

UK News

Coronavirus has made charity work difficult, but a surge in donations is “rather humbling,” Hands on London Chief Executive Officer says

The current pandemic has made Londoners more charitable, and one British organisation sees this every day during their annual winter donation.

By **Justin Shaul**

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A card wrote by a Wrap Up London volunteer to be placed in a coat that will be donated to one of hundreds of UK charities that receive donations from the Wrap Up London donation drive.

The devastation of coronavirus and multiple national lockdowns have meant that Londoners were forced to sit by and watch vulnerable communities grow within their city. Meanwhile,

charities throughout the UK are suffering from an increase in demand because of the coronavirus pandemic and the effects it's had on society.

63% of charities reported that they faced a higher level of demand compared to last year, according to a recent report done by [Pro Bono Economics](#).

4 out of 10 charities additionally reported that they were not able to meet these demands due to having staff furloughed.

New and frequently changing lockdown restrictions have made it difficult for organisations to meet the needs of vulnerable people. One obstacle is having to hire fewer volunteers than usual to comply with social distancing, resulting in a slower processing time.

"People in need still need warm coats," says Hands on London chief executive officer Jon Meech. "They still need food banks, they still need cooking, they still need soup kitchens and stuff, and of course all that needs to be done in a socially distanced way."

However, Londoners have taken note of the chaos, and decided to give back.

In fact, according to a statistic published by the [Charities Aid Fund \(CAF\)](#), between January and June 2020, the UK donated £5.6b to charity, an increase of around £800m from the previous year. The last time Britons had come together to give in this way was during the 2008 financial crisis.

Bearing witness to horrible things happening within their inner circles this year such as deaths and financial issues have indirectly made the people of London more sympathetic and giving.

One organisation, Hands on London, noticed a large spike in the number of volunteers during the UK's first national lockdown.

In a usual year, the organisation sees people volunteering in groups, with about 4,000 volunteers in big groups and 1,500 volunteers in small groups, according to Meech. This year, Hands on London has already seen about 6,000 individual volunteers, a statistic that will be published in January 2021.

"This year is the year of the individual volunteer," says Meech. "Lots of ordinary people have been coming together and have made a huge difference."

While Hands on London staff were expecting to see fewer coats donated this year during their annual Wrap Up London donation, they were pleasantly surprised to see that donations are so far about the same this year as they were last year.

Some volunteers even think that this year they have received more donations than in the previous years.

This means that Londoners went out of their way to come and donate during their essential trips, demonstrating that this pandemic has encouraged people to give back to the less fortunate.



(Left) Two Wrap Up London Volunteers inspect donated coats before placing them in sacks to be quarantined and distributed. (Right) Jon Meech shows the quarantined coats Hands on London has received within the week at their donation center near Liverpool Street.

Meech says: “It really says an awful lot about the people of London and the surrounding areas. They really made it work and still managed to respond.”

He describes the newfound support as “rather humbling”, stating that this year he’s seen volunteers from all backgrounds and walks of life come together to make a difference.

“If there’s one good thing that’s come out of the pandemic, it’s that it’s given people time to think about themselves and what’s important in their communities.

“They’re acting upon those thoughts and we’re seeing it every day.”

Hands on London is a volunteer service that provides volunteer opportunities to Londoners. During their Wrap up London event, they collect winter apparel to distribute to hundreds of charities throughout the UK such as Crisis, Red Cross, Oxfam, Age UK shelter, and even local churches and schools.