

Volunteering on the frontline: EastendHomes resident Jim Ford made it to the shortlist for the HQN Frontline Stars Award. Here is his story...

In his own words, Jim Ford has never been so busy. He's always volunteered for EastendHomes, as well as for the NHS and Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery. A keen gardener and environmentalist, Jim was also actively involved in transforming an open space on his estate in Shadwell, east London, into an urban orchard.

This now thriving public space has proved to be vital for his community over the last few months, with many local people visiting and enjoying it for the first time, as there is plenty of room to self-distance and relax. A mecca for nature and wildflowers, it really is a special haven in busy central London.

Jim said: *"It's been a delight seeing our neighbours new and old enjoy nature in all its glorious forms. I know how much the Orchard has helped people take their mind off things. Even if it's just for five minutes."*

Throughout the Covid-19 outbreak, Jim has supported the local Mutual Aid group and volunteered at the Christ Church Food Bank on the Isle of Dogs, helping to treble the amount of food they process and the number of people they support.

Every week Jim helps unload, shelve, bag up and distribute over 500kgs of food, personally delivering around 80kgs. He plays a key role in the smooth running of the practical operations of the foodbank and has lots of local knowledge about who needs support in the first place. His natural warm and unassuming personality means he can connect people and sign post them to the service and support they need.

Father Tom Pyke praised the efforts and hard work of Jim, acknowledging how his energy and drive enable them to increase their reach and the number of people they have helped.

Additionally, Jim always finds the time to look out for the elderly on his estate regardless of international health pandemics, often dropping off shopping and checking in for a chat.

Jim's HQN Frontline Stars Award nomination achieved a great deal of support and created a real feel good moment. He was frequently greeted by "Vote Jim" during the nomination period.

Always a glass half full kind of person, he continues to raise to the challenges of Covid-19 and sees the opportunity to build on new relations and connections.

When asked about being shortlisted for the award, Jim said: *"It's all about our community coming together. We've achieved so much collectively, and I know there is the appetite for us to do more and help one another. That's a nice feeling."*

EastendHomes is a community-based charitable Housing association managing over 3,500 homes in Tower Hamlets, East London.