

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



SUPPORTING OTHER CHARITIES TO REBUILD

All of the HCS partners have key missions which include supporting voluntary organisations and community groups at the early stages of their development; providing funding advice and representation to help them grow and flourish; and delivering services and projects that support local individuals, businesses and community groups. With those as a priority we have been working hard getting to know the ever changing situation with the groups in our areas and finding ways in which to support them in moving forward.

At the end of March, as lockdown commenced, HCS partners contacted over hundreds of voluntary and community sector organisations. They also identified if there were any unmet community needs and used 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.

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.

HCS partners have adapted their services to provide more online resources and help during the current pandemic. Community organisations are struggling with key issues such as moving their activities online, if possible, and the transition from office working to home working and the costs associated with this. Information sharing across community settings is also challenging with organisations worrying about GDPR.

They have also provided themed online forums to share knowledge and information. All HCS partners were able to quickly adapt their training content to move online. For example 'Safety for Volunteers' webinars via Zoom, using the most up to date webinar technology to engage attendees, such as online interactive polls, quiz, Q&A and chat functions. They are also holding active learning groups online and continuing to offer advice & guidance remotely to organisations in need of support.

We have continued our conversations with our member organisations, charities and groups in Dacorum to listen to their feedback and support them with the rebuild process. One common theme that is coming through this week is that it is clearly proving harder for organisations to return after lockdown than it was at the start.

The reasons for this are complex, particularly that there is a need for risk assessments to be updated with covid19 in mind, and this is difficult given the changing environment that we are operating within. Community centres are especially complicated as there are many different documents, advice and legislation that all need to be cross-referenced in order to ensure that they can open safely.

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.



As a result of Covid-19, over the last 4 months Communities 1st have carried out two surveys of voluntary and community organisations, in order to understand the state and the sector and target support where it is needed most.

The main support organisations need immediately is funding, to cover lost fundraising opportunities, lost income, continuing costs and to pay for their response to Covid-19. Almost one quarter of organisations state that they will survive for twelve months or less without additional funding or support.

However, most organisations report that they need support in several areas, including recruiting new volunteers, resilience planning and to develop new IT systems. One of our roles at Communities 1st is to provide this support. We have started a programme of Meet the Funder sessions which give attendees an in-depth understanding of what the funders are looking for and an increased chance of a successful application. In addition, we're offering weekly Zoom sessions with our membership team, during which organisations can discuss their needs and our team offer support.

During lockdown, over 3000 volunteers signed up with Communities 1st to support their community. Many of those are now returning to work and the challenge is to harness that community spirit and keep those potential volunteers engaged. We work closely with the VCS to understand their volunteering needs and promote their vacancies in the C1st volunteering newsletter every two weeks. In order to keep those potential volunteers engaged, organisations need to offer roles which are flexible and interesting and can fit around the schedule of paid work.



Many of our members are asking for clear advice and guidance to help them to navigate the challenging waters of reopening buildings to the public. Similarly to shops and cafés, community buildings also suffer from the balance between having a critical mass of users to make their operation viable and the challenges of social distancing.

To help with this, our Connect Dacorum team have arranged a series of webinar sessions for businesses and charitable groups in Dacorum to hear from expert speakers and discuss together their common issues. In addition to this our Support4Dacorum team are contacting all of our members by telephone to support them and provide bespoke tailored advice and guidance to volunteers, staff members and trustees alike.

Together the sector is working collaboratively in a way that before covid19 was hard to imagine. This is all to the good for the residents of Dacorum as it provides them with the highest quality services and often referrals between charities for stakeholders who need multiple types of support. Currently this collaborative work is straight forward but whether this can be maintained when charities go back to competing for funding is anyone's guess. There is a common view that we want to try and maintain a collaborative approach, and we at Community Action Dacorum are doing all we can to build alliances across the sector now that will continue to provide for Dacorum residents well into the future. We believe that charities are #NeverMoreNeeded - for the essential support they provide in crisis and beyond, and how they shape our society for the better. Your support by visiting <https://nmn.org.uk/> could make a big difference to our future.



CDA Herts has received a £5k HCF Grant through which we will be able to offer support to Rural Support Networks across the county. Our Research told us that there are over 80 RSNs, which is what we have called the informal, local, voluntary groups that sprang up in response to the Coronavirus lockdown. Many of our villages and their residents live in isolation which can lead to loneliness and associated health and wellbeing problems. Distance, exacerbated by limited public transport, creates poor access to services and many shielded, elderly and vulnerable people have been put at further risk to their health and wellbeing by being confined to their homes during lockdown. Local residents, parish councils and churches sprang together to create support networks to ensure that these people were not overlooked and were able to receive basic services and vital supplies such as food and prescriptions.

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Crucially also has been the social contact created for those at risk by volunteers collecting and delivering goods and providing other help which has included dog walking, gardening, basic household maintenance and just checking up on neighbours. Some RSNs have gone further in organising online video sessions to ensure that people can maintain social contact, exercise and spiritual support that has been missing whilst Village Halls, Churches, Shops and Pubs are closed. Using the HCF grant CDA Herts will be providing support for the existing RSNs and identifying any other communities in need of help and following the end of the pandemic we can also see a continuing vital role for the RSNs in addressing isolation and maintaining opportunities for social contact for the vulnerable and elderly in our villages. Contact tim.hayward-smith@cдахerts.org.uk for further information.



North Herts CVS has a huge variety of member organisations. They range from tiny peer support groups to branches of national charities, supporting a wide range of different people. There is therefore a lot of variation in how organisations have coped during the pandemic and in what kind of support they need to resume some kind of normality. An organisation like AbilityNet, who help people with disabilities to achieve their life goals at home through IT, have continued to operate as normal, maybe even flourish through lockdown. Others like Supported Activities, who offer support to people with learning disabilities through group craft activities, are conscious of how much their clients' well-being may be suffering as a result of curtailed services, and are keeping skeleton support going through phone calls and e-newsletters. Many are worried about prolonged loss of income as fund-raising events are having to be cancelled through most of the summer.

We help by keeping in touch with our members to offer moral support, ideas and a chance to talk through their concerns while coping and rebuilding; by signposting to excellent resources and training such as is being offered to non-members free of charge for now by NCVO on their KnowHow site, or for village halls and community centres planning re-opening, by ACRE and HSE; by offering the latest funding opportunities and other information via our e-bulletin. We also offer guidance and proof-reading to members completing funding applications.

The TeamHerts volunteering project is contacting the huge number of volunteers who have come forward to help during the pandemic, to find out about their experiences and to harness the interest of those who haven't yet been matched to a suitable volunteering opportunity but would like to volunteer post-lockdown.

Our busy Community Transport scheme continues to expand its pool of volunteer drivers to take people to important hospital appointments or for treatments – a vital service during the pandemic, They have managed to adapt to operate within governments guidelines to keep drivers and passengers safe, and have extended services to picking up prescriptions, for example.



On 1st July, HCF Training & Development has launched its Workforce Development Grants 2020-21 programme. Grants of up to £2,000 are now available for learning and development in voluntary and community organisations, which can be used to support organisations in rebuilding their workforce. The grants are available for organisations working within Adult Care Services, to develop the capacity of the organisation to deliver training and skills to its workforce, to carers or to service users/clients. Organisations may for example use the grant for training or qualifications for paid staff, coaching or mentoring for senior leaders, or for equipment, software or other resources.

HCF Training & Development has been running trustee and board development training throughout June as part of their Better Boards online programme 'Good Governance during COVID-19 and beyond'. We have supported over 160 attendees across more than 30 organisations in Hertfordshire, including trustees, chairs, CEOs and Senior leaders to help aid response and recovery through strong leadership and good governance. If a charity is well run, they will be more likely to meet the growing demand for services in Hertfordshire and HCF Training & Development is here to support this. We also launch Action Learning Groups for key CEO's and Chairs within the sector, we have 3x groups running, meeting monthly between June and September, to provide extra support during this time.



CVS for Broxbourne and East Herts (CVSBEH) are creating a partnership with local organisations to tackle some of the key issues resulting from the COVID-19 crisis as they recognise the need to provide relevant and sustainable interventions. Supported by Manchester Airport Group funding, they are aiming to deliver the following projects:

1. Refernet – A Referral Digital Tool to allow community partners in East Herts to make secure client referrals to each other. This would help ensure that local residents:
 - get access to the right level of assistance and support as quickly as possible
 - do not need to repeat personal details to multiple agencies
 - are not lost within a signposting system.
2. To provide up to 30 families with support surrounding addiction and domestic abuse which has been exacerbated as a result of COVID 19 restrictions.
3. To raise awareness of the Herts Domestic Abuse Helpline through adverts in the local press and the production of leaflets to go in the Small Acts of Kindness Warm Winter Bags for elderly residents.
4. To develop a Social and Digital Inclusion Project in the Hadhams area which will connect people in this rural area, especially those who were struggling to connect pre-COVID 19.
5. CVSBEH Meet Up, Wellbeing and Skills Clubs to support local people who are struggling as a result of the Lockdown.



As part of its offer to improve the lives of some of the county's most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people, the Herts Sports and Physical Activity Partnership (HSP) has launched its support package for community groups and other organisations wishing to deliver programmes for young people during the forthcoming school holiday period.

HSP – based at the University of Hertfordshire – has developed a support package, in partnership with national charity StreetGames UK, in response to a growing body of research on the triple inequalities of holiday hunger, isolation and inactivity faced by young people. Coupled with this has been the disproportionate impact on the most disadvantaged communities, in terms of intellectual, physical and emotional development of the young people from those areas, as part of the current and ongoing Covid-19 arrangements.

The HSP package includes funding of up to £1,000 for eligible groups, from Sport England's *Tackling Inequalities Fund*, and support around training, food - including access and advice on nutrition and healthy eating - sport and physical activity programmes, marketing and simple monitoring and evaluation to evidence the impact of their interventions.

Further details of the HSP Support Programme can be found at: <https://sportinherts.org.uk/sport-for-social-change/projectsupport/>

Interested parties can contact Will Slemmings at w.slemmings@herts.ac.uk.



Micro-volunteering – A New Way to Engage Volunteers

Watford CVS has been encouraging its members and charitable organisations across the borough to consider a micro-volunteering strategy as a way of engaging new volunteers. In particular, the CVS believes that the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic will impact on the number of volunteers available to groups and that a micro-volunteering strategy can assist in reducing the impact that Covid-19 has on charities and voluntary groups and can engage members of the community whose ability to volunteer has been impacted by the country returning to a state of normality.

In essence, micro-volunteering encourages groups of people to complete simple tasks that can be done at anytime and anywhere. For example, it may be getting people to share social media posts or to sign a petition. These tasks take no more than a few minutes and when done by a group of volunteers, the impact can be substantial. The benefit of creating tasks that can be done in a short period of time is that you can engage with volunteers who are not already active due to potential time constraints and this may encourage new volunteers, especially those who maybe reliant on volunteers who are over 70 or considered vulnerable. For further information about volunteering in Watford and Three Rivers, click [here](#).

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

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