

FREE RIDGEWOOD

A NEWSLETTER FOCUSED ON LOCALIZED MUTUAL AID, FEATURING A RESOURCE GUIDE, AND INTERVIEWS WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS & ESSENTIAL WORKERS

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ISSUE

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AN INTRODUCTION

On Friday, March 27th, we started running a food pantry at our space at 1882 Woodbine Street, in partnership with Hungry Monk. Together we distribute vegetables, bread, fruit, prepared meals, and pastries on Wednesdays and Fridays at 10am. It was clear last month that this crisis would mean a growing need for food in the community, and this is still true as we enter May.

Almost immediately after the crisis struck, Hungry Monk opened up a pantry at 68-59th Lane, and they continue to distribute food on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays at 10am. Every Saturday they also distribute groceries at Ridgewood Veterans Triangle, at the intersection of Myrtle and Cypress Avenues, starting at 11am.

Friends and neighbors have been sewing and distributing free masks for the community, and we are trying to keep up to date on all the resources available right now for people in Ridgewood. For anyone currently experiencing coronavirus symptoms, or who is unable to pick-up on-site, we can arrange home-delivery in Ridgewood, get in touch.

This newsletter is an attempt to share the information and resources we have and know about, as well as hear some stories and ideas from organizers, essential workers, and others on the front line about what's currently happening and what they think we should prepare for as this crisis goes on. We're including an info guide about food and state assistance, as well as the contact information for all of our elected officials so we can continue to ask them what they're doing to help our community get by. And there's some interviews we did this week.

None of us has ever faced a crisis quite like this before. Many of us remember the last times the city was brought to a halt—Hurricane Sandy, the financial crisis in 2008, and 9/11. The corona pandemic reminds us of all of them, but it is also completely new.

We are a group of friends and neighbors that have maintained this space at 1882 Woodbine Street since 2014. We came together after Hurricane Sandy to better prepare ourselves for disasters that might hit us in New York City. We don't want to just sit home waiting for the government and economy to figure it out, we have to self-organize for each other. We want to hear from you about what you think and what should be done.



FATHER MIKE LOPEZ,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, HUNGRY MONK

On Saturday there were over 640 people at our food pantries, almost double what we normally do. Many initially had some money saved, a cushion, and now they are seeing their resources depleted. People are now more dependent than ever on pantries, food banks, and other social services.

Right now we're at the pinnacle of our outreach, we are doing more work now than we ever have. There's been a 100% uptick in the amount of people coming in weekly. This is day 45 for us, we initially anticipated doing this for about two months, but it's probably fair to say we'll be running through June, as we finally start cutting down on the curve.

We should prepare ourselves to be in a major fiscal deficit as a community, and we have to continue operating the needed social services. Those who have some ability should start thinking about how to help their neighbors, and those in need have to know about the resources available in our community.

Right now we are hyper focused on how to sustain and maintain the work we're already doing. I live among the poor, those people are always gonna be the underdog. The only focus I have is people in need, and anyone who could help should be thinking about helping.



MARIA HERRON,
MIL MUNDOS/BUSHWICK MUTUAL AID

Mil Mundos is a bilingual bookstore and community center that celebrates Black, Latinx, and Indigenous heritage. Our one year anniversary was on March 15, right as all this madness began. We are based in a Spanish-speaking neighborhood, but there were few spaces that seemed to be for us. We are actively resisting developers' plans to gentrify the neighborhood, and I'm very proud of the crew this has brought together. I'm proud of any way that we can help the community right now.

After Bushwick Mutual Aid (BMA) started at the beginning of the pandemic, Mil Mundos transformed the bookstore into a mutual aid depot. When we got involved the amount of missed calls that were coming in to BMA's Spanish line was fucking staggering. I was like "holy shit." Over the last few weeks we've divided up the work into three primary roles: intake, dispatch, and runners.

The Mil Mundos crew started returning calls to families that called the hotline, helping them fill out the request form. This requires a fluency not just with the language, but with the culture. There were a bunch of calls in Quechua, where even Spanish is not their first language. Stories were coming in like, "I have a family of eight, I am willing to work, I used to work in bottle collecting, but can't do that anymore." We don't know what's coming next, but right now 300 people are calling a week.

When you're at our depot or doing deliveries, as people realize you know some Spanish, they start to open up to you. Every day we are hearing stories like, "My son can't do his classes because we don't have a computer in the house, how do I get a computer?", or, "I am undocumented but I need work, can you help me find work?"

Many of the families we are delivering to are also asking how they can help. For a community member whose MO used to be to stay off the radar, now offering to be visible because they want to work together, the weight of this cannot be understated. Getting people involved is the critical difference between charity and mutual aid.

Nobody knows what is happening, and that's okay that nobody has any answers. A massive wave of defaults on rental leases is coming, and there will have to be a radical re-envisioning of what public space looks like for the community, and a reassessment of what quality of life New York has to offer. I'm excited though that so many people seem willing to re-envision all this with us.



JILLIAN PRIMIANO,
ER NURSE, WYCKOFF HOSPITAL



A lot of people call the hospital the front line, but I actually think of it as the last line. We are trying our best to save people's lives, but we can't stop them from getting sick. As a nurse I support the movement of essential workers to keep themselves safe in their workplace. Many are not being offered sick time, they're not being offered PPE, and they don't have a socially distanced workplace.

Too much of the conversation right now is about individual behavior, but we should be really talking about people being put at risk by their employers. The city has been shut down for so long now, but people are still getting sick at work. They're working because their job has been deemed essential, but if they are essential, they should be working safely. They are working in unsafe conditions because they don't really have a choice, they still need to pay rent, and they need access to healthcare that is associated with their jobs, while millionaires are getting tax cuts and corporations are getting bailed out.

I really don't know what's coming, but we need more public education about the variety of symptoms, and more support for all essential workers, not just health care workers. We need mass production of all the supplies by the federal government. Right now they are allowing corporations to sell these supplies to the highest bidder, rather than making sure they go to the areas where they're most needed.

People should know that a lot of symptoms can be related to coronavirus, not just cough and fever, but things like diarrhea, abdominal pain, pink eye, rashes, loss of taste and smell. It may even be related to clots that can cause strokes and heart attacks.

It would be great for every family or group of friends to get their hands on a pulse oximeter. This is what doctors or nurses put on your finger to test your pulse and oxygen level at the hospital. What is causing people to die, most of the time, is the viral pneumonia that COVID-19 causes. Many patients have "silent hypoxia": they do not feel short of breath, but, when tested, their oxygen levels are very low. With other diseases you would be gasping for air, but with this disease you often don't know how low your oxygen is. With a pulse oximeter, people can check their oxygen levels at home and know whether they need to get to the hospital.

INTERVIEWS

"T", DOCTOR, BELLEVUE HOSPITAL

I recently finished 5 weeks of working at Bellevue. The state and modern medicine are experiencing a major crisis of legitimacy, and we must strategize beyond their narratives. What we as healthcare workers are going through now is not unlike what we saw in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria, in Greece after 2008, and in so many other countries facing austerity: a surge in demand for healthcare needs in an already broken healthcare system, where workers don't even have the most basic resources to provide care.

Imagine how we felt last month as celebrities and athletes were tweeting about their test results while our coworkers were being carried out in body bags, without even being tested prior to their passing. And now we're finding out that tens of thousands of healthcare workers are being fired, and more hospitals are slated for closure. And even if we had facemasks, testing kits, and a miraculous medication or vaccine, would it be given equitably to those who are suffering the most now? To the uninsured, unemployed, and undocumented?

Neither the state nor modern medicine will get us out of this, just as they have abandoned communities of color for centuries. Until we are liberating and sharing knowledges about this virus, and about collective care, prevention, or herbal remedies, we'll continue to be victims played by idiotic announcements from the CDC, surgeon general, Cuomo, Trump, Dr. Oz, and Bill Gates.

In the next months we'll see hospital closures, healthcare workers burning out from PTSD or being fired, and politicians rushing us back to work. The next waves of infections will be worse since we'll have fewer healthcare workers, and more precarious bodies working longer to catch up with past due rents, mortgages, and debt.

What we need is a strike, this is the vaccine. Rent strike, debt strike, and other mass exits from the economy. The challenge is how to recuperate our networks and communities around mutual aid, militant research, care for our ecologies, and to liberate foreclosed homes and farms. How do we nurture preventive practices, like making facemasks, alcohol, or virus testing, using open-source methods to protect our communities while reclaiming so many of the spaces that are essential for us. What knowledges should we share around herbs and vegetables that enrich our immune systems while rejuvenating the soil and habitats they are cultivated in? How can alternative currencies reduce our dependence on money?

Many are being dispossessed as we speak, paying rents without any paycheck. We will be forced to work even longer hours once the restrictions are lifted, unless our strikes and alternatives can give us an opening. 'Business as usual' is now, literally, a death sentence.

I'm optimistic because there are so many incredible networks and collectives that have been reclaiming time, space, and so many other critical spheres for us to live autonomously. But we must deepen networks globally, and collectivize with our neighbors and coworkers sooner than later.



ROB ROBINSON, HOUSING ORGANIZER

I am formerly homeless, and that experience transformed me, it made me look at the world differently. Living on the street in Miami, spending 10 months in a New York City homeless shelter, I kept hearing the word gentrification, I could see luxury towers going up and sitting empty, so I went to the library to read what it meant, and that launched me into housing organizing.

I never saw my lived experience as something to be ashamed of. I learned from it and want to share that, especially to others going through it. I became homeless as an adult, I was working, I had a college degree, I was never diagnosed with mental illness, I never had a chemical addiction.

Right now my work is around canceling rent and mortgages. Folks with low-income, immigrants, Black and brown people, are all adversely affected by Covid-19. When you say you can't work for 3 months, but you expect me to pay back rent? This is a moment right now to organize, first it was the moratorium on evictions, but don't expect me to pay back rent after 3 months, we need to cancel rent.

This is gonna be a huge fight, can't pay May. I ain't paying. I'm blessed to be on Social Security Disability, but I didn't pay April, I won't pay May, and I won't pay June. I'm encouraging folks to keep the money in their pocket, to not spend a dollar, don't go further into debt. There are some that are afraid, I understand that, but I can pay and I won't because I want to inspire people. You don't have to be against your landlord, you can force the government to act. Ilhan Omar is sponsoring a bill which would make the federal government responsible for relieving us of rent and mortgage payments, and makes funds available to landlords.

People should know they're not alone, we're organizing around the city, the state, and the world. The pandemic offers us an opportunity to organize like never before, it's a level playing field. This is a moment for major change, another world IS possible. If we take action, we can shape the world to come out of this. The only way to change it is to organize and rebel, folks need to be talking to each other and acting.



COMMUNITY RESOURCES

IS 093 at 66-56 Forest Avenue is offering free "Grab and Go" meals Monday-Friday, between 7:30-1:30 (adults pick up from 11:30-1:30)

Woodbine is running a food pantry at 1882 Woodbine Street, Wednesdays and Fridays at 10am. For those who are currently experiencing coronavirus symptoms, or who are otherwise unable to pick-up on-site, we can arrange home-delivery in Ridgewood: woodbine@riseup.net

Hungry Monk is running a food pantry at 68-59 60th Lane on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays between 10-2. Also Saturdays at Ridgewood Veterans Triangle, at Myrtle/Cypress. Their 24/7 hotline is (347) 592-5423.

Please visit our website for links to more resources about food delivery; the Economic Impact Payment; Unemployment Insurance Claims; applying for SNAP (food stamps), Medicaid, and Cash Assistance; and the rent strike: <https://www.woodbine.nyc/mutualaid>



Agape Christian Center at 59-02 Summerfield Street is hosting a food pantry on Saturdays, 10-11:30am, (718) 635-0674.

Ridgewood Tenants Union is organizing a volunteer mutual aid initiative, text "I need support" to (929) 251-5044.

NYC Food Delivery Assistance, call 311

NYC Department for the Aging for home-delivered meals, personal care, and home visits for senior citizens, (212) 244-6469.

Unemployment Insurance Claims, (888) 209-8124

Invisible Hands is offering food and supply deliveries, (732) 639-1579.

Bushwick Mutual Aid is offering support and deliveries, (848) 229-1747

Met Council on Housing has a tenants rights hotline, (212) 979-0611.

RIDGEWOOD ELECTED OFFICIALS

- *Queens Community Board 5.....(718)366-1834
- *City Council District #34 Antonio Reynoso.....(718)963-3141
- *City Council District #30 Robert Holden.....(718)366-3900
- *Queens Borough President Sharon Lee.....(718)286-3000
- *Mayor Bill de Blasio.....(212)NEW-YORK
- *State Assembly District #37 Catherine Nolan.....(718)784-3194
- *State Assembly District #38 Michael Miller.....(718)805-0950
- *State Senate District #12 Michael Gianaris.....(718)728-0960
- *State Senate District #15 Joseph P. Addabbo Jr.....(718)738-1111
- *Governor Andrew M. Cuomo.....(518)474-8390
- *US Congressional District #7 Nydia M. Velazquez.....(202)225-2361
- *US Congressional District #6 Grace Meng.....(202)225-2601
- *Junior Senator Kirsten Gillibrand.....(212)688-6262
- *Senior Senator Charles E. Schumer.....(212)486-4430
- *President Donald Trump.....(202)456-1111



We don't think things will be returning to normal anytime soon. Whenever Cuomo and de Blasio decide to ease the social distancing measures, we will be stepping foot into a radically different environment. Even if the medical crisis is managed, the economic effects will last years. Millions of New Yorkers are out of work and unsure how they will pay their rent. This is just the beginning.

While this is a difficult time for everyone, we can still see some hope. We can finally imagine something different to do with our days, our neighborhood, and our city. We are trying to organize ourselves to get through this, and hope to find others who want to do the same. Not only to weather this storm, but to prepare ourselves for the struggles ahead.

Please write us about Issue #2, any ideas, responses, updates, interviews, resources, offers, etc: woodbine@riseup.net

