22-07-20

Cowley Road cafe Za’atar Bake owner celebrates Oxford Hub’s Oxford-Together-programme volunteers

By Kate Pounds

Begins

The owner of Za’tar Bake invited 60 people involved in the Oxford Hub’s Oxford Together programme to a party yesterday evening.

Mahmoud Al-Hadad wanted to celebrate the work of the hub by feeding the volunteer workforce, which has been supporting people in the community during the Covid-19 pandemic, and continues to do so.

This comes as Mahmoud offers free food from Za’atar Bake to hungry people who can’t afford to pay.

Addressing the party Mahmoud said: “We wanted to do something for all you volunteers to say thank you for all that you have done for others.

“If you’re extra hungry don’t worry, there’s lots of delicious food.”

He introduced his business partner and chef Ahmed Mohamed who received a big round of applause.

Mahmud and his team provided free food, drinks and music in a Bedouin-style tent behind the cafe.

“It feels lovely to be here,” said Heather McGill, “it’s a delight that they’ve put this on for us.”

Heather, who works for Amnesty International, signed up with Oxford Together to deliver food to people in need during lockdown.

She explained it helped others, and was an opportunity for her to get out of the house and see people when she was feeling isolated herself.

“It was fun” she said, “I had to learn how to carry large amounts of lentil curry on my bicycle.

“First I tried carrying it in the box on the front, and had to give my bike a very good wash afterwards.”

Oxford Together is a volunteer programme run by the Oxford Hub providing help with shopping, collecting prescriptions, free food parcels, and social phone calls to isolated individuals.

Anna Thorne worked as a phone Links Pod Leader for the programme, supporting volunteers to make phone calls to people who needed contact.

She said: “I felt the work we did made a huge difference.

“The programme brought together a real range of people who otherwise might not have made contact, they gained a real window into each other’s lives.

“I feel really lucky to have been part of it.

It’s wonderful to be here, and for it all to be acknowledged.”

The Oxford Hub’s programmes are still supporting people and recruiting volunteers.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapist and Holywell Ward Oxford City Councillor Nadine Bely-Summers said: “I’m very impressed with how people have looked after each other, and that people who still need help are still getting it.”

She collected shopping for and chatted with a shielding person with Parkinson’s disease who was feeling isolated and anxious.

“I really wanted to be part of the programme,” she said, “all the councillors were involved.”

Za’atar Bake have been offering free food to hungry people who can’t afford to pay since May 15.

“A lot of people have suffered in the pandemic, my business partner Ahmed and I wanted to give to the community, to help them and us feel good.” Said Mahmoud.

“When Covid-19 hit us people had time to think about life, about people who suffer, and to realise we are all vulnerable.”

Ends

Photo captions:

(Za’atar Bake owner Mahmoud Al-Hadad thanked volunteers for all they had done to help others.)

(One volunteer said she had to learn to carry large amounts of lentil curry on her bicycle.)

(Cafe owner Mahmoud Al-Hadad said Covid-19 made us realise we are all vulnerable.)