

Herts Community Solutions is a network of voluntary sector support organisations working in Hertfordshire to support the health and wellbeing of our communities



SUPPORT TO MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF YOUR LOCAL VCS

We know that there is going to be a “new normal” for the foreseeable future, but what will that look like in practice? In order to prevent a second wave with another lockdown the government will shortly be putting into place what the phasing out period will look like. In the meantime HCS partners are working together on the needs of the local community for the next 12-18 months, but also for the foreseeable future. We know that any lifting of current restrictions will be phased and as people return to work their available time to volunteer will be reduced. However the most vulnerable will still need to be supported and beyond COVID19 there will be a financial crisis impacting on charities and individuals.

So how do we keep these volunteers, many of whom have never volunteered before but also acknowledge that they didn't know what to do or how to do it. We know that volunteers need to be thanked in a way that is tangible and valued, and long term volunteering needs some recognition. Volunteer Centres and Team Herts Volunteering will continue to identify and categorise volunteers who will also need to coordinate a list of county wide volunteers, offering them regular opportunities to volunteer through a monthly newsletter. Local CVSs will continue to contact and support social media based mutual support groups to help prepare them for future potential needs and a budget from HCC is needed to recognise and support volunteers on a local basis.

MEMBER DATA—IMPACT OF CORONA VIRUS

At the end of March, as lockdown commenced, HCS partners contacted over hundreds of voluntary and community sector organisations, in order to understand how these organisations were operating in response to lockdown and the pandemic. They are also trying to identify if there is any unmet community need and using this information to provide them with support, and also to report back on the state of the sector to a number of bodies, including local and county councils, NCVO and NAVCA. They will use this information to inform their response and to influence government and policy.

The survey results reflected that the major concerns were around continuing to operate with reduced staff and volunteers and a lack of funding in the immediate term to match ‘reshaped’ services, as well as help with the technology to enable services to be moved online and also in the longer term. HCS partners have given support by providing much needed volunteers, advising on sources of funding and facilitating partnership working, for example putting a homelessness charity in touch with a donor who will provide weekly meals to feed their members.

By mid April, organisations who could do so had switched to offering remote support to their members, often using technology such as Zoom to enable this. Other organisations have had to close temporarily, because their service cannot be offered remotely or because staff and volunteers are in a vulnerable category and cannot work. Even whilst ‘closed’ the vast majority are telephoning their members on a weekly and sometimes even daily basis to check that they are okay, or have put their members in touch with another organisation who will provide support.

Now that we are several weeks in HCS partners are undertaking a follow up survey of the voluntary sector, to see how the situation has developed, how groups are planning for the future and what support is needed. It is clear that as we move into the recovery period and eventually the post covid-19 era, the landscape for the voluntary sector will be very different. Fundraising and the availability of funding, along with demand for services will have changed radically and it is clear that the sector needs to plan for these changes as a matter of urgency.

ADDRESSING LOCAL NEEDS

We are also having discussions with decision makers about how to support the recovery of local community centres who are facing losses due to their closure.

Through our role as county Village Hall Advisers CDA Herts are monitoring the effect of lockdown on Community Buildings across the county. The vast majority of Village Halls are registered charities, managed by volunteers, the Trustees, who rely on hiring income to pay their bills and maintain their buildings. These buildings provide vital community facilities for the elderly and lonely through clubs, activities and societies. Week in week out these halls provide a vital function but virtually all of them will have been closed leaving the communities without anywhere to meet and village halls without income but having to ensure that the buildings are safe and secure. The majority of beneficiaries are the elderly but many of them are not online and of those that are many will not use social media or browse the web through fears of problems. There is a real urgent issue to ensure that the elderly, disabled or very ill who are in lockdown but with no means of outside communication are supported appropriately and in rural areas these are often isolated and hard to find and many farmers live in very remote locations. Many of the Rural Support Networks highlighted through the recent survey will be aware of such vulnerable people but with a few volunteers available they will not be able to provide daily support and there are not support networks in every village.

Please contact us if you are concerned office@cдахerts.org.uk and [Click Here](#) to see the results of our Survey.

We are all working in partnership to attend external meetings at district, county and regional level as representatives of the local VCS and are working closely with their public sector colleagues as well as discussing adults with complex needs as there does not appear to be adequate support available for this vulnerable group of individuals.

CASE STUDIES

All CVSBEH member groups were surveyed for feedback on their current challenges and status. 26% of respondents reported being unable to operate at present with 74% operating and in contact with their users, even if this is at a restricted level. If anyone becomes aware of a group who is struggling, who need 1-1 support or are in severe crisis, they should contact their local CVS or infrastructure organisation.

The main challenges facing respondents was the need to support self-isolating beneficiaries and struggles with IT, due to lack of expertise within their own organisations or with users who have no or limited access to computers and the internet. This also highlights an important need going forward as more services are digitalised.

HCS partners will continue to work with borough, district and county councils to address these needs as we move out of lockdown and into recovery phase.

The Herts Sports Partnership is supporting the #TwoPointSixChallenge by offering 260 free places on Mind's online **Mental Health Awareness in Sport & Physical Activity course**. Any club coaches in Hertfordshire can sign-up to complete the course. For each signup they will donate £10 to the fantastic Herts Disability Sports Foundation who do great work to develop disability sport across Hertfordshire.

About the course—One in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year. Completing this course will give you the knowledge, skills and confidence to better understand and support people living with mental health problems, and create a positive environment that ensures they enjoy the benefits of being active and keep coming back for more. You will also get access to an extensive bank of resources that you can start using straight away and after completing the course you will be able to download your certificate of completion.

The course has been awarded 3 CPD points by the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA).

Book onto the course here <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/mental-health-awareness-in-sport-and-physical-activity-tickets-102905184176>