

## 60 SECOND INTERVIEW WITH DENIS & DIANE OF WILLESDEN GREEN

### For Mutual Aid Food Willesden (MAFW)

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



PHOTO: Diane unloading the car on a delivery

*Q Can you tell us about yourself?*

We are a married couple, Denis and Diane and have lived in Willesden Green for 21 years. We run Awesome Events, a corporate events company, pop up venues, like building a summer beach at Waterloo or the DoktoberFest in Canada Water, East London.

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

We had loads of stock from Christmas that we were going to use in the summer. We had 3-4 pallets of juice to donate. I searched the internet and that's how I heard about Mutual Aid Food Willesden.

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

London is a nicer place, especially when the weather is nice.

In terms of work, we were the first hit and we'll be the last to recover. It puts everything in perspective when we do the deliveries. We've tried to get involved in the community. It's amazing what the positive people do. It's nice to see people come together. We've noticed a slowdown in general in people, from small things like how quick they come back to you on the phone.

There is a connection more to local community. Even dog walking people would acknowledge other people more: walking a foot to the left. Takes you back to the mid-70s spirit. It's grounded us, slowed us down. We're getting us back in touch with what's important to get us through the day, week or our life: It's the people around us.

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

We donated items from the warehouse. Delivery drivers are really needed so that's what we do. When people say, "Get out of bed and help," it flows out to others.

*Q Are there any stories that you could share?*

We had a delivery at Wembley and we were told to leave the box with the concierge. You wouldn't expect that.

We sat and talked to a guy who used to teach but was in hospital between August and April and hasn't worked since. He lives 5 floors up and he's been unable to leave his house for months. He has never had to accept help before and was embarrassed but he's such a lovely gent.

We are very aware that connecting with a food bank is a very difficult thing to do for most people, so humility is a massive part. We always smile but it is up to the people we deliver to engage. If they don't want to look up from the box or talk: That's fine. Sometimes you can just see the devastation on people's face and you just say good evening and go. When you see how some of these people live.... Some people are very nice, some are quite rude but on the whole what we are doing is an embarrassingly small part of what is going on at the moment. We feel we could do more. We need to highlight to people how much need there is. We are doing our bit.

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

From what we understand it was set up within 24 hours and it is a fantastic resource and we didn't realise how many people need food banks at this time. It really does put things in perspective. Were the foodbanks so overwhelmed that people are not like thank god for another outlet or has the need increased? It is likely to get worse too... Volunteers like Diane are really to be lauded because we can help, but Diane grabs it by the balls. Doesn't just think about it, they do it, at the expense of anything else in their life. Because of people like her who can help all the time, people like us can help part of the time.