



Food bank queue grows longer every week

By Janet Maitland

Finchley Foodbank has launched a Harvest Festival appeal following a dramatic increase in the numbers of requests for assistance. The volunteer-led organisation distributes donations of food to families and individuals who are struggling to feed themselves.

“The queue grows longer each week,” said Anna Maughan, vice chair of Finchley Foodbank. “In January we helped on average about 55 people a week, but by August this had risen to 220 and so far in September the weekly average is 261.”

“Although schools have fully reopened, allowing families to access free school meals again, there’s a particular increase in the number of households with children requiring support.”

Here is the hub

The food bank depends on St Mary’s RC Church in East Finchley, for a base to operate from. At the same time, the church is fighting an additional battle to raise money to repair an all-important boundary wall. “So the continued generosity of the community is essential,” said Anna.

The food bank is at the back of St Mary’s at 279 High Road and opens every Saturday between 12.30pm and 2pm. Donations can be dropped off every Friday between 12pm and 3pm. A driveway to the left of the church leads to the food bank where you can unload your car and leave the food with a volunteer. The food must be non-perishable, in date and in its original unopened packaging.

Other ways of helping

You can also give monetary donations via the online giving page available through the website at www.finchleyfoodbank.org.uk. You can contact the food bank at finchleyfoodbank@gmail.com, via the contact form on the website, through their Facebook page by searching ‘Finchley Foodbank’ or by ringing 07849 558307.

Thanks to a local volunteer and donations, the food bank has been able to provide clients with a washable face mask each, but demand is higher than supply and the food bank would ideally like to provide at least two per person, so please get in touch if you can help by making masks.



Food arriving at the food bank
Photo Mike Coles

Food bank: the items they need

Finchley Foodbank gratefully receives all non-perishable donations. The following items are particularly welcome:

Food: Cereals, tinned meat, tinned fruit, tinned vegetables, rice, tinned fish, baked beans, tinned tomatoes, tins of custard and rice pudding, pasta, pasta sauce, biscuits, soup, sugar, oil, jam, peanut butter and crackers.

Drink: UHT milk, tea bags and jars of coffee.

Bathroom: 2 in 1 shampoo, soap, shower gel, deodorant, sanitary wear and toothpaste.

Other: Washing tablets and capsules.

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Phoenix philanthropists: Alex Kleiner and Michele McDowall in the cinema’s auditorium. Photo John Lawrence

Not having the Phoenix reopen would be devastating, say donors

By John Lawrence

When Alex Kleiner and Michele McDowall decided they wanted to make a potentially lifesaving cash donation to the Phoenix, Alex had to scribble his number on the back of a tiny pharmacy receipt asking someone to call him, and push it under the shuttered front doors of the cinema.

With all the cinema’s staff on furlough, he’d been unable to make contact immediately on email, but luckily a member of staff doing a routine safety check on the building spotted the scrap of paper on the front door mat. They called Alex’s number, a conversation started, and now with the couple’s help the Phoenix is about to welcome filmgoers again.

Phoenix regulars

Alex and Michele are film lovers and supporters of the arts more widely. Success in a Silicon Valley tech enterprise has enabled them to set up two foundations to invest in musicians and artists who, in Alex’s words, “need a step up”.

They are both regular visitors to the Phoenix and were dismayed to read, in *The Archer*, about its financial struggles over the last few years. Then when the added crisis of the Covid-19 shutdown came along, they agreed the time was right to make a generous donation.

Michele told us: “The Phoenix is close to our hearts. I love

the indie films it shows that you can’t see elsewhere. I’d often come here on my own and always sit in the third row from the front because it feels like you’ve got the place to yourself. Not having the Phoenix reopen would be devastating to the local community.”

Alex agreed, saying: “It’s like politics. If you don’t vote, you don’t have the right to complain. So we thought as we were in a position to help, we would do something. There is so much potential at the Phoenix. We want to see it up and running again and getting people back through the doors.”

Midnight movie mistake

The couple, who live in Abbots Gardens, N2, used to bring their five children to the Phoenix’s Saturday morning Kids’ Club when they were younger. They laugh about the time the whole family set out excitedly for the Phoenix’s special midnight showing of the new *Star Wars* movie a few years back, with Michele dressed as Princess Leia.

Puzzled why the streets were so quiet, they arrived to find the cinema locked and nobody around. They realised they’d missed the showing by 24 hours; it had been the night before. “We wondered why everyone had already been talking about it on Facebook,” said Alex.

And returning to his and Michele’s act of financial assistance, he is matter-of-fact and modest. “What else are you going to do?” he says. “The Phoenix is doing its best to get up and running again with social distancing in mind so we want to help. We can’t let the virus win.”

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