

# #Barista Care

**B**aristas are the grassroots of the coffee community. They are the human face of a supply chain that encompasses dozens of people from the coffee farms onwards. Their competence, service and personal charm are a part of the reason many consumers choose to pay a premium for speciality coffee – ultimately serving our industry’s defining quality of providing greater financial benefit to growers.

As coronavirus swept the nation, Britain’s coffee companies quickly moved to furlough many of their teams. Overnight, thousands of baristas and coffee professionals found themselves with more free time and less cash, as the furlough scheme took time to get activated.

At 3am one night in early April, I awoke with the idea to send care packs to furloughed coffee people. The coffee industry is built on the coffee community, and it struck me that it was critical for the industry to support that community and reassure them that they had a future.

The subsequent weeks saw more than 400 care packs dispatched to coffee professionals around the UK. I would like to say this outcome was because of a grand strategy or my superior planning skills, but the reality is that Barista Care was a success because of the support and kindness of many people across the industry.

**F**irst I set about finding out if we could get the money necessary to make this happen. My first call was to Toby Weedon, barista market developer at oat milk firm Oatly, to explain the idea and ask if the company might provide some cash to help make this happen. To Oatly’s eternal credit, I was not required to produce a summary document, a bunch of marketing commitments or a set of deliverables – instead I got enough money to fund the first 135 care packs and a pallet of oat milk delivered to my garage.



Many baristas and coffee professionals found themselves furloughed or out of work thanks to the pandemic. Tim Ridley, founder of United Baristas, thought the industry should support them – and Barista Care was born



#### INFORMATION VIDEOS

In the first few weeks of lockdown, United Baristas and *Caffeine* teamed up to produce video content informing café owners of their rights and options around rent and the furlough scheme.



#### BARISTA YOGA

Each Thursday morning during lockdown the coffee community has been gathering on Zoom for a 40-minute yoga session led by Erin from Yoga Den London (and *Caffeine* staffer). Recordings of these sessions are currently available on *Caffeine*’s YouTube channel.



#### BEAN BUDDIES

Like pen pals, coffee professionals from around the country were paired up to connect over Zoom, FaceTime and Skype, drink coffee together, and have a work-related chat.



With initial momentum won, I hit the phones – along with *Caffeine* founder Scott Bentley – to raise more money. We secured commitments from the London Coffee Festival, La Marzocco, Brewed by Hand, Victoria Arduino, Coffee Hit and Mr Black. By this stage we’d made a bunch of commitments, and now we had the ability to fulfil them. However, it didn’t start very well.

Our first challenge was acquiring enough groceries in the middle of a panic-buying crisis. We’d breezily told people the packs would include things like pasta and toilet roll, which were out of stock in supermarkets with restrictions on bulk-buying. Scott tried some wholesalers, but with demand outstripping supply they were reluctant to take on new, non-essential customers. I found an old cash-and-carry card at the back of a kitchen drawer, so we made the trip (with masks and gloves) to a south London warehouse.

After queuing for 45 minutes, I swiped my card. The barriers failed to open and a warning sign was displayed. Fortunately a staff member cursed, manually opened the gate and muscled us through before his colleagues noticed.

Inside, we were surrounded by stacks of bog roll, catering-sized tins of tomatoes, piles of pasta and more sweets than I knew existed. It was like arriving in an El Dorado, albeit with dingy warehouse lighting and citizens who were desperate to survive an apocalypse.

With enough products for the first 50 care packs in the trolley, we headed for the checkout. The attendant wasn’t having it. The membership card I’d found had expired. Summoned to the manager’s desk, we pleaded the case for all the furloughed baristas out there. I had a card, it was valid, but it had been deactivated through inactivity, and it couldn’t be activated because

