

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



OPERATION REBUILD

WHAT THE SECTOR NEEDS TO RECOVER

In the short-term, critical services developed over the past eight weeks will face a shortage of volunteers due to the reopening of businesses. Volunteers who currently support services locally and county wide, are no longer available to support during the working week and as a consequence we're starting to see the difference as a result of people now going back to work – our drop-out rate is increasing due to this. To mitigate this, a second wave of volunteers are being identified urgently who can be called up on to back-fill any gaps that are created by the return to work.

In the next few months (6 weeks – 18 months), a new normal is already starting to be established and will require many of the current services delivered by the voluntary sector to remain active, potentially in reduced forms. The need for services such as befriending and personal shopping for elderly and vulnerable individuals will continue to remain high, with an increasing demand for mental health, wellbeing and isolation programmes as time continues. Some of the currently moth-balled voluntary sector services and clubs will be able to return, with others no longer being economically viable. This provides additional volunteering opportunities for people who wish to be involved locally. Many of the clubs and services that will return provide services that positively impact on the wellbeing of the community and tackle loneliness, with others providing respite services to carers.

In the long-term, Hertfordshire society may be able to benefit from a willingness to volunteer and a new approach to volunteering that generations had previously lost. The key to such social change will inevitably be forged in the communications and thanks during earlier phases. A key to creating a long-term legacy will be in volunteers understanding the value they have brought to Boroughs and Counties whether that has been realised practically currently or whether it has allowed service delivery in the knowledge that a greater number of volunteers are available. Over the next year, volunteer centres need to identify and allocate opportunities to as many volunteers as possible to support sector development. In part this will require thought now about how data is managed between Team Herts Volunteering and the network of Volunteer Centres across the county.

CHALLENGES FOR PARTNERS TO RETURN TO NORMAL

Partners are reporting similar issues when considering how to return to normal; when it is time to reopen community centres, charity shops, and buildings where volunteering often takes place safely, visitors will be required to practice the social distancing restrictions that will be in place, and adhere to notices being displayed at entrances and inside the buildings. Phased opening times will be in operation and the numbers of users will be restricted. Rooms will be required to be well ventilated and regularly cleaned, with hand sanitiser supplied in every area. But how can social distancing be enabled when premises are not large enough to allow it? Some organisations are entirely volunteer led, many of those being over 70 and it is currently difficult to see a time when these groups will be able to begin to get back to anything approaching their previous services, as the volunteers may have to isolate for some months to come.

Good Governance online training is launching this week, to support Hertfordshire's Charity leaders and boards to navigate immediate needs and plan for the recovery phase. During these uncertain times, strong leadership will be vital in ensuring sustainability for local organisations.

'Good Governance during COVID-19 and beyond' is a series of webinars to improve the effectiveness of Hertfordshire's charity sector, to help aid response & recovery during COVID-19.

Webinars will cover topics such as the Charity Sector 'New Normal', Risk Management, Strategy development for Boards, Leadership for CEO's during COVID-19 and Building financial sustainability. More information can be found [here](#)

FUNDING THE FUTURE

Over the past three weeks we have highlighted how the Herts Community Solutions (HCS) partners have worked together, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and how much impact the work we have done has had in the voluntary sector as a whole, including our members and our own organisations.

Funding and immediate cash flow is our primary concern so that services that are not lost as a result. A significant number will have lost out on the busy summer months of fundraising or lost other income streams indefinitely. Most funders are continuing to look at emergency COVID response funding and haven't yet moved to considering funding as lockdown is eased and organisations face a raft of new challenges to provide services. In addition, there will be increased competition for the money available, as we move into a shrinking economy.

HCS partners are also helping VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise) organisations that have adopted new ways of working through the COVID-19 crisis to meet the needs of existing service users or face unforeseen costs to ensure the resumption of their normal activities. New work or projects that help our areas recover from the challenges are also considered. For example the Watford and Three Rivers Community Fund launched by W3RT which was initiated by Watford Mayor, Peter Taylor.

VOLUNTEERING LEGACY

There is a real opportunity to build a strong and long-lasting legacy for volunteering in Hertfordshire, using the thousands of people who have come forward to support their community at a time of crisis as a basis to change attitudes and build a new societal norm that will support the most vulnerable in society. The key will be in communicating the value all volunteers have had, even those who have not yet been called upon, and recognising the impact that they have / will have on people in their community. The most important phrase here will be "thank you". By identifying and addressing individuals' motivations, they can be placed in meaningful voluntary roles (both key and episodic) that provide them with satisfaction and retain them in the longer term. Volunteer centres and infrastructure organisations have a core role to play in this work both in the short-term to undertake work to classify and support volunteers, but also in the future to build on a shared legacy and lead community growth. 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.

To capitalise on the spirit of volunteering, an important task that HCS partners are undertaking is to identify opportunities for volunteers to be offered with clear messaging about how these opportunities help with the efforts to support the community through coronavirus. This will provide a core population of volunteers who can be allocated to other needs should a second lock down become a reality. In parallel to this a sleeper cell of volunteers should be developed to capture the names and details of people who are happy to support in the event of a future critical need arising. These volunteers should be kept informed and involved through a light-touch approach that recognises them as part of a "club" of volunteers who are ready to be called up on at short-notice when needed. A third cohort of volunteers may be identified who are able to support with the rebuild of local voluntary sector infrastructure. Opportunities for one-off or repeated support to impact on the needs of a damaged sector may take many forms, from fundraising, to recycling. These volunteers may be members of the sleeper cell but may not.

For many it will have been their first experience of volunteering and if there is to be a positive legacy from the pandemic, hopefully it can be one where volunteering becomes more widespread, across all age ranges, ethnicities and social demographics. As the lockdown is eased and we find new working patterns, there will remain the challenge of ensuring volunteers can work in a safe environment.

This newsletter is being compiled by Community Action Dacorum on behalf of all the partners.

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