



# Give yourself the gift of getting involved in 2023

*The New Year is an ideal time to try a new challenge or find ways to support others. Here two East Finchley residents reveal the rewards they have found in volunteering. First, Amanda McGrath explains how she has become involved with Driving Aid to Ukraine. When the world changed under lockdown, my business as a fabric agent supplying the fashion retail trade slowed down and I took that as an opportunity to volunteer for Barnet, packing food parcels going to the families that were isolating. It gave me a wonderful opportunity to meet new people. I found it extremely rewarding to be able to give my time for free and support people who needed help.*

Then when the war in Ukraine started, I initially joined the national scheme to take in a family as I felt the need to help and support people forced to flee their own country. My mother was a refugee from Gdansk before the Second World War and I was aware how this could be any of us, at any time.

Luckily I always read *The Archer* from cover to cover and, as the grim news about the war escalated, I saw the article about East Finchley resident Michael Byrne and his organisation Driving Aid to Ukraine.

I volunteered to help and, under Michael's guidance,

I'm creating connections with dynamic organisations and people to raise awareness, money and goods. Lacking experience in this field I've found it both challenging and rewarding but I'm so pleased I have got involved.

The organisation drives a seven-ton truck to Ukraine regularly, delivering vital aid such as medical supplies, baby food, and warm clothes now that their punishing winter has arrived. Driving Aid to Ukraine is a small but growing organisation and anyone who would like to join us on this venture is most welcome.

I've lived in East Finchley for over 28 years and raised three sons here and I love the village atmosphere and the supportive community. Before the onset of Covid and the Ukraine war I'd never had the opportunity to stop and rethink the never-ending daily task of work to support my family.

Now I would urge anyone who has the time and possibility to come and join us, or check out the regular volunteers column here in *The Archer*; there are so many local initiatives and charities that will welcome you with open arms. Find out more at [drivingaidtoukraine.org](http://drivingaidtoukraine.org)



Wartime mission: Amanda McGrath with Michael Byrne, who drives aid to Ukraine

*Louis Victor moved to East Finchley four years ago, already knowing that he liked the village feel, amenities and location. He explains how volunteering for Finchley Foodbank has only added to his sense of belonging.*

**What surprised us when we moved to East Finchley was the really strong and supportive community feel of the area embodied by big things like the Festival, the N2 Food Project, Grange Big Local, N2 United and Finchley Foodbank, but also by small things like the vibe of the local social media groups and other kindnesses seen daily on our streets.**

My retirement plan was to try to work to help my local community and as a Foodbank volunteer I have started to achieve this. I began on Fridays, sorting donations ready for Saturday clients and in midweek, pre-packing bags of groceries.

Groceries are no longer pre-bagged as the Foodbank now gives clients the pleasure (and dignity) of making their own selections in person. When Tuesdays were reorganised into a second day of 'client' sessions I was initially nervous about how I would feel meeting and assisting the clients and who they would be... but the whole point is that there is no 'they'.

Foodbank clients are not 'they', they are 'us', simply normal people who, for reasons beyond their control, need help at a given time to provide enough food for themselves and their families.

Everyone that I have met has been so friendly, the clients have diverse needs but clearly recognise us for what we are, a voluntary organization doing our best to help. Meanwhile, my fellow volunteers are lovely. I was 40 years a librarian, mainly in schools, and after retirement I was really missing the camaraderie of working in a close team but I am already feeling something of the same closeness with my Foodbank colleagues.

I would urge anyone who can to become a Foodbank volunteer. There are a wide range of days and tasks for which help is needed and you don't need to



Help at home: Louis Victor volunteers at Finchley Foodbank

be available every week. If you can't volunteer please continue to donate food individually or within a group.

The list of most-urgent items appears weekly on the Finchley Foodbank Facebook page and items can be brought in person on Fridays (11am-2pm) to St Mary's RC Church, 279 High Road N2 or left at the receiving point in Sainsbury's.

Items that are always welcome include: cereals, soap, UHT milk, baked beans, tea, tinned tomatoes, tinned corned beef, pies and ham, tins of cus-

tard/rice pudding, tinned fruit, tinned vegetables, pasta, pasta sauce, toilet rolls, biscuits, rice, soup, tuna, sardines & mackerel, washing tablets/capsules, jars of coffee, cooking oil, sugar, honey, jam, crackers, sanitary wear, toothpaste, deodorant, shampoo (2in1), and shower gel.

Finally, monetary donations are also of great worth in keeping the Foodbank stocked and running. More details of all ways to help are available at [www.finchleyfoodbank.org.uk/give-support](http://www.finchleyfoodbank.org.uk/give-support)

## BE PART OF IT Volunteers wanted

Compiled by Lynn Winton of N2United

**Proms at St Jude's** in Hampstead Garden Suburb needs enthusiastic and capable volunteers to join committees working year round to put on the festival. Whether it's education, fund-raising, music planning, social media, catering or logistics, they'll try to match you with the kind of task you would be happy to undertake, whatever time commitment you can offer. Find out more at [www.promsatstjudes.org.uk/volunteering](http://www.promsatstjudes.org.uk/volunteering).

**Driving Aid to Ukraine** is a non-profit organisation based in N2 started by local resident Michael Byrne, who personally delivers lorries of humanitarian aid to the Ukrainian conflict zones, via border transfer points. The project requires volunteers to help scale up by building and sustaining a social media campaign, fundraising and grant writing. This is a fantastic opportunity to use your skills to bring vital aid to utterly devastated people and learn about the international aid sector at a grassroots level. Please get in touch with Michael at 07791 912389 or visit [drivingaidtoukraine.org](http://drivingaidtoukraine.org)

A crucial element of **Finchley Foodbank**, based at St Mary's church hall in the High Road, N2, is its volunteering team. They are sensitive to the needs of the clients, work from a position of trust and are great team players. Roles range from receiving deliveries and sorting food donations to restocking shelves and staffing a Tuesday and Saturday session. If this could be you, please email [finchleyfoodbank@gmail.com](mailto:finchleyfoodbank@gmail.com)

Could you spare an hour or so a week to make a real difference to an older isolated person? **Age UK Barnet** is looking for befrienders to offer friendly chats, support and companionship. The charity also needs walking buddies to help older people to get out and about. Just a couple of hours a week of your time could make a big difference to an older person in East Finchley. As a thank you volunteers receive a free day pass from The Muswell Hill Gym where you can spend a day using all the facilities. Please contact volunteer manager Lisa on 020 8432 1422 or email [lisa.robbs@ageukbarnet.org.uk](mailto:lisa.robbs@ageukbarnet.org.uk)



N2United is East Finchley's Community and Business Network. If you wish to be included in this column please send details to [N2United@ILoveN2.co.uk](mailto:N2United@ILoveN2.co.uk) Max 60 words please.



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