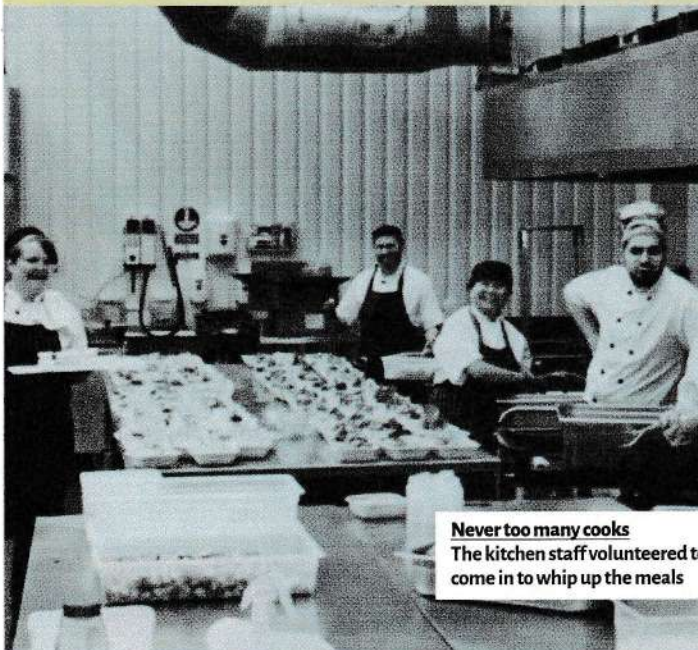


Shining the spotlight on those who thought creatively about helping others in lockdown

**FOOD IS COMFORT. IT'S FAMILIARITY.**

**FOOD IS LOVE**

In a time of crisis, Sam Vacciana teamed up with catering firm Fooditude to help those who really needed it



**Never too many cooks**  
The kitchen staff volunteered to come in to whip up the meals

**The beginning of lockdown was frightening. It was like *Doctor Who*.** I live on a busy road in central London. It was so quiet and eerie.

Early on, I got a phone call from [catering company] Fooditude, saying they had food in their freezers and they didn't want it to go to waste. They had cooks who were happy to go in and volunteer, but they needed somebody to distribute the meals throughout the community. I run a social enterprise helping people out of unemployment [Bermondsey Employment Skills and Training] and I've worked with Fooditude previously.

They had approached quite a lot of other people who hadn't even responded to their email. That galvanised me. I thought: 'Right, well, we can help you. You're not going to throw that food in the bin. No way. We will find, by hook or by crook, 300 recipients by Friday.' Which we did.

I contacted a few organisations – a couple of tenants' and residents' associations and a couple of sheltered housing units, who look after elderly people. In the first week we distributed to five organisations. It really quickly snowballed from 300 meals on that first Friday, to doing 1,200 meals every Tuesday and every Friday.

Soon we were delivering to 13 organisations. They were giving the meals to a mixture of elderly people; those who are shielding; homeless people; quite a lot of families as well.

There has been a big thing about free school meals and not everybody received them, by a long shot. When I got back to my area





**A lot on their plates**  
Every meal was prepared with love and fed someone who may have gone hungry

I also did some deliveries to people on my estate.

We found people all along the way who were sitting at home waiting, and going hungry. Especially the more elderly members of our community. I think they're much more compliant and that text we all got just terrified a lot of them. It said "don't go out"... and they didn't go out.

Some big charities just kind of evaporated at that time. It was left to little community group players. I've never run a food distribution hub before. And Fooditude has never done that level of community work. That was what was so lovely about it – all different people from all different walks of life pulling together to really fill that gap.

I had volunteers working with me at the Biscuit Factory [a venue in South Bermondsey that donated space]. Other volunteers have delivered meals around the SE1 area, using their own vans, petrol and time.

Co-ordinating the network and running the distribution hub was a bit daunting. There's a lot of spreadsheet work involved. I was nervous, in case I'd got the numbers wrong. The meals come in trays of 27. By the end, everyone knew what five 27s were! We've been really careful with masks and gloves. You don't want to give somebody a meal with a dose of Covid-19.

The feedback we got was so lovely. We had a comment from one elderly lady who said it was like eating in a restaurant, she said, "I never know what I'm going to get but I know it's always going to be delicious."

It wasn't just about nutrition though. Imagine – you're at home, you're elderly and you're scared because you received this message and about 10 letters from various agencies telling you not to go out or else. Then somebody comes to your door with a couple of beautifully prepared meals and just has a chat. People would say, "We thought we'd been forgotten, it's so nice to know that people remember we're still here."

Food is just so much more than fuel. It's comfort. It's familiarity. Food is love.

I signed on to Universal Credit right at the beginning of lockdown. Everybody's helped everyone, but it's really difficult being on UC. And it's impossible, I think, to actually live on it. It's not about budgeting. It's just not enough.

Still, those first couple of months, April and May, were just such a special time. You could feel the goodwill and the love and the community spirit. I was one cog in a big machinery. It was a rare moment, and we're really lucky to have lived through that. The community in Southwark has really pulled together.

In the future, when I look back, I will tell my grandchildren that it was a real honour to be able to do it. I will never forget those couple of months. It was just so lovely – the way the world should be.

**Sam was speaking to Laura Kelly @laurakaykelly fooditude.co.uk**

# MAKING THE PANDEMIC WORK FOR MUSICIANS

South London musician Kwake Bass is an industry stalwart. But now his community is at risk – so he's taking action to rescue it from disaster

**The industry, like everything else, was completely paused by lockdown.** It impacted the operation at the rehearsal space I run, The Room studios. It meant there was no HQ for the community to come together, hang out and work, which is so important to musicians. It meant we had to start looking at ways to develop our business for online.

Reuniting the community digitally was the priority. Streams going out on the likes of Instagram live can only do so much, so we were researching how to capture a jam session while allowing it to be held remotely without sacrificing the quality. We started doing the Isolationcy sessions, virtual jams that used the expertise of our community to help artists who might not have access to the gear they would get in a studio. People were really into it, and it gave us insight into what's possible within the limitations of the crisis.

There were all these technological hurdles that we had to address and having to rely on social media giants to stream content was a problem. We created Behind the Notes TV, an alternative platform for artists who want to do live performances and earn a living while they can't tour. We're a team of musical directors, producers, front-of-house experts and web developers, we have all the knowledge needed to put across great live shows. So we created our own infrastructure, letting artists go direct to the fans on a pay-per-view basis. The artist can do their thing instead of spending their time worrying when they'll make money from a live show.

We have to find ways to make the digital environment more interesting and more malleable for creative industries. We're inviting artists into The Room to livestream their gig – it's a big space so distancing isn't an issue. They have access to 4K-quality cameras and there are people on our team who can shoot in a more cinematic way than you can with a smartphone and social media account. We use green screens and multi-shots of everyone to upscale the production value of it. It's about housing artists and giving them the freedom to create their own thing.

Rich artists can do whatever they want. Things were already tough



for DIY artists, now you can add the pandemic to that. There's this idea that there's no working class in music any more. We're listening to that concern and we know not every artist has a label who can sort these things out for them. This puts the resources and power back in their hands, even if they can't get in front of a live audience yet.

It's about understanding how to weave our way into the crisis. Artists deserve to be paid and I'm glad we can make that happen, but look around us – it seems to me that if we're not doing any more with the platform that's not right. That's why we're planning on including a requirement that a percentage of ticket sales go to charity.

All of this means the industry will be even tougher to crack for kids who aren't born with connections or money. We're setting up a community interest company with an outreach plan to get kids into the sector and into work. For every event or rehearsal, if someone needs anything from a stylist to a drummer, we'll often sort them out with someone from our community.

Everyone is struggling. This way supports the people in the industry who are struggling, or the people who just want an opportunity to get their foot in the door, without big corporation middle men. These are long-term moves and it's about implementing what I know to support the community. It's not the time for selfish endeavours.

**Kwake Bass was speaking to Hannah Westwater @hannahjt**