

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



SUPPORTING LOCAL

Since the start of the pandemic we have seen how communities have come together in a way that hasn't been seen since the Second World War with a renewed community spirit. Neighbours are helping each other out and mutual aid groups were quick off the ground. We have all heard of these wonderful stories. With the strict instructions to stay at home it is not surprising that there is the inclination not to travel, to stay local and not subject anyone else to unnecessary travel. This is why some groups have chosen to operate their own support schemes covering a small community.

However, there is a disproportionate impact on rural communities which have had a more difficult time in having their needs met. Therefore the HCS partners have set up services, for example volunteer shopping services operate mostly in areas where there are fewer mutual aid groups.

All the HCS partners have worked with them to help them directly work with their communities in ways that are both safe and empowering. In all cases we have been able to supply online support and information and all charities are doing their bit to help out.

Herts Community Foundation (HCF) also carried out research in May which provided data on how the local voluntary sector has responded to the initial phase of the Coronavirus outbreak and plans and challenges for the future. The survey findings will help shape the next phase of grant-making for HCF to support organisations looking to the longer-term.

- Of the 222 organisations who completed the survey, 75% have been in existence for more than 10 years. Many local groups are deeply embedded in the communities they serve.
- 39% of those with employed staff have furloughed people as a result of the pandemic.
- 56% said they have the capacity to work with more volunteers, 44% said they didn't.
- 30% said that their service delivery had increased since the pandemic, with the same number saying theirs had decreased. 27% said they had ceased delivery completely.
- Positives to emerge are: better sense of community; learning how to work remotely and offer online services, better collaboration with other organisations and less red tape.
- 60% of charities will remain financially sustainable for between six months and a year. The negative financial impact will hit more next year with uncertainty about longer-term funding.

HCS partners are helping community groups with funding and grants for example HCF has also already made immediate needs grants totalling £350k to more than 100 groups through its Coronavirus Relief Fund.

CDA have been working with village halls, and for urban areas that have high levels of deprivation, HCS partners have been working with the community addressing anxiety, diet and loneliness.

Communities 1st's activities span a wide area when arranging for volunteer shoppers and we have kept things as local as we can. In doing so we have been able to tailor specific shopping requirements.

"Sheila asked us to do her shopping, being on a low budget she wanted fruit and vegetables from the local market. We knew a volunteer who was familiar with the social distanced layout of the market and was prepared to do her shopping there rather than in a supermarket."

On the other hand, there are some services that can be delivered where location really does not matter and can have some benefits, some other activities such as the Handyperson Service which requires the expertise of individuals cannot be confined to a small location.

Communities 1st have been co-ordinating a telephone befriending service where location of either party is not usually important and in some instances a degree of separation can be useful.

Other tasks where keeping it local do not apply are tasks such as of registering volunteers, the requirements of ensuring volunteers are properly interviewed, checked and inducted is the same wherever they will be active and whatever roles they carry out. Communities 1st has worked alongside groups who are delivering services locally but carried out the volunteer recruitment process for them.



Community Action Dacorum has been working with pop-up and internet groups across the Borough to guide them in the safe delivery of support services in their area. We have been able to give them guidance on how to ensure their teams are operating within best practice guidelines. By doing this work, we are reducing the chances of harm being done to vulnerable people across the Borough and so protecting as many people as possible. There was a lot of very positive feedback and we are able to help them directly work with their communities in ways that are both safe and empowering and in all cases we have been able to supply online support and information.

A number of practical issues were raised by these groups, but by working together, we have been able to identify key issues that are blocking their work and refer those on to the Borough and County for further action. In some cases, such referrals are helping build up a holistic picture of the massive positive effort volunteers are making across Dacorum. We are also able to pass on some useful information to Herts Help who can then identify areas where people have particular needs that are being missed by local support groups.



In our role as county Village Hall and Community Buildings Adviser CDA Herts has been receiving information from our Members through our Networks regarding receipt of the 'Business Support' and 'Retail, Hospitality and Leisure' Grants. We are concerned that many Village Halls will have been severely financially affected by closure due to lockdown, reliant as they are on booking and hiring income with very little reserves. A worse case scenario would be that some of these vital community assets are unable to re-open and carry on providing facilities for lonely vulnerable people especially in rural areas where so often other services are non-existent.

However, we are pleased to report that so far things are looking good and that the Grants' system administered by district and borough councils is responding with vital financial support. At present we are aware of 25 Village Halls that have received the emergency Covid-19 funding totalling £265k. Great news for Village Halls and the rural communities they support.



CVS for Broxbourne and East Herts have worked with partners to produce a directory of 45 mutual aid groups across East Herts and Broxbourne. The list, hosted on their [website](#), focuses on providing information and connecting people to their local group for support services or to volunteer their help. The directory provides contact details, type of service offered and any restrictions or area of operation. Every one of these groups consist of healthy individuals offering their time to run errands for those in need. The two work symbiotically and people are benefitting from them, feeling an increased connection with other people and their community.

One such mutual aid group is 'Looking out for each other in Braughing' which offers friendly phone calls, shopping, and prescription collection.

When CS, 70, heard the news of the lockdown and realised that she could be stuck indoors for the long haul, she tried to book a Tesco delivery but there were no slots." Without the support of the local food shopping service I would not have been able to manage. Most of my friends are older than me. A couple are in their 90s and they're not online, so I do worry for them."

HCF Training & Development has launched series of free trustee training webinars, taking place throughout June to support the leadership of Hertfordshire VCS organisations. Our Better Boards online trustee training programme, has been designed to improve the effectiveness of the Hertfordshire voluntary sector, both during COVID-19 and beyond. During these uncertain times, strong leadership will be vital in ensuring sustainability for local organisations. Upcoming webinars include 'Trustees stepping into a crisis', 'Minute Taking', 'Inspiring leadership during COVID-19' and 'Understanding & developing the CEO-Chair relationship'. All of our online courses can be found [here](#).



The Herts Sports and Physical Activity Partnership (HSP) Team has now been working remotely for some 11 weeks and has been keeping abreast of developments and to undertake some much needed planning for when Covid-19 related issues have settled down, and daily life returns to something near normal.

During this period – with the support of Sport England around flexibility of use of resources - HSP has initiated a range of projects to help Hertfordshire residents overcome the challenges of lockdown and the associated restrictions for example:

Sporting Chance. This programme – formerly known as Satellite Clubs – attracts some of Hertfordshire's most disadvantaged and vulnerable young people and works closely with colleagues in the Hertfordshire Police Gangs & Knives Team, to target those in danger of becoming involved in antisocial behaviour, possibly leading to crime and disorder.

Sport England Funding. We have been allocated £80k from the Sport England *Tackling Inequalities* Fund to help organisations in LSEG areas – particularly targeting those with a disability, BAMER communities and women and girls – overcome any short term financial difficulties and in planning for the delivery of related programmes, as and when the current restrictions are lifted. Grants of up to £2k are available and preference will be given to those organisations based within, or delivering benefits to our *Active Local* communities.



Watford CVS, covering Three Rivers, has been holding weekly COVID zoom calls to help communities express their concerns, share ideas, and seek advice. There are normally 10 participants and the sessions are held on Thursday afternoons at 3pm via zoom. New mutual aid groups have sprung up all over Watford and Three Rivers and they value the opportunity to discuss and share ideas and advice such as the requirement for volunteer support, any relevant training or policy information, along with safeguarding support and ways to engage with the community. Most of these groups work with some very isolated and lonely groups in the community.

Vanessa, Head of Communication and Community from Chorleywood Corona Support Group said "In the early stages of lockdown it was frantic as community groups emerged with hearts & minds focused on supporting the vulnerable and isolated residents in the community. When TRDC & W3RT connected with us it was a turning point with regards to structure, signposting, guidance, and support. As a volunteer group we felt connected and safe in the knowledge we had professionals to turn to. We have come across a few cases within the specialist area of mental health and wellbeing that have been dealt with because we had clear lines into the authorities. This has been invaluable to us as a group and to the residents of Chorleywood Parish"



Welwyn and Hatfield CVS are working with Communities 1st in delivering shopping, prescription collection, dog walking and transport for WH area.

Wise Food are doing great work in Welwyn Garden City in teaching people how to cook during the shutdown – Sarah has produced a book <https://www.whcvs.org.uk/catering-for-the-covid-19-crisis/> and does regular monthly newsletters. Families are put under greater strain as lockdown continues. After distributing a questionnaire for adults working or living with children, May's newsletter tackles some of the most pressing household problems that were highlighted.

Read for some easy dinner meal ideas, tips about looking after your mental health as a parent, information about Vitamin D, and links to many more resources www.sarahscotland.co.uk.
