

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



COMBATTING FRAUD

Sadly, criminals have seized up on the Covid19 pandemic as an opportunity to make money through fraud. With elderly residents in Hertfordshire being separated from their normal support networks and often long periods of isolation knocking the confidence of single people, they become easy victims of fraud and petty crime. It is a sad fact that fraud has increased in the past few months by 400% in Hertfordshire. Herts Community Solutions work in partnership with statutory agencies and one another to protect the vulnerable whilst empowering volunteers to make a difference to their society through the way that we operate and the networks we build to throw a circle of protection around the voluntary sector in the county.

Examples of this work include the efforts CVSs have gone to in contacting mutual support groups that have popped up through social media. These groups have done some fantastic work in the past few months mobilizing their local population to volunteer in their community. The vast majority of these groups are safe and well-meaning and so Herts Community Solutions have been able to support them by extending our existing support services to these groups and offering to undertake vetting checks for them. Indeed, groups have approached HCS members to be checked to give them some validation of their members when approaching unknown and often vulnerable people to help. Without the support of the CVSs, these unconstituted organisations would have no protection from criminals who come forward to use them as a way to target vulnerable adults, and similarly those people who use their services would have no assurance that the volunteer they are working with is ok.

Working with volunteers across Hertfordshire during the pandemic has been an exciting challenge. The six volunteer centres along with #TeamHertsVolunteering have successfully processed nearly 10,000 applications from people wishing to volunteer to help in our communities. The advantage of the volunteer centres has been their experience of supporting local volunteers for many years, checking out suitability and building relationships between volunteers and charities. This experience placed us well to be able to undertake suitable vetting checks on these 10,000 people quickly and efficiently. By checking their references and ensuring their identity was correct, we have been able to protect the public from people using volunteering as a way to defraud individuals. These extra checks are vital to ensure that people are not just allocated to roles that they are not suited to or given details of individuals that need help without appropriate checking.

With shopping services also a high need during the first 3 months of lockdown HCS partners looked at finding solution that didn't rely on cash exchanging hands for combatting the possibility of fraud and also to safeguard against spread of the disease. They wanted to protect their users from doorstep scams, which unfortunately had increased as a result of COVID-19. Used like a debit card by key volunteers, the Expend payment cards provide a holistic view of spending. The organisations can keep track on how much they are spending where and on who. They can also capture the information in the app in real-time.

It is a reflection of our world that we need to protect society, and a credit to the HCS partners that we ensure it is done, without fuss and quietly in the background, so keep those who need a little extra support safe.

At the start of the lockdown, Communities 1st were aware that many existing local groups would turn their focus to supporting the community through the new challenges brought about by self-isolation and shielding. In addition, it was clear that a number of new neighbourhood and Mutual Aid groups would be created to address these new challenges on a micro level, using platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. Although the response from local communities was overwhelmingly proactive and positive, there are inherent risks, particularly for new groups. These mainly surround areas such as safe-guarding, vetting of volunteers and compliance. Communities 1st identified and contacted a number of local groups by researching on the internet, social media sites, speaking to new and existing contacts, gaining referrals and social networking.

These groups were offered the opportunity to run their local activities under the umbrella of Communities 1st. This arrangement offered support in terms of guidance on best practice, insurance coverage and access to banking facilities if needed. Other groups continued independently, and were given advice on volunteering best practice and safeguarding. They were also provided with Communities 1st resources designed to support new voluntary groups in their activities - <https://www.communities1st.org.uk/Covid19NewGroup>. This direct and remote support was designed to mitigate the potential risk to vulnerable and isolated individuals and also support the fast-growing number of local support groups.

We remain in contact with the neighbourhood groups, community groups and Mutual Aid groups that we identified at the start of the lockdown and are on hand to give them support and advice as and when required. Groups can contact us at memberservices@communities1st.org.uk



Here at Community Action Dacorum we have been working hard on checking the identity and taking references for the hundreds of volunteers who have signed up either through Team Herts or directly with us to help during the COVID crisis so that when we pass them on for a volunteering role we are confident about them. There have been changes to our normal demographics of volunteers and we have been able to offer our member organisations high calibre volunteers who are happy to take on trustee responsibilities which have been hard to fill positions recently. We have also been able to place many volunteers into roles supporting hospital discharge patients and GPs referrals through our Community Navigators network.

We have also been working with the mutual aid support groups that have sprung up by providing DBS checks for these groups. We are hearing great things about the work these groups are doing, and beginning to find more of them using our Support4Dacorum services to get advice or to check out new volunteers through our vetting programmes.



CDA Herts Village Halls Advisory Service has been very busy supporting Village Hall and Community Building Management Trustees throughout the lockdown period of the Covid-19 Crisis. As public buildings all Halls have had to remain closed except for certain essential reasons but now as we near the 4th July it seems likely that with lockdown easing many Halls are thinking about re-opening. This brings with it a whole range of health and safety concerns regarding the management of social distancing and infection control and we have been hosting virtual Zoom Network Meetings across the County to listen to Trustees concerns and answer questions. We have 4 such Networks covering East Herts, North Herts, Dacorum & Three Rivers and St Albans, Hertsmere & Welwyn Hatfield through which we provide information and advice much of which is based on the work of ACRE our national lead agency. We have held 3 Zooms so far, all well received and lively with participants sharing their own experiences with each other. The 4th Zoom Meeting will be on Thursday 18th June covering East Herts which is our busiest and most active Network and likely to be very lively. For all the latest Information and Guidance covering all Village Halls and Community Buildings [Click Here](#) to visit our website.



Throughout June, HCF Training & Development has been providing a series of webinars through its [Better Boards trustee development programme](#), to inspire strong leadership and good governance for the Hertfordshire voluntary & community sector. We have a risk management webinar upcoming on Thursday 25th June, which will cover a trustee's legal responsibilities in regards to risk management, what we have learnt from Covid-19 and support in setting up a pandemic recovery plan. How to mitigate risk, such as fraud will be covered in the training.

HCF will also be launching the new [Hertfordshire Matters](#) report at an [online event on Tuesday 23 June from 3pm](#). The real impact of the outbreak is still unfolding and HCF is very aware that our needs analysis report is needed now more than ever so that philanthropists, local organisations, community leaders and the voluntary sector can better understand the key issues facing local residents.



CVS Broxbourne and East Herts (CVSBEH) have been working with Ware Festival to deliver an online programme of activities for July as the traditional festival activities have been deferred until 2021. There will be a series of online course, demos and activities that residents can participate in. Courses planned will be digital skills, iPad and Tablets Made Easy, Drawing for Wellbeing, Cook and Learn and Sewing for Beginners.

CVSBEH has been able to use some of its Hertfordshire Adult and Family Learning funds to provide these courses. Collaborating with local organisations such as Southern Maltings Arts Centre in Ware, CVSBEH have been working remotely to provide advice and support on how to adapt and react during the pandemic with a longer view to maintaining future sustainability.

This approach means that the need for both safeguarding and online safety needs are met with all the booking and administration managed by the CVSBEH team. Ian Richardson said 'CVSBEH are vital enablers to encourage and support partnerships between voluntary organisations so they meet the needs of our residents without putting anyone at risk.'

For a full programme of activities please visit <http://www.cvsbeh.org.uk/community-learning/>



NHCVS are registered as an umbrella body with the DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) which means that we can process DBS applications for member organisations, their staff and volunteers. For volunteers there is just a small admin charge of £12 per check.

Some of our member groups, particularly those supporting older people, offer occasional talks on how to recognise scams. Others have a wealth of information on their website, for example North Herts & Stevenage CABs. They will be taking part in the CAB's national annual scam awareness campaign. This year it runs from 14-28 June and covers issues such as how to recognise a scam, what to do if you've been scammed and how to get emotional support if needed: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/our-campaigns/all-our-current-campaigns/scams-awareness-campaign-2019/>



Watford CVS are working with the police, Watford Borough Council, Citizens Advice Watford and local business partners to encourage community groups and charities to be aware of fraud and scams as criminals seek to capitalise on the Covid-19 pandemic. One fraud scam involved residents receiving a text message about a refund for an online purchase with a link where financial information was required to process the refund. If you are not used to ordering online, individuals do not necessarily have the experience to be able to recognise this as fraudulent or illegal behaviour.

Information is received from the Covid-19 network about any community scams. The information is shared with members and local mutual aid groups to ensure that the information is shared widely, and users and members of the public become more knowledgeable and vigilant against fraud, particularly about sharing their financial and personal information. Watford CVS are also encouraging people to go on to the Citizens Advice website to use their [online scams helper](#) to get specific advice.

Emily Douse, Watford CVS Lead, commented that 'Partnership working is vital now. We're enabling informal groups to continue their good work, whilst being aware of good practice, governance and legal issues.'



As well as working on the Compassionate Community Connector, WHCVS continues to provide a DBS service to its members. We are currently working with a number of small groups providing funding advice, assisting with completion of applications and sourcing new accommodation, charity registration and risk assessments. We are supporting individuals experiencing hardship by signposting to either food banks or mutual aid groups. In some cases, work with local grant giving organisations to provide electrical equipment.

We are working with two local business who are offering remote volunteering for their workers.