



## **What to consider when setting up or running an INFORMAL Community Group responding to Covid-19**

If you do not have the ability to volunteer for an existing and established organisation that is already providing support, you may consider setting up or running your own informal community group to support those in your neighbourhood.

The information below is designed as a guide and is meant as a starting point to help volunteers, leaders and those we are helping stay safe. It has been put together to help you avoid unintended negative consequences while you do your best to help those in need.

Misunderstandings and raised stress levels can be common in these type of situations so taking some time to make a plan and put some guidelines in place will help everyone have a better understanding of what is required and the limitations that are in place.

Although you may be confident that everyone's motives within your group are genuine, it is important that you take steps to protect the vulnerable and volunteers from the virus and also from malicious/false allegations, stress, overload and abuse.

Each group will need to create their own ways of working to suit their area and their community, and bear in mind the following is not a set of rules to follow, however it is intended to stimulate thought.

### **Things you may need to consider**

#### **Who else**

- Before doing anything, check if anyone else has already set something up in your area - there are many organisations that are already seeking additional volunteers at this time
- Are there organisations that are in your area that could work together – Churches/Village Hall Committees/Car Schemes/Local Pubs

#### **Your objectives**

- Be clear about what you want to achieve. It might be you want to help housebound people with shopping, to set up a system to identify and reach out to those in need, and/or to support people facing financial hardship due to loss of

income. Your objectives may change over time. Try to ensure that everyone involved understands what you're doing so your activities are coordinated and expectations are managed.

## **Risks**

- Complete a risk assessment – looking at any potential risk to people being helped, volunteers, organisers.
- Draw up some simple advice to volunteers and those they are helping to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus. For instance, not entering a home; keeping a safe distance, washing hands before and after handling shopping. If in doubt follow the NHS and government guidelines  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>
- What methods you will have in place for a volunteer to report someone potentially having the virus?
- What procedures will you follow to reduce the risk from scammers and false accusations? For instance,
  - Volunteers never taking a bank card to pay for shopping or to get cash
  - certain named volunteers dealing with cash
  - limiting the cost of any shopping
  - volunteers not entering people's homes
  - buddying volunteers.
- If the situation continues for an extended period, you may also wish to consider having different volunteers help the same person (this reduces the possibility of inappropriate relationships forming).

## **Wellness**

Keeping your volunteers healthy is vital to ensuring you can continue to support your community. Obviously taking precautions in relation to the virus is key, but someone's mental health & wellbeing is equally important.

- Think about ways to mitigate volunteers receiving calls at inappropriate times of the day and night?
  - Set a time limit on receiving calls (10am to 7pm)
- Ways to reduce the stress and demands on volunteers.
  - Split the workload out amongst your volunteers
  - Find time for volunteers to chat amongst each other to off load any issues they have
- Have a plan for volunteers coming down with the virus. How will you cover? How will you support the volunteer?

## **Expectations**

In moments like this everyone wants to help, which means people may put themselves in uncomfortable situations.

- Make sure all your volunteers are aware of expectations, and that they are not required to do anything beyond the agreed task.
- Will volunteers shop for alcohol, tobacco, pharmaceutical drugs? If you have a policy of not buying alcohol you may wish to consider uncomfortable aspects such as that alcohol withdrawal can be life threatening for someone who is alcohol dependent.
- How will you deal with complaints if a volunteer has to substitute products or if items are missing?

## **Data**

With so much going on, it might be easy to forget that if you hold someone's data (phone number, address, etc) you have a duty to keep this safe. Follow simple precautions such as password protecting electronic documents and locking away printed documents will suffice.

## **Safeguarding**

- What criteria will you have as to who can volunteer and how? Maybe think about initially recruiting people that understand the importance to working within guidelines and have had an element of safeguarding training – voluntary sector workers, youth workers, church leaders, youth group leaders to name but a few.
- Older volunteers may be able to help in ways that still allow them to help, even if self-isolating. Will you have a minimum age?
- Will a member of your group act as the safeguarding lead? How will people report concerns? Will you provide your volunteers with information and telephone numbers to report safeguarding concerns?
- What advice will you give volunteers if they are concerned that someone needs medical treatment?
- Are your volunteers aware of how to spot the signs that someone may be vulnerable?

To report a Safeguarding concern in Norfolk call **0344 800 8020**

**Call the police on 999 in an emergency.**

## **Advice and Support for Community Groups**

For more detailed information and guidance and for help putting procedures in place, contact Community Action Norfolk. Staff there will be happy to help.

Email - [office@communityactionnorfolk.org.uk](mailto:office@communityactionnorfolk.org.uk)

Telephone - 01362 698216

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