debt situation and want help. I have been a Debt Manager with them for two years.

Typically, someone who is riddled with debt or who just doesn't know how to deal with their debt problem any more will call a central helpline. The helpline will look to see if there is a debt centre open local to them and set up an appointment with that Debt Manager. Over the course of three meetings, a route out of debt solution will be offered.

Q *How did you hear about Mutual Aid Food Willesden?*

St Gabriel's have worked with Dione previously when she organised a street party and asked the church if they wanted a stall. Whenever something is going on Dione lets us know.

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

The need is double, a 100% increase in the amount of people who need food help than before lockdown.

People need food parcels where they are furloughed or have job insecurity. They're on furlough and feeding a big family, there's not enough money to go round. Particularly for those whose professions is to look after children after and around school, they are unsure when they will work again with the lock down. Those families struggled before but got by and now are finding it pretty impossible.

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



MAFoodWillesden



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MutualAidFoodWillesden

MutualAidFoodWillesden@gmail.com

020 8050 2867

<https://localgiving.org/charity/mapesburymutualaid/project/WillesdenFoodBank/>

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Mutual Aid Food Willesden were one of the first during lockdown to say we are starting up: If you identify a need, Mutual Aid Food Willesden can help. The relationship has grown and deepened through this.

It's been really good to use Mutual Aid Food Willesden who are very, very efficient and welcoming. There has never been a time when a parcel hasn't been delivered. There is always a friendly face and they are helpful. Even if it is short notice. If I saw a debt client at 9am, they could have some food by 7pm.

Equally as we are so local and part of St Gabriel's, we can give back. Me and 4-5 other church members also volunteer for Mutual Aid Food Willesden. We get together and deliver on Wednesday as a church.

Q Are there any stories that you could share?

There was another lady that I saw last week. Generally, she preferred the food bank because she could ask for what she needed. She was a new Christians Against Poverty client so I don't know her well yet. We just had a conversation and she said, "My son is getting a bit fed up of tuna and tinned food. Because all the money was going on rent, they weren't buying food and there was no real variety. It so happened I went to the food bank for another reason later that day as a volunteer driver. MAFW had just received a load of donations: fresh food, ready meals, even a bit of meat, potatoes. This lady sprang to my mind who I was just talking to that morning in conversation. I remembered her saying, "My son's fed up of tuna but what else could I do?" I delivered it on Thursday and she was grateful. Some variety at last!

When you ask Christians Against Poverty clients if they need a food parcel, they say no because they don't see themselves as needy enough even though MAFW is set up for people just like them. There was a girl who'd just moved to Edgware, she wouldn't have asked for it but Debbie didn't give her the choice that she offered. It gave her everything that she needed and she was grateful. MAFW is such a blessing to so many people.

We've requested delivery of hot food through MAFW for Christians Against Poverty clients too where they struggle without kitchen facilities.

It's lovely to see the food boxes. The non-perishables are vital. But the little extra treats like chocolate, biscuits, fresh fruit and veg are so lovely and make such a big difference.

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

Mutual Aid Food Willesden's service is really efficient and really meets the needs of the local community. People are now able to ask for food when they need it rather than having a pride issue because it is so efficient and they can get the food the next day.

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