



Covid Response Update - 19/6/20



Dear All

We hope you are keeping well - we have been very busy indeed, as you might expect from a pioneering local mental health charity finding itself in the eye of the storm. We have been adapting our food-growing and wellbeing offer to make sure that we are able to support people even while we are unable to run our usual gardening sessions.

People come to MindFood for help with stress, depression, anxiety and isolation, and it was clear from the outset that the Covid crisis would be severely detrimental to anyone already struggling with their mental health. In a 'normal' year this is estimated to be 1 in 4 adults in the UK, and an alarming 1 in 2 adults in London consider their stress levels are becoming unmanageable.

It has been vital for our participants to still feel a part of the MindFood family, and for a much wider audience to know where to find us if they are struggling.

Even as lockdown measures start to ease, we know that many more people will be affected by the mental health implications of the crisis - we expect this number to grow as the economic crisis develops, unemployment increases and social inequalities are felt more acutely.

To this end we have taken immediate action to address support needs, but we have also been looking at ways to share more of what we do with our community going forward. We felt it might be useful to summarise our lockdown response so far...

We hope you enjoy the update - please do not hesitate to contact us should you require more information.

The MindFood Team

First response

When lockdown began, we had to put a pause on our usual MindFood gardening activities in line with social distancing. We immediately reached out to our members with a survey to help shape our response.

They confirmed that connecting with nature, practising mindfulness and sharing delicious nutritious veg has never been more important.

Our opt-in 'MindFood Massive' whatsapp group for around 30 regulars was a good place to start - we centred the chat around positive practical advice, and asked people to show us what they were growing. The photo below (left) shows Bob getting to work right away with his sowings for Summer, despite shielding with COPD.

We have also maintained an upbeat and hopefully uplifting tone to our monthly newsletter, which we circulate widely on facebook and twitter, sharing our good news stories and providing light relief from everyday worries.



MindFood at Home

Soon after, we set about delivering spare young veg plants, compost and fresh vegetables to shielders and other vulnerable people.

The photo above (right) shows stroke survivor, John, who lives alone, has limited mobility and finds himself prone to isolation. We have been ringing him a couple of times a week to chat, and to help connect him with other support groups for food and medication deliveries. He wanted us to send this picture to the MindFood family to let them know he was thinking of them.

We have also helped older members of our group with Zoom, by writing a step-by-step guide to video calls so that they can join us for our weekly virtual plot visits. This has been adopted by a number of mental health support organisations who we connect with regularly through our local Mental Health Forum.

The virtual plot visits have helped people follow the progress of plantings they made as far back as November, and kept them connected to the plots and each other.

Growing Wellbeing

Since the beginning of lockdown, Lucy (MindFood's Programme Director and Grower) has been posting videos on facebook twice a week covering our Growing Wellbeing syllabus.

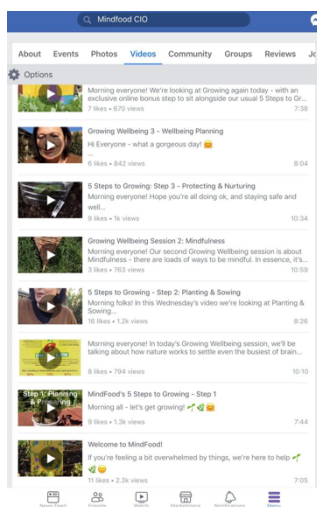
The 'chats' serve as a useful refresher to those who have attended our courses before, but they are also a great place for those keen to get on with their own self care before our plots open up again.

They have been a key indicator that the MindFood message is a popular one - many of the videos are regularly receiving between 700 and 1000 views, with good engagement and a reach of 15-17k local residents.

At MindFood we're all about giving people the confidence to just have a go - when it comes to growing (and wellbeing), half the fun is discovering what works best for you.

To see our videos, please visit:

www.facebook.com/mindfoodcio/videos



More Special Deliveries!

The popularity of our outreach work on facebook inspired us to connect with more organisations supporting people in the community.

We have extended the 'MindFood at Home' idea beyond our existing participants, making special deliveries to many more people who have got in touch with us via facebook, or by phone or email.

As a tiny team with limited time, we have focused specifically on those who are most vulnerable, those experiencing hardship, and primary schools who have been looking after the children of keyworkers through lockdown.

Through the plant delivery scheme we have made valuable connections with local Primary Schools in the most deprived parts of the borough, as well as Food Banks (Christ the Saviour in Ealing, and St Mellitus in Hanwell), the Carers Trust, the Young Ealing Foundation, and Family Lives. We would like to explore more opportunities with these organisations going forward.

These are the primary schools we have helped to date:

Khalsa, Lady Margaret and St Anselms in Southall
Oldfield, Edward Betham, Our Lady of the Visitation and Stanhope in Greenford and Perivale
Oaklands Primary in Hanwell

We are also helping the following SEN schools in the borough:

Mandeville, Springhallow and Castlebar.

And over the coming weeks will be making deliveries to schools and summer clubs in Ealing and Acton.

Every delivery is accompanied by a pack of leaflets to distribute, so people know they can get in touch with us if they need help.

The leaflet also offers immediate self-care advice on the 5 Ways to Wellbeing.

Keeping Growing

One of our key goals throughout lockdown has been to keep our two growing sites at Horsenden Farm and Cleveley Allotments tidy, safe, purposeful and productive. We have been able to use the sites as a nursery for our young seedling and plant donations, and the properly managed gardens mean we can welcome MindFood participants old and new to the sites without them feeling overwhelmed by the scale of the tidy-up that might otherwise have awaited them.

Without the help of our usual gardening groups, our two part-time Growers have had their work cut out for them maintaining the sites over the last three months. We are starting to recruit a small number of trained volunteers to help with this work, and harvest produce for Food Banks and soup kitchens as the growing season reaches its peak.



We have carried out risk assessments at both sites to ensure we can do this safely.

And finally...

We're starting to envisage a time when we'll be able to welcome newcomers to the growing sites:

- New participants can register for eventual Growing Wellbeing courses by emailing us at info@mindfood.org.uk

- **The deadline for the MindFood Makeover fund has been EXTENDED to the end of this month (30/6/20).**

Please follow the link below and donate or spread the word. There are just 16 days to go, with around £1500 still to raise.

www.spacehive.com/mindfood-makeover

Many thanks for your support!

For all enquiries, please call Lucy Clark, Programme Director, on 07720092954

